REFLECTIVE PRACTICE WITH EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PROFESSIONALS
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RESEARCHERS
Ms Cristyn Davies – Associate Semann & Slattery
Associate Professor Kerry Robinson — University of Western Sydney

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DISCLAIMER
This report has been produced for the sole use and benefit of the Child Australia. Semann & Slattery have based recommendations on the outcomes of research, interviews and consultation provided at a given time. Semann & Slattery have relied on such information being correct at the time this report was prepared.

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CORRESPONDENCE
All correspondence related to this report is to be directed to:

The Company Directors
Semann & Slattery
PO Box 202
Newton NSW 2042

SUGGESTED CITATION
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Glossary
**ACTION RESEARCH**

Action research is generally depicted as a cyclical process of change, which is facilitated by a change agent or critical friend.

The cycle begins with a series of planning and learning activities initiated by the learner and the change agent working together that includes gathering information. The second stage of action research involves trialing new approaches and actions related to what was learned. The third stage of action research involves a review of the output or results and planning for the next cycle of activity.

Action research supports service development and effective permanent change in child care services. It is based on the premise that participants who are active in directing their learning are more likely to adopt new approaches to working in child care services. (IPSP Guidelines, v.1.4, 2011)

**APB**

‘Aboriginal/Aborigines Protection Board’. The APB operated in a number of Australian States with the function of “protecting” and regulating the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Western Australian Aborigines Protection Board operated between 1 January 1886 and 1 April 1898 as a Statutory authority under An Act to provide for the better protection and management of the Aboriginal natives of Western Australia, and to amend the law relating to certain contracts with such Aboriginal natives (statute 25/1886); An Act to provide certain matters connected with the Aborigines (statute 24/1889). These boards were played a critical role in the Stolen Generation.

The Western Australia Aborigines Act was passed in 1905. Under this law, the Chief Protector was made the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and part Aboriginal child under 16 years old.

The Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance was passed in 1911. The Chief Protector was made the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and part Aboriginal child under 18 years old. Any Aboriginal person could be forced onto a mission or settlement, and children can be removed by force.

**CALD**

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Children from CALD backgrounds are one of the priority groups for inclusion support through the Inclusion Support Program.

**CHILD AUSTRALIA**

Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia (Child Australia). Child Australia is the Professional Support Coordinator in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Child Australia has over 21 years’ experience in providing programs and services that facilitate access to child care services for all children including those with additional needs. Child Australia provides innovative professional development programs and support services for industry professionals to facilitate building nurturing and stimulating child care environments.

Educators are defined in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as “early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood settings” (2009, p. 45).

Eligible child care services are Australian Government approved child care services, including private and community based long day care; outside school hours care (including vacation care); family day care, occasional care; and in-home care; and Australian Government funded non-mainstream child care services (non-Child Care Benefit) such as flexible/multifunctional services; multi-functional Aboriginal child care services; non-mainstream outside school hours care; non-formula funded occasional care (100 per cent Australian Government funded); and mobile children’s services.

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is Australia’s first national curriculum framework and a key component of the National Quality Framework. Educators use the EYLF to inform curriculum decision-making and ensure that all children experience quality teaching and learning.

Flexible Support Funding (FSF) is support provided to eligible child care services to build their capacity to include a child with additional needs by employing additional staff to increase the staff to child ratio for a time limited period. FSF is administered by Inclusion Support Agencies (ASAs) and eligibility and subsidy limits apply.

Inclusion is defined in the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) Program Guidelines as “Access to and participation of all children, including those with high ongoing support needs, in the child care environment. This includes children with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, including refugee children” (2010, v1.3, p. 87).

Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) are locally based agencies that support eligible child care services to build their capacity to successfully include all children, including those with additional needs.

Inclusion Support Agencies employ Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) to support eligible child care services to build their capacity to successfully include all children, including those with additional needs.

The Inclusion Support Program (ISP) forms part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP). The program funds Inclusion Support Agencies and the National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider to support eligible child care services to improve access and inclusion for children with additional needs.
The Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) is one form of support available through the ISP. The ISS is funded to assist eligible child care services to include children with a demonstrated need for higher and more ongoing levels of support.

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) is an Australian Government initiative, funded through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace relations. The program aims to promote and maintain high quality care and inclusion for all children in eligible child care services, by increasing the skill level of carers, educators and management in line with nationally consistent priorities.

The Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU) provides professional development and support to eligible Indigenous child care services. IPSUs also work with the PSC and ISAs to respond to current and emerging needs. The IPSU is a key component of the Professional Support Program (PSP).

The overarching framework that will include the regulatory body responsible for ensuring quality in early childhood education and care; the Early Years Learning Framework; the National Quality Standards; and the Quality Rating System.

Priority groups for inclusion support through the Inclusion Support Program are:

- Indigenous children;
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds;
- children with a refugee or humanitarian intervention background, and
- children with a disability, including children with high support needs.

Professional development refers to a process of continuous learning that supports and enables educators to build on and develop new knowledge and skills for both personal development and career advancement. It may encompass a range of learning opportunities including in-services and conferences, critical discussions with colleagues, engaging with books and journal articles, and informal learning opportunities situated in practice.

Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs) are funded under the Professional Support Program to develop, manage and monitor the delivery of this professional support to all eligible services, Inclusion Support Facilitators. There is a PSC in every Australian state and territory.

The Professional Support Program (PSP) forms part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP). The program funds Professional Support Coordinators and Indigenous Professional Support Units to provide professional development, advice and resources to assist child care services to provide quality child care.
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Reflective practice is defined in the EYLF as being ‘... a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Its intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision making about children’s learning. As professionals, early childhood educators examine what happens in their settings and reflect on what they might change. Critical reflection involves closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives’ (DEEWR. 2009, p. 13).

REFUGEE

Refugees flee their country for their own safety and cannot return unless the situation that forced them to leave improves.

SERVICE SUPPORT PLAN

A Service Support Plan (SSP) is a planning tool designed to assist eligible child care services to identify goals that connect to their issues and needs in relation to inclusion, and develop an action plan to build their capacity to include children with additional needs and/or high support needs. A SSP is a prerequisite for accessing other funded supports available through the IPSP, including Inclusion Support Subsidy.

STOLEN GENERATION

The Stolen Generation refers to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were removed from their families by the Federal and State Australian government agencies and church missions under parliamentary acts. This took place between 1869 and 1969, although in some Australian regions, children were still being stolen in the 1970s.

‘Stolen Generations’ people are therefore prevented or seriously prejudiced from successfully asserting rights under the LRA [Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)] or NTA [Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)] (Central Land Council submission 495 pages 2-3; See also: Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (1997).

STRENGTHS BASED APPROACH

A capacity building strategy that builds on the strengths and resources of child care services.

A strengths-based approach operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment. In a strengths-based approach the focus is on the individual, not the content. By focusing on what is working well, informed successful strategies support the adaptive growth of organisations and individuals. (IPSP Guidelines, v.1.4, 2011)
Executive Summary
This research project titled: Reflective Practice with Early and Middle Childhood Education and Care Professionals was a collaboration between Child Australia and Semann & Slattery. The research was undertaken, in part, to try and bridge the gap between theory and practice, which is often cited as a challenge in early and middle childhood education and care. The difficulty in sourcing Australian based research to support program provision and policy is a challenge for Australian policy makers and practitioners. This research was undertaken with early and middle childhood professionals across Western Australia and the Northern Territory. However, this report makes a contribution more broadly, providing local, state and territory perspectives that are relevant across Australia in the areas of inclusion, diversity and difference. The research will support the development of policy and of effective strategies for addressing inclusion, diversity and difference at both the level of management and of everyday practice. The findings have also informed the development of a professional educational resource package, comprised of three plays, or performed ethnographies, based on action research with early and middle childhood professionals located across Western Australia and the Northern Territory. This resource aimed at early and middle childhood educators and other professionals addresses key issues around diversity, difference and inclusion.

