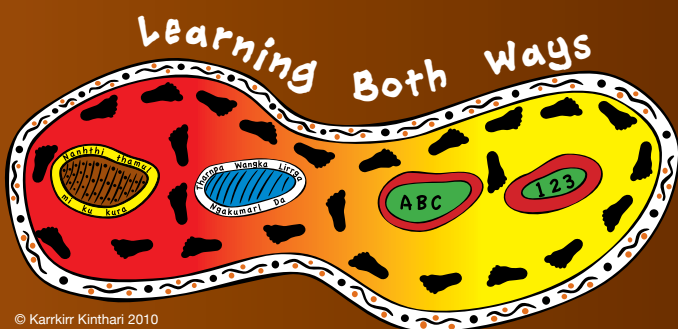




You're in new Country



Advice for Non-Indigenous
Early Childhood Mentors,
Trainers & Teachers

Compiled by Rebekah Farmer and Lyn Fasoli

Please note- you will find the term 'whitefella' in quotes scattered throughout this publication. This is not intended to convey disrespect to non-Indigenous people; it is simply the term used within the Wadeye community to refer to non-Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this document may contain images of people who have passed away since its publication.

All images and quotations have been used with the written permission of individuals and/or their parents

Cover features image of Mardiwaththen Kinthari.
We would like to thank Ryun Fell, Senior Media Technologist, Division of Learning & Teaching Services, Charles Sturt University for the images he has contributed.

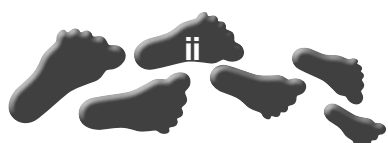
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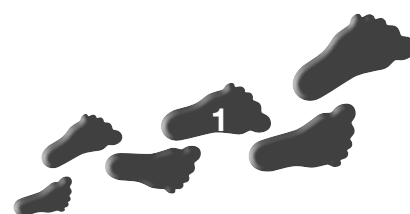
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About this Resource

Developed by the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) in partnership with Charles Sturt University, this is one of a suite of resources for early childhood educators created through the national 'Building Capacity for Early Childhood Education' project, funded by the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations. The main audience for the resource is non-Indigenous early childhood educators, teachers and mentors who work with Indigenous people in remote community contexts. It has been produced by remote Indigenous early childhood educators with the support of the resource compilers, Rebekah Farmer and Lyn Fasoli (BIITE).

This is an important time in the development of remote Indigenous early childhood services as more and more non-Indigenous educators come to remote communities to work with Indigenous colleagues. Anyone familiar with Indigenous early childhood will know that a huge number of new early childhood projects are being 'rolled out' in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory with the aim of 'closing the gap' on Indigenous disadvantage. Non-Indigenous workers recruited to these projects and services, ideally, hold early childhood qualifications, however, due to a national shortage in early childhood graduates, some recruits may hold other or no job-specific qualifications. For many, it will be their first experience in a remote Indigenous community. As a result, many workers feel unprepared, flounder and often leave after only a few months, a situation that undermines rather than builds the capacity of local Indigenous staff. Making the decision to work in a remote Indigenous community is the beginning of a learning journey that is full of rewards as well as challenges and is a journey that will be more successful if non-Indigenous workers are open to learning as well as sharing their skills and knowledge with others.

The messages, themes and advice contained in this booklet were generated through participatory action research undertaken over approximately 18 months involving the project team and Indigenous early childhood educators in the Northern Territory. The booklet primarily reflects the views of Indigenous early childhood educators who work and live in the Northern Territory community of Wadeye and is augmented by the views of Indigenous early childhood students studying at the Batchelor Institute. We have attempted to create a culturally informed resource, linked to existing relevant literature, in order to better inform and support non-Indigenous mentors, trainers and teachers in making the transition from a Western-focused early childhood setting to working in the intercultural context of a remote Indigenous community.

Indigenous early childhood educators have shared stories of their personal work experiences along with their formal and informal learning, highlighting the ways non-Indigenous people have supported and enabled them to succeed in the workplace and in their learning, while reflecting on some of the equally important things that non-Indigenous people struggle with when they begin to work in remote communities. This resource is their answer to the key question - "What is important for non-Indigenous people to learn to help them support your early childhood work and learning?"

The resource provides localised views of some of the complex issues that can impact on early childhood workforce development and learning in some remote Indigenous communities. However, they are not a generic Indigenous view, as there is no such thing. As early childhood educators and researchers with specific expertise in working with Indigenous early childhood staff and students in the NT, we cannot emphasise enough that this resource is not a 'one size fits all approach'. Every Indigenous community is different. Some communities may share these views while others will differ. The resource should not be used as a template or a rulebook. However, it can be the basis for cultural learning and a starting point for discussion with the Indigenous staff, families and communities. It is designed to support the development of non-Indigenous teachers, trainers and mentors in a remote Indigenous early childhood contexts by promoting critical reflection. Some questions are provided at the end of each topic to guide reflection and action.

Community Overview

A short overview of the Wadeye community is provided here to enable readers to better understand the primary context in which this resource was developed.

The remote Northern Territory Indigenous community of Wadeye (pronounced wad-air), also referred to as Port Keats, is situated 270km by air southwest of Darwin. Access is available daily from Darwin by air in under an hour. However, road access to the community is a 470km journey on a mix of sealed and unsealed roads and is limited to the dry season, the six months of the year when there is no rain. Roads close for the remaining months of the year due to wet season flooding and the damage it leaves behind.

Founded as a Catholic Mission in 1935 by Father Richard Docherty, the Port Keats Mission attracted Indigenous people from more than 20 clans and seven different language groups to the area because of the services and levels of safety it offered. The community continued to grow as a Catholic mission administered by the Australian Government until 1978 when local governance was handed over to the Kardu Numida Council and the community's name was officially changed to 'Wadeye' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p.12). The collapse of the Council in 1994 saw clan leaders keen to re-establish control and form a governance structure that offered the government functions needed while also reasserting customary rights. In 2003, this vision became the Thamarrurr Regional Council (Taylor, 2010, p.5) with representation from the twenty clan groups in the area (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p.12). In 2008, Wadeye became part of the Daly Shire through the Northern Territory wide restructuring of local government. Wadeye is now the home for families from 22 land owning clan groups with approximately 5 languages spoken and a number of dialects. English is not widely used and is mainly used to communicate with non-Indigenous visitors to the community. Murrinhpatha is the most commonly spoken language and the language taught at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School, although for many Indigenous residents it is a second or third language (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010 p.12).

Wadeye now has grown to be one of the largest remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, with a population of approximately 2675 people (Northern Territory Government, no date). Over half are under the age of 18, including an estimated infant population (0-3) of over 300 children (Taylor, 2010, p12). Community families have access to a range of facilities including a crèche, preschool, a primary and secondary school, mobile playscheme, clinic, aged care facility, church, butchers, bakery, post office, take away food shop, community store, fruit and vegetable shop, women's centre, shire offices, police, safe house, Centrelink, job agency and a Batchelor Institute training facility. Community infrastructure is set to increase further with Wadeye identified by the Northern Territory Government as a 'growth town' to be developed 'with services, buildings and facilities like any other country town in Australia' to enable it to become the economic service delivery centre in the region (Northern Territory Government, no date).

Early childhood services in the community for before school age children include the Save the Children Australia Playschemes, Our Lady Of Sacred Heart Preschool and the Children's Service Support Unit (CSSU) Crèche. The Save the Children Playschemes operate in four different community locations each week and are facilitated by local Indigenous staff supported by qualified early childhood educators from outside the community. They provide a range of play and learning activities as well as parent support (Save The Children Australia, 2010). The Playscheme also supports early childhood workforce and local leadership development through the employment of local staff and an advisory committee developed by local women according to ceremonial lines to provide local management to playgroups (Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, no date).

Our lady of Sacred Heart Preschool offers a bi-lingual early childhood education program from facilities located within Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School. Beginning at preschool level, children's first three years of schooling are taught in Murrinhpatha. The school employs a high number of Indigenous staff as teachers, assistant teachers and literacy workers (Catholic Education Office Northern Territory, no date).

Save the Children Australia in partnership with the Batchelor Institute and the Thamarrurr Council undertook a community consultation in 2007 to support the future development of an expanded early childhood service. In mid 2010 the community crèche was relocated from the school grounds to a new purpose built facility. The service has had multiple managers since its inception in 2008 and has been managed by the Children's Service Support Unit (CSSU) since late 2010. CSSU is a Western Australian organisation with the stated purpose of 'building resilient individuals, families and communities by providing support, management and learning opportunities for organisations, and those disadvantaged by poverty, location or a lack of services' (Children's Service Support Unit, no date).

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Project Mentor - Karrkurr Kinthari's Story

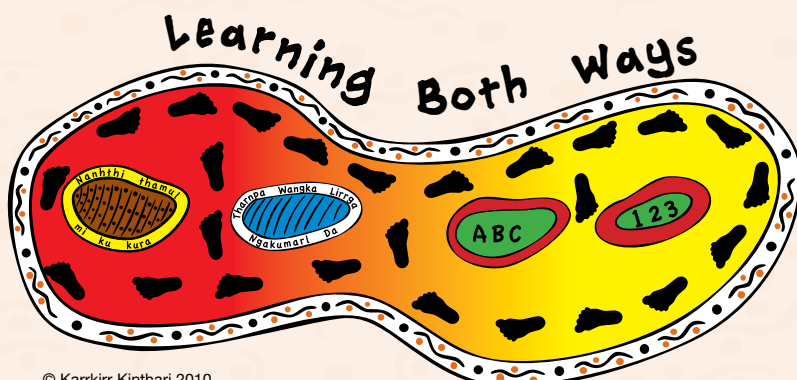
Preschool Teacher Karrkurr Kinthari has provided invaluable support throughout the development of this resource. She has spent many hours talking, sharing experiences and guiding us as our valued and respected mentor, early childhood colleague and friend. Karrkurr's powerful symbol of what both-ways learning means to her not only provides the project with its logo but details from the logo are embedded subtly in the design throughout the resource to reflect the both-ways paradigm that underpins it. The following is her story explaining her logo and her motivation for involvement in the project.



My name is Karrkurr Kinthari. My clan group is Rak Dirrangara and my country is the plains of Nama. Some of my totems are the water lily, owl and kanhpubi, the mermaids. My language is Marri Ngarr, but I also speak Murrinhpatha. I am 57 and have lived in Wadeye all my life. From 1963 I spent 3 years at Kormilda boarding school in Darwin. That's when I started learn whitefella way so I could walk in both worlds. I went to Batchelor College to get my teaching diploma and I started working at the school in the kindergarten when I was only 19. I still work there. I have always worked at the school. There is no other place to be than working with kids – working with kids is my life. I love children. We like teaching them both-ways of learning. When I first started work it was hard to speak up. I was too shy. Not today! I am a strong person. Sometimes whitefellas don't listen to us. We are always being told what to do and they make decisions for us. It's hard sometimes to stand up to a whitefella and speak our mind. I hope that whitefellas read this book and think about good ways of working together so that we are working both-ways. I've worked with lots of whitefellas, and whitefellas come and go, but I will still be here. This is my home. It's best to support each other always and make our life better.

This is my symbol of learning in two ways.

On the left are two water holes which represent a place of life. The words around these waterholes are important things for us as Aboriginal people - our land, our dreaming, our ceremonies, our totems and our food. On the right are the circles of whitefella learning. The footprints represent the children and teachers walking to the service to learn in both-ways.



© Karrkurr Kinthari 2010

Mi - food
Ku - animal
Kura - water

Tharnpa - ceremonial dance group
Wangka - ceremonial dance group
Lirra - ceremonial dance group

ngakumarl - totem
da - country
nanhthi - things
thamul - spear



Project Mentor- Mary Jimarin's Story

Mary Sophie Jimarin is the present co director of the Wadeye crèche. She has been involved in a number of early childhood projects with Batchelor Institute since 2008 and has played a key role in the current project as a cultural mentor, early childhood colleague and friend. She has made a critically important and significant contribution to the development of this resource through her honesty, experience, support and advice. Her story below provides her perspective on early childhood workforce development in her community.

My name is Mary Sophie Jimarin. I grew up in Peppimenarti but my homelands is Namarluk outstation. I moved to Wadeye in 2005 to be with my mother's family. This is my mother's home. I started working in a small crèche that used to run out of half of a preschool building. They only had 5-10 kids coming a day. Today the community has a big new building with up to 20 kids each day.

In 2008 I went to Batchelor Institute to study my Certificate III in Children's Services. It was hard to leave my son Justin to go to workshops and be away from him. Now I am studying in community and am close to finishing my Cert III. I hope to be finished by Christmas. I am an Indigenous mentor. I learnt to be a mentor from all that time I spent with Becky and Mali. They gave me the idea. Now I am the mentor to the director and the trainer. I teach them the right ways, but it's easy with them cos they really want to learn. I've worked with lots of whitefellas in the 6 years I have worked at crèche and I never gave up. I am still here. This is my son's home. I hope that this book helps whitefellas learn more about better ways to support us when they work in the Aboriginal community. I hope they hear our voices and learn to understand our way.



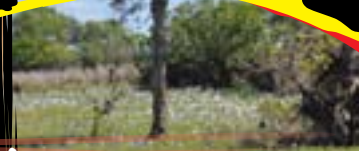
You don't know - You're in new Country

You're in a different world, not your part of Australia.

Everything in that country got a story.

Every Indigenous community is different.

Even when they get that culture
training before they come, when
they get there they don't do it.



You don't know - you're in new country

Entering into new country is a privilege. For non-Indigenous Australians who have never experienced a remote Indigenous community, it is a place that is exciting and unnerving, familiar and unfamiliar, a place where you must learn a new language, a new culture and how to operate in a new environment. Working in a remote Indigenous community is as rewarding as it is challenging and full of amazing opportunities that open up as you acquire knowledge about the culture and the people you will be working to support. For most, it will be a temporary home, one that may last for years but which is not meant to be permanent. Keeping this in mind, non-Indigenous people should be aware that:

- Cultural awareness training is an essential part of preparing to work within an Indigenous community. Cultural awareness training may start with a workshop but it continues over the whole period spent in a community. It will be the foundation of your intercultural learning journey.
- Every Indigenous community is different and a generic 'one size fits all' approach to cultural awareness or competency training cannot provide you with all the knowledge you will need to work effectively in a specific community. Talk with community members about what you have already learnt. Listen to them and allow them to extend on your cultural knowledge with community specific cultural information.
- While cultural knowledge is an empowering tool, gaining community-specific cultural knowledge is not an entitlement for non-Indigenous visitors; it is a privilege that comes with the development of strong respectful relationships.
- Every community has its own culture and ways of doing things. Indigenous clan groups residing in the same community can also have different cultural practices and beliefs. Talking with the people you work with is the best way to learn this information.
- There are very real cultural differences between non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people in Australia. If you strive to develop a deep understanding of those differences, you have a much better chance of making a positive contribution.
- Your learning can start before you arrive in a community. Many communities have websites with information about their own culture - how to dress, where to go, where not to go, traditional owners, grog rules and many other issues. Find out as much as you can about the community you will be working in before you arrive.
- It is important to get to the point in your own professional development where you can truly hear and understand what Aboriginal people are saying to you. Be open and honest and let people know this is a new experience for you and that you want to learn more to help you work the right way. People will share information with you when they feel you are ready to learn and when you demonstrate you truly respect and value them as individuals. This takes time but it is worth the effort.



Advice from educators

When you're going into different community, you're in a different world, not your part of Australia. We got our own law, way of working, how we do things, how the community is set up. People have to be aware. They have to understand there's a law there and an outsider has to find out. Dig and go and talk with the right people. Find out information. We all have to learn about the law.

Indigenous early childhood educator

With cultural training, they need to experience it. Maybe go to an outstation and spend a couple of days or a week just to see how people live, how they connect, their relationship and just learn by watching and listening. Have the space to learn. Don't just come in with your degree and mainstream ideas.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Every community is different. You're in a new country when you come to our community.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Everything in that country got a story. It tells you where to sit, how to respect that country and how to behave around that country. It's good knowledge to have.

