

Practice *Cultural Competence*

What is Cultural Competence?

*“Cultural competence is a set of congruent **behaviours, attitudes and policies** that come together in a system, agency or among professionals enabling that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989).*

It could be said that cultural competence is a symposium of many things;

- Culture refers to the integrated part of each individual person that includes human behaviour, communications, customs, beliefs, values etc.
- Competence refers to a capacity to function effectively on an individual and a group level in a chosen concept, in this case cultural.

In relation to this information sheet we will focus on the cultural competency in early care and out of school hours care settings.

Who is using Cultural Competence?

Cultural competence appears to have been a natural progression from cultural awareness, cross cultural, cultural inclusion and other avenues of cultural learning. As the diverse fabric of the Australian population reflects many varied backgrounds, most professional settings have cultural competency as an integral part of their professional services provision.

It is not enough to have cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity, as the individual also need to have the ability to apply and project the cultural knowledge in collaboration with other culturally competent individuals. Team communication therefore becomes very important in relation to the development of a cultural competent environment.

Cultural competency is part of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Early Year Learning Framework “Belonging, Being and Becoming”. It clearly address the importance of a cultural competent educator’s role; “Educators view culture and the context of family as central to children’s sense of being and belonging as well as success in lifelong learning”

What is the purpose of Cultural Competency in early care and out of school hours care settings?

- To eliminate discrimination, conflicts and potential cultural misunderstandings
To meet quality standards, rights and legislations associated with service provision, and to continuously improve professional service provision
- To embrace emerging cultural needs
- To manage the dynamics of working in a culturally diverse environment
- To foster cultural strengths in children and educators

What are the benefits of Cultural Competency?

- Enrichment of the child's care experience (belonging) and development (sense of being)
- Enrichment of the working environment for educators
- Enrichment of communication and relationships with children, their families and the community

How can you evaluate your level of Cultural Competence?

As cultural competence is a reflection of combinations of what we know, what we want to know and what we can pass on, cultural competency becomes an integral part of a continuous learning process.

It is important to note that it is impossible to know it all and do it all. Realistic goal setting becomes vital to successfully integrate cultural competency as part of the educator's professional development.

There are two levels to evaluating cultural competency in early care and out of school hours care settings;

- Service delivery practices - which are driven by regulations, policies, guidelines, trends etc and;
- Human interaction practices - which are driven by client (children and family) cultural preferences

However, fluency and success in cultural competency is driven by the individual educator and the best way to get a feeling for where you are at is to ask reflective questions such as;

- Do your service values reflect the true cultural environment of the children and families utilising the service?
Resources: enrolment forms, surveys, parent-educator meetings, general communication etc.
- Do you know the cultural competence of the individual staff members including yourself? Resources: professional training, self-assessment, surveys, staff meetings, questionnaires etc.
- Have you thought about the different learning styles when you are implementing cultural competency?
Resources: professional development, strength based approach, general communication etc.

References

1. Early Years Learning Framework, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Documents/Final%20EYLF%20Framework%20Report%20-%20WEB.pdf
2. Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health
3. <http://www.ceh.org.au/culturalcompetence.aspx>
4. National Centre for Cultural Competency
5. <http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/foundations/frameworks.html>
6. University of Maryland, USA, School of Public Health
7. http://www.sph.umd.edu/epib/cultural_competency/RationaleContextDefinition.html