The research is timely given the principles prioritised in The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), which include equity and respect for diversity. These principles are central to developing quality children’s services. The EYLF also recommends reflective practice as a core principle and means of enhancing programs within the early childhood sector. This research project incorporated a focus on developing and enhancing current early and middle childhood professionals’ skills in this area through their involvement in relevant localised action research in their workplaces.

Davies and Robinson, the chief investigators in this project, developed a mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to this research, including the following:

1. Online survey for early and middle childhood educators across Western Australia and the Northern Territory (n=138);
2. Online survey for Inclusion Support Facilitators, Indigenous Support Unit Facilitators, and Child Australia staff, (n=31);
3. Focus groups with early and middle childhood educators, Inclusion Support Facilitators and Indigenous Professional Support Unit Facilitators (n=2); and
4. Supervised action research projects covering a range of issues around inclusion, diversity and difference (n= 7 completed).

The following discussion outlines the main issues arising in the research.
Key Findings
SEX IMBALANCE ACROSS THE EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SECTOR

The over-representation of women in the early and middle childhood education sector was linked to ‘low’ status across the sector, few supported professional development and career opportunities, poor salaries, and long hours. Participants pointed out that those employed in the schooling sector received higher salaries, better professional development opportunities, recognition and higher status in the broader community, and better holidays. Participants commented that if the sector had a more balanced gendered workforce, conditions and salaries would be higher. They also stated that the employment of more men in the sector would provide important role modelling for young children.

THE IMPACT OF EQUITY AND DIVERSITY POLICIES WITHIN AND EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SECTOR

Early and middle childhood educators and other professionals need support, such as mentoring, coaching and training, around policy development and implementation into daily practice. Policies need to include a concise and sound theoretical component, supported by practical suggestions or methods of implementing policies. Policies need to be concise and succinct. Many educators working in the early and middle childhood sectors do not read, revise or update their inclusion, equity and diversity policies. The benefits of reading and revising policies are too frequently not realised in an industry that is generally time poor. Some early and middle childhood educators view policies as rules and regulations, rather than a means to be innovative around practice. Finally, strong leadership is required to engage staff around policy review, revision and implementation. Strong leadership can lead to fostering and enhancing staff interest and involvement.

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT ISSUES IN THE EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SECTOR

The early and middle childhood education sector is plagued by professional image issues that make it an unattractive long-term employment / career option for many educators. The sector faces issues associated with the commitment of some staff to remain in the field for significant periods of time, or in considering early childhood care and education as a career. In addition, the Northern Territory encounters specific problems, such as an itinerant and seasonal workforce, which impacts on employment problems in the sector (including unskilled and untrained employees). Further, Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISF’s) and Indigenous Support Unit’s encounter specific communication and travel issues associated with supporting services in remote communities and locations. It is apparent that communities living in remote locations are disadvantaged in terms of readily accessing support service facilities.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING AROUND DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE AND INCLUSION ACROSS THE EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SECTOR

This research highlights that education and training is a major issue facing the sector and individual workplaces. It is an area that poses great anxiety for directors and managers, as well as for educators and other professionals. In a sector where a large percentage of staff are untrained and inexperienced, professional development plays a critical role in developing staff’s professional skills required to provide the quality of care and education of young children that is expected by families and the community. However, who should be responsible for bearing the costs of professional development in settings is a question that poses much conflict between management and staff. Most frequently in workplaces, it is the expectation that professional development is undertaken in staff’s own time, and often at their own expense, which provides little incentive for them to participate in the opportunities that are available.

Few participants encountered workplaces that fully supported staff in undertaking further studies, despite the direct benefits that this may have had for services. Few early and middle childhood educators received encouragement, financial support, or time release from employers.
Educators and professionals in the sector most frequently utilised newspaper/magazine articles, television, and the Internet to inform their understandings and practices around inclusion, diversity and difference. The information gathered from these sources is often based on less academic and less rigorous research and can often contain stereotypes and a level of bias that stems from personal opinions and racist assumptions and values.

**ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

There is a need for all educators and professionals working across the early and middle childhood sector in Western Australia and the Northern Territory to have ongoing education and training about issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Educators raised concerns about the difficulties associated with different understandings of time, children being left in settings after they had closed, and families not understanding the payment structure required for childcare services. This suggests the need for community education around early and middle childhood education and care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Research participants identified the need for settings and organisations to review and update their resources around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Some Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander children understood themselves as ‘people who lived in the past’, without a clear present and a clear future. In some cases, this was echoed in the lack of contemporary and innovative resources, teaching strategies, and training around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture being accessed by early and middle childhood settings.

While some educators and professionals indicated that they had attended one off training workshops, it was apparent that this was not enough to support the complexity of issues that the sector is addressing in this area. All participants universally requested nuanced and location specific training (given the complexity and diversity that exists across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities). Many educators did not perceive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as ‘bicultural’. There are many children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural backgrounds whose first language is not English, and who may speak more than one home language, with English being a second, third or fourth language. In addition, these children and their families are negotiating conflicting cultural values and priorities, but these complexities are often not identified and supported within early and middle childhood settings. Inclusion Support Facilitators are often brought in to assist settings when situations have escalated to unmanageable circumstances for educators, if they are called in at all.

Educators are constantly witnessing or negotiating issues of racism between children, and with families in their settings. In many cases, research participants reported that issues of racism specifically directed toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families were not effectively managed or recognised by educators within settings. Educators also discussed the difficulty of gaining families’ trust with regard to attending early and middle childhood settings, which was understood as an issue related to Aboriginal communities’ experiences with, or being part of, the ‘stolen generation’.

**MULTICULTURALISM AND BICULTURALISM IN EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

Practices identified by research participants reinforced cultural stereotypes and did not fully engage with the potential depth of learning about difference that is possible in multicultural contexts. Some educators feel frustrated about the best ways to move beyond superficial and tokenistic approaches to the inclusion of different cultures. Educators and other professionals require more than one-off training courses around these issues of inclusion, requiring more sustained educational programs to build their skills base.

Bicultural (including bilingual and multilingual) children are often not receiving the support they require due to a lack of nuanced and specific knowledge within the early and middle childhood
sector around the value of bicultural support, and of recognising the needs of bicultural children. Consequently, bicultural support for staff is not seen as important. This impacts on the perceived value of staff accessing research and/or professional development opportunities in this area in order to increase their knowledge, to develop skills, and to implement new ideas and strategies into existing programs. However, when services do access bicultural services, they appreciate regular and frequent visits from Inclusion Support Facilitators. It was pointed out by some participants that the support offered by the IPSP program could be reviewed in terms of improving delivery. Research participants considered that this would lead to improving the quality of bicultural support offered in settings.

REFUGEE CHILDREN
Educators and Inclusion Support Facilitators expressed their desire for ongoing education and support about the socio-political context of the refugee children attending their settings, and also, the best ways to support traumatised children, who had often lost family members in the context of war. Participants expressed their desire, and a desire on behalf of the settings in which they worked, to have training around the socio-cultural and political contexts from which current refugee populations originate. The cultural backgrounds and beliefs of refugee children were generally opaque for educators who had little or no training in addressing diversity and difference in these communities.

CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SETTINGS
Early and middle childhood educators and other professionals require more formal education and professional development opportunities in the area of children with additional needs. Currently, they rely heavily on personal and community experiences to gain knowledge in this area. Early childhood educators have more personal experience of working with children with additional needs and their families than IPSP staff. The Internet features significantly as a resource for information on children with additional needs. Of particular importance is the low level of formal educational experiences around children with additional needs acknowledged amongst the participants in this research.

Inclusion Support Facilitator participants in this research indicated that there is not enough adequate funding to support the current needs of children with disabilities in early and middle childhood settings across Western Australia and the Northern Territory. IPSP work is often dominated by priority groups (particularly children with additional needs), and assisting settings with applications for funding. A lack of funding is often the logic employed by settings to refuse accepting children with additional needs. Inclusion Support Facilitators who participated in this research identified difficulties associated with the funding model, which they perceived as contradictory. While Service Support Plans are focused around a child care services’ needs, an Inclusion Support Subsidy is attached to supporting a particular child with a disability, rather than funding a service so as to assist in increasing their capacity to include all children.

