

# Kindergarten research insights

Professional reading resource



## Promoting cultural diversity in early childhood education — Part 1

Today, almost half (48.2%) of Australians have a parent born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). With this increasing multicultural diversity, it is more important than ever that we are preparing our children to recognise diversity, and respect and appreciate difference.

Early childhood education can play a leading role in facilitating this recognition and respect. This is because a child's social and cultural environment, both at home and in their early childhood setting, influences their learning and development. Experiences in early childhood have lifelong impacts on learning.

The *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline* (QKLG) recognises children are diverse learners with unique knowledge, perspectives and capabilities. Teachers and educators are encouraged to consider inclusive practices that respond to children's cultures and languages and create culturally safe spaces (p. 8). Other national early childhood frameworks make similar recommendations.

However, in my research (Ba Akhlagh, 2021a, b) I found that not all Australian early childhood teachers feel confident promoting cultural diversity in their classrooms. I quite often hear teachers say, 'I don't have any culture'. It is important to consider how knowledge and understanding of own and others' cultures may affect teachers' confidence in responding to diversity. Culture is about the behaviour and attitudes that shape us. If teachers are aware of these influences, they can promote respectful learning about different ways of knowing and being. Through critical reflection, unhelpful unconscious biases that hinder acceptance of cultural diversity may be identified.

The following considerations can support teachers to reflect on their cultural understandings and inclusive practices in supporting diverse learners in kindergarten.

### Being guided by the children

The QKLG guides teachers to view children as diverse learners with unique knowledge, perspectives and capabilities (p. 8). Teachers can be guided by children to promote different cultures in their classroom through open-ended activities. In my PhD research, I found children are often taught particular ways to paint, draw or make something. But their ideas of creativity may be very different, based on what they do at home. Allowing them the freedom to take control of their creative practice is one important way of encouraging young children to be proud of their cultural differences and to share their ideas with others in the classroom.

### Celebrating events

Every year my family celebrates Persian New Year in spring, and I have had the opportunity to visit a local school and share some of the activities and traditions that this involves. Finding out about and celebrating the cultural events of families and staff attending the service is a great way to encourage respect for different cultures.

## Setting up the classroom

The classroom can be a welcoming and culturally safe space for all children and reflect the diversity in the classroom through books, posters and pictures without any special labelling. One great classroom activity could be to display a map of the world and invite families to share a photo and pin it on the map to show where they are from.

## Partnering with families and communities

There is a wealth of knowledge from many different cultures in our families and communities. Teachers can improve children's exposure to different cultures by inviting families to share drawings, pictures, stories and cuisines from their culture, and by inviting community groups to the classroom to share aspects of their culture.

## Understanding language matters

Teachers can use positive language, celebrate differences and respond openly and honestly to children's questions. They should also challenge ideas and viewpoints that are biased and discriminatory, and offer alternatives that support and respect diversity.

## Confronting your own biases

It is important early childhood teachers engage in critical reflection and identify their own unconscious biases to effectively encourage cultural diversity in the classroom. There are many resources available on anti-bias approaches in early childhood that can support reflection on bias and equity in practice and planning.

Resources include:

- Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edward's (2019) article [Understanding Anti-bias education: Bringing the four core goals to every facet of your curriculum](#)
- Early Childhood Australia Learning Hub module [Anti-bias approaches in early childhood](#)
- *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood* (4th edition), edited by Red Ruby Scarlet. 2020.

## Reflective questions

- How is each child's individuality and agency supported in the kindergarten program?
- What do I understand about the cultural and linguistic identity of the children and families I work with?
- How are children's diverse ways of being and knowing used to inform planning and assessment?
- What do I know about my use of respectful language and interactions, personal beliefs and potential bias, and cultural responsiveness?

## Further reading

In [Part 2](#), I shift focus to how sustained, system-wide change can support individual efforts to promote cultural diversity in early childhood education.

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