



Exploring Multiculturalism, Anti Bias and Social Justice In Children's Services

Once we begin to recognise the politics of what we do everyday, we can begin to see how everyday living in children's services is a multicultural experience.

by Miriam Giugni

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Profile of Network

With over 30 years of experience, Network supports Out of School Hours care services to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to deliver quality Out of School Hours care services. Network has the expertise to support services to develop their management skills, such as financial management, strategic planning, leadership skills, and conflict resolution and team management. We provide professional support to enable services to strengthen their ability to become inclusive services and to ensure children with additional needs can participate in care services and activities.

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The Alliance of Children's Services is a consortium of seven key organisations that resource and represent the various sectors of children's services in NSW:

- Community Child Care Cooperative Limited NSW (lead agency)
- NSW Family Day Care Association
- Network of Community Activities
- Contact Incorporated
- Ethnic Child Care
- Family and Community Services Co-operative Limited
- Child Care NSW
- Semann and Slattery

Children's Services Central's main role is to ensure our service delivery is supporting the provision of professional inclusive quality children's services.

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Friends at Stanmore Out of School Hours Care

Introduction

What makes for a liveable world is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. It is posed in various idioms all the time by people in various walks of life. If that makes them all philosophers, then that is a conclusion I am happy to embrace. It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes our own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable?

(Judith Butler, 2004 .p. 17)

This quote highlights the responsibility we all have to place justice at the centre of our work with children and families. It shows that we are in a position to make a difference in the work we do with children. It guides the politics of this book to explain why we need to focus on multiculturalism, anti bias and social justice in our work with children and learn about the historical aspects and how it came about. It also reminds us about how the meaning of multiculturalism in our work and how this relates to every child, family and staff member on a daily basis. Multiculturalism is about human rights, having a fair go, access and equity, respect and acknowledgement, acceptance of cultural, linguistic, religious diversity because this is what makes up Australian society today.

At the Fourth National Conference of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council, multiculturalism was defined as follows:

"A multicultural society is one where a variety of different cultural groups co-exist harmoniously, free to maintain their distinctive religious, linguistic or social customs, equal as individuals in their access to resources and services appropriate to them and their needs, to civil and political rights, and sharing with the rest of society particular concerns and values. There would be diversity, equality, empathy of interaction. All of the groups would stress tolerance of cultural, linguistic and religious differences which would be complementary to the loyalties the individual shares with other Australians and which forms his/her identity as an Australian ethos".

This definition sets the context and framework of how multiculturalism can and should be thought about and acted upon in our work with children.

Why this book?

The purpose of this book is to offer an introduction to ideas that will assist staff in children's services to think about the importance of multiculturalism in our everyday work and how this links to anti bias, equity and social justice. It is intended to give a broad overview of ideas, philosophy, and policies.

The book is not intended to give you the 'answer' about how to 'do' multiculturalism, anti bias curriculum, equity and social justice, nor is it the only way to look at and understand these ideas. Rather it is a starting point for looking at multiculturalism in children's services. It gives a broad overview of the available literature at this time in 2007. No doubt things will grow and change over time.

It is important that this book be accessible and useful to those who work with children and families who might be unsure about how multiculturalism fits into the work they do. It is also important to realize that ideas such as

multiculturalism, anti bias, equity and social justice, are never really 'finished' so when you are thinking about them, as you read, it is important to remember that there is always more to learn!

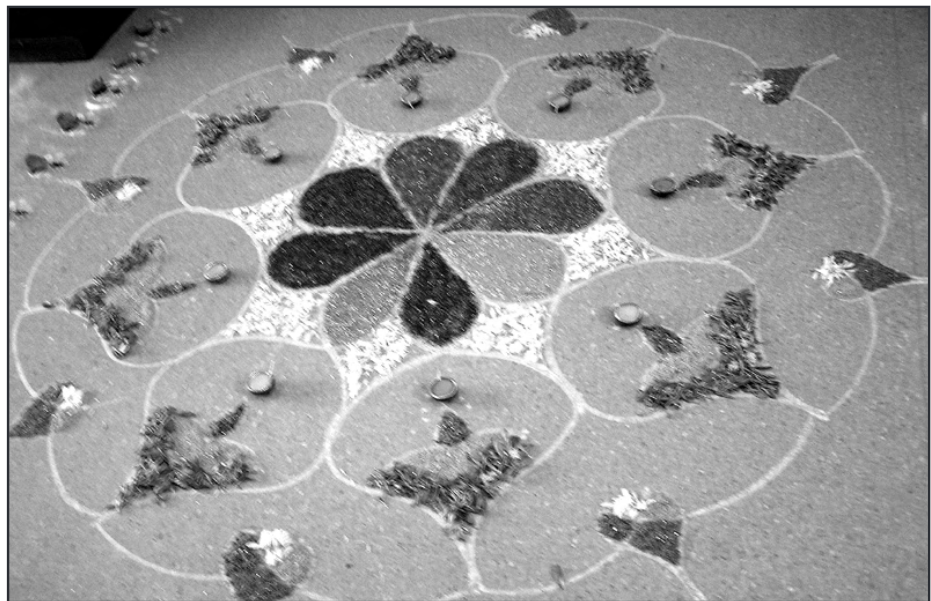
Please view this resource as a tool for all staff in children's services to be used in many ways;

- For personal reflection
- As a discussion starter for staff meetings and parent meetings
- As an orientation guide for new staff or students and volunteers
- As a support document in the development of policies

As you read this book, use the critical questions provided to consider how these ideas can be applied in your everyday practice with children. It is likely that you will have different opinions about what is written here – these differences can become the focus of your discussions with children, staff and families. It is only through continual reflection on our practice and our philosophies that we can improve our services for all children.