The time Inclusion Support Facilitators spend in settings is frequently spent assisting services to support children linked to funding, which results in other children named as priority groups, which are not linked to funding, being excluded, or considered a low priority. Other children, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from different cultural backgrounds could benefit from inclusion support strategies. Some educators need training in identifying and supporting diversity and difference in their settings, as well as developing and implementing inclusive strategies that are not dependent on an external funding model.

Some educators have lower expectations of children with disabilities, which affects the quality of care and education they offer, or affects their decision to enrol a child with a disability in their setting. Establishing goals with families and children with additional needs is critical to the progress and experience children have in their settings.
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| SEX IMBALANCE ACROSS THE EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SECTOR | 1. Needs to take an active role in lobbying relevant government and professional bodies to develop strategies to address the sex imbalance across the sector;  
2. Should develop strategies that address (i) the need for better pay for appropriate qualifications that is aligned with that received by teachers in the primary schooling sector; (ii) the need for better working conditions, with appropriate teacher-child ratios; (iii) the need for better professional development and ongoing formal education opportunities. |
| THE IMPACT OF EQUITY AND DIVERSITY POLICIES WITHIN THE EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SECTOR | 1. Review and revise policies associated with equity, diversity, difference and inclusion. Employees would benefit from ongoing training around all policies and the practical application of policies on a daily basis in workplaces across the organisation.  
2. Foster greater awareness that policies around inclusion, diversity and difference need to be informed by a sound theoretical framework and supported by practical suggestions or methods of implementation.  
3. Increase awareness in early and middle childhood settings of the importance of providing adequate time for reviewing and revising policies in line with current frameworks and research. Regular staff meetings need to be encouraged in all settings; in which case, these times could provide an ideal space for such discussions.  
4. Provide increased mentoring support in early and middle childhood settings focused around policy development and practical implementation in the area of inclusion, diversity and difference. There is currently a major gap between policy and practice due to too many policies, which educators find challenging to remember and implement.  
5. Provide training opportunities in the area of effective policy development around equity and diversity for educators and highlight strategies to translate policy into daily practice. In addition, revise and further develop policies that are concise and practically oriented. |
| PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT ISSUES IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SECTOR | 1. Needs to take an active role in lobbying relevant government and professional bodies to develop targets for the introduction of compulsory educational qualifications in the early and middle childhood and care sectors across Australia.  
2. Needs to take an active role in lobbying relevant government and professional bodies to provide strategies that focus on incentives that will encourage the recruitment and retention of employees to the early and middle childhood sector. These strategies might target subsidized educational opportunities in the sector. |
It is recommended that peak bodies responsible for early and middle childhood education and care:

1. Increase awareness of the critical role that professional development (PD) plays in the sector, especially since a significant percentage of staff are inexperienced and untrained. PD is important for developing the quality of care and education provided to young children that is expected by families and the community and that is required in the sector.

2. Increase awareness of organisations and professional roles that support long day care, pre-school, after-school care, family day care services. Active promotion of these organisations to services could appear on organisational websites and in newsletters.

3. Lobby directors and managers of early and middle childhood education services about the importance of providing greater supported opportunities for staff to access professional development and the benefits to services. It is often expected that PD is undertaken in staff’s own time, and often at their own expense, which provides little incentive to participate in PD opportunities.

4. Lobby directors and managers of early and middle childhood education services about the importance of providing supported opportunities for staff to access pathways to formal and officially recognized educational qualifications in the field. This might include: study leave for staff undertaking TAFE and tertiary studies; applying for special project leave that is associated with the staff member’s position in the organisation.

5. Encourage directors and managers of early and middle childhood education services to provide realistic and adequate time release for staff who are undertaking further study.

6. Encourage staff in the early and middle childhood education sector to utilise more professional educational sources for information around inclusion, diversity and difference. Currently, newspaper/magazine, television and the Internet are common sources of information, which is often based on less academic and less rigorous research and often contains a level of bias that stems from personal opinions. In these contexts, representations of Aboriginality and Torres Strait Islander communities, refugees, or others from CALD backgrounds are often based on stereotypes and/or racist assumptions and beliefs.

7. Highlight the importance of directors and managers in the sector being aware of relevant professional journals, periodicals and other professional reading material to keep up-to-date on practice, policy and research; and encourage them to pass these resources on to their staff.
### THEME: ABORIGINAL, TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER, INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS, AND INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE

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<td>It is recommended that peak bodies responsible for early and middle childhood education and care:</td>
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<td>1. Provide educators and professionals working across the early and middle childhood sector with ongoing cultural awareness training around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. While some educators and other professionals indicated that they had attended one off training workshops, it was apparent that this was not enough to support the complexity of issues that the sector is addressing. For example, some educators were more likely to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as having ‘behaviour management issues’ than other children in their settings.</td>
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<td>2. Highlight, within a training context, the awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as bicultural, and the subsequent support needs required for children and families.</td>
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<td>3. Highlight, within a training context, the necessity of systematically and thoughtfully integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues across the curriculum, rather than celebrating Aboriginal/multicultural days in isolation.</td>
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<td>4. Support, within a training context, educators and other professionals to develop culturally sensitive communication strategies to build strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and to appropriately convey information to families about the setting their child attends.</td>
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<td>5. Highlight the need for early and middle childhood settings and resource libraries to regularly review and update resources (curricula, books, toys) around Aboriginal and Indigenous culture.</td>
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<td>6. Provide targeted ongoing and systematic cultural awareness training for educators and other professionals, highlighting the meaning of and application of the Racial Vilification Law in Australia, and the importance and legal obligation to intervene in acts of racism taking place between children, or children and adults in settings.</td>
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<td>7. Highlight the need to educators and other professionals to educate all children and families in settings about the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, regardless of whether or not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families attend the setting.</td>
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<td>8. Provide community education in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about what is entailed in early and middle childhood education.</td>
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<td>9. Build strong, collaborative and effective relationships with Indigenous and Professional Support Units, and increase awareness of these units across the sector.</td>
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<td>10. Lobby government to increase funding to Indigenous Professional Support Units to increase capacity (workload, travel to remote locations, and to improve currently inadequate communication strategies to settings in remote communities). Such a strategy, like all of these recommendations, are in line with ‘Closing the Gap’, a commitment by all Australian governments to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians, and in particular provide a better future for Indigenous children.</td>
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| MULTICULTURALISM AND BICULTURALISM IN EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD IN WA AND NT | 1. Provide ongoing, nuanced cultural awareness training around counteracting ethnic and cultural stereotypes. This needs to move beyond a focus on ‘multicultural’ days, and to include systematic integration of cultural awareness and difference training throughout curricula in early and middle childhood settings.  
2. Regularly review and replace multicultural resources (curricula, books, toys) in line with contemporary evidence-based research and approaches to address ethnic and cultural difference and inclusion.  
3. Provide educators and other professionals with education and training that helps support them to: ensure no racism occurs in the setting and that anti-racism policies are in place; provide suitable interpreters who speak children and families’ preferred language; and respect differences in culture, language and religion, understand diverse cultural practices and child rearing practices in Australian society; promote children's self esteem about their cultural heritage; and encourage maintenance of, and support the development of, the child’s home language. |
| REFUGEE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SETTINGS | 1. Provide ongoing education and training to early and middle childhood educators and other professionals about the current socio-political context and cultural beliefs of the refugee children and their families attending settings.  
2. Provide educators and other professionals with mental health first aid training, and support strategies to address: post-traumatic stress disorder, other complex mental health concerns, grief and loss, and language and cultural difference.  
3. Provide educators and other professionals with education and training that helps support them to: maintain a safe, predictable environment; consider new activities related to a child’s experiences; offer creative ways to assist children’s feelings and anxieties; ensure no racism occurs in the setting and that anti-racism policies are in place; provide suitable interpreters who speak children and families’ preferred language; maintain confidentiality of families and their children; provide parents with information about education, income, parenting, available services and how to access these; address specific needs and issues of each family; respect differences in culture and religion; develop workshops for parents about early and middle childhood. |
| CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SETTINGS | 1. Provide ISFs and early and middle childhood educators with information and/or training to assist them to become familiar with the meaning and application of Anti-Discrimination laws as they relate to the children’s services sector (Disability Discrimination Act, Australian Human Rights Commission Act, Racial Discrimination Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Sex Discrimination Act, and the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act 1996, and/or the Western Australia Equal Opportunity Act 1984). |
|                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
2. Encourage ISFs to locate and utilise existing resources and information to inform their conversations with child care services regarding non-discriminatory practice. The electronic resource, *Discrimination and Children's Services*, developed by the NSW PSC, is one example of such a resource. This can be accessed at http://www.cscentral.org.au/publications/childrens-services-central-publications.htm.

