Embedding and Valuing Indigenous World Views in Early Childhood

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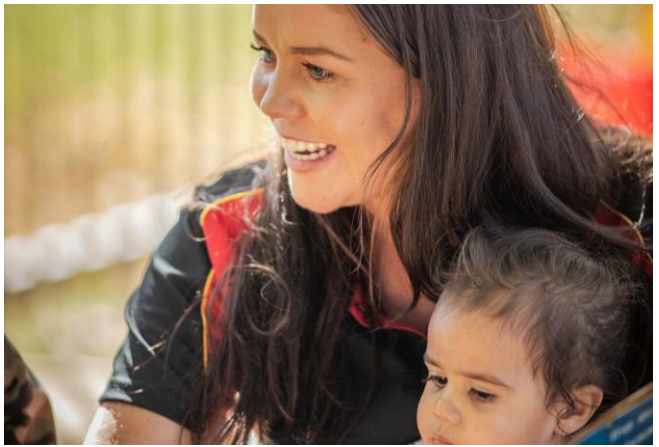


INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgement to Country

Towri - Meaning

Wiradyuri Country

Three Rivers

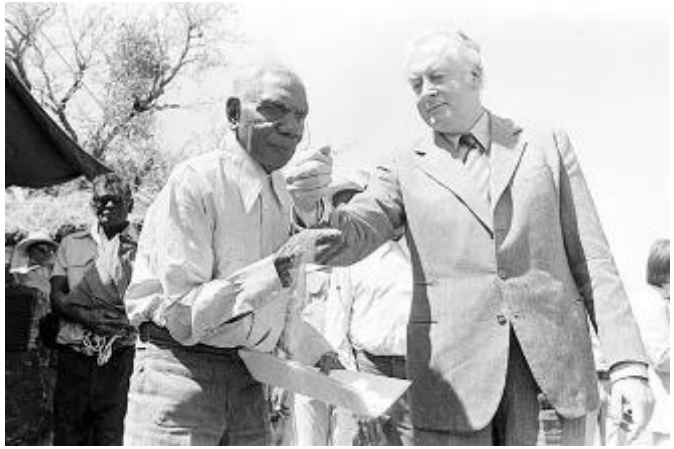
Wiradyuri Totem

What we will explore!

- The voice of subjectivity
- Sense of self and self–awareness
- Disrupting dominant discourses that assert or apply Western privileges in educational settings (regimes of truth)
- Moving towards building a more equitable, inclusive and diverse social settings for Indigenous children.

It is documented throughout **history the oppressive nature** and traumatic impacts Western colonisation and broad paternalistic frameworks has had on Indigenous culture. In history, various State and Federal policies were introduced to control the lives of Aboriginal people all of which have had lasting detrimental effects.

- Stolen Generation
- Aboriginal Protection Law
- Northern Territory Intervention
- White Australia – Assimilation Policy
- Flora and Fauna Act 1974
- ‘Close the Gap’ initiatives
- ‘Sorry Day’ – Australia Day/Uluru debate



Gough Whitlam & Vincent Lingiari 1976

As First Nations peoples, **our culture includes a 'deep sense' of belonging and identity and involves a spiritual and emotional relationship to the land** that is uniquely beyond any relationships that other cultural groups might experience (Perso, 2012, p. 12). This deep culture includes notions of congruent behaviours, laws and practices, customs, patterns of relationships, kinship, autonomy in decision making and so on. It also involves a historical perspective; culture has protected the identity of Indigenous people throughout Australian history, including the effects of colonisation and having dominant Western culture imposed in all aspects of their lives (Perso, 2012, p. 11).

- It is paramount to acknowledge and respect the history and culture of our first nation's people and to develop an awareness of how to incorporate **'cross-curriculum perspectives'** or both ways of learning, in early childhood programs (Harrison, 2011, p. 18; Martin, 2007). The concept of '**Both Ways**' and how this learning provides 'cultural safety' for Indigenous people within the early years sector is integral to educators 'intercultural learning' (Farmer & Fasoli, 2011). Intercultural competence moves beyond 'understanding' and 'tolerance' to encourage a vigorous exchange within and between cultures that incorporates Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing, *being* and doing (Culture at Work, 2004, as cited in Farmer & Fasoli, 2011, p. 20).