I wish you well in your journey.

Robyn Monro Miller
Executive Officer, Network of Community Activities



A Rangoli for Diwali Celebrations
by Savithri Madakasira, Family Day Carer Blacktown

Definitions, History and Stories of Practice

This chapter is made up of short stories that introduce some important terms and their history. Each short story is linked to a practical example and questions for critically reflective practice to spark your thinking about what you do in your everyday practice and why.

Each short story focuses on the words and language we use to name and describe the work we do with children about multiculturalism. By having an idea about how and why certain words are used in policy and documents that guide our practice, we can gain an insight into how we can better understand why we do what we do and how to talk about it.

The following questions can help guide you through this chapter. As you read consider:

- Why is language important to working with multiculturalism in children's services?
- Why is it important to link the language of government policies and guides for practice?
- What might I be able to do in my work with children and families if I know the definitions and history of words that relate to multiculturalism in children's services?

Definitions: The politics of defining words

Defining words is tricky because meanings of words change over time and place. Often definitions related to multiculturalism come from a standard government policy which then sets a framework for practice. However, the meanings that we give to words also come from our own experiences. So, the definitions suggested here work as a common starting point to set the direction for bringing together official policy (Regulations and Quality Assurance) with your everyday experiences with children. These definitions can help you think about how you plan, implement and evaluate experiences and activities for the children in your care.

Words that appear frequently in children's services literature include:

- Culture
- Multicultural
- Anti Bias Approaches
- Access and Equity
- Social Justice

By thinking about the history and meaning of these terms, staff can build cultural competency in how they talk about experiences and activities in their everyday work with children. So, what follows are some brief definitions of these words to help begin the process.

1. What is Culture?

It is important to think about what we mean by 'culture' because it is the main part of 'multiculturalism'. So, multiculturalism means that there are many different kinds of cultures in our society. A very broad definition of culture is that it refers to the things we do to negotiate our identities. It is a process, a lived experience and an ongoing practice. Culture is created by individuals and groups and is passed on in some form from generation to

generation. Cultural practices are created in order for people to identify with each other or to differentiate from other people and cultural groups. Culture can differ from group to group but also from person to person based on beliefs, values, attitudes and social structures. These might include: thinking, talking, acting, access to resources, beliefs, faith, practices, customs, way to live, art, sport, language, food and eating, geographical region, education, socioeconomic status, laws, class, country of birth, family structure, sexuality, languages spoken, popular culture, mass culture, media culture to name a few! In other words, culture is everything we do and are!

To some extent culture is something we inherit from society, but it is also based on how we live, what options we have and how we choose to use them. So this means that culture is not always 'natural' but a product of social construction. This is why some cultural groups live in conflict. We are passionate about who we are and what we believe. When something or someone challenges this belief, people work hard to protect 'who they are' and 'what they believe'.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- What is your definition of culture?
- How do staff and families define culture? (eg: consider the information on enrolment forms)
- What are the similarities and differences in how you and others define culture? (eg: think about the part culture plays when there are differences of opinion about issues such as rights for refugees)
- What are some ways you recognise language to be value laden with meaning? Are all words value laden with meaning? If not why?

2. What is multiculturalism?

It is important to remember that while Australia is a multicultural society, it is based on the dispossession of Indigenous people. For over 200 years, Indigenous peoples of this country have suffered the loss of their land, culture, languages and experience blatant discrimination by the system and society on a daily basis. Their struggle to survive is ongoing. It is 'unfinished business'.

In this sense, Australia has a similar history to countries like USA, Canada, New Zealand/Aotearoa, Argentina and Chile. Multiculturalism was first developed in Canada in the 1960s and after many struggles by migrants it was adopted in Australia in the late 1970s. Until recently all political parties supported multiculturalism as national policy. It was originally designed to support the rights of migrants of Non English Speaking Background (NESB) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) in a society which had been based on a White Australia Policy. In political terms, multiculturalism created a significant shift in how Australians see themselves.

The core principals of multiculturalism include: human rights, to speak one's language, practise one's culture and religion and for these practices to be acknowledged and promoted in society. This includes institutions such as children's services. It also includes having equal access to resources and services, which meet the linguistic, cultural and other diverse needs of the Australian population which, through migration comes from some 200 countries of the world.

In terms of children's services, multiculturalism has more specific meanings. Generally, Multiculturalism can be defined as different cultures participating in a society unequally. Elizabeth Dau (2001), the pioneer of Anti Bias Approaches in Australian children's services, expands this definition by stating that "multiculturalism [is] the existence of a number of distinct ethnic or cultural groups within one nation-state. It can be a matter of statistical fact and/or promotion by Government policy". In terms of children's services policy, multiculturalism has referred to equity of access to Government services, programs and funding. However, many people are confused not just about the definition, but how the word is used.

It is important to recognise that providing multicultural activities and experiences is not a choice, but a right. Australia is made up of people from diverse cultures and backgrounds it is each person's right to have their culture represented, accepted and celebrated in they way that they choose (subject to laws and lore). Even though recent changes to Government policy have been to the detriment of multiculturalism, the rights of people to belong are not negotiable. Therefore, we are responsible to act upon these rights in our everyday work with children and families.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- How do you talk about multiculturalism in your everyday planning and work with children?
- What ideas do people in your service have about multiculturalism? (You might build a definition with colleagues)
- What examples of practice can you think of that reflect multiculturalism in your service?

3. Who is multicultural?

Deciding who is and isn't multicultural often sparks critical debates that to date seems to be unresolved. In Australian society there is a perception that non English speaking background (NESB) or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups are those who have an ethnicity such as Greek, Italian, Thai, and Indonesian. In terms of Government policy, Multiculturalism also refers to groups that represent Australia's migration history. But, in recent times questions have been raised about how we see cultural groups and what part White Anglo Australians have in this cultural mix. So, it is important to note here that often white Anglo-Australians think that only other people have 'culture' or 'ethnicity'.