3. Support ISF’s, through professional development, to explore options to ensure they support child care services in relation to all three priority groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from CALD backgrounds, and children from a refugee or humanitarian intervention background.

4. Support and encourage ISA’s to explore opportunities for supporting ISFs to engage in ongoing conversations and debates around issues of equity, diversity and inclusion to inform their work with child care service educators.

5. Provide ISF’s with opportunities to enhance and further develop skills in coaching and effective communication to more confidently articulate the multiple ways they can support child care services in relation to all forms of diversity; and to engage educators in conversations that unpack their understandings around inclusion and the impact on practice.

6. Provide training to early and middle childhood educators in relation to inclusion, diversity and difference. This training will address a range of issues in order to unpack assumptions, generalisations and stereotypes in relation to children from the IPSP priority groups, as well as well as relationships and partnerships with families. The performed ethnographies:

   - *Jimmy’s Story: Exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion in early and middle childhood settings;*
   - *Adela’s Story: Exploring Ethnicity and Biculturalism early and middle childhood settings;*
   - *William’s Story: Belonging in early and middle childhood settings;*

   that have been developed through this research are one tool to address these issues.

7. Support and encourage educators and other professionals to use relevant learning frameworks (such as the EYLF and the Framework for School Aged Care) as a tool to engage colleagues in conversations about their inclusive practice, drawing on relevant principles and practices, including but not limited to partnerships with families, high expectations and equity; respect for diversity and cultural competence; and holistic approaches.

8. Provide ISFs and early and middle childhood educators with training relating to reflective practice, to inform their understanding of what reflective practice is and looks like, so that this becomes a tool for thinking critically about their practice as it relates to inclusion. The performed ethnographies:
- Jimmy’s Story: Exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion in early and middle childhood settings;
- Adela’s Story: Exploring Ethnicity and Biculturalism early and middle childhood settings;
- William’s Story: Belonging in early and middle childhood settings;

could be used as part of this process.

9. Conduct an audit to locate existing resources that can be used to support ISFs to engage in ongoing conversations with early and middle childhood educators about inclusion, diversity and equity; and where gaps are identified that additional resources are developed to address them.

10. Support and encourage ISFs to explore options to ensure they support child care services in relation to all three priority groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from CALD backgrounds, and children from a refugee or humanitarian intervention background.

11. Support and encourage ISAs to explore opportunities for supporting ISFs to engage in ongoing conversations and debates around issues of equity, diversity and inclusion to inform their work with child care service educators.

12. Provide ISFs with opportunities to enhance and further develop skills in coaching and effective communication to more confidently articulate the multiple ways they can support child care services in relation to all forms of diversity; and to engage educators in conversations that unpack their understandings around inclusion and the impact on practice. As above, the performed ethnographies commissioned by Child Australia can assist in this process.

13. Provide training to early and middle childhood educators in relation to inclusion, diversity and difference. This training will address a range of issues in order to unpack assumptions, generalisations and stereotypes in relation to children from the IPSP priority groups, as well as well as relationships and partnerships with families.

14. That relevant learning frameworks (i.e. EYLF and the Framework for School Aged Care) are used as a tool to engage educators in conversations about their inclusive practice, drawing on relevant principles and practices, including but not limited to partnerships with families, high expectations and equity; respect for diversity and cultural competence; and holistic approaches.

15. That ISFs and child care service educators are provided with training relating to reflective practice, to inform their understanding of what reflective practice is and looks like, so that this becomes a tool for thinking critically about their practice as it relates to inclusion.

16. That an audit is conducted to locate existing resources that can be used to support ISFs engage in ongoing conversations with child care service educators about inclusion, diversity and equity; and where gaps are identified additional resources are developed to address them.
Introduction
Child Australia, a leading provider of professional development and support to the early and middle childhood sector, embarked on funding innovative research with the aim of enhancing the capacity of the early and middle childhood education and care sector. The gap between theory and practice is often cited as a challenge in early and middle childhood education and care. Furthermore, the difficulty in sourcing Australian based research to support program provision and policy has long been seen as a challenge for Australian policy makers and practitioners. To address this, Child Australia formed a partnership with Semann and Slattery, one of Australia’s leading professional development and research companies. The multi-disciplinary team at Semann & Slattery collaborated with Child Australia to lead four research projects, one of which was Reflective Practice with Early and Middle Childhood Education and Care Professionals. The research findings are contained in this report, and also form the basis of performed ethnographies, or plays, which will become a critical resource to educate the sector about inclusion, diversity and difference issues that participants identified across Western Australia and the Northern Territory in this research project.

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is underpinned by principles that prioritise equity and respect for diversity. Similarly, the Framework for School Aged Care in Australia—prioritises outcomes for children based around care, empathy, diversity respect, and fairness. Central to quality children’s services are practices of inclusion, diversity and difference. In addition, the EYLF recommends reflective practice as a core principle and means of enhancing programs within the early and middle childhood sector. Reflective practice undertaken by early and middle childhood educators and other professionals has been characterized as a critical component of quality in the children’s services sector, and an excellent method through which to enhance policies and practices around inclusion, diversity and difference.
Approach To The Study
As lead researchers, Cristyn Davies and Associate Professor Kerry Robinson, in consultation with representatives from Child Australia, developed a mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to this research project. A qualitative research approach involves the use of a variety of methods to collect information, including: focus groups, interviews and observations. One or a combination of these methods can be used to gain a broad understanding of the perspectives held by participants about pertinent issues, such as early and middle childhood educators’ and other professionals’ experiences of inclusion, diversity and difference in their educational and care settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Contrastingly, a quantitative approach is used to describe information that can be counted or expressed numerically. Quantitative data can be represented both textually, and visually in graphs, histograms, tables and charts. Both methods of gathering data were employed in this project to provide robust research data about inclusion, diversity and difference in early and middle childhood settings across Western Australia, and the Northern Territory.

In addition, the researchers facilitated and supervised a number of small action research projects undertaken by the participants. The action research projects focused on several areas of concern identified by participants including: ‘Children with high support needs living in out of home care attending Children’s Services’, ‘Children’s mental health and wellbeing in early and middle childhood settings’ (with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health), ‘Belonging through children’s eyes’ (linked to the Early Years Learning Framework, and the Framework for School Aged Care), ‘Early and middle childhood professionals’ recognition and support needs around children’s bicultural needs’, ‘Inclusion and enrolment in early and middle child care settings’, and ‘Barriers to Inclusion Support Subsidy funding for the inclusion of children with speech and language delay/disorder’. Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams, or as part of a community of practice, with the aim of improving their strategies, practices, and knowledge of the environments within which they practice (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). It is an interactive inquiry process that balances problem solving in a collaborative context, alongside analysis and research, to understand underlying causes enabling future predictions about personal and organizational change (Reason & Bradbury, 2002). The aim of this component of the project was to develop an understanding of the usefulness of action research in addressing particular issues associated with diversity, difference and inclusion relevant to localized settings; to provide participants with some basic research training to gain an understanding of what is involved in the process of doing action research; and to increase participants’ knowledge of diversity, difference and inclusion in areas relevant to their daily work.