Indigenous early childhood educator

You come out from the whitefella world, with your mind, and you going into a different country, like Bali. Indigenous community like that. You gotta have that expectation – different culture, different people, live in a different world. Like when you go on a holiday, you don't rush, rush, rush. You relax and enjoy yourself. Then you learn. Then people can accept you.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I've seen it for years. We talk to people about what they need to do in a community, but they don't do it. They're disrespectful and don't even know it.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Even when they get that culture training before they come, when they get there, they don't do it. They just get job, get plopped in that community. Then they just start telling people what to do. That sort of thing you don't need!

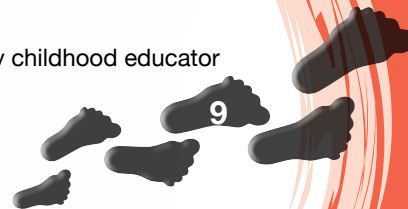
Indigenous early childhood educator

Maybe learn little bit of language, speak to people. You don't within yourself have to agree with everything but if you go to a new place you just have to pretend a bit, because you're there to help people. Show that you care and that you want to help make it better for kids. They'll help you settle into your place and they'll look after you. Like if there's drunks or petrol sniffers, they'll tell you about where not to go. You'll get more care from them if you just show that respect. They'll look after you while you're out there. But if you don't, they'll just turn a blind eye to you.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Give yourself that time to think and learn and accept you are learning, just by what's happening around you.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

According to Wild & Anderson (2007, p. 202) generic cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous people intending to work remote communities needs revising. They say such training should:

- *'be designed and/or developed in consultation with local Aboriginal people, in particular traditional owners*
- *draw upon existing local Aboriginal resources, networks and skills*
- *be conducted or include presentations by Aboriginal people*
- *be delivered at the regional or local level to allow programs to be appropriately adapted to take account of regional cultural differences, customs and concerns of local Aboriginal communities*
- *include protocols and information specific to the role or position of the individual undertaking the training*
- *be sufficiently long and detailed to meaningfully inform participants of matters necessary to the delivery of programs and services to Aboriginal clients*
- *be evaluated, updated and reinforced on a regular basis'*

In their study of cultural awareness training programs for non-Indigenous health workers working in remote communities, Westwood and Westwood (2010) found some serious deficiencies. In particular, they found that remote area workers *'need the capacity to examine their own cultural assumptions and then the skills to adapt effective practice to a range of other cultural groupings, including Aboriginal people'* (p. 427).

Indigenous researcher Fredericks (2008, p. 82) discusses concerns that many Indigenous people have when visitors to their communities presume to know how to 'fix' local problems based on their work in other places. *'...sometimes the people who are trying to do the "fixing" are people who have a history of working in the Pacific or Papua New Guinea or some other place with vulnerable peoples and try and overlay what they did in these contexts in the context of Indigenous Australian lives'*.

Understanding what it means to work and live in a new country can be very challenging for non-Indigenous workers because of the differences in knowledge systems and worldviews. Zubrick, et. al, (2008, p. xxi) explain that, *'Aboriginal knowledge systems have ways of sensing the world, worldviews that differ in significant ways from the dominant "western" or "European" knowledge system in Australia. Aboriginal knowledge systems are based on intimate relationships, not focused on what things are as much as who they are and how they are related'*.

Davidson et al. (2008, p. 1) agrees. *'There is strong commonality between Indigenous peoples across Australia arising from their shared culture and heritage; equally, there is much diversity. Indigenous peoples and communities have a wide range of backgrounds, needs and aspirations, and interact with "mainstream" society in many different ways. It is important that this complexity and diversity be appropriately reflected'*.

Given the differences in communities, early childhood services in these communities should ‘... be tailored to fit the needs and the experiences of the community’, says Sagggers et al. (2006, p. 2). These authors have a wealth of advice for non-Indigenous workers gained from extensive consultations with Indigenous people from across Australia, including those living in remote Indigenous communities in the NT.

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Reflection and action

Have you ever travelled overseas for a holiday? Think of the things you found out before you went – the facilities, places to go and see, the language, culture, customs and the things that should be avoided so as not to cause offence. Reflect on how it felt to not understand the customs or language. Did you ask questions to try to understand or employ a local guide to share knowledge with you along the way? Consider the similarities of travelling overseas and moving to a remote Indigenous community.

Listen and learn from a cultural mentor.

You have to connect with the people first.

Talk to people, do the things their way.

Have a cup of tea. How long
it takes, doesn't matter.

We know our kids,
you don't.



Listen and learn from a cultural mentor

Developing a mutual mentoring relationship with an Indigenous person is the best way to learn about culture and community as well as share your knowledge. Strong mentoring relationships take time and effort to establish but are extremely valuable. They provide you with a culturally informed perspective that allows you to view situations in new ways and work collaboratively to develop a culturally respectful and inclusive early childhood service.

- Take your time and get to know the people you are working with. Be friendly, open and genuine. Listen, learn, ask questions and enjoy your experiences.
- Don't be afraid to ask when you don't understand and need guidance. The only way you can truly learn what you'll need to know to make a difference is to listen to and learn from a local Indigenous person.
- Over time, as your relationships with your new colleagues strengthen, someone will emerge as your cultural mentor. He or she is most likely to be the person that other staff direct you to for answers to your questions and is someone who will be open to you for help.
- A cultural mentor can guide you along the way, introduce you to people and teach you about family relationships, culture and community. With your mentor's help you will learn the right ways to work with people and the community expectations in relation to how to behave and dress.
- Nurture the relationship with your mentor. Be friendly, open, genuine, humble and honest. Ask for your mentor's opinion and be guided by the advice you receive.
- The mentoring relationship is also empowering for your mentor. Through it you can demonstrate that you have listened, heard and valued what has been shared with you. As the relationship strengthens, you will become sounding boards for each other's ideas and questions.
- Reflect with your mentor often. Use statements like, 'What do you think about...?', 'What would you do...?', 'What do you think we should do about...?', 'How do you think this would work....?' Be aware that your mentor may decide to discuss your questions with other staff rather than take sole responsibility for advising you.
- Be sensitive to jealousy in other staff members that a mentoring relationship may create. While you may consider one person to be your mentor, taking the time to involve all staff in decision making processes and dedicating time each day to interact and talk with each individual staff member will make sure they know you value them as well.



Advice from educators

My mentor's always there when I need her. We have a connection, a bond. We share knowledge. I help her understand my way; she explains things and helps me understand her knowledge. We respect and value each other. She is a good listener, my friend. She's part of my life and part of my family's life, like she meant to be there. I don't see her as high up there, a Professor. She's calming, like Gularri, peaceful water for me. She is my comfort and foundation and I'm like the relaxing south wind, the madirring, pushing her along too.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Don't barge in and take control. Go with the flow. Talk to people and do the things their way- what they been doing a long time. Then you can add your pieces into the puzzle.

Indigenous early childhood educator

If you stay away from everyone in the community, they treat you like an outsider. You'll get all that pressure. You'll do things differently and you'll know you don't have that support from community. It's good to feel that support and have someone to talk to about a problem. They will be there to help you.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I really felt out of my comfort zone when I first started to work with Indigenous early childhood workers in remote communities. At first I was really worried that I would make mistakes and upset the staff. The relationship that evolved between my Indigenous mentor and myself, gave me the opportunity to bounce ideas and ways of doing things off her first, to make sure that they were ok from a cultural perspective, before I discussed things further with the wider group.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

Whitefella's come to our community with ideas from other places and just do them without discussion.

Indigenous early childhood educator

She tells me her story and I tell her mine.

Indigenous early childhood educator

For me as Aboriginal person, when I go to a different place, I say who I am, introduce myself, tell them where I'm from, tell them this is the knowledge I have and try and have a discussion. Say what my job is. Put it on the table. You have to connect with people first, maybe have a cup of tea. How long it takes, doesn't matter. Slowly go into that flow and start showing them new ideas. Like how we do things and why we do things different.

Indigenous early childhood educator

You get these mob that say they know culture. They understand it. They can't just know it from a book - they got to live it!

Indigenous early childhood educator

I was chatting with an Indigenous colleague about things we are good at, and things we need more help with. When I asked her, "What things are you good at?", she told me, "Being a mentor". I was really proud that she understood that she was teaching me just as much as I was teaching her.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

My mentor helps me and I help her. She visits a lot to help my learning- that is a good thing. We talk on the phone when she is in town. She's real patient, never seen her cranky with us, but she gets annoyed sometimes when whitefellas don't work right way. My family know her now and they are happy for me to travel to conference now... I will be going to Canberra in October with her, to the launch of this book!

Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

In an article for non-Indigenous teachers working in remote Indigenous communities, Bond (2010, p. 43 citing Back, 2004, p. 2) advises them to *'work and live with a community perspective'*. Many non-Aboriginal people arrive in Aboriginal communities bringing their *'individual and distinct agendas'* and these agendas often do not support the *'common community defined outcomes'*.

A Commonwealth of Australia publication entitled *Culture at Work* (2004, p. 10) recommends that effective teaching and training with Indigenous people requires skills in intercultural competence which;

- *'Highlights that knowledge on its own is a passive response to other cultures.*
- *Emphasises our need for a dynamic relationship with our own culture so we can analyse and reflect on our own "way of doing things" when faced with other cultural traditions.*
- *Moves beyond "understanding" and "tolerance" to encourage a vigorous exchange within and between cultures.'*

In reviewing case studies of remote Indigenous service development, Scougall (2008, p. 54-55) identifies *'side-by-side buddy mentoring'* as one of the more effective strategies currently being used. *'One feature of several remote projects is a side-by-side buddy mentoring arrangement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous project staff known as malparrara. It is now regarded as best practice in Central Australia. It involves partnering an Aboriginal worker with local cultural knowledge with a non-Indigenous person possessing professional qualifications. This way of working creates opportunities to strengthen personal relationships between project staff and community members.'*

Wunungmurra (2010, p. 10), an Indigenous early childhood educator from the community of Gapuwiyak in the NT, likens the community impact of some consultants to a 'tsunami'. *'I think that the consultation that is happening is like a tsunami. People come into communities with new ideas and just scrape the community clean of the old ideas. People in communities already have good ideas about how to fix problems. But this tsunami consultation doesn't listen to those good ideas.'*

The Remote Area Health Core (2009, p. 11) handbook for remote health workers advises outsiders to a new community to take their time and learn, before they make judgments. Newcomers need ‘...to accept community structures and characteristics for what they are (and) work within these structures and characteristics, rather than battling to change what may have been well entrenched over many generations. It is important to avoid making judgments such as, ‘the mothers ought to look after their children better’...or ‘they should pick up the rubbish’. Take your time and don’t let first impressions cloud your view because, eventually, ‘...you are able to see what lies beneath them, and gain an understanding of how better to work with them rather than against them’.



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Reflection and action

Think of someone in your life that you consider to be your mentor, Indigenous or Non-Indigenous. Reflect on how this relationship began and evolved. How has it affected your career? Can you describe some key qualities or traits that made this person a good mentor for you? What qualities do you think you will bring to a mentoring relationship you will have in a remote Indigenous community? What do you think about the idea of mutual mentoring? Did your previous mentoring experience flow both ways?

Discuss your reflections with local Indigenous staff and learners. Talk about the qualities or traits that you valued in your previous mentoring relationships. Help staff and learners to generate a list of the things they think are important qualities for a mentor to demonstrate. Discuss the idea of mutual mentoring. Together, make a chart or picture that shows what a mutual mentoring relationship might look like.



Learn about family rules and kinship

You can't explain the rules until you live it.

Live it and learn.

It takes time to learn kinship rules but it's worth it.

People who come to our community need to know about kinship.



Learn about family rules and kinship

Developing understanding and respecting the complex family structures and cultural rules associated with family will help you work more effectively in a remote community. While you may be enthusiastic and keen to learn, resist arriving in community and bombarding people with questions. The sharing of cultural knowledge comes with the development of relationships and is not an immediate entitlement for non-Indigenous visitors.

- Be sensitive. Take the time to develop relationships with people before expecting them to discuss local cultural protocols.
- Family rules determine many of the interactions that take place in remote communities. They determine who can make decisions, who can give directions, who can speak to each other and where and how many interactions occur.
- Because of avoidance rules it may not be appropriate for people to say the name of, or make eye contact with some members of their family. Rules may also apply to interactions with members of another clan family. Rules are specific to each community; learn about the cultural protocols of the specific community that you are working in.
- If people advise you that they can't say someone's name or talk about them, don't assume that they are being uncooperative. Ask them if they know someone who may be able to share this information with you.
- Sometimes people may not appear to actively participate in training or work when in the company of someone with whom they have an avoidance relationship. It may look like they are not interested when they actually are.
- Reflect on the structure of the workplace or learning environment and allow people to choose where they wish to physically place themselves. Given the opportunity, people will arrange themselves in clusters according to cultural rules observed in their community.
- When making decisions about staffing, consult the community and existing staff. People will share who can and can't work together and may be able to offer suggestions to allow the service to better accommodate these rules.
- Nicknames are often used in situations where cultural rules influence the use of names. This may be for various reasons such as the death of a relative or an avoidance relationship. Although using nicknames in Western early childhood services is frowned upon, if they are used in an Indigenous context it may be for cultural reasons.
- Rules can also exist between local Indigenous community members and other Indigenous people who have relocated to the community. Indigenous residents from another community may not see themselves, or be seen by others, as the right people to make decisions, as it is not their country.
- Local Indigenous people are more comfortable to try new ways of doing things and more motivated to participate in learning activities when they know that you respect and can demonstrate some level of understanding of the kinship rules that apply in their community.

Advice from educators

You can't explain the rules until you live it. Live it and learn. Kids need to learn. Tell them about the story. Tell them about the country and the landmarks. Whitefellas need to learn too.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I told her, 'I can't sit there!! That man in there. You people should learn this.' People who come to our community need to know about kinship.

Indigenous early childhood educator

It takes time to learn kinship rules but it's worth it. I was working in a remote community for a while but it wasn't until my Indigenous mentor drew a kinship map that I really understood her relationship to the other people working in the service. I know how people fit in now and it's made my relationship with my mentor stronger.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

I had one of the kids passing out books to all the boys in the class and when he came to one kid he threw it on the ground. I growled him but now I know it was an appropriate way for him to deal with this avoidance relationship and it was culturally acceptable. You see the same thing at the shop where a woman might come out and throw a fifty dollar note on the ground for a man to pick up.

Non-Indigenous educator

Sometimes there's a lot of jealousy in the community. They won't respect you if you from another community. They thinking, 'Who that Yolngu coming to our community?' They see that Aboriginal person like outsider.

Indigenous early childhood educator

My cousin, he works here too. Every time I go to the office, I'm always careful that I don't run into him. He's a poison cousin but they got that new word now, avoidance.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Funeral is really important and circumcision, men's business, women's business, really important. It is taught to us when we are young. When the old people talk about it, you grow up with that knowledge.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I asked the ladies the name of one of the children at the crèche, so I could write it on his painting. The women called him "Cowboy". Then one of the ladies told me they could not say his real name because it was the same name as their cousin and in this community people can't say their male cousin's name.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

My family know her now. She respects my family. They don't worry about me as much when I am with her.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Indigenous families live it, grow up with it and know it. As a visitor you need to learn too.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Read more about this message from other sources

Australia's national peak body representing the interests of Indigenous children and their families, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care [SNAICC] (2010, p. 9), remind people of how many of the modern day Indigenous communities came into being. *'It is important to understand that many Aboriginal people, and Torres Strait Islander people to an extent, were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands to live elsewhere. Others have chosen to relocate from their traditional lands for a wide range of personal, economic and other reasons, while usually retaining strong connections to their "country"'*.

SNAICC (2010) describes key features of traditional family's structure that are often observed in remote Indigenous communities.

'Skin group

In many Aboriginal communities there are a number of skin groups within language groups, and all people in these communities are born with a skin name. Skin groups govern social behaviour and interaction, determining those whom individuals can and cannot talk to, marry and trade with, as well as identifying their natural enemies. These practices are particularly observed in remote communities in parts of the Northern Territory.

Moiety (Moi-ety)

As well as skin groups, in some communities all people belong to one of two basic divisions, or moieties. Children belong to the same moiety as their father; their mother belongs to the other moiety. Everything – spirit beings, plant and animal species, clan groups, areas of land and water – belong to one of these moieties. Within each moiety, people belong to smaller groups called clans.