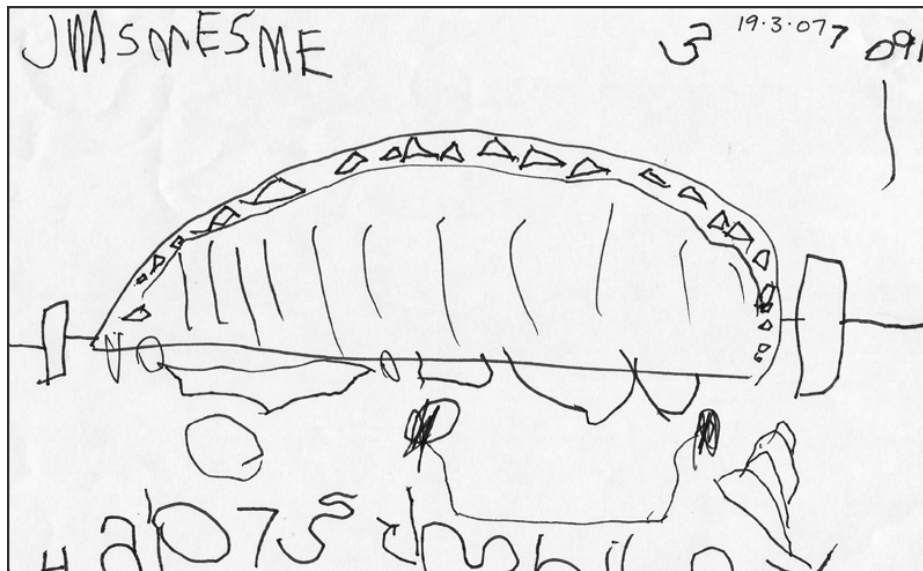
Some examples of this form of multiculturalism include TV current affairs programs, or newspaper reports or conversations on talkback radio. Most of these examples talk about multiculturalism in quite a different way from the definition given above. In the last few years, there has been a lot of discussion about the place of refugees

in our society, citizenship tests and the need for Australians to speak more languages. Christina Ho (2007) shows us that the way Australians talk about multiculturalism has changed in the past 10 years. She writes: "Now multicultural policy is heading in the...direction...from emphasising the value of cultural diversity to one demanding that migrants integrate into 'Australian values'".

So, instead of cultural groups being able and free to practise their cultures without discrimination, Government policy is expecting all cultures to conform to a White Anglo Australian way of living. It is hard to do this if you are not part of that cultural group. Imagine if suddenly people were told not to speak English any more and instead all Australians were expected to speak another language? How would people feel? What would be the response?

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- What are your experiences of having to change the way you do things to At In?
- What expectations do we have of children and families to change who they are and what they believe to At In our services?
- What experiences and activities can we provide to help staff and families think about the different ways that people participate without expecting them to change to At In? (Think about language, eating practices, dress, family structure, gender, learning styles, celebrations)



75th Birthday of the Sydney Harbour Bridge by Jackson (4 yrs)
Tillman Park Children's Centre, Marrickville Council

Putting ideas into practice

What does it mean to be Australian?

This story comes from a group of young Australian children engaging in conversations about the different ways that cultural identities can be defined, including countries of origin, languages spoken and popular culture. It is an example of cross cultural conversation and multiculturalism in action.

In order for this story to make sense, it is important for you to know the cultural identities of the children:

Tonio: second generation Italian Australian
Lucinda: Anglo Australian
Colm: second generation Italian and Aotaroa/New Zealander Australian
Eleanor: Anglo Australian
Daisy: Aboriginal
Laura: Anglo Australian

On a winter's day in July, this group of children were sitting at the morning tea table in their child care centre eating fruit and chatting. Their conversation included lots of different kinds of cultural knowledge.

Tonio: What if Barbie didn't like Spiderman?
Lucinda: Every time she sees him she would just walk away
Tonio: She would throw Spiderman in the garbage bin
(they all laugh!)
Colm: If she...if she takes his Spiderman suit off, well she just can't because then she will know who he is...and he takes her home and takes it off he thinks he looks better... and he can catch her in his web.
Lucinda: Who is he?
Colm: Peter Parker as the same as Spiderman as Tonio and Batman see?
Lucinda: Barbie come [sic] from a beautiful land called Barbie land in Australia (spoken in a 'Hollywood' accent)
Tonio: No in Brazil
Eleanor: and in Italy
Laura: She's Australian
Daisy: She's not Australian she's only a Barbie not a person
Tonio: No she's Italian, like my Dad and I'm Sydney too
Nicolo: I'm Greek at my home
Laura: Well I'm Barbie (spoken in a 'Hollywood' accent)
Daisy: I'm Australian
Eleanor: I'm Aboriginal
Daisy: and I'm Aboriginal Australia
Lucinda: I am English but I forgot my language oh yeah it's English

Colm: I speak what all the children speak like
 Laura: It's Australian
 Tonio: I speak Australian...Italian
 Nicolo: Australia Greek
 Lucinda: I still forgot my language
 Eleanor: I speak Australian
 Daisy: I speak Australia
 Eleanor: I speak Aboriginal

(Giugni, 2003)

This conversation shows us that this group of young children has some knowledge of their own and each other's cultural and language groups. It is also worth questioning - to what extent do they access and deploy the social power attached to these cultural groups. It seems important for them to grapple with working out 'who they get to be' in their social group by using labels that socially define 'race', ethnicity, language by what is apparently desirable in their everyday multicultural setting. Some may wonder whether children are 'simply playing with words', but as you read in the beginning of this section, all words are value laden with cultural meanings, including how we name ourselves culturally. So, it is important to note here that, just as the children's conversation reflects, Anglo Australians are also a cultural and ethnic group.