The methods employed in this project included:

1. Online survey for early and middle childhood educators across Western Australia and the Northern Territory (n=138);
2. Online survey for Inclusion Support Facilitators, Indigenous Support Unit Facilitators, and Child Australia staff, (n=31);
3. Focus groups with early and middle childhood educators, Inclusion Support Facilitators and Indigenous Professional Support Unit Facilitators (n=2);
4. Supervised action research projects covering a range of issues around inclusion, diversity and difference (n= 7 completed).

A qualitative approach allows researchers to capture a nuanced, in-depth understanding of a group’s feelings, perceptions and practices around diversity, difference and inclusion in the early and middle childhood sector. A quantitative approach provides the fundamental connection between empirical observation and the mathematical expression of quantitative relationships. Participants were targeted, and reflected a range of early and middle childhood educators, Inclusion Support Facilitators, and Indigenous Professional Support Units across Western Australia and the Northern Territory.
Potential Limitations Of The Study
One of the limitations of this study was that a large percentage of directors (67.7% of 138 respondents) from settings undertook the online survey for early and middle childhood educators. This means that the responses are more likely to indicate a higher level of literacy, experience and education than is the case across the sector. Another limitation of the study was the over-representation of IPSP staff who completed their action research projects, while early childhood educators dropped out of this component of the research due to time issues. These issues included: not being able to get leave to attend the workshops, not having the time to pursue the action research during work-time, or contending with understaffing problems in their settings. Early and middle childhood educators participated in the focus groups, in addition to IPSP staff, thus providing their perspectives within that context.
Literature Review
EARLY CHILDHOOD: DIVERSITY DIFFERENCE AND INCLUSION

Early childhood is a critical period in which a child's sense of identity, their sense of belonging, and how they see themselves in relation to others in the world more generally, begins to take shape. The social, emotional and physical differences that exist amongst children, as well as the diversity that reflects their daily lives in terms of family structures and relations, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and socio-economic circumstances and opportunities, highlights the need for educators and carers of young children to be aware of the importance of incorporating and reflecting this diversity in children's early educational and care experiences. Consequently, developing policies, practices and curricula related to diversity, difference and inclusion in early childhood education and care settings is paramount to children's successful early education. Embracing the pluralism that exists in children's lives is a central feature of the philosophy and the focus on social justice and equity that underpins the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Aged Care in Australia.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Diversity is a term that is used to encompass a range of identities and includes an awareness and understanding of the different power relations that exist for those identities who have historically been marginalised in society across socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. For example, family diversity includes all possible family structures such as, but not limited to: nuclear families, same-sex parented families, single parent families, foster families, families headed by grandparents, and blended families. Within the context of this family diversity, some family structures have more power and privilege than other families in society, and their powerful positions are supported and validated by legal and socio-cultural institutions and practices. The concept of difference recognises the ways in which identities and socio-cultural practices and values operate outside what is generally considered to be the 'norm' in society, or from those who are representative of the dominant culture. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian cultures can have different kinship relations, family structures, and practices from those dominant in white Australian cultures. Those kinship relations, values and practices most different from the perceived norm, for example—dominant white, middle class, heteronormative, nuclear family—have historically been most marginalised in society.

WHAT IS DIFFERENCE?

The early years of children's lives are not only important to children's sense of identity and belonging, but it is also a period in which children develop their perceptions of difference. Research overwhelmingly shows that by the time children enter primary schooling their perceptions of difference reflect and perpetuate the dominant racialised, gendered, sexualised, classed and body stereotypes that prevail in the broader society (Alloway, 1995; Glover, 1991; Palmer, 1990; MacNaughton, 1993; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Troyca & Hatcher, 1992). As Robinson & Jones Diaz (2006, p. 4) point out, 'Children do not enter early childhood programmes as empty slates but rather bring with them a myriad of perceptions of difference that they have taken up from their families, peers, the media and other social sources and negotiated in the representations of their own identities'.

Research since the 1980's has demonstrated that young children learn and act on different racialised, ethnic, and gendered differential positionings from an early age (Troyca & Hatcher, 1992; van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Zembylas, 2010;). In the early 1990’s, Glover (1991) identified that children 2 and 3 years old are aware of differences and simultaneously develop positive or negative feelings about these observed differences. For example, children's awareness of racial differences developed early in their lives, particularly around skin colour, impacts on the relationships that they initiate and foster with other children (Aboud, 1988; Averhart & Bigler, 1997; Katz, 1982; Palmer, 1990; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Socio-cultural discourses of race, ethnicity, class, and gender, among other aspects of identity, are reflected in the way that children position themselves in schooling contexts, including early childhood education, and influence the way they think about themselves and others (Kicket-Tucker, 2009; Quintana & Vera, 1999).
WHAT ARE IDENTITY CATEGORIES?

Children use social categories of identity, such as race, ethnicity and gender, to exclude or include others in their daily schooling lives. Research in early childhood education over the past two decades has overwhelmingly demonstrated how children are active agents in the construction of their own gender and in the policing of gendered behaviours of other children (Davies & Robinson, 2010; MacNaughton, 2000; Robinson & Davies, 2008, 2010; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006). Dettore, Ristori and Casale (2011) in recent research conducted with preschool children in Italy reinforce how children actively exclude and reject children who deviate from gender norms. Gender non-conformance, particularly in young boys, continues to pose concerns for parents and early childhood educators as well. Young boys playing dress ups in female clothing continues to raise concerns associated with their potential non-conforming sexual orientation in the future (Davies, 2008; McInnes & Davies 2008). Critical to an understanding of the process of gender construction in children’s lives is how early childhood educators can play in perpetuating or disrupting normalising discourses of gender in children’s formal early education (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006). Some early childhood educators incorporate gender equity considerations into their practices with young children. These practices tend to be encouraging boys and girls to play in non-traditional gendered areas; for example, encouraging boys to play in the ‘home corner’ and girls into the ‘block corner’. However, research highlights that this practice has limited impact on children’s stereotypical gendered perspectives and behaviours and children’s daily practices continue to reinforce traditional gendered performances of femininity and masculinity and the power relations inherent in these social categories (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006).

Zembyas’ (2010) research into children’s construction and experience of racism and nationalism amongst Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-speaking children in three Greek-Cypriot public schools, highlights young children’s utilisation of nationalistic, racialised, gendered and classed practices to reproduce the dominant socio-cultural and political relations of power in the broader society. Research undertaken by Robinson and Jones Diaz (2000, 2006) with early childhood educators in New South Wales, focusing on diversity and difference and early childhood education policies and educators’ practices in these areas, highlights how children’s awareness of diversity and difference impacts on their perceptions and behaviours toward others. One early childhood educator in their research commented: “Children are keen observers of difference. They are keen observers of how others treat difference and learn positive or negative attitudes, which are reflected in their interactions with others”. Another reinforced this perspective saying: “Children are aware of cultural diversity well before they can articulate difference between them... which makes it very important to validate and represent their cultures in the setting”. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) also point out that children often make negative comments about other children who are different, such as, “he’s naughty he’s black” and ‘They don’t speak properly’. These negative perceptions and behaviours of young children raise critical issues for early childhood educators. Robinson and Jones-Diaz (2006) argue that despite some early childhood educators’ awareness around children’s capabilities, particularly in terms of their negative constructions of diversity and difference, whether it be in regards to family structures, cultural practices, race, ethnicity, social class, gender, or linguistic diversity, few early childhood educators challenge these perceptions and values in a critical deconstructive manner and do not consider it integral to their educational practices with children. With regards to linguistic diversity, they point out: “There appears to be on the one hand, importance attached to the early childhood workers’ role in assisting children to understand about other languages while, on the other hand, opportunities to deconstruct and critique dominant discourses associated with linguistic assimilation, linguicism, bilingualism and language maintenance are rarely taken up or even considered significant” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2000, p.80).
WHAT IS PERFORMED ETHNOGRAPHY?

