



Principles and Practice Recommendations: Early childhood education and care

Based on the findings of our community engagement process with the Aboriginal community of Perth, three early childhood development priority areas have been identified (Early childhood education, Child protection/removal, Housing). Early childhood education includes early childhood education and care (childcare, playgroups etc.) and early schooling (kindy/pre-school, early school years). The Elder/Co-researcher group of the Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort (Our Children, Our Heart) Project advocate the following principles and practice recommendations in relation to the early childhood education and care (childcare, playgroups etc.) priority area.

Principles

1. Recognise that Aboriginal children's health is inclusive of their physical, social and emotional wellbeing which in turn is considered intimately connected to their sense of belonging and connection to community, culture and country
2. Recognise the importance of identity, culture and family/kinship network to Aboriginal children's sense of self and belonging, pride, confidence and learning
3. Recognise, acknowledge and value the strengths of Aboriginal children and their cultural differences and what these contribute to the knowledge and learning of all children
4. Recognise that sharing is a real strength of and an important component of Aboriginal culture and that it is taught to Aboriginal children from a young age
5. Recognise that independence and freedom are valued components of Aboriginal culture that are taught to Aboriginal children from a young age
6. Recognise that Aboriginal kids learn how to live in 2 worlds from a young age and bring important but different strengths from their Aboriginal world
7. Recognise the importance of children learning Noongar language (parents questioned why are kids learning Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese but not Noongar?)
8. Recognise the impact of colonisation (including stolen generations, missions, etc.) on families and parents in terms of intergenerational trauma, grief, and loss of culture on Aboriginal children's sense of self, pride, and behaviour

Practice Recommendations

1. Provide culturally appropriate early childhood education and care (childcare) that is honouring and respectful of culture, identity and Aboriginal knowledge, child rearing practices, and ways of learning
2. Ensure that Elders and other Aboriginal people (own mob) have a valued role in education settings
3. Provide more Noongar Language teachers, Aboriginal teachers, education assistants and liaison officers within early childhood education and care (childcare) settings
4. Teach Noongar culture and history from Aboriginal perspectives as part of the curriculum (not just token NAIDOC days)
5. (Re)Provide bus services for parents who have difficulty getting their children to their early childhood education settings
6. Work with Aboriginal parents and the local Aboriginal community to address the ongoing and deep seated lack of trust in services, workers, schools, kindy and playgroups (the provision of culturally appropriate services is one of the keys to (re)building trust with children, parents and other family members)
7. Provide opportunities for Aboriginal children and families to participate in cultural activities, get out of the suburbs and be healthy and active together

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Community reflections

Early childhood education and care

“Education is about equipping for life, equipping as an Indigenous person, equipping them as role models, parents, as older siblings of the family”. [Participant, South Lakes Community Forum, 2017]

“when they get to primary school, because they haven’t gone through that early childhood, they start to fall behind in the educational areas, but they are still years ahead, leaps and bounds, socially than their little wadjella counterparts. So they sort of start to fall behind and then they don’t want to go to school because they can’t keep up, so, you know, there is a whole lot of things that need to be in place for our children to grow up strong.” [Participant, Beechboro Community Forum 2017]

“People need to understand there are different ways of living at home and there is a difference in how Noongar families operate. For many Aboriginal families there are always a lot of people around, children socialise from a young age and this is a strength for Aboriginal kids.” [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]

“Aboriginal people value sharing, being generous, looking after each other within your family but also the wider community. We teach this to our kids from a young age – especially the importance of sharing. We share food, money, breastfeeding each other’s kids.” [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]

“my son came home telling me that the teacher said that he wasn’t allowed to share with the other little Nyoongar kids. I said, ‘You tell that teacher we did that all our lives and we are never going to stop. One blackfella will never see another blackfella go hungry.’” [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]

“Education is critical for our kids but in both cultures. We can use white education to strengthen Aboriginal culture.” [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]

“I would love to one day be able to see our culture respected for its wisdom and its knowledge and for our history and for other people to become involved as well.” [Participant, Men’s Focus Group, 2017]

“if universities can bring in an elder one day a week for adult students—well, they are 18 or 17 or whatever they are, upwards—to give them support and encouragement, why can’t schools do that, you know?” [Participant, Pilot Community Forum, 2016]

“Curriculum needs to include Aboriginal culture, language and history for all kids to learn and generate more understanding. Why are Australian students learning Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese when they don’t learn Noongar?” [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]

“Parents want their children to learn language – this is really important. It is important that kids have access to language and that any words are passed on from a young age. It is a disservice that we teach kids other languages but not their own.” [Participant, Champion Centre Focus Group, 2017]

“Culture is connected to learning to respect your elders, connection to the bush, being proud of our ancestors and proud of who we were, and then rebuilding yourself for the new, contemporary way to be a Nyoongar.” [Participant, Pilot Community Forum, 2016]

“We got to teach our kids how to live in 2 worlds. It’s about learning to trust.” [Participant, Hilton Kindilinks Focus Group, 2017]