We have a tendency to think that all groups except White Anglos are ethnic or multicultural and think wrongly that a White Anglo Australian means not being part of a cultural group (Davis, 2004). If we can begin to look at multiculturalism as including White Anglo Australians, then the possibilities of understanding how cultures communicate are increased. At the same time we can begin to see that some cultural groups are represented more regularly than others. In addition, the opportunities for identifying and being recognised as Australian for many people can help fight racism, sexism, and homophobia for all Australians.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- Who do you include in your definition of Australian?
- What way do you include multiculturalism in your definition of what is an Australian?
- How can new definitions of being Australian help deal with issues of racism in our work with children and families?
- Do you include the cultures of heterosexuality and homosexuality in your definition of culture? Why? Why not?

4. Seeing multiculturalism as a 'good thing' and a human right

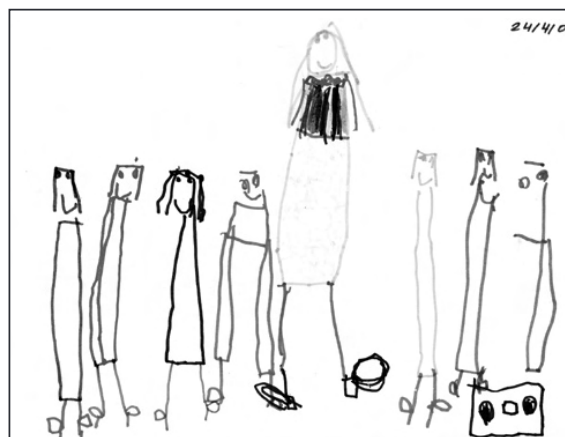
Sometimes the views of Government and media can influence people to think in negative ways about multiculturalism, diversity and difference. The news reports about the Cronulla Riots in 2005 are a good example of how they responded to multiculturalism and Australian values. So, multiculturalism was no longer talked about as a good thing, rather it was seen as negatively changing the way people think about being an Australian. Multiculturalism is then blamed for divisions in society, rather than being seen as something that includes all people and their cultures. It gives an example of the way some people talk about what multiculturalism is in Australia. It is important to remember that the way we talk about multiculturalism is influenced by our cultural backgrounds, life histories and the media.

Ho (2007) gives an example of how Government changes can have an effect upon the way we talk about and value multiculturalism. She shows how the word 'racism' has been removed from Government documents that are written about multiculturalism and have been replaced with the word 'harmony'. Whilst harmony is an important part of multiculturalism, it fails to address the discrimination that some cultural groups can experience because of the way we talk about multiculturalism publicly. If we think that all cultures 'get on' and can live in 'harmony' then it seems we have no reason to deal with racism. Indeed some people think that there is no racism in Australian society but many cultural groups who experience racism on a daily basis show that in fact it does. The stories in this book are also evidence that racism exists, and so we have a responsibility to work against this discrimination in our everyday work with children and families.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- What are some ways you can think of to actively promote multiculturalism in your everyday experiences with children and families?
- In what ways does your policy reflect the rights of people to participate in Australian society?
- How can you help the people you work with to recognise racism and act upon it?

Irish dancing by Lucy (4 yrs)
Tillman Park Children's Centre,
Marrickville Council



Putting Ideas into Practice

“All the Lebs are bad guys”

Abdul is a 4 year old Lebanese Australian Christian boy living in Bankstown. Brian is a 4 year old Anglo Australian boy living in Cronulla. These two children attend the same children’s centre and have shared a strong friendship for the past two years. The day after the Cronulla Riots, Abdul was very distressed and the following conversation took place.

- Abdul: They said the Lebs are bad guys
- Miriam: Who, who said that?
(Abdul begins to cry)
- Abdul: Brian (4 years) and the TV. They said all the Lebs are bad guys at the beach and Lebs can’t go to the beach
- Miriam: But you’re Lebanese and you are not a bad guy -
- Abdul: - no, Leb
- Miriam: Sorry, you’re a Leb and you are not a bad guy and Sarah is a Leb and she’s not a bad guy I know lots of Lebanese people who are not bad guys
- Abdul: But Brian said everyone saw the TV. And they said all the Lebs. Brian said I am a Leb bad guy.

On your first reading what are the cultural issues evident in this story?

- How do current social issues impact the way that people see cultural groups?
- What role does media culture play in this story?
- What are the multicultural issues presented here?
- What are the anti bias issues here?
- What does this story tell us about the knowledge of young children?

Staff reflection:

Following this conversation Brian, Abdul and I sat together to talk about what had been said and the effects of those words. Brian said that he would still play with Abdul, but 'it's just that he can't go to the beach'. Abdul said that Brian was not being fair. Brian said that Abdul 'just didn't listen'.

At this point I thought that it was important to intervene in the conversation. I expressed how I felt about what had been said indicating that even though they both thought differently, some of the things were hurtful because all Lebs are not bad guys. I named my expectations of how I thought Brian and Abdul should treat each other and how important it is to ask questions about what we hear on the news because TV is not always respectful of people and culture. In some ways I think that the two boys took on what I had said by reflecting upon the history of their friendship, but I cannot be sure that their ideas have changed forever.

There is so much negative media about Middle Eastern people that is unfair and unjust. As I spoke I was thinking about the policies and guidelines that might be useful to me. The word that rang through my head was belonging. How did this conversation affect the sense of belonging Abdul feels? How does this conversation affect the sense of belonging Brian feels? How can I be respectful of both their cultures when I am aware that there is serious racism evident in their conversation?