Performed ethnography is a representation of the findings from research that is written in a play format. This approach involves developing ethnographic research data into play-scripts that are either read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences (Davies & McInnes, 2012). This methodology has been employed by writers, researchers and educators in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, and in the fields of performance studies, theatre studies and arts-based inquiry in education (see Deavere Smith, 1993, 1994; Davies & McInnes, 2012; Denzin, 1997; Goldstein, 2001; Langellier, 2000; Mienczakowski, 1997; Sykes & Goldstein, 2004). The methodological approach taken in this research encompassed the need to explore early and middle childhood educators’ and other professionals’ experiences and concerns around inclusion, diversity and difference, highlighting the effectiveness of participants’ stories in contributing to transformative practices. Performed ethnography is a critical methodological approach that supports this transformative process. It is an evocative and dramatic story showing interactions in a way that allows participants to more fully engage in the emotional process of witnessing, experiencing and resolving conflicts (Denzin, 1997, Goldstein, 2001). It has been used successfully in developing understandings of race relations with judges (O’Connor, 2000). Such participation is very useful for critical professional development.
Demographics In Early And Middle Childhood Across Western Australia And The Northern Territory
PARTICIPANTS FROM EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD IN THE ONLINE SURVEYS

In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 138 educators undertook the online survey across Western Australia and the Northern Territory. In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 84.8% of respondents were from Western Australia, and 15.2% of respondents were from the Northern Territory.

In the *Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) online survey* (from this point on, referred to as the *IPSP online survey*), 31 respondents undertook the online survey across Western Australia and the Northern Territory. In the *IPSP online survey*, 86.7% of respondents were from Western Australia, and 13.3% were from the Northern Territory.

REGIONS THAT EDUCATORS WORK IN AND SUPPORT

**Western Australia:** In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 27% of respondents work in and support the north metro and Islands region, 26.1% of respondents work in and support the south-east Perth metro region, 20.9% of respondents work in and support the south west region including Mandurah Peel, 13% work in and support the central region, which includes Geraldton and Kalgoorlie, 6.1% of respondents work in and support the east metro region, which includes some of the wheat-belt, 6.1% work in and support the great southern region, and 0.9% work in and support the Kimberley region.

In the *IPSP online survey*, 11.5% of respondents work in or support the Pilbara region, 11.5% of respondents support the North metro and Islands region, 11.5% of respondents support the Central region, which includes Geraldton and Kalgoorlie, 7.7% of respondents work in or support the East metro region, which includes some of the wheat-belt, 7.7% support the Great Southern region, 3.8% of respondents work in or support the South West region includes Mandurah Peel and the South West, 3.8% of respondents work in or support the South East Perth metro region, 0% of respondents worked in or supported the Kimberley region, and 46.2% of respondents support the whole state.

**Northern Territory:** In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 82.6% of respondents work in and support the Northern region, and 17.4% work in and support the central region of the Northern Territory.

In the *IPSP online survey*, 75% of respondents work in, or support the Northern region, and 25% of respondents work in or support the central region of the Northern Territory.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT POSITION

In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 67.7% of respondents were early childhood directors, 18.1% were Out of School Hours Care coordinators/managers, 3.9% were early childhood educators, 1.6% were family day carers, 0.8% were Out of School Hours Care team members.

In the *IPSP online survey*, 30% of respondents were Child Australia staff, 26.7% of respondents were Child Australia Inclusion Support Agency staff, 26.7% of respondents were Professional Support Coordinators, 13.3% of respondents were other Inclusion Support Agencies, and 3.3% of respondents were Indigenous Professional Support Unit staff.

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN CURRENT POSITION

In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 46% of respondents had less than three years experience in their current position, 20.4% had 5-10 years experience, 13.9% had 3-5 years experience, 10.2% of respondents had 10-15 years experience, and 9.5% had 15 years or more experience.

In the *IPSP online survey*, 41.9% of respondents have been in their current position less than 3 years, 32.3% of respondents have been in their current position between 3 and 5 years, 19.4% of respondents have been in their current position between 5 and 10 years, 3.2% of respondents have been in their current position between 10 and 15 years, and 3.2% of respondents have been in their current position for over 15 years.
YEARS WORKING IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD FIELD

In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 46% had 15 years experience working in the early childhood field, 25.5% had 5-10 years experience, 16.8% of respondents had 10-15 years experience, 8% of respondents have less than 3 years experience, 3.6% have 3-5 years experience.

In the *IPSP online survey*, 43.3% of respondents have had 15 years or more working in the early childhood field, 20% of respondents have had less than 3 years, 16.7% of respondents have had between 5 and 10 years experience, 10% of respondents have had between 3 and 5 years experience, and 10% have had between 10 and 15 years experience.

SEX

In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 99.3% of respondents identified as female, and 0.7% of respondents identified as male.

In the *IPSP online survey*, 93.3% of respondents identified as female, and 6.7% of respondents identified as male.

QUALIFICATIONS

In the *early and middle childhood educator online survey*, 65.6% of respondents had completed a Diploma (TAFE qualification in children’s services or equivalent), 17.2% of respondents had completed an undergraduate university degree in early childhood or primary education, 9.3% of respondents had completed a Certificate III in children’s services or an equivalent, 7.4% of respondents had a university postgraduate degree in early childhood or primary education.

In the *IPSP online survey*, 63.2% of respondents had completed a Diploma (TAFE qualification in children’s services or equivalent), 36.8% of respondents have completed an undergraduate university degree in early childhood or primary education, 0% of respondents had completed a Certificate III in children’s services or an equivalent, and 0% of respondents had completed a university postgraduate degree in early childhood or primary education.
Sex Imbalance Across The Early And Middle Childhood Sector
Within the online surveys, research participants across the sector were asked to identify their sex. Within the *early and middle childhood online survey*, 99.3% of 136 respondents identified as female, and 0.7% of 136 respondents identified as male. Within the IPSP online survey, 93.3% of 30 respondents across Western Australia and the Northern Territory identified as female, and 6.7% identified as male.

Although the research questions did not specifically ask research participants about sex imbalances in the early and middle childhood sectors, participants raised this issue independently within the context of the focus groups. Focus group participants across Western Australia and the Northern Territory noted that the majority of educators and Inclusion Support Facilitators working across the sector were women, and linked this to inadequate salaries, and their ‘low’ status across the sector. Participants identified the discourse of professionalism within the sector, which was perceived as positive, but certainly not enough to address the gender imbalance. Most participants stated that there ‘was a long way to go to achieve equality of pay, respect and working conditions.’ Participants commented that these divisions were even more problematic in regional and rural areas, and that ‘men would not put up with those conditions like us’.

Participants also commented that they wanted more men to work in the sector so that children developed a more balanced perspective in their early years about men as educators, carers and role models. Some participants from the Out of Ours School sector commented that they were more likely to ask male colleagues to address challenging behaviours in children who did not respond positively to female educators because of children’s cultural and religious differences in relation to their attitudes to women: ‘so you know we are putting in strategies like only getting the males to deal with those kids [which] is a short term thing. But it is not sustainable really. We don’t think that it is quite right. There is no easy fix is there. It is just making it easier to deal with’.

The early and middle childhood education sector has traditionally been perceived as women’s work, which is reflected in the low professional status and poor pay experienced by educators in this area of the workforce. The undervaluation of women’s work is embedded in many workplaces. Sectors that employ best practice endeavour to identify areas where equal opportunity may be improved and will design and implement policies and practices to achieve improvement. Along with the need for greater parity of pay and for fostering better working conditions in the sector, there is a need to simultaneously encourage women to further their education and qualifications, which will also contribute to enhancing the professional image of the sector. This will not only provide women in the sector with greater professional opportunities, it will enhance the quality of education offered to children and their families, as well as potentially encouraging men to consider a career in the sector.
The Impact Of Equity And Diversity Policies Within The Early And Middle Childhood Sector
ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES

Survey responses indicate that most educators and IPSP staff are aware of their setting’s diversity and difference policies. In the early and middle childhood educator online survey, 90.4% of respondents stated that their centre or setting had policies around diversity and difference. 2.4% of respondents commented that their setting did not have policies that addressed diversity and difference, and 7.2% were not sure whether their setting had policies around diversity and difference. These results suggest that although most staff are aware of their settings policies, some staff could benefit from policy revision.

85.7% of 77 respondents of the early and middle childhood educator online survey were aware that cultural background was included in their diversity policy, followed by 80.5% of participants who were aware that disability was represented, followed by 76.6% of participants who were aware of the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture diversity policies. 57.1% of respondents indicated that they were aware that gender was represented in their diversity policy, followed by 51.9% who were aware of alternative family structures, followed by 44.2% who indicated that single parent families were included. Respondents had less awareness around issues of class and socio-economic status (33.8% of respondents), mental health (35.1% of participants), gay and lesbian issues (29.9% of respondents), and refugee families (36.4% of respondents). 10.4% of respondents indicated that they were uncertain of what was in their diversity policies. These results suggest that a large proportion of educators were familiar with policies that address cultural background, disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Further, some educators have awareness of policies around gender and alternative family structures. In addition, further training around the relationship between policy, practice and issues of class and socio-economic status, gay and lesbian issues, mental health issues, and refugee families would benefit educators.

In the IPSP online survey, 82.6% of respondents identified that their program or organisation has a policy around diversity and difference. 4.3% of respondents believed that their program or organisations did not have a policy around diversity and difference, and 13% of respondents were unsure of whether their program or organisation had a policy around diversity or difference. These results indicate that some educators and staff require additional training around their setting’s policies around diversity and difference.

81.8% of the 22 online survey IPSP respondents were aware of the inclusion of disability in their diversity policy, followed by 72.7% of participants who are aware of the inclusion of Aboriginality and Torres Strait Islander cultures, followed by 68.2% who are aware that cultural background was included. 50% of 22 respondents indicated their awareness of the inclusion of gender and refugee families, followed by 45.5% of 22 respondents who were aware of alternative family structures. There was less awareness of the inclusion of policies around gay and lesbian issues (31.8%), foster children (31.8%), mental health (31.8%), single parent families (31.8%) followed by issues of class and socio-economic status (27.3%). 18.2% were unsure of what was in the diversity policy. These results suggest that most IPSP staff are aware of their organisation’s policies around disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and cultural background, but would benefit from revision of these policies. Further, training, revision and further development around policies that address alternative family structures, gay and lesbian issues, foster children, mental health, single parent families, and class and socio-economic status would benefit IPSP staff.
FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

Research participants in the focus groups across Western Australia and the Northern Territory commented on the significance and benefits of having policies that can’t be practically implemented. One educator from a Perth focus group commented: ‘I think that practical policies are a lot easier ...a lot of policies are a little abstract.’ Another educator from a Perth focus group commented: ‘Putting [policies] into practice, you know, they are all important, but then which are more important, which one overrides the other; it is a big minefield.’ These observations suggest that policies need to include a concise and sound theoretical component, supported by practical suggestions or methods of implementing policies.

Research participants also commented that most of their colleagues do not read, revise or update their inclusion, equity and diversity policies. Some participants suggested that staff may not see the benefits of reading and revising policies in an industry that is generally time poor. One participant from Perth commented, ‘they [educators] need to be encouraged to read the policies’, and that staff don’t necessarily ‘understand why we have the policies’. Another participant observed that educators could be ‘encouraged to read the policies during their break’. Research participants also observed that some younger, or less experienced staff view policies as rules and regulations, rather than a means to be innovative around their practice. One educator new to early childhood education commented: ‘I know we all have them but...I have forgotten, you know...there are so many. I am looking at the childcare policies [from other centres] to see which ones we can steal ... It is like there are so many. If you are new to a child care centre ... you know, it is like overkill.’ This observation suggests that early and middle childhood settings need support, such as mentoring and coaching, around policy development and implementation.

Research participants also observed that policies are often too long to read and remember. One participant from a Perth focus group commented: ‘I think sometimes the policies are too long. I think that they need to be a bit more confined ... what the policy is and what is expected ... so that you know, so that the staff understand it a little bit more. You know, you can write it more concisely.’ Similarly, an educator from a Darwin focus group commented:

We have a policy folder, and we tend to read the policies and then – I don’t know, there are so many policies to remember, you don’t remember all your policies ... and you possibly do something different in practice ... there is a lot – yeah, there is a lot to remember within each policy ... different things. So I can honestly say that I don’t remember every policy in our folder.

I’ve got 100 or something in mine when I started and we’ve brought that down to eight main ones in the hope that our staff might actually pick it up.

This last observation reveals the gap between policy and practice due to too many policies which educators find challenging to remember and implement. Barriers to reviewing and revising policies include inadequate time put aside by settings to undertake revision in line with current frameworks and research.

One research participant in Perth linked staff apathy in relation to engagement around policy to the perception that working in early and middle childhood was an “easy career option”, rather than a space for innovative practice:

Some of the people working in the industry ... ... aren’t very good, you know, they ... a lot of the time, you know, people ... well what am I going to do? I will do childcare if I can get in. If I knock on the door of a childcare centre and they are desperate ... I can get in. I think they think it is all about sitting down playing with the kids all day.

These observations reflect the need for training in the area of effective policy development around equity and diversity for educators that easily translates into daily practice. In addition, staff meeting times could provide an ideal space to discuss, revise and further develop policies that are concise and practically
oriented. Another educator from a Perth focus group shared her positive experience of discussing centre policies with her colleagues: ‘we explore various situations, we do a policy review, you know, talking about different scenarios and situations … Staff are keen to learn about it’. This comment indicates that strong leadership is required to engage staff around policy review, revision and implementation, and that this approach can lead to staff interest and involvement.

Both quantitative and qualitative data reveal the need to revise policies, as well as to promote opportunities for practically oriented policy development and awareness training. While the sector exhibits strengths around including policies around some issues (for early and middle childhood educators: cultural background, disability, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture; for IPSP staff: disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and cultural background), other areas require further attention (early and middle childhood educators: gender and alternative family structures, class and socio-economic status, gay and lesbian issues, mental health issues, and refugee families; and IPSP staff: alternative family structures, gay and lesbian issues, foster children, mental health, single parent families, and class and socio-economic status).
Education And Training Around Diversity, Difference And Inclusion Across The Early Childhood Sector
ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSES

Employees in the early childhood sector gain their knowledge of diversity, difference and inclusion from a range of sources. 54.2% of 83 respondents who completed the *early and middle childhood educators online survey* question: Where do you get your knowledge base around diversity, difference and inclusion? indicated that training was the most important source of their knowledge in this area. 40.7% of 81 respondents acknowledged that personal experience was also an important source of knowledge around diversity, difference and inclusion for them. Reading around these issues was ranked highly by 37.3% of 83 respondents, as were team discussions by 28% of 81 respondents. This was followed by mentoring & coaching by 24.7% of 81 respondents, then allied health professionals (e.g. GP’s & speech therapists) by 24.4% of 82 respondents, networking forums by 21.5% of 79 respondents, and the Internet by 18.5% of 81 respondents. Interestingly, despite the Internet being considered a less important source of information in comparison to other sources, it was still generally viewed as a significant source of information and ranked highly by 22.2% of 81 respondents. From these results, training is obviously considered an important source of learning by early and middle childhood educators around diversity, difference and inclusion, but personal experiences ranked highly amongst respondents, followed by learning through discussions and interactions with colleagues and other professionals. The Internet is also a growing source of information for these educators.

Similar to early and middle childhood educators, more than half (52.4%) of the 21 *Inclusion and Professional Support Program* (IPSP) staff completing the same question in the *IPSP online survey*, ranked training as the most important source of information around diversity, difference and inclusion. Equally, the same number of IPSP staff also considered personal experience as a most important source of knowledge in this area. Reading was also considered an important source of information by 36.4% of 22 IPSP respondents. However, in comparison to the early and middle childhood educators, IPSP respondents indicated the Internet as a highly ranked source of information in the area; that is, 23.8% of 21 respondents considered it most important. However, in comparison to the early and middle childhood educators completing the survey, IPSP staff did not rank networking (27.3% of 22 respondents), mentoring and coaching (22.7% of 21 respondents), and allied health professionals (18.2% of 22 respondents) as highly as sources of information.

Based on the *IPSP online survey*, the following graph highlights where respondents gained their knowledge about specific issues relevant to diversity, difference and inclusion. Across all identified areas, the community, personal experience and newspapers/magazines were the main sources of information. This finding may be linked to the high ranking of personal experience, including professional experiences working with certain communities, highlighted in the previous discussion wherein IPSP staff identified the most important sources of information in the area of diversity, difference and inclusion. What is of concern is the reliance on newspapers/magazines, and in some instances, the Internet and television, as primary sources of information. Newspaper/magazine articles, television representations, and information gathered on the Internet can be based on less academic and less rigorous research and can often contain a level of bias that stems from personal opinions and/or certain political affiliations. Articles in newspapers/magazines and television representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, refugees, or others from CALD backgrounds, for example, are often based on stereotypes and/or racist assumptions and beliefs. What is equally concerning is the lack of acknowledgement of official educational institutions, such as TAFE and University as primary sources of information in this area.
The following graph is based on the *early and middle childhood educator online survey* responses and highlights where these participants get their knowledge of specific areas related to diversity, difference and inclusion. Similar to the results from the IPSP survey discussed above, the communities in which employees live and work and personal experiences are the primary source of information for early and middle childhood educators across these specific areas identified around diversity, difference and inclusion. Although early and middle childhood educators who responded to this survey also rely on newspaper/magazines as do IPSP respondents, though to a slightly lesser degree, early and middle childhood educators rely more heavily on the Internet as a primary source of information, especially in the area of mental health, disability and issues pertaining to cultural background. As pointed out with the IPSP survey results, early childhood educators also did not tend to see formal education as a primary source of information around diversity, difference and inclusion. Similarly, this may be a result of few educators undertaking further study, as discussed later in this report, or minimal discussion of diversity issues in formal training undertaken by respondents.
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

As pointed out across in the survey results, personal experience, including professional experiences working in communities, plays a critical role in the understandings of early and middle childhood educators and IPSP staff around diversity, difference and inclusion. This was also the case for participants who were involved in the focus groups conducted in Perth and Darwin. Discussions with colleagues were also an important source of learning, as pointed out by the following Darwin participant:

In our office we are very open (as ISFs). We actually talk and unpack with each other what has just happened with the staff at a service, or at a PD [Professional Development] workshop we’ve gone to, or at conferences.

Learning on the job through experience was central to many of the early and middle childhood educators and IPSP employees. Their understandings of different cultural groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, was generally derived from direct interactions with these communities:

Aboriginal communities have got family worked out. In some ways, they have the EYLF down much more effectively than mainstream services, like ... belonging, and family, and family is such a huge network. There are some wonderful things that we can learn from Aboriginal communities about their lives and their learning frameworks (Darwin participant).
The Internet Verses More Formal Academic Sources Of Information Around Diversity, Difference And Inclusion
The Internet was a valuable primary source of information for many participants in both the survey and in the focus group interviews. The Internet was often the first point for accessing information about a range of issues relevant to educators’ every day professional practice. This was certainly the case with accessing information about diversity, difference and inclusion. However, some found it difficult to negotiate the vast amounts of information that were available. The following comments highlight the different perspectives around focus group participants’ use of the Internet:

I had to research absolutely everything and the Internet was the way that I did it. I had to teach it all to myself, and the Internet was just the best way to do it.

I found it very stressful. You have got so much information. You can pretty much find information on any topic talking about inclusion and how to go about dealing with it. So yeah, it varies, you know, whilst there is a lot of information, it is all about interpretation.

I absolutely use the Internet but you have to be really careful about any journals, anything, you have to be really careful and you have to think about what you are reading and how it relates.

Focus group participants acknowledged that they used the Internet to find out information about issues that they were not overly familiar with, information they needed quickly, and to identify strategies to deal with certain issues. The convenience and quick access to information was important to participants.

I use the Internet to look for strategies. Like at the moment we’ve got really poor sportsmanship in the culture of the school. So I’ve been trying to look up sportsmanship programs and stuff. You know, so get some ideas of who is using what. Is there, you know, something that I can tap into ... Just to understand and get more information.

The Internet is becoming an increasingly important source of information, but as some of these focus group participants pointed out, there are some critical issues that need to be considered, especially if it is the only source educators’ use. The Internet is primarily an unregulated source of information and any one can place information on the World Wide Web regardless of how the information has been formulated. It is important that educators and other professionals have the critical skills to search, sort and evaluate the kind of information located on the Internet (e.g. reading peer reviewed journals as opposed to online tabloid media).

Online survey participants were asked about what type of material they read to inform them about diversity, difference and inclusion. Most of the early and middle childhood educators (40%, or 32 of the total 83 respondents) indicated that information received from professional organizations of which they were members, was the primary source of their professional reading materials. Other important sources of reading were relevant professional books (36.4% or 28 of the total 83 respondents), the Internet (32.9% or 26 of the total 83 respondents), professional Journals (e.g. Australian Journal of Early Childhood) (32.5% or 26 total 83 respondents). The IPSP respondents indicated that books (42.9% or 9 of the 21 total respondents), newsletters (28.6% or 6 of the 21 total respondents) and information sent out from professional organizations of which they were members were their main sources of professional reading. However, professional journals were also an important source for some IPSP staff. These results demonstrate that professional organizations like Child Australia and Early Childhood Australia are in significant position in terms of educating staff in the sector about critical issues around diversity, difference and inclusion, as well as other important aspects of early childhood education. It also places a responsibility on these organizations to provide up-to-date information that is based on rigorous research, as well as personal experiences.
Focus group participants were asked whether they utilised other avenues of information gathering, such as professional journals, or whether they relied most frequently on the Internet. One participant commented:

The Internet. Before I took on the position where I am now I found there were only a handful of relevant resource, like journals, that were made available to staff. I think it falls back again on the director, to actually pass newsletters and professional journals forward to the staff.

The last comment made by the participant above highlights the importance of directors and managers of passing on relevant professional reading material to their staff to keep them aware of up-to-date information. It also points out the need for directors and managers to be aware of the professional Journals and other professional reading material that is available across the sector.
Professional Development And Attending Conferences
As pointed out previously, the online survey results indicated that both IPSP staff and early and middle childhood educators considered training and professional development important. There are numerous professional development activities and conferences that focus on developing the skills and knowledge of early childhood educators and carers in the area of diversity, difference and inclusion. As many of the educators and other professionals in the early childhood sector are often inexperienced and untrained, professional development (PD), including conference attendance, plays an important role. It is also critical for those employees to have training to upgrade their skills and knowledge and to keep abreast of new approaches in their field. Professional development is therefore important for developing the quality of care and education provided to young children that is expected by families and the community and that is required in the sector (see the National Quality Framework). As one participant in this project commented, “There is a lot of frustration in regards to PD”. This frustration exists for both those who are responsible for providing the professional development opportunities and organising these events for their employees, as well as for the educators. Early childhood educators often work long hours, with challenging adult-child ratios, and in highly demanding circumstances. The expectation across the early and middle childhood sector that professional development is undertaken in educators’ own time, and often at their own personal cost, provides little incentive for them to participate in the opportunities that they are offered. As the following focus group participants pointed out:

Our aim is to try and get the staff to do PD and to get them interested. But they say ