FOR EDUCATORS

Facilitating cultural competence with children

Building understanding

Guided by the principles of cultural competence, educators are compelled by our frameworks to respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences (EYLF, p16).

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, education should prepare every child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship among all people and groups, regardless of their background (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29). These principles directly align with our frameworks through our responsibility as educators to seek to promote children's cultural competence (EYLF, p16)

Knowledgeable and confident self-identities

Cultural competence is critically linked to a strong and knowledgeable sense of identity and belonging. Through building a personal sense of who they are and where they belong, children are better placed to demonstrate respect and understanding for others.

- How do educators gauge children's feelings of being recognised and respected for who they are? (VEYLDF, p19)
- How are members of the children's families and communities involved in planning and implementing identity-affirming learning experiences?
- How do educators model acknowledgement of individual children's cultural and social identities?

A sense of belonging

A sense of belonging is more than feeling comfortable in a particular environment. Belonging acknowledges interdependence and the key role of relationships in forming identities (EYLF, p7). A sense of belonging within the service is central to building cultural competence as it facilitates a group identity that is itself both diverse in nature and founded on positive relationships with others.

Under the outcome of Community, the VEYLDF highlights the importance of participation and reciprocity to a sense of belonging to groups and communities (VEYLDF, p21).

- What evidence do educators use to document children's developing sense of belonging within the service? To what extent are relationships between children taken into consideration?
- How do educators define reciprocity in relationships between children?
- How are children's contributions to decision making sought out and encouraged? What strategies are in place to ensure every child at the service can contribute to group decision-making processes?

Challenging stereotypes and racism

Part of respecting the cultural identity of others is being aware of how our own values, beliefs and attitudes relating to diversity are shaped and addressing any bias we might hold (VEYLDF, p22). It is critical to recognise that stereotyping and racism are forms of bias and to address this appropriately.

- What experiences do children have access to that enable them to develop a deeper sense of cultural identity? (VEYLDF, p18). What measures are in place to avoid stereotypes in planning for these experiences?
- How are stereotyping and racism directly addressed with children? How are educators guided to react to situations?
- What proactive conversations around challenging bias are children involved in?
- What strategies are in place to ensure children are learning to recognise bias and unfairness? (VEYLDF, p21)
- What types of resources are used to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of diversity? How does the choice of resources challenge stereotypes? Do resources need updating to avoid stereotypical perceptions of cultural diversity?

Note: FKA Consultants can provide guidance regarding appropriate resources, including accessing the FKA Multicultural Resource Centre (see 'How we can help' below).

Further considerations

The nature of our communities means that often children and families enrol in our services while learning English as an additional language. Where there is limited shared language, a

variety of ways of communicating are used to ensure that all children are supported to achieve success in the outcome areas.

- How are rights communicated and discussed between educators, families and children where there is limited shared language?

- How are members of the children's families and communities involved in planning and implementing identity-affirming learning experiences using their home languages?

- How are the contributions of children learning English as an additional language sought out and encouraged? What strategies are in place to ensure every child at the service can contribute to group decision-making processes, particularly where the child is new to learning English?

Practice tips

- Emphasis is placed on building a relationship during the enrolment and orientation process, utilising bicultural support where appropriate.

- Conversations with families are viewed as an opportunity for two-way communication, where information, philosophies and aspirations are shared and heard by both parties.

- Where possible, children are involved in conversations with families and their input is sought and valued.

- Children are drivers in setting rules, codes of conduct and decision making. Educators openly seek feedback from children using a range of communication skills including visual aids, interpreters, listening, group conversations, observations of children's play and experiences.

- Educators bring children together to explore questions of identity and culture and model negotiation skills in facilitating group conversations so that all children can contribute.

- Educators actively seek out opportunities in the service and community to engage children in dialogue about fairness and social justice.

- Empathy and compassion are implicit in all interactions in the service through modelling active listening skills, acknowledging others' feelings and providing support to others.

- Opportunities are provided for children to build capacity to understand the experiences of others by developing language skills in describing and expressing their feelings and emotions.

- Children's capacity and agency is supported through the use of appropriate resources, such as diverse play experiences, books and materials endorsed by

- Difference is embraced and acknowledged by providing different ways of accomplishing things

- Where difference is identified, the focus is on finding out about it by asking the rights questions rather than making assumptions

How we can help

Bicultural Support is provided by FKA Children's Services throughout Victoria. We offer early childhood education and care services access to skilled and experienced professionals who provide specific language and cultural assistance to help enrol and settle children. The Bicultural Support Team can be reached on 03 9428 4471 or by contacting fkacs@fka.org.au.

FKA offers a range of professional learning opportunities for services, which are customised according to individual needs. Check our website for upcoming opportunities, or contact the Professional Learning Team by calling the office or emailing training@fka.org.au.

Research and frameworks

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations & Council of Australian Governments 2010, *Educators' guide to the early years learning framework for Australia*.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations & Council of Australian Governments 2009, *Belonging, being & becoming: the early years learning framework for Australia*.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2009, *Victorian early years learning and development framework for all children from birth to eight years*.

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner 2015, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Available from: http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx [8 December 2015].

Further information

How to request bicultural support http://fka.org.au/bicultural-support/request-bicultural-support

Free Interpreter support for Victorian Government funded early childhood services
http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/comms/Pages/interpreterservice.aspx