The learning experienced from this story includes:

- That young children know that many people watch TV
- That messages on TV can be seen as the 'truth' about an ethnic group like Lebanese Australian people
- That children have the capacity to connect social stories with the people in their lives
- That children's relationships and friendships are complex and fragile in a similar way to adults
- That children have lots of knowledge about racism and how this works in the media

So, based on these learnings we are reminded that issues of multiculturalism are not purely the celebrations of different cultures. Rather this story reminds us that multiculturalism happens all day everyday and can have strong impact on children's lives. Children are the experts of their own lives, so have expertise in understanding culture and how they live and experience it in their relationships and friendships with others. So, whilst celebrations are an important part of cultural life, so too are the everyday events that can shape children's experiences in our services.

5. What is an anti bias approach?

Whilst Anti Bias Approaches originated from early childhood, the ideas and practices are useful right across children's services and schools. In fact, much of the work around multiculturalism has been based on these ideas in children's services and the school curriculum. So they are relevant to children of all ages as well as adults! The Anti Bias Approach is focused on what educators and carers can do to work against discrimination. In effect the Anti Bias Approach is saying that by teaching from a social justice perspective that respects and includes all cultures, children's learning will be more meaningful and so be better prepared for school and participating in society. For those who might not have heard of Anti Bias Approaches, a short history follows.

The Anti Bias Curriculum (1989) began in the United States from a group of activist educators who were "dissatisfied with current curriculum for helping children learn about diversity" (Derman-Sparks, 1989). So, the curriculum occurred in a political and historical context influenced by the USA civil rights movement and the feminist movements in the 1960's.

In other parts of the world similar work also emerged because children's services staff recognised the importance of dealing with issues of multiculturalism and antidiscrimination in their daily work. This international work grew out of policy changes, human rights movements and activists who were determined to make a difference in the lives of children and families.

In Australia, the term 'Anti Bias Approach' was coined by Creaser & Dau (1995) based on their connections with people in the USA such as Louise Derman-Sparks. So Anti Bias work is the product of people working together, locally, nationally and internationally, to fight injustice in the lives of children in care and education. The main principles of this way of working with children include:

- construct a knowledgeable, confident self identity (for children to be confident about who they are)
- develop comfortable, empathetic and just interaction with diversity (for children to be accepting of difference)
- develop critical thinking (for children to be critical about injustice)
- and the skills for standing up for oneself and others in the face of injustice (for children to act upon injustice)

(Derman-Sparks, 1989, p.xi)

These ideas are based on ways of thinking about the world that highlight and connect childcare, antidiscrimination and multiculturalism. They include critical thinking about what is fair and unfair in relationships between people and about our assumptions of what children might be capable of understanding in terms of what is fair and unfair (MacNaughton 2003). This applies to all children and adults.



Friends at
S.H.A.R.E., Summer Hill

Putting Ideas into Practice

“Only Joking”

‘Racism is embedded within the very fabric of our society and is largely hidden’
(Iram Siraj Blatchford, 1994, p. 22)

A group of children in after school care are playing basketball. Ahmed throws the ball to Julian but Julian misses the ball and they lose possession of the ball. Another boy in the team, Luca, calls out to Julian “you are playing like girl”. The staff member who was watching the game spoke to Luca, and said “what does playing like a girl mean?” Without beginning to explain Luca responded by saying “only joking”.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- Is it OK to say things like ‘you run like a girl’, ‘no way José’, ‘that’s so gay’, ‘black boy’, ‘coon’, ‘eeny, meeny miny now’, ‘nigger’, ‘terrorist’, and then say “only joking”?
- Whose experiences of discrimination even if someone is “only joking”?
- How do you recognise the comments that children make in their everyday play and act on them in ways that promote respect and social justice?

Name calling, even in jest, is one way to perpetuate racism and sexism. As we have seen gender is a form of culture and so we need to recognise and include the anti bias issues about gender equity in our everyday multicultural curriculum, experiences and activities



An Arabic Unicorn by Samara (5 yrs) July 2007
Tillman Park Children’s Centre, Marrickville Council

6. Multiculturalism and Anti Bias Approaches

It is important to distinguish between Multiculturalism and Anti Bias Approaches because both ideas play different roles in children's services and society, but both are equally important. In some ways, Multiculturalism is seen by many as a way of 'including all cultures' or 'celebrating culture' which gives the impression that all cultures are equally valued in society, but of course they are not. As I outlined in the beginning, it is shaped around Government policy that has the power to allocate resources to institutions, programs and people to meet the challenges presented through Australia's migration history that is culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse.

An Anti Bias Approach, on the other hand, has been created specifically in the context of children's services. This approach sets out to recognise the existing bias, discrimination and injustice that many people experience on a daily basis. This might be about differences in appearances, cultural practices, religion, language or citizenship. By exposing these ongoing injustices, Anti Bias Approaches act to question the apparently benign practice of celebrating culture uncritically.

This does not mean people should not celebrate culture, rather it suggests that people should recognise that not all cultural events are celebrated equally. For example, most public holidays are based on Christian holidays, such as Easter or Christmas. As important as cultural celebrations are, they often hide the daily experiences of discrimination that people face (Barnes, 2001). If people are all equal why are Diwali or Eid or Sorry Day not recognised as public holidays? This would be like assuming that a person is identified only by celebrating their birthday each year.

The ways in which we represent and celebrate culture in children's services are critical to whether or not people feel that they can belong. It is critical to consult children, families and the community when planning cultural events.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- Who do you consult when planning cultural celebrations?
- What part do children and families play in the planning?
- What part does the community play in your planning?

Putting ideas into practice

What about Santa?

Each year a father of one of the children dresses up as Santa. At the end of year party, Santa would arrive with lollies for the children. One year the staff decided to have a debate about whether having Santa was a good idea or not. There were many different opinions and it was difficult to come to an agreement. Some of the issues raised included:

- It is our tradition
- It is history (St Nikolaus)
- It represents the dominant culture
- It is my culture
- It is a money making exercise
- It is condescending to children
- Santa is all about childhood
- It is parent participation
- It is cultural exclusivity

All of these statements reflected the people in the discussion, their beliefs, values and life experiences. This group of people wanted to respect each other so nobody was willing to make a decision about whether or not to have Santa visit the centre that year. What did come to the fore was that of the nine people in the conversation we learned about a number of religious and cultural events that occur around the same time as Christmas. So the debate was an important way to learn about the complexities of the staff at the centre as well as the possibilities for thinking differently about how and what to celebrate at the end of the year.

Next the issues were raised with families and children. There were different views about Christmas and Santa from families too which made decision making even more complex. Still the staff focused on what we could learn from the experience rather than getting stuck in a 'yes or no' situation. Once all the perspectives were shared, we were able to see how people felt about Christmas and what was important for families and their children. To some extent it is not important to share the final decision for that year in that centre because the learning and consultation far outweighed the final decision. The feedback from staff, families and their children was more about having the issues 'out in the open for discussion and debate'. Dau, Hughes, MacNaughton, Hetherich & Baird (2002) have created a useful discussion paper about Santa and Christmas that might help you find practical ways to think through the multicultural and anti bias issues around 'doing Christmas in children's services'. This paper certainly helped the people in the story above to think through a number of different ways of deciding what to do next. However this is not to say that we will take the same decision next time. This kind of thinking is fundamental to our work with children in a multicultural society.

The history of tradition

Not only did we learn about each other, but also about Christmas as a tradition. In our discussions many were surprised to think about Jesus as Jewish and as a person of 'Middle Eastern appearance'; as a radical fighting against imperialism; that Christmas trees were first introduced into Britain in the 1840s by Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria; and that the story of Santa Claus is a Spanish word from an old German fairy tale about St Nikolaus, and that Santa as we know him was invented by Coca Cola.

It is not that we have to understand everything about every culture. But at each centre there are many wonderful resources to draw on, such as families, local councils and government departments. Children too are keenly interested in these kinds of traditional celebrations.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- What cultural and religious traditions are represented in your service and how can you find out more?
- In what ways do you use the families as a rich resource for learning about culture?
- Do you know the histories of cultural, spiritual and religious events such as:
 - * Eid
 - * Ramadan
 - * Buddha's Birthday
 - * Diwali
 - * Solstice
 - * End of year holidays
 - * Hanukkah
 - * Christmas
- How many other histories and traditions can you learn about in order to create possibilities for meaningful celebrations at your centre?

One of the great risks to meaningful work around multiculturalism and anti bias work is 'The Tourist Approach'. Derman-Sparks (1989) discusses the dangers of visiting a culture for the day in order to learn about difference instead of looking at how people who work with children can meaningfully share cultural experiences, stories and ideas. In the same way the Australian Anti Bias Approach (2001) talks about the complex issues implicit in 'doing' multiculturalism and anti bias. Vajda (2001, 31) shows the problems of a 'Tourist Approach':

A 'tourist' approach to an anti-bias, multicultural curriculum is better than denying the ethnic and racial multicultural nature of Australian society, but it can itself be limiting and even in some cases destructive. It forgets that culture, race, ethnicity and family influence children every day of their lives, not just on one special day of the year. A tourist approach is more likely to encourage stereotypes than to dispel them.
(emphasis added)

So, the challenge for children's services staff is to seek ways to avoid tokenism and the 'tourist approach' and instead share meaningful experiences. On one hand this might be looking at the ways children include and exclude each other, on another hand it may be participating in preparations of diverse community cultural events (these could be celebration, but remember that in some cultures children also participate in wakes and funerals – these may not be 'celebratory' in the same sense).

Begin by choosing cultural celebrations and experiences based on the families attending the service, then seek out what is happening in your local community (Council websites are an effective way to find this information). Then consider how State, National, and global issues are relevant in children's lives, especially those that are current in the news, which children often know about.

7. What about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ASTI) issues?

Generally ATSI issues are not dealt with here because the policy of multiculturalism set out to resolve issues of discrimination against the NESB/CALD migrants since World War II. However, in order to discuss issues of discrimination in general, terms such as 'access and equity' and 'social justice' can be useful because they help us look at why and how some racial and cultural groups receive 'special treatment' from the Government based on colonial mistakes. If we understand these issues, we can work to change our attitudes and how we work with children.

This might help build our knowledge of the policies under which we operate as well as our cultural competence as children's services staff.

Aunty Kerry Mundine shares her dream that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will one day be able to stand equally side by side with all of the cultures in Australia. She talks about how important it is for non-indigenous people to know Australia's true history, but also to know about the many cultures that make up Australian society. Aunty Kerry reflects:

I reflected upon how I almost lived in two worlds: a white world and a black world. In the white world I have to think about how the world sees me as a Professional Aboriginal early childhood educator and how I must work harder to change preconceived views of me just being Aboriginal. Then, there's the awareness that I may just be seen as the "expert" on Aboriginal issues and the other professional knowledge I have gets pushed to the side. As a student teacher in a mainstream centre I needed and wanted to stand on my own two feet and not be supported in delivering educational outcomes for children. As an Aboriginal student I felt I needed to demonstrate that my 'race' was not the only part of my identity that mattered. I could teach and be professional and stand side by side with confidence in knowing that I was equal to my colleagues. I want to stand beside them knowing that they are my 'sistas' or brothers', as equals.

(Mundine & Giugni, 2006, p.9)

This reflection reminds me that people are not just representative of one culture. It shows how multiculturalism can be important to many cultural groups. Furthermore it shows that people who are part of a cultural group that experiences discrimination, share an understanding of what it means to be marginalised in Australian society.

8. What is access and equity?

Access and equity have a number of different definitions which point to the importance of fairness and responsibility. In terms of Government policy, Access and Equity is about fairness for all people especially when some legal rules can discriminate against people. In this sense access and equity might mean getting a 'fair go'. A result of this is that many cultural beliefs and practices may not be included in society which means that some cultures will have more privileges than others. For example, the state government has a priority of access list to ensure that groups that experience discrimination can have access to children's services.

Bigger issues like same sex marriage are another example. There are many different and contrasting beliefs about this issue in a number of different cultures, even in mainstream Anglo society.

Another example is the maintenance of community languages. Views about how languages other than English should be integrated into children's services are fiercely debated. So, when words such as 'access and equity' are connected with 'multiculturalism' and 'anti bias approaches', we begin to see that every person has an obligation to think about how and whether people's cultures are valued, celebrated and visible in children's services.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- What are your policies about access and equity?
- How do you work with these requirements?
- How do you consider access and equity in your planning of experiences and activities (for example consider whether or not all children have equal access to the activities and experiences or think about how rules of inclusion and exclusion govern who can play)?

9. What is social justice?

Government commitment to social justice has been expressed by means of implementing the Access and Equity Strategy, but it is important to be critical of the effectiveness of this strategy. In theory, Access and Equity considerations require service providers to establish whether all eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or people from other cultural backgrounds have equal access to services and that these meet their expressed individual needs.

Professor Mick Dodson is a Yawuru man from the southern Kimberley region of Western Australia. His quote is an example that every person is entitled to fairness and social justice in their everyday life. His statement suggests that fairness is not the reality of every human being. So, this raises questions about how we as a society, and specifically as people who work with children, can work towards social justice for all people in the way that Professor Dodson imagines it. He writes:

Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.

Mick Dodson

Annual Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 1993

Another way of defining social justice focuses on actions which people take to challenge the unequal structures in society that enable discrimination to continue. This suggests that people can work at an everyday level to create a more "socially just" society by starting with small changes in our local communities. So, social justice can include the social interactions between people – children, families and people in children's services. It can also mean raising an awareness of the injustices in society and openly talking about what is happening and what we might be able to do about it. Therefore, social justice has to be an active term, not just legal or theoretical. In this way, social justice promotes a different kind of interaction between different groups of people based on individual human rights.

This work is tricky because there are no 'right' answers to this question. People will have differing ideas about what social justice is. The Prime Minister thinks that sending troops to Iraq is socially just, yet there are many Australian people who disagree.

The Children's Services Regulation (2004) provides guidelines, but it is up to children's services staff to discuss their

different opinions and work out what they will do in practice. So to some degree, children's services staff are on the frontline and so should expect and welcome conflict and constant moral questioning when working with diverse families and planning for socially just outcomes.

Social justice is hard but worthwhile work. When thinking about how you might approach this work in your everyday practice with children and families, it is important to remember that Government laws and policies are based on a specific values system. This is a reminder that everything is value based and political.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- What ideas do children have about what is fair and what is unfair?
- How could plan to talk about what is fair and unfair with children?
- How could plan to talk with families about what is fair and unfair?



National Sorry Day Event 2007 for the Glebe community held at Glebe Public School (photos by Maria Bamford)

Putting ideas into practice

Respect across cultural boundaries

In a children's centre in South West Sydney with a high population of Muslim families the following situation occurred – the Parent tells her story:

"I wanted to enroll my child in the local child care service so I went and visited. The place was beautiful and had all the things children would enjoy. It also had facilities for my older children before and after school. I was happy with the environment. I noticed that there were no Muslim staff at the centre and this worried me because of the discrimination I knew my children could face. So I asked the coordinator who was a white woman how she would respect my children and my culture and religion and she replied 'the same way that we expect respect for the lesbian families who might come to the centre'. I looked at her for a minute and thought this person is committed to all people in the community. I thought that it was a good response and that if a lesbian family had asked the same question as me that the coordinator would have said 'we expect respect from all families including Muslims'. I felt very safe and enrolled my children. I saw how they worked to include all kinds of different people. I learnt from that conversation and I think I understood respect in a different way."

This story shows that we cannot assume that because people practise a certain religion like Islam that they are discriminatory against other cultural groups such as Lesbian and Gay people. It shows a bigger picture of respect and how people can and do promote respect for all cultures whether they like them or not. It is a hopeful story that shows potential for us in our work with children and their families and it also indicates that the staff at the centre has conversations about who is included and respected. This example is not just about culture, it also shows how social values can differ amongst cultures.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- What assumptions do we need to challenge when working with multicultural and anti-bias work?
- How can we get better at recognising the many cultural experiences that are occurring at the same time?
- What can we learn from each other?
- What are the things you are doing to put respect at the heart of your work? How do you ensure that all people can and should be represented in children's services?

10. Recognising the value laden culture of children's services

Based on these definitions of multiculturalism, anti bias, access and equity, and social justice we can begin to see how important these ideas are in our everyday work. Whether your focus is education, child care, leisure or community development, thinking about discrimination and culture is central to your everyday work. Many of the ideas referred to in this resource are closely connected with ideas about how societies are built, how societies survived, human development, and knowledge about how children learn. They help us recognise that the world is not value free and power is not equally distributed and so we have a responsibility to act upon peoples experience of injustice in children's services. By having a good knowledge of Government polices, regulations, and quality assurance we are better equipped to stand up in the face of injustice in our everyday work with children.

The role of people working with children is vital because they stand in the front line. You see the many ways in which children include and exclude according to cultural background. In this sense, Government policies can both enable and hinder this kind of participation, but they are a starting point only.

Questions for Critically Reflective Practice:

- Do all children equally participate in our curriculum, programmes, experiences and activities?
- How do we reflect upon who we are as a way of recognising that we bring bias with us to our work?
- How do children take up the idea of choosing who belongs?
- How can we begin to see that Anti Bias and Multiculturalism are about who is included and who is excluded and why?
- How do we make links between home and school?

Every game you play is cultural and value laden, every activity or experience you provide is cultural and value laden. Every decision you make is cultural and value laden. Once we begin to recognise the politics of what we do everyday we can begin to see how everyday living in children's services is a multicultural experience. This means that we have to be conscious every day about how we include, represent, value, respect and celebrate culture on a daily basis in order to avoid perpetuating racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and language discrimination. That's why we need to focus on equity in our everyday practice in order to work towards social justice in the lives of children, their families and the communities in which we work. The nature of this work is ongoing.

Appendix 1

A history of social policy in Australia

This list of policies below gives a picture of how people have been/are treated in their everyday lives. These policies have been formulated by political parties who historically and even today are in the majority White Christian Anglo middle class men.

In the Australian Anti Bias Approach (2001) Vajda wrote:

In the recent past government policy towards newly arrived migrants has changed. From a policy of assimilation where there was an endeavour to stamp out differences to make people alike, where there was an attempt to force indigenous people and all new arrivals to surrender their culture in favour of the dominant culture, Australia has moved to a policy of integration and finally to a policy of multiculturalism.

Here she shows signs of positive shifts in thinking. Yet in 2007 as Ho (2007) demonstrates, the government has made another shift in the opposite direction to eradicate the word 'multicultural' and instead uses the term 'citizenship'. The implication of this shift is that it becomes harder for people to 'belong' because their different cultural beliefs are not recognised. It is therefore harder for them to demand a fair go based on Government policies.

**As you read this list consider what each of these policies did for Australian society and how it might still impact the thinking of people who govern and regulate children's services.*

SOCIAL POLICIES WITHIN THE LAST 219 YEARS IN AUSTRALIA - Jones Díaz (2007)

INDIGENOUS	IMMIGRATION
Extermination & Regulation (1788 – 1860)	Colonization (1788 – 1860)
Segregation (Protectionist – reserves & missions) (1870 – 1930's)	White Australia Policy (1901 – 1970's)
Assimilation (Forced removals) (1880's – 1960's)	Assimilation (1949 -1974)
1967 Referendum	Integration
Self determination (1967 – current)	Multiculturalism (1970s – current)
Reconciliation? (1991 – 1996?)	Critical multiculturalism Vs anti multiculturalism? New racisms Citizenship 2007?
Mainstreaming	Promoting Australian values and mutual obligation?

Like the White Australia Policy, current Government policies of 'citizenship' set out an official framework of what it is to be Australian. In other words, your decisions about activities, experiences and programs for children are also decisions about what to include and what not to include. So, your understandings of culture are crucial to your decisions about how to equitably represent the many cultures that make up Australian society. Although we may not have learned about different cultural understandings, it is our responsibility that children learn about this history. Only by knowing the history can we make better choices about strategies to adopt at your centre.

Appendix 2

Developing a philosophy to support your work

A philosophy is a statement of values, beliefs and rationales for the work you do with children and families. Children's services can benefit from having a philosophy that focuses on issues of social justice, equity and are reflective of multicultural experiences.

Critical Questions for Philosophy Development:

- Does your philosophy affect the people with whom you work? How?
- Does your philosophy affect the families and children?
- Does your philosophy affect the local community?
- Does your philosophy affect Australian Society?

Consulting children, families, staff and community:

- In what ways do you regularly consult children about what is fair and unfair? How do you use this information?
- In what ways do you consult families about their ideas of multiculturalism, equity and social justice? How do you use this information?
- In what ways do you consult the local community about their ideas about multiculturalism, equity and social justice? How do you use this information?
- In what ways do you consult and question Government policies in your philosophy development?

Policies to support your philosophy:

- Do you have a policy about multiculturalism?
- Do you have a social justice policy?
- Do you have a policy that addresses equity and anti bias issues?
- Do you have an anti discrimination policy?

Appendix 3: Resources & References

Resources

For further advice on support programs for children's services:

- Bicultural Support Pool
<http://www.cscentral.org.au/inclusion/bicultural.html>
- Inclusion Support Facilitators (for your local ISA)
<http://www.cscentral.org.au/inclusion/overview.html>
- SCAN
http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/html/childcare_serv/childcare_scan.htm
- Ethnic Child Care
<http://www.eccfcsc.org>
- Community Childcare Cooperative
<http://www.ccccnsw.org.au/links/index.html>
- Children's Services Central
<http://www.cscentral.org.au>

Websites and Journals

<http://www.socialjusticeinearlychildhood.org>

<http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ceiec>

<http://www.wwwords.co.uk/ciec>

<http://www.religioustolerance.org>

<http://www.hreoc.gov.au>

<http://www.inequality.org/index.html>

<http://www.nd.edu/~dsikkink/race.html>

<http://www.theory.org.uk>

<http://www.cre.gov.uk>

<http://home.sprintmail.com/~peggyriehl/prmulti.htm>

<http://www.blackfellasdreaming.com.au>

<http://www.antar.org.au>

<http://www.girl.org.au>

Intercultural Education Journal of the International Association for Intercultural Education

E-mail: gobo@unito.it or barry@iaie.org (copies of the journal are available at the ECCFCSC library)

CD Rom

<http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ceiec/resources/cdroms.html>

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