We must learn to critically reflect and re-examine the visibility of our own subjectivities and question ‘why I speak and act in the ways I do and what are the effects for the people around me? (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 43)

We must Disrupt the powerful and dominant socio- cultural binaries that exist in society (adult/child – age, female/male – sex, Indigenous/non-Indigenous – race) that perpetuates an authoritative and subordinate paradigm- its time to re-examine our oppositional dualist thinking.

- It is important to remember that ‘perceptions of children’s critical thinking as active citizens in their own right, have valuable contributions to make to families, communities and society in general terms’, however this is often overshadowed by traditional understandings and constructions of childhood as a period of innocence, powerlessness and incompetence (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2007, p 23).
- Children must be viewed as active world citizens and agents of change within their own right if we are to continue to move forward in such a time of social, political and economic change” (Johansson, 2009).

This is incredibly important to understand when building the capacity of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators in implementing and making curriculum based decisions that will directly impact the educational outcomes for the children, as this disconnection to culture and the continuation of neo-colonial practices, may create social constructs of Aboriginality as problematic, and more students are culturally vulnerable and at risk of experiencing social disadvantage (Gale & Bolzan, 2013).

It is inherently important that emphasis is placed on education services to reconceptualise programmes and practice to embed Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum and improve the educational outcomes for Indigenous children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures need to be valued for being resilient, continuing and a source of pride and strength for communities, focussing on and harnessing strengths based approach in all regard (Lawrence, 2009).

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families feel welcome, respected and safe when their culture is made visible and their communities are acknowledged and celebrated (Lawrence, 2009). These interactions with culture and community are critical to opening pathways to reconciliation and acknowledging Indigenous ways of know and doing.

- Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's connections to culture, community or family are weakened, they are at risk of not only being lost to their culture but also to themselves' (Larkin ,2010, as cited in Farmer & Fasoli, 2011, p. 33).

Equality

VS

Equity

There is a considerable need for the early education and care sector to provide Indigenous children, families and communities with equal access to culturally safe learning environments and educational programmes and curriculum that encompass the cultural heritage, worldviews, identities and learning processes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Martin, 2007).

Valuing and working closely with local Indigenous services, teachers and health and education workers promotes a positive message to the whole community.

- Early childhood educational environments play a critical role in providing a balanced representation of diversity so that all children develop positive social and cultural identities (Miller, 2010, p. 21).

- Providing positive climates for professional inquiry may be extended to examining how Aboriginal perspectives be more inclusive in the service as a whole.

- From before birth children are connected to family, community, culture and place, and their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships, particularly within families, who are children first and most influential teachers (DEEWR, 2009).

  - What does the EYLF say about culture, in particular Indigenous culture?
  - Is it reflective of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child?

When children are connected with and contribute to their world they begin to learn ways of *'being'*, which reflect values, traditions and practices of their families and communities and broadens their understanding of the world in which they live (DEEWR, 2009, p. 26).

These cultural beliefs of child agency is evident in most research on Indigenous child rearing and parenting practices, and are in sharp contrast with Western world constructions of the child as ‘developing’ (Kruske et al., 2012; Frances, Hutchins & Saggers, 2009).

Traditional modes of academic testing present Aboriginal students with a deficit in regards to literacy and numeracy. Early Childhood is a powerful platform that is seeking to disrupt these conventional modes/approaches to teaching and learning. Does this transcend and is this made visible into primary and secondary curriculum based decisions?

Mainstream Education Curriculum – Australian History

- Why is this considered ‘universal’?
- Does this continue render Indigenous perspectives as obsolete?

“We are part of the dreaming. We have been in the Dreaming for a long time before we are born on this earth and we will return to this cast landscape at the end of our days. It provides for us during our time on Earth, a place to heal, to restore purpose and hope and to continue our destiny”

Helen Milroy, 2008

This encourages us to remember our

shared human needs to feel we belong –

that is,

that we ***connect*****,**

that we are ***capable***

and that we ***count*** and

WE have

***courage*.**