Totem

For Aboriginal people, the "totem" is a non-human species or phenomenon that stands for, or represents, the group. Aboriginal peoples' 'totems' link people or groups through their physical and kin relatedness. Totem relationships are embedded in a view of the world in which connectivity is the foundation of all life. In some areas totems represent individuals and groups in a broader social context. Examples include the Owl and the Possum.

Clan

A clan usually consists of two or more family groups that share an area of land over which they have ownership. Clan boundaries are passed from one generation to the next, generally through the father.'

(SNAICC, 2010, p. 22-23)

Wild & Anderson (2007, p. 54) explain that *'Aboriginal communities should not be viewed as a "whole" because there are divisions across different language groups and within those language groups there is a division between clans or families'*.

The Remote Area Health Corp (RAHC) (2009, p. 20) cultural orientation handbook provides some general information about avoidance rules, sometimes called 'poison' relationships. *'There are many aspects to the kinship network: who can be spoken to, who has to be avoided, who has specific responsibilities and obligations, who guides, who teaches, who marries whom, and who attends to passing away ceremonies... These avoidance relationships are about respecting your family and are not about disrespect. The term "poison" is also used to describe avoidance, this term is meant with respect. You do not touch or go near poison'.*

Brothers and sisters should never:

- touch each other (ever)
- give anything to each other (use another person)
- talk to each other directly (use another person)
- say each other's names (gender specific)
- be in the same room together (at any time)
- attend each others funeral'.

(RAHC, 2009, p. 21)

Fryer-Smith (2008, p. 2:15) discusses avoidance rules that apply through traditional law. *'Often, people face in different directions, or sit apart, or communicate only through an intermediary. This practice usually signifies the observance of kinship rules. Sanctions for breach of kinship rules vary according to the nature of the rule and the relevant kinship relationship'.*

Zubrick et al. (2006, p. xxi) discuss the importance of relationships amongst Aboriginal people and their land and how their knowledge systems are embedded in these relationships. *'Aboriginal education systems require children and adults to hold multiple schemata in mind simultaneously in order, for example, to know and understand complex kinship systems and skin groupings, and navigate traditional lands' (p. xxiii).*



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Reflection and action

Think about your own family relationships and what is considered 'acceptable' or not in how people should behave. What rules might an outsider to your family need to know to work more effectively with your family members?

Consider keeping a journal of confusing events or interactions you have with your Indigenous colleagues. Write down the story of the incident where you were confused or didn't understand what was happening. Later, when you have formed a friendly relationship with someone in your community, ask them about these incidents.



Learn our ways with our kids

We don't like to say 'no' to kids.

Don't think you know our kids
because you know your kids.

Kids don't always stay with the mum and dad.

I want my kids to achieve in both worlds.



Learn our ways with our kids

For a non-Indigenous visitor to work effectively with families in a remote community it is essential that they develop a sound understanding of the parenting practices of the local Indigenous culture. This understanding not only allows you to work more effectively with children and adults, but it will enable you to support local staff to develop a culturally safe early childhood service for their community.

- As a non-Indigenous visitor to a community you will observe many differences between the child rearing practices of Indigenous families and those with which you are familiar. These differences are important. The way families raise their children is right for them.
- Acknowledge where you are and that your expectations of children's behaviour are probably different from local expectations. Ask staff and learners how they respond to any behaviour you find problematic. A strong relationship with staff and parents will lay the foundation for discussing similarities and differences in approach.
- Many people in remote communities are struggling to work effectively with children who are living and learning in an intercultural world. They are immersed in a mixture of Indigenous and Western views and values and their behaviour reflects this. Adopt ways of working with children that reflect parenting practices common in the community and offer fresh ideas and thinking when staff and families seek your advice.
- Get to know local families and learn their ways with children. Resist analysing or judging practices according to your own cultural perspectives. When people trust you, they may ask for your help and advice believing their children might listen to you.
- Western norms of guardianship are challenged in Indigenous culture. Understanding this can minimise misunderstandings. Extended family members, including siblings, have responsibilities for looking after children. Children don't just stay with their parents. Be aware that your expectations could be wrong about who to ask to get permission for an excursion or to seek help with a problem.
- In remote communities, children are allowed greater levels of independence and often make their own decisions about a lot of things including where they go, who they will go with, when they want to eat and sleep. Adults respect their children's choices. These increased levels of independence will need to be reflected in the day-to-day operation of the service.
- Certain people hold responsibility for disciplining children. Always talk with family members or staff before intervening with a child - especially if this involves touching a child, such as moving them from one area to another area.
- As a mentor, teacher or trainer be aware that younger children may accompany adults to events or training, and older children may attend to help care for younger siblings. Plan ahead and keep some resources handy to accommodate children. Children also need to be considered when planning trips away from the community. Some people may not feel safe in leaving children in the care of others.
- Given the increase in non-Indigenous people living and working in remote Indigenous communities there are more non-Indigenous children using the local early childhood services. Local staff may be hesitant to discipline non-Indigenous children for fear of upsetting their parents. This situation requires effective cross-cultural communication. Talk to parents of non-Indigenous children and ensure that they understand that their children will be looked after in the same way as Indigenous children. This may be different to the care they have previously experienced in town based services. Talk to staff to develop strategies to support them to work effectively with non-Indigenous children. Bring staff and non-Indigenous parents together to develop 'rules' that they would like to see used with their children.
- Your responsibilities for children's welfare are the same in a remote community as they are elsewhere in the NT where reporting of any suspected child abuse or neglect is mandatory.

Advice from educators

We don't like to say 'no' to kids. We have our own ways of getting kids to cooperate. Support us to work with kids, our way. We will ask you when we need you. Talk to us and give us your suggestions, but don't think you know our kids because you know your kids.

Indigenous early childhood educator

My son was not listening to the director (non-Indigenous). He was crying. I was in the kitchen and one of the other ladies told me the director pulled him, rough. I did not like it, so I went up to her and told her not to do that to him as he was only little (2 years old). She was scared that I spoke up to her.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Kids don't always stay with the mum and dad. Sometimes they stay with other family.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We don't think like the kids do. If we stop them they'll keep doing it

Indigenous early childhood educator

When whitefellas have their children in care in our community, they need to make sure that they don't expect us to look after their child different to the way we look after other children.

Indigenous early childhood educator

It's different rule for kids in town. In the community kids get everything they want. You have to understand the kid's background.

Indigenous early childhood educator

With all the knowledge I have, the way I've been brought up, it's all in me. All the knowledge I've had from EC (early childhood studies), that's all in me too. I see it in my head, what sort of practices I have. I have both. Non-Indigenous (people) need both too.

Indigenous early childhood educator

My little granddaughter talks real loud, no stopping, and when she eats she grabs the food. If you take that thing off her, she scream. She just chuck herself on the ground. No one in town know how to deal with her. She used to people just buy her anything she want in the community. Someone tell her off and she just scream. I don't tell her off. I teach her different. One time she take off the crust on the bread and chuck it. I show her she has to eat the crust on the bread, quiet. Sitting down is good and showing. Show her the food on the plate and maybe eat a little bit to show her. Talk quiet.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I want my kids to achieve in both worlds. My daughter was singing at the school and she was standing tall and proud. It was nice to be there and see that happen. Because the way this world is now I get worried. But she can still talk in her language.

Indigenous early childhood educator

My little nephew, he's like turning into 3 and he already knows how he relates to everyone.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We don't want to do it your way – we want to do it our way. We know our kids, you don't. This is Wadeye, not Nguuu, Alice Springs or somewhere else!

Indigenous early childhood educator

Caring for non-Indigenous children places a huge pressure on local women. They are often shamed by comments made by non-Indigenous parents who don't understand Aboriginal culture or the rationale for the service. They simply expect that the service will provide the same service as those in town.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

Read more about this message from other sources

The Remote Area Health Corp (2009, p. 23) cautions visitors to remote Indigenous communities about interfering in discipline situations involving Indigenous children. *'A child is a gift to the entire kinship network and is highly valued. Children are given constant affection and child-rearing is shared by all those who have a responsibility to the child within the kinship network. Each of these people has their specific role essential to healthy child-rearing'...* *'Affection is an essential ingredient of child discipline. Intervention by adults outside a defined kin group is rarely accepted. Teaching is done by demonstration and participation rather than instruction'.*

This is confirmed by Scougall (2010, p. 30) who explains, *'The socialisation of children in Indigenous families and communities is typically achieved through the use of subtle and indirect means, such as paying selective attention, the use of stories that communicate a value laden message, or the encouragement of children to imitate parental actions. Older children are often expected to assume responsibility for supervising and protecting the younger ones and taking responsibility for things such as what they eat and how much'.*

Malin, Cambell and Agius (1996, p. 47) share aspects of data collected as part of their larger comparative, ethnographic study that explored the implications of different child rearing practices for children as they become accustomed to a Western-oriented learning environment. They present snapshots of family situations of both 'Dorothy', a Nunga mother, and 'Ann', a middle class Anglo-Saxon parent. Both reflect on each other's childrearing practices; how and why they do things the way they do. The authors conclude that *'the successes, of families such as Dorothy's in raising children competent in the ways they consider important could be misconstrued by outsiders from a different culture, with different values and with a tradition of different practices. Ann's perception that Dorothy's children were not being adequately supervised, that they were non-compliant, that they teased in a cruel way and so on precluded her from seeing them as nurturant, self-sufficient, and resourceful. Such perceptions, often compounded by the family's visible poverty, detract from, or obscure, the real achievements of parents with definite and deeply held aspirations for their children.'*

Guilfoyle et al. (2010, p. 69) explain that the image of the child held in many remote Indigenous contexts has implications for how adults interact with them. *'...children are embraced as naturally strong and are positioned as equal members of the community, with the right to act autonomously and to make their own decisions*

(Warrki Jarrinkaku ACRS Project Team, 2002)...This does not suggest that the child is free from guidance. Instead, the responsibility is on the broad community to create and provide an environment which is nurturing and safe for children to freely explore their world, building on their inherent strengths rather than directing them. As such, children's needs are not individualised or separated out from those of the community as a whole (SNAICC, 2004a; SNAICC, 2005; Waltja Tjutangu Palpayi Aboriginal Corporation, 2001; Warrki Jarrinkaku ACRS Project Team, 2002; Wright, 2005).'



Scougall (2008) advises non-Indigenous workers in communities to take the time to learn about Indigenous viewpoints on child rearing. He says, *'It has only been in relatively recent times that the value of Indigenous child rearing practices has been recognised. In the not so distant past they were generally regarded as "lacking in discipline" relative to western norms (Gray, Trompf & Houston 1994, pp. 83–84)'* (and) *'some child-rearing practices that were once viewed negatively by non-Aboriginal people can, in fact, be effective means to develop independence and emotional and physical resilience among Indigenous children thereby enabling them to cope with the often harsh circumstances that they are likely to encounter later in life'* (Scougall, 2010, p. 30 citing Malin, Campbell & Agius 1996).

While it may be important for young Indigenous children to learn behaviours that make them successful in schools, Larkin (2010, p. 3) emphasises the critical importance of young Indigenous children being treated and supported to learn how to be strong in their own culture. *'Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's connections to culture, community or family are weakened or threatened, they are at risk of not only being lost to their culture but also to themselves.'*

Kitson & Bowes (2010, p. 84) remind educators to take a wider view of children's behaviour so they can understand why they may behave as they do. *'It is important that educators understand the influences of children's life experiences and are aware of the impact these may have on children when they are in educational environments (Wilson & Matthews, 2001). Indigenous children are generally expected to be self-sufficient (Warrki Jarrinjaku ARCS, 2002; Butterworth & Candy, 1998; Wilson & Matthews, 2001), to share everything, to tolerate teasing as the major form of adult discipline and to sleep when they are tired (Townsend- Cross, 2004; QDETA, nd). These practices may not fit with routines in early childhood services such as set times for sleeping or teachers' interpretation of teasing as "mean". Sharing is strongly developed and children may become confused when expected to ask permission before they use someone else's things, as often occurs in early childhood settings.'*

Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi (2001) reflect on how Indigenous and non-Indigenous families raise their children. They quote Wendy Nungurrayi Brown who comments, *'Some things are the same for Aboriginal and white kids but some things stick out for most kids. It's one way for white kids, another way for our kids'* (Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi, 2001, p. 8).

Bromot et al (1989), while undertaking studies in early childhood at Batchelor Institute, refer to the way in which adults and children from north east Arnhemland (Yolngu) relate to each other, drawing attention to the way that, *'Yolngu adults are always trying to arrange things so that if children are competing with each other they put themselves in the middle . They try to prevent competition between children, and if it has developed and children are fighting, they try to help children resolve it in some way, perhaps by removing the thing they are competing about'* (Bromot et.at 1989, p.32). They also point out that, *'Yolngu people bring their children up like this because in Yolngu society all people are equal. That comes from the djalkiri. It doesn't matter how old a person is; they could be very old or very young but they are still equal. A person is what they are, and they are all equal, and have equal rights. Nobody can make or force anybody to do what they want them to do. The other person has to agree before they will do it. A person is what she is and nobody else can change him not even a boss, unless she agrees to change for some reason'* (Bromot, et al, 1989, p. 32).



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Reflection and action

Hold a yarning circle with staff, families or learners. Talk together about being a child. Share your experiences of growing up, the games you played and enjoyed, the places you went, the people who helped you grow and learn, the things you most looked forward to and any rules your families applied. Compare differences and similarities. To record the important information that you shared, draw pictures of yourselves as children. Talk about what has changed and what has stayed the same nowadays. How do you all now work with your own or other people's children today?

Family comes first

When you get adopted you are part of a family.

Family comes first.

Family is more important than work.

Families are always there for each other.



Family comes first

Working as a non-Indigenous person in a community is not just about getting to know the individuals you work with; it is also about getting to know the extended family relationships system and the obligations that come with it. As your understanding increases you will be able to better understand how people operate in the community and respond more sensitively and effectively.

- Family is so important to Indigenous people that they prioritise their families over everything else. This may mean that staff members prioritise their family responsibilities over their work responsibilities. Although this varies amongst Indigenous families, family issues tend to impact strongly on service delivery in remote communities.
- Sometimes there are arguments amongst different family groups or within one family group and these conflicts can end up in the service. More effective solutions to these problems can be found if you have a good understanding of the relationships that exist in the community and between the staff and families that use the service.
- If a staff member from a particular family is excluded from a service, for whatever reason, other family members may not use that service. On the other hand, if only one family group is represented in the service, other families may choose not use the service.
- Saying 'no' to a request made by a family member can be a difficult thing for Indigenous people to do. Staff find it difficult when a family member comes to the workplace and places demands on them. Staff may ask you to deal with these kinds of issues as they may not be able to address them directly because of family obligations.
- Working with Indigenous people and children requires an understanding of how adults relate to the children and who can and should take responsibility for them. If you don't know about these family ties you may make wrong assumptions about staff and other adults' interactions with children.
- Jealousy between families in remote Indigenous communities is a very real issue. Being consistent and transparent in your approach can minimise the risk of creating tension between family groups who may feel that one family is receiving preferential treatment.

Advice from educators

Family comes first. Family is more important than work.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Community people get really frightened sometimes, like paranoid. They think about people trying to hurt them by hurting the baby or the kids. So they only really trust their own family to look after kids.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Sometimes they don't bring their kids to the crèche. They get shame for their kids. Maybe only got one kimbi (nappy). They get scared or shamed if that baby got scabies everywhere or if that baby got no father. They only feel safe when someone working there that knows them.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Whitefellas put work and money before family; we do it the other way round!

Indigenous early childhood educator

If you don't try to understand how important family are to people – you won't get people's respect.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Meal times are important to family. Big cook up for everyone at the camp that's there.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Family relations can make it hard to study.

Indigenous early childhood educator



“Whitefellas call it humbug, but families look after each other. Money's not a big thing, it's shared. If someone is hungry I'll buy them food. If I am hungry they'll buy it for me. Families are always there for each other. Doesn't matter if its money, food, bills or shelter we support each other”

Indigenous early childhood educator

When you get adopted you are part of family. They can be like your new family in the community. They will watch over you. You get introduced to everyone who is part of your community family. If you got any problems, that's the family you can go to talk to about things. You won't have to get so stressed. Your community family don't have to get paid for something that you need.

Indigenous early childhood educator

If people think that one family gets more than another, they can get jealous.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

Torres & Arnott (1999, p. 228) reflect on training approaches in remote Indigenous communities and point to the critical importance in understanding kinship rules and relationships within a community. *'Indigenous societies are firmly embedded in structures and processes that emphasize relationships between kin, kinship and friendship networks and are inextricably intertwined with the land.'*

Bond (2010, p. 48) interviewed community members to find out how visiting teachers should work with community to be more successful. Community members spoke about the importance of teachers forming close personal relationships with people in the community. The 'adoption' of an outsider into a local skin group enables an outsider to be positioned within a kinship network. It was critical for an outsider, like a teacher, to form trusting, respectful relationships with the senior members of an Aboriginal community and this takes a long time. *'Trust is only earned by consistent socialising with the community over a number of years (p.49) and was more likely to take place when outsiders 'walk around' rather than driving around the community 'to see what everybody wants' (p. 50). The tendency of outsiders to drive around was seen as a kind of 'snobbery' (p. 50).*

Pyett et al. (2008, p. 181) provide this advice from an Indigenous community member. *'Remember, if we let you in to our community and make friends with you, it's for life. We have shared the births of your babies, we know you, you belong to us. This is a privilege that is not available to most researchers. And the obligations that come with that relationship are ongoing'.*

Scougall (2008) discusses some differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous views of family that can help non-Indigenous visitors to understand the importance of family to Indigenous people. He says, *'The first and foremost point of difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous families and communities is, and always has been, the significance of the extended family'* (Scougall, 2008, p. 28). Quoting Daly & Smith (2003), *'Indigenous households are characteristically large and compositionally complex. They are multi-generational, and constituted on the basis of kinship. These co-residential extended families are linked to other similar households through wide-reaching economic and kinship networks ... These networks act as crucial mechanisms for cushioning against financial hardship, and enable the sharing and redistribution of cash and other resources across households'* (Daly & Smith, 2003 p. 14 in Scougall, 2008, p. 28).

In a remote Indigenous community, like any community, conflicts and power battles amongst different people occur and this affects service delivery. Flaxman et al. (2009, p. 31) report an example of an Indigenous worker *'...under pressure from family for preferential treatment to services and resources. This placed her in a difficult position because she could not agree to unreasonable requests, but in refusing them she could cause extreme offence to her family members and potentially harm her relationship with the community more broadly'*. When family members expect special or preferential treatment from local family members who work in a service there are no easy solutions but... *'In these situations, it was often easier for the Indigenous workers to blame the non-Indigenous supervisors for their inability to give preferential treatment or share resources, than to refuse family members' requests themselves'* (p. 31).

Kitson and Bowe (2010, p. 86) explain how important relatedness is for Indigenous educators, especially when guiding young children. They cite Fasoli and Ford (2001) discussing an Indigenous teacher who *'emphasised talking calmly and gently to children because only certain family members have the right to 'growl' at them'*.

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Reflection and action

What does the word 'family' mean to you? Who do you think of when you reflect on 'family' in your cultural context? Which members of your family lived with you when you grew up as a child? What would you say are your cultural obligations to your family?

Share your cultural perspective of what 'family' means to you, with staff and learners. As a group, draw kinship maps to generate discussion and show the connections that may exist between staff and learners you're working with. This will give you a greater understanding how people fit together in the community.



Think outside your culture



Share new things - that add onto what we've got - and make things better.

Learn to see the world in new ways.

What you see as important may not be the same for us.

You have to know and learn how everything works there and you can learn that from local staff.



Think outside your culture

As a visitor to a remote community, you will find yourself in a culture where beliefs, practices and values may differ greatly from your own. Thinking outside your own cultural expectations and looking at differences, as differences, rather than as deficiencies, will give you a better starting point for supporting staff and families.

- All people grow up in culture. That culture is right for them and provides them with a way to see and value their world in cultural ways. What we notice and value as worthwhile is based on what we've learned from our own cultural knowledge systems. For many non-Indigenous educators, Western views and values of early childhood limit what they see and think about Indigenous cultures. Difference is often seen as deficiency. A qualification in early childhood is only the beginning of the learning journey as a non-Indigenous teacher, trainer or mentor working in a remote community.
- Put your Western rules and ideas aside while you learn to see the world in new ways. Talk with people and explore ways to support the strengths and capacities of Indigenous staff, families and communities. Resist the urge to pressure or persuade people to conform to the expectations of your own culture. Be open and learn.
- Indigenous people have been thinking outside their culture since non-Indigenous people came to their communities. They have become familiar with many mainstream ideas and expectations. Some of these ideas they embrace and agree with. Some they reject. They need to see that you can meet them half way. You need to learn aspects of their culture the way they've learned aspects of your culture. Hold back your judgments.
- Early childhood services in remote communities that attempt to mirror Western mainstream practices, with little reflection on the strengths, needs and aspirations of the local community, often find few families willing to use the service. Establish a 'cultural advisory group' with staff and families to guide the development of a culturally safe and inclusive service. Meet often and discuss the priorities for children from a local community perspective, from your own cultural perspective and from the perspectives of the funding/regulatory authorities or government program which employs you. Be innovative and work with staff and the wider community to negotiate practices and strategies that reflect local cultural beliefs, Western practices and legislative expectations.
- Encourage staff to include their culture views and values in their roles, the early childhood learning programs and the day-to-day operation of the service. Sometimes local staff believe the children's service is, essentially, a Western institution and that their cultural ways do not belong in the service.
- Consider the influence that culture has had on both the play experiences of Indigenous children and your interpretation of these events. Would you expect Indigenous children to use materials and resources in exactly the same manner as non-Indigenous children? Does your interpretation of what you observe reflect the cultural context in which the play events have occurred?
- Think about what it means to be an agent of transformation who works to preserve and reflect local cultural perspectives and values. Understand that your role involves self-learning and incorporating Indigenous cultural beliefs and values into your own professional practice, rather than merely transmitting Western knowledge to Indigenous people in order to meet Western cultural expectations.

Advice from educators

When a whitefella comes, they don't have to see this like a mainstream childcare. They got to think, 'Why is it set up like this way?' Because this is how this mob work! They got to support the people. Do new things that add onto what we've got, and make things better.

Indigenous early childhood educator

With my little baby, I'm thinking I want to put him in the crèche so I can do my work. But I want him to have my milk and not bottle.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I missing that baby when I don't see him all day. In the community it's a different life to town.

When the babies cry you have to take to mother to feed. Even if the mother is in the classroom.

You maybe have to hang around til recess time.

When a baby need to be feed up, other workers and family take him. Like when I used to work with my kids, they used to be carried around all the time while I was working. My sisters helped.

People go everywhere and take the kids. They don't do that 'baby room' and 'toddler room'. In community the environment different, different from mainstream child care, not set.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I run it with all the parents there. All the staff having cup a tea and their breakfast and lunch for everyone. Even if that food only for kids, we had everyone eating. I know that the kids can benefit because parents are there. If I don't feed the parents, they don't bring them there.

Indigenous early childhood educator

You have to think about how to support the parents and staff and the kids. Even the blokes - the uncles and dads. You don't lock the front door. You leave it open. They come in and talk to the kids. You don't lock them away from the kids just because someone might think wrong for that bloke. You always welcome everyone in.

Indigenous early childhood educator

It's really sad sometimes when I see the way some non-Indigenous people treat Indigenous staff in communities. They just don't get it. Sometimes they just don't want to either. They want things to run the way they're familiar with, to make Aboriginal families conform, and fit the model of a Western family that they understand. That's not our job, to make people conform. We need to learn too. We've got to stop this assimilation attitude, stop working as if we need to 'fix' people. Non-Indigenous people need to adapt their practice to meet the context they're in. It's always curriculum, curriculum, curriculum! There needs to be a more strengths-based approach where we work with what people know and want and build on that.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

One of the children was using the play dough. He was rolling it into little balls and placing the balls next to each other in a line.

It looked like he was making a caterpillar, something I've seen children do in mainstream services. I asked him if he was making a caterpillar and my Indigenous colleague spoke to him in language and then told me - "No, he's making goose eggs." It made me think about the assumptions I make because of my Western views.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

You have to know and learn how everything works here and you can learn that from local staff. Staff can say, 'We know someone who's good to work here', like a grandparent so the kids can learn stories.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Read more about this message from other sources

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), describe culture as *'a great source of strength to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, including the important connections to country, spirituality, family and community'* (SNAICC, 2010, p. 2). They emphasise that it is *'crucially important for non-Indigenous service providers to recognise and to have this understanding and respect when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'* (SNAICC, 2010, p. 2).

Priest et al (2008) draw attention to the fact that *'for many years formal early childhood services have been dominated by mainstream culture. The desire to achieve the improvement of standards of health and education from a mainstream perspective has inhibited serious interest and investigation into Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) child rearing. The emphasis has instead been on the imposition of western practices within a broadly paternalistic framework, assuming the superiority of mainstream views'*. The authors challenge these assumptions and present models of conventional practice often observed within remote early childhood services in comparison to the Warrki Jarrinjaku Indigenous leadership model.

Johns (1999), a well respected Indigenous early childhood educator from the NT, provides non-Indigenous early childhood educators with advice on 'risk taking' behaviour which is often seen when children are given a greater sense of independence. *'In Aboriginal society, risk taking is considered an important learning process for children, and is quite acceptable as long as an adult is present and the children know the rules. As carers, we shouldn't try to stop children from doing something they are used to doing at home and about which their families are not worried'* (p. 62).

Docket and Flear (2002), prominent Australian early childhood researchers with significant experience in Indigenous research contexts, challenge educators *'...to critically examine their own values and understandings regarding play and think about how these views may be different to the experiences of the children in their programs'* (p. 121).

Flear (1999) advises educators to think deeply about their taken-for-granted concept of play. *'We need to understand and value the differing types of play that take place across cultures, as well as the cultural meanings enacted through play. If we do not, we risk utilising a deficit model for our observations of non-Western children; that is, judging children's play, either consciously or unconsciously, by culturally inappropriate standards'* (p. 78).

Tamisari and Milmilany (2003), an anthropologist working in Arnhem Land in the NT, describes Indigenous views on young children's learning in one community. Indigenous cultures have a range of goals for their children's education that may or may not fit with the goals of mainstream education.

'YOTHU/MARRATHULMA (male and female), toddler 1-6 years

From birth children start learning their mother's language from her gentle rocking and singing them to sleep (guyukuyyun), although later they will eventually speak their father's language. At this stage, children learn how they relate to and address other people (gurrutukurr kinship and skin names), and participate in all daily activities. Up to six years of age children enjoy a certain amount of freedom and play around and socialise with other children. One of their favourite games is to play-act in the role of a relative in a family unit (wagnawagna, literally camp/home). During this period children are allowed to vent their



emotions and impose their will over others as these behaviours are seen as an assertion of identity and character formation' (Tamisari & Milmilany, 2003, p. 7).

Martin (2007), an Australian Indigenous early childhood scholar and researcher, reminds the early childhood field that they need to disrupt the legacy of 'colonialism and its discourses of invisibility and paternalism'. She suggests some key questions to help non-Indigenous people working in Indigenous contexts. '... 'what are the taken-for-granted views embedded in all aspects of Aboriginal early childhood education?'; 'whose values and beliefs are being centred and privileged?'; 'whose values and beliefs are made invisible?'; 'how are these relationships perpetuated in the practices of management committees, teaching staff and administration staff?' and 'who is being silenced?' (Martin, 2007, p. 17).

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Reflection and action

Critically reflect on the current practices in a remote Indigenous service. Take a copy of the service program and/or daily routines. Meet with a group of family members and staff. Talk together about the programmed activities or routines that appear to incorporate local Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Discuss the programmed activities and/or routines that reflect Western ideas and legislative requirements. Identify common ideas, gaps and any conflicts in perspectives. Finally, talk about what everyone has learned by talking and thinking this way and how you can use this learning to improve your program.



Be an advocate for local staff -support local leadership!



There are good ways and bossy ways.

Remember we work for the community,
for our kids, not you!

When I know you're there to help,
I have more good feeling.

When you take over, I step back.



Be an advocate for local staff - support local leadership!

To support the development of a sustainable Indigenous early childhood workforce, building the capacity of local staff is paramount. Supporting local Indigenous staff to take on leadership roles within the service is a key step towards self-determination and independent operation of a community owned service.

- Remind yourself daily that you are there to help and support local Indigenous staff to run their own service, a service that meets the needs of their culture, children, families and communities. Look for and promote people's skills and strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses or gaps in their learning.
- Be aware that, from the perspective of local staff and the community, often non-Indigenous people are seen as taking over and not sharing power and control in decision making about the service. Ask staff or a respected person in the community to introduce you to community leaders. Talk with them about the vision they have for the service. Explain funding requirements. Work together to establish an advisory group to support staff and the service. Let the community guide you in relation to what they want for their children and families. Meet with them regularly.
- Discuss successes and challenges with the service advisory group. For example, if someone isn't pulling their weight, talk to staff, local leaders and your advisory group about how to solve this problem. If the service needs to hire staff, discuss who they feel is the right person to work in the service.
- Be aware that, sometimes, staff in the service cannot make a decision or take responsibility because of family relations. If you have a good relationship with your staff you can talk these problems through. Check back with your advisory group in these instances. Be mindful that sometimes it may be more appropriate for you to make some of the hard decisions until local leaders are ready to take on these kinds of responsibilities.
- It's hard to learn how to do something if someone else does things for you all the time. Support people to do things for themselves. Remember that many Indigenous people have seen scores of non-Indigenous people coming through their communities. Many of these visitors have disempowered rather than empowered them during their stay. Giving staff responsibility demonstrates that they are trusted and valued.
- Re-empowering demoralised or apathetic staff takes time, but it is critical for an effective children's service. Create opportunities for staff to take responsibility, acknowledge successes along the way, however small. Discuss the issues that appear to challenge staff, as they arise. Staff are more likely to take responsibility when they are enabled to contribute to decision making, feel a sense of achievement and experience success.
- When you see a problem, bring it to the attention of the local Indigenous service leaders and identify why you think it is important. Ask what they think about the problem. Give them plenty of time to think about the problem. Leave staff alone together to talk to each other about it in their own language, before they talk to you. Don't expect people to give you an answer immediately. It can take some time, days, for people to think through a problem with others. Sometimes the problem lies outside the service. Take time to listen to staff views on how to solve the problem.



- Finding a mutually acceptable resolution to a problem, one that works for the service, the Indigenous workers and families and the funding agency, can be difficult for all concerned. If a decision must be made, it is best to work with your local Indigenous advisory committee or the staff team to come to an agreement about the best way to proceed, rather than make the decision on your own.
- Demonstrate your respect for and belief in staff by promoting them to be the spokesperson when visitors come, especially visitors from government or funding bodies. Introduce visitors to staff and redirect questions to local staff to answer. Rehearse these kinds of interactions if staff are not confident talking to strangers. Prepare handouts or posters with staff so they can refer to these when asked typical questions about their service.
- While your job title might be 'director' and you have been appointed to be 'the boss', in that you have ultimate responsibility, you will find it hard to work with local women if you act 'bossy'. While making decisions might be seen as typical boss behaviour in a mainstream service, it is likely to alienate your staff and they will let you know by simply leaving the service. This risk can be reduced by working alongside and supporting the development of a local Indigenous director or co-director.
- Negotiate how tasks get done with your staff members rather than telling them what to do or doing things yourself without consultation. If you pitch in and are part of the team you're demonstrating a collegial form of leadership and that 'being the boss' doesn't mean leaving others to do all the work. Do the 'dirty jobs', such as the cleaning, and be seen to be doing your share. Working on the floor and leading by example is advocacy too. You're showing rather than telling. But beware of becoming the person who always does the dirty jobs! Be assertive and remind people that it isn't fair for you to always do these jobs.

- All too often the day-to-day provision of an early childhood service overshadows the importance of making time for formal learning experiences. When training organisations visit or a formal training session is planned, staff must have time off the floor and away from the distraction of children so they can participate in a focused way. Negotiate with your community advisory group and funding agency to close the service to allow for regular training. Be an advocate for staff as learners and support the development of both individual and community ownership over learning.
- An effective way to promote learning is to support local Indigenous leaders to pass on their learning to other staff in the service. This also empowers them in their roles as leaders. Provide recognition through titles such as 'team leader' or 'training leader'.
- Provide a computer for staff to use. Encourage and support staff to try new things on the computer from time to time, such as doing email, downloading music or 'Skype'. Keep in mind the 'fear factor' - that some people may fear new technologies. Some staff may avoid the computer because their literacy is not strong and they feel ashamed to reveal this. Show how to use technology rather than just telling. Encourage staff with literacy to help less literate staff or put links to programs such as 'Read English on the Web' on the desktop of the computer. (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/reow/index.html>)
- Build early childhood support and knowledge sharing networks for your staff in the community. Invite staff from other services to afternoon tea for sharing good ideas, yarning circles and family events. Celebrate staff and service achievements with parties and ceremonies. Invite the wider community to attend and show their support.
- Many remote Indigenous staff have never seen an early childhood service outside of their community. This isolation means they have little idea of the national or international scope of early childhood as a profession. A starting point is to help staff network with other Indigenous people doing similar jobs in other communities. Teach staff how to use Skype and mobile phone technology and encourage staff to use the service phone to ring staff in other services for advice or support. Seek funding for staff to leave community for professional development events, such as conferences or meetings with other remote Indigenous children's service staff. Join the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) to receive regular newsletters that contain information of relevance to Indigenous early childhood workers (<http://www.snaicc.asn.au/>)

Advice from educators

“When she [the non-Indigenous director] was in control, I felt lost, out of place and not too sure. We had to follow her rules. She used to lock the cupboards. I felt out of place.”

Indigenous early childhood educator

Lucy worked at that crèche for 5 years and has worked with 7 different non-Indigenous directors, all with different ideas and ways of working. Once a new director come into the service and even though she knew Lucy was the co director she just treated her like a team leader, taking away her level of responsibility and disempowering her. Lucy tolerated the new director without complaint, but it was clear that she lost interest in her role and that resulted in a huge increase in days off.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

When I know you're there to help, I have more good feeling. When you take over, I step back.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Whitefellas need to be careful that they don't come across as bossy. When I get bossed it makes me want to just go back home. There are good ways and bossy ways. Remember we work for the community, for our kids, not you!

Indigenous early childhood educator

Other whitefellas, they used to boss me, tell me what to cook and when to cook it – I used to hate that. It used to make me feel like I did not know what I was doing. It's different now. She wants me to run the kitchen. I decide what the kids will eat. I know the foods they like. I know what's good tucker for kids. She even taught me how to shop online at Coles!

Indigenous early childhood educator

When she's not there, I do the work. When I'm not there, she does the work. When we are both there we work together. We are a team.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Advice from educators

Non-Indigenous people need to be able to talk, help generate ideas but follow them through to the end - help our ideas become reality.

Indigenous early childhood educator

As soon as that bad director left, all the staff came back to work.

Indigenous early childhood educator

When you get out there, tell people why your there, what your job is and sit back and watch the kids. Talk with people and get the feel of the place, the nature of the centre. Watch and talk to staff. People will already have a team. There will be leadership already happening – you just need to step back and see it.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I was visiting a remote service one day when another non-Indigenous early childhood visitor came in. She didn't live in the community and was there on a support visit. She spent the whole time talking me, mostly about what was wrong with the service as if I held her personally responsible! She spoke in a loud voice and the others could hear. She completely ignored the Indigenous staff. I was embarrassed for her.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

I was asked to go to the SNAICC conference in Alice Springs. Save the Children paid for me. It felt good to be asked. I really felt like the co-director of the crèche, like I was important. It made me proud and I learnt a lot. It was good to meet people from different communities; I learnt about the flour drum stove cooking and different Aboriginal cultures from around Australia.

Indigenous early childhood educator

When I asked the Indigenous staff what they wanted help with, they were hesitant to give me direction and tended to shrug their shoulders without offering me a suggestion. Over a period of a week, I continued to ask the staff, "What can I do to help? Are there any jobs that need to be done?" Towards the end of the week, one of the Indigenous staff responded almost hesitantly saying, "You could clean the bathroom and toilets". So I did. This became one of my jobs whenever I visited that service. I don't think they've had many non-Indigenous staff asking them to make these kinds of decisions.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator



Advice from educators

During visits to a remote service, I noted that when a staff member came in late, they were chastised. If they carried out a task that was not up to standard they were shamed. The service was like a prison. The office door was always locked. Staff had to ask for a key to go to the toilet. Biscuits for staff for morning teas were also kept locked in the office and staff had to ask non-Indigenous staff to have one at morning tea. The keys were always hanging around the neck of a non-Indigenous staff member. The service was closed more often than open and had tremendous trouble recruiting staff.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) encourage the use of a strengths based approach when working with Indigenous people so that *'efforts are effective and supportive in assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build their capacity, and sustain their strengths to support healthy relationships and families, and raise their children to be strong in their culture'* (SNAICC 2010, p. 2). A strengths based approach that *'supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's family and kinship structures is particularly important. This is crucial to building parenting capacity and assisting members of the community to strengthen family and other relationships. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people draw on a wide range of kinship networks to share and co-operate in raising children who are strong in their cultural identity'* (SNAICC 2010 p. 2).

SNAICC (2010) describe principles for providing culturally competent services, noting the need to *'Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have a sense of ownership and leadership in the design, development, delivery and evaluation of programs targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'* (SNAICC, 2010, p. 87). They note that when *'working on projects or initiatives with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is very important that you try to make sure there is local involvement throughout the process, by, for example:*

- *including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in advisory groups;*
- *establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group; and*
- *engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander project officers, consultants, specialist support, artists etc'* (SNAICC, 2010, p. 96).

It is important to note that some *'community leaders are frequently on numerous organisation boards, advisory groups, consultative committees and working groups, and may also feel overwhelmed by the expectations on them, so be understanding if you get a "No"'* (SNAICC, 2010, p. 96).

Priest et al. (2008) outline *'an early childhood leadership model that senior Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) women, living semi-traditional lifestyles in the remote desert regions of central Australia, have identified as a positive and important way forward for their children, families, governments and related professionals'* a model that is valuable as *'Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) cultural knowledge is officially recognised as being equal to 'mainstream' knowledge'* (Priest, 2008, p. 121). Key features of this model include

- *service models designed by Anangu in genuine partnership with professional non-Anangu who facilitate the process (see Warrki Jarrinjaku principles and practices);*
- *service delivery relies heavily on Anangu;*
- *the coordinator is Anangu;*
- *Anangu and non-Anangu are paid a wage;*
- *non-Anangu staff perform a specific function in the service – they are not the 'boss';*
- *the program cannot function without Anangu;*
- *the aim is to equally value and respect quality practices from both mainstream and Anangu culture;*
- *Anangu specifically ask to work in the service;*
- *Anangu have greater choice, opportunity and self reliance'* (Priest et al. 2008, p. 123)

Fasoli & Moss (2007, p. 277) report on research that analysed the development of 6 remote Indigenous children's services in the NT. They point out that these services often took a *'wide angle view of what a children's service could be'* which meant that they did not look like a mainstream urban service because staff prioritised what they saw as their community's unique and specific needs and values.

Jones & Harris-Roxas (2009, p. 11) talk about the importance of quality relationships for engaging remote Indigenous parents and carers in education. Out of quality relationships can come *'a sense of empowerment which enables each participant to feel valued and equal, and feel that they are able to be heard and can influence change'*.

Fasoli et al. (2004) emphasise how important it is for early childhood workers coming from outside the community to develop trusting relationships with local community members. In one community a mentor was hired to be a facilitator rather than a director of the local service. This person was *'...someone who could help the child care staff to develop their service but who would not be in charge of it'* (Fasoli et al. 2004, p. 105). The aim, to build local workers' capacity to enable them to run their own service, was achieved.

Flaxman et al. (2009, p. 29-30), in a review of staffing and recruitment issues in remote early childhood services, noted that respondents in their research stressed *'the importance of employing local people and providing opportunities for families. Many called attention to the importance of recruiting and training Indigenous staff members, and of providing mentoring and support, which increased skills, local capacity and motivation. Mentoring was commonly used to train local Indigenous workers and therefore make service more sustainable. One service provider used formal training and mentoring to support a local Indigenous worker to eventually run the service alone. The CfC funding provided the opportunity for this to occur over the four years, by which time the trainer wanted to make herself 'redundant'*.

Fasoli & Johns (2007, p. 88) discuss the issue of staff absence drawing on a study of six remote Indigenous children's services. *'Finding enough staff on the day was often problematic, due, at least in part, to pressures that staff experienced in their own lives. Cultural obligations, illness, and other issues often caused staff absences. The fact that many of these staff were related to one another also meant that groups of staff often had to be away at the same time. Having a pool of rotating staff ... helped to ensure that sufficient staff were always available to take the place of absent staff. Innovative and culturally responsive staff management practices evolved to enable the complex work of the centre to run smoothly.'*

Centre for Community Health (2005, p. 25) in an evaluation of remote Indigenous child care services in Central Australia, concluded that, *'Child care services in remote indigenous communities differ vastly from mainstream services in urban settings. They tend to be family centres where mothers bring along their children often staying with them and participating in their learning. Families access the centre according to their needs. "You can't have expectations as you need to be where the community is at and let them set the pace" (Nareen Carter, Integrated Early Childhood Project Manager – CCL worker).'*

Scougall (2008, p.54), through researching what is effective in remote Indigenous service delivery cautions non-Indigenous staff. *'The attitudes and ways of working which non-Indigenous project staff have are a critical factor. One danger is that professional expertise can sometimes be accompanied by an attitude that solutions to local family and community problems can only come from outside the Indigenous community.'*



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Reflection and action

A common statement associated with capacity building is 'I'm working to do myself out of a job'. Reflect on this statement and consider what it really means to you. How would you reflect this in your work practice?

Hold a yarning circle with staff and learners when you begin to work in a new community. Recognise that unless this is a brand new service with all new staff, there will already be levels of leadership and responsibility established within the service. Take a strengths based approach, find out what peoples job roles already are and who staff and families look to as leaders within the service.

Strong Relationships are everything

Find the connection with them. You feel good.

They have that knowledge of the community.

Strong connections mean strong relationships.

Being truthful and go that extra mile...
It is about relationships, respect, sharing.



Strong Relationships are everything

Your ability to develop strong relationships with staff, learners and families is critical to the success of any remote Indigenous early childhood service. Relationships built on trust and respect, create cultural safety and more productive outcomes for all.

- When you arrive in a community people will want to know who you are and where you are from. They need to 'place' you in order to know how you fit into their social system. Bring photos of your family and home to share with people. These can be good starting points for establishing your first relationships.
- As a non-Indigenous person, new to a remote community, the Indigenous people you work with are your best connection to community. While other non-Indigenous community members will help you and share their perspectives on the community, it's critical that you get to know and listen to local people. However, they will only share what's going on once they know you, are comfortable with you and trust you.
- In your early days, a good relationship building experience for getting to know staff is to go on a 'bush trip'. Get to know people while immersed in their culture.
- Your long term relationships with people in the community will be affected by how you approach problems and priorities. You will be enthusiastic when you first arrive and see many areas that you may think need urgent attention. Write a list of goals but keep it private. Resist the urge to take action. Listen and learn from local people about the issues you identified. Find out what has already been done or attempted. You may revise your list after getting to know the community and its priorities.
- The relationship dynamics in an early childhood service with staff and the community are different in every community. What has 'worked' in one community will not necessarily 'work' in another. Even when you have had experience in other remote communities, be respectful about sharing your ideas and listen closely to what the local and families tell you. People will be more confident to consider your ideas and share their ideas with you if they believe you truly value them and their unique culture.
- Take the time to get to know each staff member or learner as an individual and as part of their wider family. As your relationships with people and their wider family increase, you will have access to a wider support network of people in the community.
- It can be easy to get to know and form close relationships with the local Indigenous people who speak English well and are more familiar with Western ways. This is a first step. Make just as much effort to get to know people who do not speak your language easily or who appear shy and less confident. This is part of taking a strengths-based approach. Ask people to teach you some key words in their language and use them whenever you can. This process not only recognises their strength but shows that you are seeking to learn.
- Strong intercultural relationships depend on learning each other's ways and this takes time. Be patient with yourself and with your staff/learners. Acknowledge mistakes and don't overreact to problem situations. Be humble, say 'sorry' and talk to staff or learners about your concerns.



- As a non-Indigenous worker you have enormous power, even if it doesn't feel that way at times! To have a lasting and beneficial effect in the community you have to form relationships where power is shared. Learn to use power in ways that empower others rather than disempowering them. For example, it's important to avoid situations that could be seen as ridiculing or shaming a staff member. If a staffing problem arises that needs to be addressed, talk to the person privately and always maintain confidentiality. Talking about staffing issues outside of the service, in the wider community, can shame local staff or learners and may result in the person walking away from the relationship they have with you, as well as from the service.
- 'Humbug' is a widely used term for putting pressure on someone to provide money or other resources based on mutual obligation relationships and it can be difficult for a non-Indigenous person to understand and deal with. If you handle these requests sensitively, your relationship with learners and staff can be strengthened. For example, you may be asked by a local person to borrow, buy or give them something, based on your developing relationship. If the request is something you feel is reasonable, then give it to them. If you feel the request is unreasonable, too expensive or you simply can't access the item, talk to the person about other ways they could get what they need or ask the person to give you the money to buy the item while you are in town. Rather than simply refusing such requests, remember that all good relationships are about give and take. Be realistic. Be honest. Tell people what you are feeling. It's also important to understand that 'humbug' is a much bigger issue for many Indigenous staff than it will be for you. It is very difficult to refuse close family members what they request. In this case, they may ask for your support and authority to say 'no' to a family member or find an alternative solution.
- The relationships you form in an Indigenous community are never restricted to that community. For relationships to be truly reciprocal, they need to exist in your community too. Indigenous people travel frequently and they could come to your community. They will be in a new place and may need your help, just as you did when you were in their community.
- Your presence in the community is a privilege that is likely to end when your contract finishes. Your role is, necessarily, short lived because it is primarily about empowering and supporting local people to develop and run their own services after you're gone. However, the relationships you make will provide you with many amazing experiences, memories and lasting friendships. Treasure your time in the community and make the most of this opportunity that few non-Indigenous people will experience.

Advice from educators

Being truthful and go that extra mile...It is about relationships, respect, sharing and caring and being truthful.

Indigenous early childhood educator

This is the kind of relationships we need. Walking together, hands together – represents the true connection. We together here, our journey's the same. We want to achieve a same outcome for kids.

Indigenous early childhood educator

You bringing your idea; me bringing my idea - together. We take that journey together. I don't fall cause we holding each other up. You don't be up there and me down here.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Strong connections mean strong relationships.

Indigenous early childhood educator

You don't have to go straight into the heat. You gotta, just like remember, you in a different place. Learn how everybody connected, how they related to each other. You have to know about the relationship between people.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Whitefellas need to be able to say, 'I was wrong', and that they are sorry if they make a mistake.

Indigenous early childhood educator

It's like when whitefella comes and talks about same thing all the time. Community people won't relate to you, cause you pushing, pushing all the time. You got to know your place. If you want us to give it back, maybe you got to crawl slowly, like crab out of their house. Like go out and then go back home and then go out again. Slowly.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Advice from educators

Learn the local language and culture. Share your language and culture.

Indigenous early childhood educator

A relationship is when you get stressed and that person is there for you but they don't get stressed too.

Indigenous early childhood educator

When a new person comes to the community to work here and she's young, maybe she starts telling people what to do. How would she know? Because she has never been out here and worked with Aboriginal kids! When someone does that, someone like me steps back. When they take over, I step back.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Whitefellas out here treat me like a friend when they need my help. But when I go into town, it's like they don't want to know me. Being truthful means both-ways, in my world and in yours.

Indigenous early childhood educator

When we make mistakes, it's big shame job. It makes you feel that you completely don't know nothing; it makes you feel like you are stupid, properly, especially it coming from the Balanda (non-Indigenous person). It really, really hurts us inside. We all make mistakes and stumble and trip. You might make mistakes too! Talk with us about it. Share them with us and let us help your learning.

Indigenous early childhood educator

I try to teach new people some language and the right way. If they listen, things are easier.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Even if you have to sit out there talking all day, the more time you spend with people the better you build bridges.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC 2010, p. 55) recommend that, *'A good place to start in establishing good relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as with any other people, is with respect. When non-Indigenous people develop and demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their culture and spirituality, and the strength and resilience with which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have preserved their family connections, communities and culture, they are likely to establish respectful interpersonal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families.'*

'It is clear that where you have demonstrated your respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their culture, then mistakes you may make in interpersonal relationships and communication are more likely to be forgiven or overlooked by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. What is important is that you have integrity; that you are honest and respectful in your dealings' (SNAICC, 2010, p. 55-56).

The Remote Area Health Corp (2009, p. 23) advises that – *'Aboriginal people like to identify themselves by their family relationships. For example, upon meeting, Aboriginal people will often question each other about where they are from, who they are related to and who they know. They are often looking for some common ground and kinship system which will determine how they will relate to each other. It may be useful for you as a non-Aboriginal to share personal information about yourself upon meeting others, including where you come from and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities where you may have worked'*



Zubrick et al. (2009, p. xxiii) explain, *'When Aboriginal people meet each other, the most important information is not what you do or where you work but how you might be related – where's your country, who's your family – establishing what relationships you share, so you will know how to behave in the proper way. Aboriginal society is based on relationships between people, country, animals, trees; everything and everyone is in this relationship. The focus of society is the wellbeing of the group. Within this each person is valuable to the group and the group is strong and healthy when everyone is included. Aboriginal children learn in families and communities, from and with*

adults and children they have relationships with. Education includes sharing and reciprocity, designed to maintain and strengthen kinship ties to ensure the wellbeing of the group. This is often at odds with the competitive nature of Western education systems that reserve the greatest value and biggest rewards for individual achievement'.

Full References

Bamblett (2010, no page) discusses the importance of establishing relationships that demonstrate an understanding and acceptance of another person's culture. *'When the culture of a people is ignored, denigrated, or worse, intentionally attacked, it is cultural abuse. It is abuse because it strikes at the very identity and soul of the people it is aimed at; it attacks their sense of self esteem, it attacks their connectedness to their family and community.'*

Flaxman, et al (2009, p. 31) review the lessons learned by workers delivering Indigenous family and children focused projects in remote community contexts. They report on the impact that 'humberging' can have on remote Indigenous staff and the importance of non-Indigenous colleagues' ability to understand the process. *'The respondents described instances where family members had made inappropriate requests, asking Indigenous service provider workers to borrow vehicles and equipment for personal use. In these situations, it was often easier for the Indigenous workers to blame the non-Indigenous supervisors for their inability to give preferential treatment or share resources, than to refuse family members' requests themselves. In these instances, it seems that having some non-Indigenous staff was useful.'*

Priest et al (2008, p.121) highlight the important role that relationships play in the process of genuine collaboration, shared leadership and knowledge exchange. Their Aboriginal Child Rearing Project, undertaken in a number of Central Australian communities, is a case in point. It has demonstrated that, *'... there is a 'gap' in the mainstream knowledge base and this creates an environment where genuine collaboration and shared leadership can occur. Everyone involved is both a teacher and a learner – a leader and a follower. The leadership, power and responsibility are shared. Knowledge builds over time through a process of deep listening and respect – 'everyone working together as one' (Wendy Nungarrayi Brown, personal commentary). For people to work together as "one", trusted relationships need to be established over a period of time. As Sharijin King explained: "Nothing can be achieved until there is a relationship. If there is no relationship then it won't work. Relationship is the key." (Sharijin King, Waltja manager, personal commentary 2006).'*

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Reflection and action

Consider the following scenario

'Your flight arrives in a new community and there is no one at the airport to meet you. You try to find your way to the place you need to be, stopping along the way to ask local people for directions. They show no interest in you or why you are there, and wave you off with an impatient tone, making you feel like a nuisance. You phone a colleague to ask them to pick you up, explaining that you are lost and in unfamiliar territory, but they are too busy and don't have time to pick you up. They just rattle off directions that don't make all that much sense to you.'

Does this scenario reflect a non-Indigenous person visiting a remote community or an Indigenous person travelling to your community? Think about how you would achieve your goals in a remote Indigenous community without the support of staff and learners. Now think about how you will respond to your Indigenous colleagues needs when they visit your community.



Communication - It's critical



Talk to us. We need to understand your way, but you need to learn from us too.



Sometimes whitefellas use that language and we don't know what that word really means.

We've learned your language.
You don't learn our language?

Sometimes I can't hear you properly.



Communication -It's critical

Communicating effectively with staff and learners is one of the more complex challenges you will face as a non-Indigenous teacher, trainer or mentor. Understanding some of the issues that can impact on effective communication can support you to develop and use strategies appropriate for situations as they arise.

- Most remote Indigenous people do not speak English as their first language. In many cases, it is their second or third language. For this reason, avoid using complicated words and jargon. Use plain language when talking with people until you have been able to gauge the individual's level of aural English literacy.
- Many Indigenous people only have the opportunity to speak English when engaging with non-Indigenous visitors. They have little reason to learn and practice English literacy in other situations.
- Although they may not speak English well, remote Indigenous people expect to be spoken to with respect. The use of 'baby talk' can be perceived as patronizing and the attempts of non-Indigenous people to speak in what they imagine to be Aboriginal English can lead to embarrassment. Just use familiar words and a simple sentence structure.
- People need time to digest information in a foreign language and think about how to respond. Don't rush communication events. Allow people time to discuss issues in their own language as a group; one person may be more confident with spoken English and will emerge as a spokesperson and then present the group's response.
- Show an interest in the languages spoken in the community. Learn key words and phrases that can help you communicate. Learning the local words for food, water, children and family is a great place to start. Write things phonetically to help you remember the new sounds.
- It's easy to misinterpret people's silence as either agreement or misunderstanding. They may simply be thinking about the questions or, for cultural reasons, may not be in a position to respond or express their opinions, especially in a group situation.
- Indigenous people regularly endure non-Indigenous visitors who bombard them with questions and ask for their support. Be aware of this and be patient. Also be mindful that sometimes people will say 'yes' - just to make you go away without causing offence.
- Targeting one person when speaking in a group situation can make that person feel exposed and uncomfortable. Focus on the group as a whole rather than singling out an individual.
- Be aware of the timing of conversations with Indigenous staff members, especially if it something sensitive. Find the right time to talk. Discussing sensitive issues in front of others or their family may shame the learner/staff member.
- Learn about body language. People may not make eye contact or appear disinterested when, in fact, they are keenly interested.
- Hearing loss is common amongst Indigenous adults. Face people when you are talking to them so they can see your mouth. Sit down at their level or move closer to them. If people are sitting on the ground, sit with them to talk rather than standing over them.

Advice from educators

You've got to learn, our language comes first for us. When whitefellas don't know our language and we don't know theirs, there's communication breakdown.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We've learned your language. You don't learn our language? It comes down to respect.

Indigenous early childhood educator

One of the best phrases I ever learnt to say in an Indigenous language was 'You're doing good work'. My mispronunciation generated a lot of laughs along the way, but the fact I tried opened the door for discussions with people about language, who all wanted to help me learn how to say it the right way, and then teach me more words.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

Ask me what I think. Not what they think. Talk to young people and find out what they want. Listen to what they say.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Sometimes whitefellas use that language and we don't know what they're saying, what that word really means.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Break down the sophisticated words to make it easier. I know that word. I might have heard it before. But I want you to talk to me about that word and how I can use it and what it's for.

Indigenous early childhood educator

It's all about communication. When people communicate they can learn.

Indigenous early childhood educator

When people try to talk to me in Aboriginal English, I feel shame for them, embarrassed.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Advice from educators

I always ask, "Can you break that down so that I can understand?" Some of those words I don't understand I tell them, "Break that word down!"

Indigenous early childhood educator

Those young girls don't like to talk English much; they don't get many chances to.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Sit with us on the ground - show us you are trying to connect. Share our stories, listen to our ideas and hear what we are saying.

Indigenous early childhood educator

They were showing and letting us practice. We talk and answer questions, like you do, in good way, writing things down.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

We need to understand your way, but you need to learn from us too. Stop and talk to us using another word, show us through actions what that word really means.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Whitefellas say it as it is, we don't. We use story for the message and there is more to that story. Sometimes it is easier for me to tell you I got a headache and gotta go home, than say "I'm really hurt and shamed by what you said to me".

Indigenous early childhood educator

Non-Indigenous people need to be able to talk with us, help generate ideas but follow them through to the end. Help our ideas become reality.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Non-Aboriginal people need to learn how to communicate with Aboriginal people.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) describe good communication to be *'an essential requirement for relationship building and developing trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities'* (SNAICC 2010, p. 59). They discuss the importance of the use of body language as a form of non-verbal communication by Indigenous Australians.

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use a range of gestures and signals as part of their communication. These can be specific to local cultural or language groups. They can include gestures with the mouth, hand or head.*
- *Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people "tend to be very conscious of body language and consider what is not being said is as important as what is being said (Dick & Swepson, 2009)."*
- *It is important to be aware that this, "coupled with a legacy of mistrust and cynicism about 'whitefella' motives," means that non-Indigenous people working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people "have to be very aware of their own body language and non-verbal communication (Crane & Richardson, 2000)" (SNAICC 2010, p. 61).*

SNAICC (2010) also draw attention to the need for hearing loss to be considered when reflecting on communication. *'It is important to not underestimate the significance of hearing loss or impediments amongst adults in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and to consider how hearing impediments can be an obstacle to effective communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, staff and the general community. Develop steps and techniques in your communications strategies to cater for the needs of clients and staff members who have hearing impediments'* (SNAICC, 2010, p 62).

Howard (2007, p. 96), who works with remote Indigenous communities in the NT, explains the importance of considering the impact that hearing loss can have on communication with Indigenous people. *'Cultural and linguistic differences are critical factors to consider in intercultural communication. However, the widespread hearing loss that is known to exist in Aboriginal communities can also have a significant and adverse impact on communication, especially intercultural communication.'*

Howard (personal communication) states that *'Widespread hearing loss means that Indigenous people have difficulty listening, especially to unfamiliar people talking about unfamiliar things. Do not judge people's capacity and/or motivation on the basis of how well they appear to listen or speak. Some signs that someone may have a hearing loss are people who:*

- *Are quiet and shy or;*
- *Are noisy and loud;*
- *Ask "what" a lot;*
- *Take a long time to answer;*
- *Often misunderstand what is said;*
- *Watch people's face closely when listening;*
- *Often avoid when they have to listen– especially new people;*
- *Often say words wrong and*
- *Rely on others, especially when they have to talk to non Aboriginal people'*

'Early onset hearing loss means that it is harder to learn language, especially English as a subsequent language. Indigenous people with hearing loss may also have less familiarity with Western world views than others in their community with better hearing. Less English and cross cultural confidence, compared with others in their family or community, is often a sign that a person has a hearing loss. These factors may arise from hearing loss but they then compound communication difficulties related to hearing loss, as well as impacting on hearing loss in their own right.' (Howard, personal communication).

Rea & Young (Rea & Young, 2006, p. 13) acknowledge that *'long silences often need to occur before people feel free to speak up or have given adequate consideration to the issue being discussed. Extended pauses often give Aboriginal people time to thoroughly consider questions and often translate what has been said into their own languages. This is of particular importance considering that for many Aboriginal people, English may be a third, fourth or even fifth language'*.

Scougall (2008, p. 54) citing Burchill (2004) reminds visitors to communities to avoid the use of jargon. *'I think it is important to go into a community with a view that you are a learner not "the expert". One way of doing this is to leave your jargon at home—make sure that plain English is always used. Yarn in plain English; don't use flash words. Aboriginal people want to share in the dialogue rather than be intimidated by flash talkers (Burchill, 2004, p. 8).'*

Fredericks (2008, p. 82) discusses the importance of listening for ongoing learning. *'From the listening comes the dialogue... (and through)... dialogue, learning can occur around what is important to Indigenous people in terms of health and wellbeing, making it possible for Western trained health professionals to work out the best way to work with Indigenous peoples.'*

Konigsberg & Collard (2002) talk about language and the dominant culture. They say, *'The onus has always been on Aboriginal people to learn standard Australian English. Society has never tried to work the other way to take into account and accommodate different ways of speaking. So basically, there was a real true shut off instead of trying to have a flow of real communication going, there's usually a real shut off of "You don't speak my way so therefore I won't listen to you"'*(Konigsberg & Collard, 2002, p. 41).



Rea & Young (2006) explain that when Indigenous people say 'yes', it does not always mean 'yes'. *'Community people may not agree but may just say 'yes' to stop the pushy outsider bugging them' (Rea & Young 2006, p. 8). 'Many Aboriginal people will attempt to placate an angry or pushy person by either ignoring or agreeing with everything they want even though they feel no obligation to fulfil any of the commitments made. In this situation – "yes" doesn't always mean "yes", but may simply be a method for getting rid of you without offending' (Rea & Young, 2006 p 13).*

Fryer-Smith (2008, p. 5:7) has prepared documents for lawyers to help them work more effectively with Indigenous people. She explains that some questions that visitors ask can be difficult for Aboriginal people to answer. In Aboriginal culture people respect the privacy of another person's thoughts and feelings. Asking someone in a community to tell you what another person 'thinks' may be met with silence. She details some of the common mistakes made by non-Indigenous people visiting communities that can be avoided when they become aware of them.

- *'Don't attempt to speak Aboriginal English. Attempts by non-Aboriginal English speakers to speak Aboriginal English may be interpreted as mocking or patronising.*
- *Don't "correct" the speech of a speaker of Aboriginal English.*
- *Don't use long and/or complex sentence constructions.*
- *Don't use figurative speech. An expression such as "as clear as mud", or "raining cats and dogs" may confuse a speaker of Aboriginal English.*
- *Don't ask negative questions, such as "You didn't do that, did you?" Such questions may easily confuse a speaker of Aboriginal English' (Fryer-Smith, 2008, p. 5:4:8)*

Ungunmerr-Baumann (1989, p. 3), a well-known Indigenous educator from Daly River in the NT has written powerfully out of her experience about communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. *'Our people are used to the struggle and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves have spent many years learning about the white man's ways; we have learnt to speak the white man's language; we have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people in Australia to take time and listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for, respect and understanding'.*



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Reflection and action

Think of a time that you have been involved in a communication event with someone who spoke a language that was unfamiliar to you. Did you get confused? Did that person get frustrated with you because you didn't understand? Did they speak really slowly? How did you feel? How did they react? How did their reaction make you feel?

Teach, learn and work Both-ways



It's bringing culture and sharing knowledge with other people.

Learning other ways - teaching other ways



We need more of this campfire learning.
Campfire learning is what I grew up with.

Help each other to communicate, be strong to each other. Blackfella way and whitefella way.



Teach, learn and work Both-ways

When working in an Indigenous early childhood context, the concept of Both-ways learning should become a foundation for your everyday practice. Both-ways is about intercultural learning. This can only occur when you are able to demonstrate respect and understanding of Indigenous culture and Indigenous people feel comfortable to share their knowledge with you. Both-ways learning incorporates Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into learning situations and workplace practices.

- Both-ways learning provides cultural safety for all concerned. The learning experience moves at the pace of the staff and learners and allows people time to think and translate thoughts from one language to another. Both-ways learning shows respect for what local staff, learners and the community consider to be the priorities for their own learning and for the delivery of their early childhood service.
- Both-ways learning and work environments will look and feel different to those designed for urban, Western students and workers. Things held in high regard in Western early childhood services and traditional classrooms may not be valued in the same way by Indigenous staff and learners. Indigenous learners and workers reactions to some typical learning and work environments include:
 - air-conditioning – Too cold.
 - training rooms – Too closed in.
 - white boards – Too much writing.
 - lecture style knowledge sharing – Too hard to listen.
 - computer chairs with wheels – Too scary. They move too quick.
 - long work shifts – We have to look after our family too.
 - separation of children by age – Our kids look after each other.
 - too many Western songs and stories – We have our own.
 - defined sleep times – Our kids sleep when they are tired.
- Few people hold formal early childhood qualifications in remote communities but many hold the Indigenous cultural knowledge that is fundamental to developing strong Indigenous early childhood educators. Tap into workers' knowledge in every learning situation; on-the-job learning, staff meetings, in-services and more formal training events. Include elders as mentors, co-trainers and advisors. Expect everyone in the service to engage with both local community cultural knowledge and Western knowledge. Discuss where concepts and practices overlap and where they differ. Put ideas gained through these exchanges into practice, into posters and drawings, into policies and into print so that Both-ways knowledge builds up in the service and becomes central to the delivery of the early childhood service and development of the curriculum.
- Talk with local community members to learn what has 'worked' for their learning in the past. This will help them to identify what they need from you to help them work and learn.
- Show that you're a learner too, rather than an 'expert'. Be humble and receptive to new knowledge.
- Assume people know something already about the knowledge areas you want to share. Ask them about what they know and use that knowledge as a starting point. Indigenous people want to build on their knowledge to help their children thrive. Recognise the value of a strength-based approach to learning. Build on what people know to develop individual's workplace skills and confidence.



- Make clear the purpose for learning any new concept or practice. Demonstrate new ideas and explain why you believe they are important. For example, explain why you are washing your hands so often, why you talk with children during lunch or why you are worried about a particular child. When you see practices that you don't understand, ask people to tell you why they do things the way they do. Learning on-the-job can be more engaging and effective, for both you and the local staff, than learning in the abstract, such as in a training workshop. On-the-job learning helps by making it clear how new knowledge is applied to practice.
- While on-the-job learning is critical to the development of an Indigenous early childhood workforce, opportunities to explore the knowledge and theories that underpin practice are equally important. Time for quiet reflection, away from the distractions of work, home and child responsibilities, is essential for learning difficult and complex ideas. Schedule time weekly for both on- and off-the-job training.
- Observe how new ideas and learning are taken up by local staff. Constant reminding makes people weary and resistant. There may be good reasons why new concepts are not adopted, which people may not feel ready to talk to you about. Be patient. Be open to the right time to talk and listen. Notice when staff engage in new practices as well.
- With significant community involvement and ownership, services are more likely to foster higher levels of passion and commitment in staff and learners because they feel endorsed and empowered by their community.

Teach, learn and work Both-ways

- Sometimes early childhood services in remote communities are disconnected from the community and are seen as a 'whitefella' institution. When this occurs, Indigenous people will be reluctant workers and learners and families will be less likely to use the service. If there is no community-wide investment, the job of managing a service, training or mentoring is considerably more difficult. If you feel there is little community investment, you can avoid much frustration and wasted time by implementing a whole of community re-engagement process. Take the time to demonstrate to the community that you are there to support their views and visions for their children.
- Some staff may not have had successful learning experiences in the past. Some may not have spoken or written English sufficient to even consider attempting a formal course. You have a special responsibility to make their first new learning experience with you a positive one.
- Provide people with resources to support their learning. Many people will not have access to notebooks, scissors, textas, pens and the other 'equipment' taken for granted in mainstream education. Having their own equipment can give local staff a feeling of pride and ownership in their learning.
- Learners like to do it right – use pencils, have rubbers and liquid paper available, so that they can correct mistakes if they want to. Their concerns about getting things right may be a legacy from past schooling experiences. Offer exercise books for learners to take notes and record the spelling and definitions for new words that they want to learn. Suggest that learners store their learning materials in the service if their home situation is crowded.
- Focus on learners' interests as a starting point for learning. Talk with staff to find out what they want to learn, and what they think they need to learn first. Offer suggestions. This approach is likely to be more appealing to staff than a set curriculum or structured training package. Provide experiences that allow staff and learners to experience feelings of success and achievement and to build their confidence. Learning how to use the computer to download music, how to bake a cake from a recipe or how to grow vegetables could entice a reluctant learner into more formal training.
- Give learners time to document their new learning – don't rush them. People need to think and transfer their thoughts from English to their own language and back again. Brainstorm in small groups and record everyone's input on butcher's paper. Place the brainstorming sheet in a prominent position to support staff to record information in written form. This helps people to learn to spell words they may have only ever heard and reduces the shame that may be experienced if they do not have high levels of written literacy.





- Provide learning opportunities in the real world. Walk around the community to identify play hazards or find materials for craft activities. Visit another early childhood service in the community or in a neighbouring community. Create networks that include other Indigenous people working for similar outcomes for their children in your community. Networks are a powerful learning opportunity.
- Make Both-ways resources to use at your early childhood service. Provide Western ideas as propositions rather than directives. This makes space for what local Indigenous people already know about the topic rather than assuming that the ‘teacher’ is solely responsible for imparting knowledge.
- Visual representations help learners conceptualise ‘big ideas’. Physically making visual representations with staff and learners is a great way to reinforce learning and allows learners to demonstrate their understanding. Visual representations can be made with posters, diagrams, photographs, paintings, drawings, boxes, sticks or clay constructions or computer graphics.
- Be flexible. On some days, learners may want to participate to a greater degree than you expect and on others they may be less interested. View yourself as the one who needs to be flexible to accommodate their needs. People in remote communities have complex lives that impact on their capacity to make time or set aside other responsibilities in order to learn.
- Recognise that clock watching is of little interest to most Indigenous people. A continuous focus on time appears to be much more of a Western value. People may not want to start and finish work or training at the scheduled time because they’re enjoying themselves and want to learn more. Can you shuffle your schedule to accommodate this? Put learner needs before your own.
- Repetition is important for learning new concepts and ideas. Don’t expect people to learn something new because they’ve been shown or told once or twice. Re-present new ideas often and in multiple ways - through demonstrating, telling a story, pointing out an example, using an analogy or metaphor or posting the new idea on the wall for easy reference and as a reminder.
- Ultimately, Indigenous staff will ‘talk with their feet’. If a workplace or training program isn’t working for them often the first sign will be a lack of staff or learners! If staff don’t turn up for work, evaluate your practice first. Instead of blaming the worker or learner, think about how you work and what you may be doing that is creating the problem.

Advice from educators

Both-ways is to help each other to communicate - be strong to each other. Blackfella way and whitefella way.

Indigenous early childhood educator

It's bringing culture, sharing knowledge with other people, learning other ways, teaching other ways.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We held training sessions in a variety of places that the learners chose - the women's centre, GBM complex and the river bed with a roo tail and damper cook up.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

We need more of this campfire learning. Campfire learning is what I grew up with.

Indigenous early childhood educator

One learning activity asked the learner to talk about bush medicines for kids. We visited her uncle and he shared many stories with us of the way things used to be and bush medicine, traditional ways with kids. He told of using charcoal on boils, eating flying fox to get rid of the flue, colds and asthma and rubbing rock snake fat on babies' elbows and knees to make them crawl faster.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

You need a positive learning environment. Positive is when you come to a place where you're not shame. You're safe. You're comfortable. You're coming to a place where you find friends. If you have a good experience in a new environment, then you want to come back and you feel free.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Give them examples. Show them and help them to think about different activities. Help them to make their own place in the way that they run it.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We don't follow time. Time's no good for us. We were not brought up to look at watches or time; our time is just the sun and our guts when we hungry. Guts tell us that we need food.

Indigenous early childhood educator

The Crèche was closed, but staff were still keen to do their learning, so we did a workshop at another place. The time flew and after lunch I asked people if they wanted to do more or finish up. They had all been focused for a long time and really interested in what they were doing and wanted to keep going. In the end, I had wrap things up as I was going to miss my plane home.

Non-Indigenous Early Childhood Educator



Advice from educators

A staff member was worried about people playing games and talking on their mobile phones at work because the children could get hurt. We talked about it and she decided that a poster would be the best way to remind people without shaming them. On a big piece of paper we made a rough outline of the poster, the kind of pictures we needed and the messages the staff member wanted to convey. She posed for a series of photos that were then used to transform her ideas into posters to display around the service. It was positive to note, that in the weeks after her posters went up, there was a significant decrease observed in staff playing games on their phones.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

When you want the learning, it's easier to learn. But if someone says you have to learn, then it's hard.

Indigenous early childhood educator

She was talking, learning, listening and sharing in a group. We listened and took the new ideas and did them how we wanted to, how was right for us.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We like to use the arts in learning, like we learn our culture, like in traditional way. It is learning with the arts, like singing, dancing, painting passed down the generations from generation to generation.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Advice from educators

Get trainers to go out to the community and train us out there. That gets people confident. Then they can start coming into town for workshops later, when they're more confident.

Indigenous early childhood educator

Include Indigenous language in our training, not just English.

Indigenous early childhood educator

"What about our kids?" they say. "There's nothing for the kids in some communities, so why would those people do the training?"

Indigenous early childhood educator

I want to go to Batchelor now to do workshops. I don't get time off the floor away from the kids to do my learning books here at the crèche.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We talked about 2 ways learning: the whitefella ways and the blackfella ways. Indigenous way was different before whitefella came. Aboriginal children learned many things from ceremony, hunting and watching old people do art. Now they go to school to learn Western ways and sport. In the olden days, culture and many other things were strong.

Indigenous early childhood educator

One learner was keen to make a book for kids. She wrote out the words of the song Ku Karrak- 'The kookaburra sits in the old gum tree' - in Murrinhpatha. We took some photos of gum trees and I found images of kookaburras and sent them to her. On my next visit she showed me the finished product, a professional book that she had been supported to make by the staff at the schools Literacy Production Centre.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

Wali Wunungmurra, an Indigenous leader from the community of Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land, explains the importance of learning Both-ways. *'In an exchange of knowledge both sides learn from each other instead of knowledge coming only from the Balanda (non-Indigenous) side. But Yolngu and Balanda knowledge will only come together if there is respect for our knowledge and where Aboriginal people are taking the initiative, where we shape and develop the educational programs and implement them'* (Wunungmurra, 1989, p.12).

Hutchins et al. (2007, p. 15), non-Indigenous early childhood educators with experience in remote community contexts, reviewed literature on high quality Indigenous early childhood service delivery. They emphasise the importance of identity and culture in defining cultural safety and, citing the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (2005), define it thus: *'Cultural safety – the knowledge that as an individual you can express your identity, practice your culture and have your values honoured without fear of ridicule, chastisement or prejudice. Providing culturally safe services and programs requires embracing the legitimacy of difference and the ability to explore and reflect upon your own life experiences, realities, beliefs and the impact of these on others (Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2005)'*.

Veronica Arbon, Indigenous educator and scholar, reflects on what Both-ways means. *'The 'Both-Ways' concept is a contested idea. It has grown out of work in remote schools in the sixties and seventies (I have personal experience of engagement in such processes in my own childhood). In the eighties, the concept began to surface in Western literature, becoming increasingly complex in meaning over the years. At Batchelor Institute, staff and students use the concept to step outside the known, to question from different ways of viewing, sensing, feeling and engaging in the world, never a simplistic interpretation of 'Both-Ways'. All are learners in this environment. The concept has been challenged, but more importantly, has had the capacity to challenge in return, to push thinking to new levels, to demand alternative interpretations of basic aspects of life and to accept a fundamental quality at one level and negotiate meaning at others. This concept has been a signpost to do things differently'* (Arbon in Fasoli et al. 2004, p. 7).

Karen Martin (1999, p.6), Indigenous early childhood scholar writing about cultural safety for Aboriginal families and children explains, *'Meeting the needs of Aboriginal clients requires a service to have an understanding of, respect for, and reflection of the ways in which Aboriginal families go about their "business" of raising their young. In this way there is minimal opportunity for Aboriginal families being misjudged when inappropriate, non Aboriginal norms for child rearing are applied. Remember, it was exactly this misjudgment that resulted in the forced removal of so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families (HR&EOC, 1997)'*.

Indigenous educator and former principal of a remote school in Arnhem Land, Yalmay Yunupingu, (2010) talks about balancing her cultural knowledge and Western knowledge. *'All I'm doing is just fighting for my rights, our rights - it's the best thing for kids. ...I carry this vision around, what was in the past, the present and the future. And in my vision, I always think about the history, the language and the culture, the strong culture that was in the past. And in the middle, I've got a question mark to the present. I got a big question mark. So future, I don't really know. ...This is what I always think about this thing and sometimes this makes me cry. Cause you don't know what's going to happen in the future. I want to bring Western and Yolngu culture to a balance, to balance it, not one up here and one down here.*

Everything should be balanced. We come from a balanced world - yirritja and dhuwa1. We come from a balanced world, like a yin and yang philosophy. This is what we, in the past, been fighting for...to have self-management, self-determination and self-reliance' (see <http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2010/07/07/2947356.htm>).

A key theme from a review of literature on children's services development in remote communities, undertaken in the 'Both Ways' Children's Service project, was *'the fundamental issues of control, access and support; control in terms of Indigenous ownership and management of services for children and cultural maintenance within those services, access in terms of appropriate and available training, resources and ongoing support for all aspects of service delivery but particularly aspects related to management and administration of services and support to address barriers to service delivery presented by continued fragmentation of service funding, accountability and licensing requirements'* (Fasoli et al. 2004, p. 232-233). These are all 'Both-ways' issues in that they require an equitable and fair distribution of power and control.

Scougall (2009, p. 49) reviewing lessons learnt through the analysis of many Indigenous capacity building projects confirms mentoring and role modelling as successful training strategies. *'Mentoring, role modelling and the buddy system all appear to have been popular and successful strategies employed. There are plenty of examples where Indigenous understanding, skills and capacity for initiative were built on the job. But we did not encounter any instances where substantial capacity was built through the provision of workshops conducted in isolation. It appears that Indigenous capacity is most effectively built when it is undertaken in connection with a specific social purpose.'*

Fordham & Schwab (2007, p. 38) emphasise the importance of culturally comfortable spaces for learning and engagement of community members. They urge recognition of *'... the rich oral tradition of Indigenous peoples, the need to spend more time in developing ideas and spending time with communities in their own space and, in turn, creating a "comfortable" space for Indigenous adults within the school'*.

Jessica Ball and colleagues (2005, p. 456), working with First Nations people in Canada, urge training providers to undertake training through a community development approach that strengthens local cultures. *'Education that prepares people to work as providers of childcare and development services is likely to influence which culture and what aspects of culture are reproduced through the subsequent design and delivery of programs for children. Far from being culturally neutral, course curricula for early childhood educators are cultural constructions grounded in the worldviews, beliefs, and norms of those who conceptualize and teach the curricula. In turn, training curricula may significantly shape the cultural identity, cultural competence, and cultural allegiance of the children whose families bring them for care and education. The most effective step that can be taken to increase the cultural appropriateness of services for First Nations community members is to train community members themselves and involve the whole community as much as possible in the conceptualization, delivery, application, and evaluation of training'*.

Zubrick et al. (2006, p. xxiii) talk about the differences between Western and Aboriginal ways of viewing the world which are so critical to effective learning. *'Aboriginal knowledge systems have ways of sensing the world, worldviews that differ in significant ways from the dominant 'western' or 'European' knowledge system in Australia. Aboriginal knowledge systems are based on intimate relationships not focused on what things are as much as who they are and how they are related'* (p. xxii).

Anderson (2009, p. 18), working through Charles Darwin University in the NT remote communities, reminds VET and other professional development visitors to remote Indigenous communities that the local priorities may be very different from the Western priorities. *'There is a natural tension between the priorities of community members, who will rightly prioritise issues that affect their family, community and culture above participation in VET training, and the priorities of VET educators, who perceive that the training they are there to provide takes priority, as they are only in the community for a short time'*.

Young et al. (2007, p. 7) discuss the *'...significant misalignment between the content and delivery models of VET and the prior skills, educational demands and aspirations of desert Indigenous people. VET programs struggle to adapt to and address the types of learning needs that arise as a result of language and cultural differences and the different ways work is constructed.'*



Ball & Pence (1999) have done extensive work with Indigenous communities in remote areas of Canada. They have developed a concept for curriculum development called the Generative Curriculum. They challenge the early childhood field to move beyond the limited concepts of developmentally and culturally appropriate practice. *'Good advice to students in speaking out about early childhood education needs, practices, training programs is to take stock of the community in which they are working, consider the cultural values and wishes of parents who bring their children for care, and involve parents as much as possible (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997). No one would argue with that. But are we willing to take our own advice by yielding a place in curriculum development, program design, and even the training of early childhood providers to knowledge that resides within the community? Are we willing, in our pedagogical delivery, to yield floor time to respected community elders speaking out about the needs, practices and goals of their cultural constituency?'* (Ball & Pence, 1999, p. 46).

Bond (2010, p. 40), working with Indigenous communities in Queensland, advises outsiders who play educational roles in a remote community to *'... be culturally responsive, friendly and compassionate and... heed the advice of senior Indigenous members of a community to be successful.'*

An Aboriginal cultural competency resource, recently developed by the Aboriginal Services Branch of the NSW Department of Community Services (Working with Aboriginal People and Communities: A Practice Resource, 2009, p. 6) highlights respect: *'Respect for elders, the land, animals and ancestors are fundamental aspects of Aboriginal culture ... Visiting workers need to offer and earn respect, particularly in dealings with community elders and leaders. Elders and community leaders not only hold key community knowledge, but they also have a great deal of influence over when, how and if a community will work with those from outside'*.

Another resource, developed by D'Arbon, Fasoli, Frawley & Ober (2009) through research with Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators in the NT, provides a practice tool for reflection on the intercultural capabilities needed to support educational leadership in a remote Indigenous context. Expressed as questions, the resource can be used by people who work in educational roles in remote Indigenous communities to assist them in seeking and finding common ground amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues and others.



Meet as a group and ask yourselves, 'Do we:

- *establish, strengthen and value respectful relationships? How? When?*
- *respect local traditional leadership as well as (institutional) leadership systems? How? When?*
- *respect different ideas about land, language and culture? How? When?*
- *reinforce, promote and acknowledge cultural identity? How? When?*
- *encourage discussion about an intercultural/both-ways philosophy of education? How? When?*
- *promote intercultural perspectives across the curriculum? How? When?*
- *create time and space to learn from each other? How? When?*
- *create a non-threatening environment where people feel free to express themselves? How? When?*
- *value intercultural systems? How? When?*
- *see ourselves as being on a continual learning journey? How? When?*
- *work towards balancing imbalances? How? When?'*

(Adapted from D'Arbon et al. 2009, p. 44)

Howard (personal communication, 2011) provides the following advice for training with Indigenous learners where hearing loss is so prevalent.

Group settings

- *'Tell people what activities they will be involved in a while before it happens. This helps them prepare for what they will be asked to do.*
- *Give people the questions they will be asked publically sometime before they are asked them. This way people can consider their answer and not be put on the spot.*
- *Give handouts that outline the "big picture" of what they will be involved in.*
- *Try and make sure there will not be any background noise around when people need to listen. This means things like lawn mowers outside or people having side conversations in the group.*
- *Use a sound field amplification system (like a PA system) when people have to listen in a big group.*
- *If possible have notes taken and typed up so people can read them during the meeting and review what happened after the meeting.*
- *Have breaks and allow enough time during breaks for people to discuss what was said.*
- *It is especially important to have discussion breaks before any decisions are made.*
- *After group discussions allow people time to access people who can help clarify what is said.'*

and

'One on one and small group sessions

- *Background noise - Be careful to limit or move away from background noise*
- *Wait - Those with hearing loss take longer to respond. They need to think about what was said, to make sure they have understood as well as work out what they want to say.*
- *Don't interrupt - People with hearing loss often have a prepared 'story' they want to tell about something. Interruptions may mess up them telling their story.*
- *Help make familiar - Help people locate what is being discussed within their framework of experiences.*
- *Help Clarify - Be available to undertake post discussion clarification of what has been said in group discussions.*
- *Fixed sequenced questions - Be careful about surveys and sequenced fixed questions. If possible allow people to tell their own story in their own way to give you information, then ask further questions leading from what they told you if needed.*
- *Get to the point - It is harder work listening if a speaker goes all around things before they get to the point.*
- *Don't talk too long - People with hearing loss have to work harder to listen and reach listening overload more quickly.*
- *Use amplification devices - Hand held amplification devices can help to understand what is being said.'*

(Howard, 2011, personal communication)

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Reflection and action

Arrange a workshop or training meeting in the workplace. Observe how learners engage in the learning and what they bring to their learning. Arrange a bush trip with a specific learning purpose. Once again, observe how learners engage in learning and what they bring to their learning. Talk to the learners about the two learning experiences. Make a chart that shows the learning that occurred in each setting. Talk about how learners felt about their learning. Evaluate the pros and cons of each setting for learning different things.



Community life can be hard sometimes



Disengaged youth

Health issues

Fighting and jealousy

Boredom, gambling, grog and gunja



Community life can be hard sometimes

Life for many families in remote Indigenous communities is full of challenges. It is important for non-Indigenous staff to take a wide view of community life in order to understand the pressures that people they work with live with every day. Some of the problems include disengaged youth, fighting, health issues, lack of transport, boredom, substance abuse and a lack of access to many of the resources that are taken for granted within most Australian towns. As a non-Indigenous visitor to the community you need to be aware of these issues. Always consider how these aspects of community life can impact on an individual's ability to participate in the workplace or in training activities.

• Disengaged youth

In some remote communities large numbers of young people have not received adequate education. They are bored and have little to do with their time, often leading to antisocial behaviours, gang affiliations and substance abuse. These youth may have missed out on schooling for any number of reasons but often due to truancy, mobility or feeling alienated from the school. As a result, with few literacy and numeracy skills, they cannot get a job, even where there are jobs available. The plight of these children causes enormous anxiety and stress for families who worry about their future.

To some families, school may represent the mainstream world that is taking their children away from their culture. To others, they want their children to have the best of both worlds but they may have lost confidence in the school. This ambivalence towards school results in many children being truant from school. To stay in school past the primary grades children need strong family encouragement and support. Concerns about and involvement in children's education can impact on a staff member's ability to get to work on time and their full attention to their work throughout the school day.

• Fighting

In some communities, where fighting occurs often, it might not be safe to walk through a particular part of the community or down a particular street although this might be the only way for a staff member to get to work. Fighting can result in exhaustion for kids and adults caused by stress and by being kept awake all night. It is not uncommon for essential services like the community store to close when there is fighting or for all community services to close to allow for a community meeting to be held to resolve the issue. Fighting amongst families in the community can also end up being a problem in a service when staff who work together represent different factions in the fighting. They may not come to work until the conflict is sorted out.

• Transport

Travelling out of the community for work or training related activities is not always possible or desirable for Indigenous people. People may not want to leave the community for family reasons such as having small children they are uncomfortable to leave behind, work commitments and lack of payment while they're away. The unpredictable weather and violent storms associated with the wet season can make air travel in small planes an unsettling thought. However, even with all these deterrents, it's best not to assume that people do not want to travel.



Ask people if they want to attend functions such as training or conferences in town. Many people are keen for the opportunities and many more timid community members will travel once they and their families have developed trusting relationships with you. In addition, when two community members can travel together they often feel more comfortable about leaving the community.

In a large community, getting to work or training without a vehicle can be a problem. Home can be a long walk from the service. In the wet season, with early morning and afternoon downpours, getting to work can be an issue. Walking in the hot sun is also difficult. Picking up staff or students in a car helps them to attend non-routine activities, especially outside normal working hours.

● Housing

Housing for local community members is very crowded in most remote communities. While non-Indigenous people may complain about the quality of their community-based housing they usually have their own space. For many Indigenous staff crowded housing means that everyday facilities like a quiet place to sleep, a functional shower, toilet or washing machine - the things that most Australians take for granted - are not always available. Coming to work tired or in dirty clothes is something no one wants to do and people may stay away due to feeling shame.

Due to delays in upgrades to housing in a number of remote communities, some residents have had to live in tents for extended periods. This too can impact on participation in the workforce as getting ready for work, finding clean clothes and organising family members is an additional challenge in these conditions and takes extra time.

● Access to Services

Many services, including the clinic, shops, stores and Shire offices, close down during the lunch period in the middle of the day. Community stores often close for a longer period on the day that stock is delivered to allow for unpacking. Many staff need to access these services but can't use their lunch break as a constructive time to do activities like go to the clinic or doing their shopping. Flexibility in staff break times can help staff to get their business done without unduly disrupting the service.

● Health issues

There are a number of health conditions that are common within Indigenous communities including boils, scabies, trachoma, diabetes, kidney disease and hearing loss. Some of these conditions require daily trips to the clinic for medication or dressing changes. Often, staff are responsible not only for managing their own health but for supporting other family members. This makes health issues within the community a major impact on people's ability to participate at work or training.

Community health clinics may have specific times when they can see patients and staff may have to leave work to access medical services for themselves or a family member. This is especially the case when visiting specialists, such as dentists or optometrists, only come to the community for short periods of time. Where further medical treatment is not available in the community, people may need to be transported to the nearest hospital or take time off work to be the escort of a family member who needs hospitalisation.

● Gambling, grog and gunja

Payday in remote indigenous communities is an important day of the week. Most people are paid on a particular day of the week and these are the days when everyone needs to get to the shop to buy food. If the shopping is not done straight away, family members may 'humbug' (put pressure on) the staff member for money or the money may get used for other purposes, such as gambling, grog or gunja. Staff may not share this concern with non-Indigenous people who are new to the community.

Staff who are parents often worry about their older children while they are working and not able to keep an eye on them. They worry that their children may not be going to school or be tempted to get involved in anti-social activities. This worry can cause people to be distracted and unfocused at work. Providing staff with some time off to check on children may help them to focus again on work.



Advice from educators

There's a lot of drug abuse and alcohol everywhere and community life is hard but we still encourage our kids every chance we get.

Indigenous early childhood educator

We had to stay awake all night in case they snuck up on us. I get really tired for work.

Indigenous early childhood educator

They signed to us to pack up and clear out as there was going to be fighting, so we packed up, really fast! It was quite frightening to see one old lady had armed herself with a metal bar for protection. The large group of men watched us the whole time to make sure we were packing up, as if they were not going to start anything until we were gone and safe.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

I know it's good for kids to be in the mainstream. Like my kids, they achieving mainstream but they not achieving our way. They don't know how to relate to extended family. They got to learn that. I can see they losing that.

Indigenous early childhood educator

All the babies were having a rest. I went to sleep. The director came in and growled me. She said, 'I'm not impressed! No one's doing any work!' We were all doing work! Everything was done. All the babies were asleep and the staff were in the big room. Sometimes we don't get enough sleep at night because of the fighting, and rest time is important.

Indigenous early childhood educator

One of the parents needed help to get a new key card from the bank. She could not physically go into the bank because there has been fighting between her family and the family of one of the bank staff. She phoned her husband who could go in to the bank and he collected the card for her.

Non-Indigenous early childhood educator

I had to take my son to the clinic so I couldn't come to work. Everybody knew that. But that director thought I was just being lazy.

Indigenous early childhood educator



Read more about this message from other sources

Burchill & Higgins (2005, p. 5) put the current problems faced by Indigenous communities into perspective by reminding readers that these issues stem from a history of colonisation. *'In order to understand the current issues facing Indigenous communities, it is vital to understand the history of colonisation. The past resonates into the present: it impinges on the family, the children, and their ability to reach their full potential'* (p.5).

Fredericks (2008, p. 82) citing McKendrick (1998) explains the importance of listening for solving the enduring problems affecting remote Indigenous communities, in this case health problems.

Malin & Maidment (2003, p. 94) emphasise the relationship between Indigenous people's control over their own affairs and their health. *'"Social determinants" research has demonstrated the importance of an individual's control over their life circumstances to their health. Perhaps this is the key to understanding the huge differences in life expectancy between the Indigenous populations in North America and New Zealand as compared with Australia. As far back as 1969, Dunn and Tatz explained that Indigenous peoples in Canada, USA and New Zealand had more say in their children's schooling than occurred in Australia. Rolley proposed that we have much to learn from New Zealand where Maori people play an active role in the direction of the education of their children.'*

According to a recent NT government inquiry into child protection, the state of housing puts enormous stress on families and children in many remote Indigenous communities. *'Poor housing and overcrowding were found to be a major contributing factor to poor child wellbeing outcomes and disturbed family functioning. They can discourage stable relationships, add significant stress to all concerned, and place pressure on food and financial security. The Inquiry heard that even where there is significant investment in refurbishment of houses plus the building of new dwellings on some remote communities, in the medium term this will reduce the average home occupancy from the high to the early teens. In another community, the housing program will reduce average occupancy from 18 to 9 in two to three years. This is still not satisfactory'* (NT Government 2010, p.17).

Taylor (2005, p. 48) analyses the challenges facing the Wadeye community in the NT. *'Of greatest concern for longer-term social and economic development at Wadeye is the current level of school truancy. While precise measurement is complicated by student mobility, barely one-fifth of those consistently enrolled can be classified as regular attendees. In addition, there are large numbers of intermittent enrollees who attend occasionally and some 200 in the region who are not enrolled at all... These figures suggest that non-attendance at school has become the social norm for compulsory schoolage children, a transformation that has built up gradually since the days of mission schooling. As a consequence, educational needs at Wadeye are now two-fold: to ensure that school attendance once again becomes accepted and normal practice, and to ensure that those who have left school with little experience of it have every opportunity for remedial action.'*

The most recent review of progress on 'closing the gap' for Indigenous disadvantage indicates there is a long way to go (SCRGSP, 2011, p.5).

- *Post secondary education — attainment of post secondary qualifications increased for both Indigenous and other people between 2002 and 2008, with no change in the gap between Indigenous and other people.*
- *Disability and chronic disease — rates of profound or severe core activity restriction were twice as high for Indigenous people as for non-Indigenous people, with no change for either population between 2002 and 2008. Hospitalisation rates for all chronic diseases except cancer were higher for Indigenous people than other people in 2008. The gaps between Indigenous and other people increased for circulatory diseases, diabetes and kidney disease, and remained the same for other conditions between 2004-05 and 2008-09.*
- *Household and individual income — after adjusting for inflation, median gross weekly equivalised household (GWEH) income increased for Indigenous people between 2002 and 2008, from \$347 per week to \$445 per week (in 2008 dollars) but a similar increase in the incomes of other people meant the gap did not change.*
- *Substantiated child abuse and neglect — from 1999-2000 to 2009-10, the substantiation rate for Indigenous children increased from 15 to 37 per 1000 children, while the rate for non-Indigenous children increased from 4 to 5 per 1000 children, leading to a significant widening of the gap (partly reflecting increased reporting).*
- *Family and community violence — the proportion of Indigenous people who had been victims of physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months did not change significantly between 2002 and 2008, and remained around twice the proportion of non-Indigenous people.*
- *Imprisonment and juvenile detention — the imprisonment rate increased by 59 per cent for Indigenous women and by 35 per cent for Indigenous men between 2000 and 2010. In 2010, after adjusting for age differences, Indigenous adults were imprisoned at 14 times the rate for non-Indigenous adults, compared to 10 times in 2000. The Indigenous juvenile detention rate increased between 2001 and 2008; dropped significantly between 2008 and 2009; but was still 23 times the non-Indigenous rate in 2009.'*

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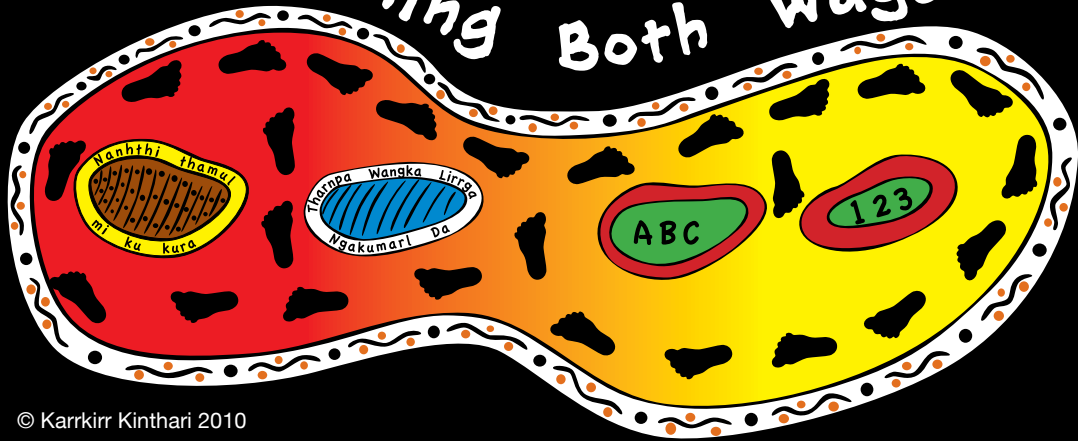
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Learning Both Ways



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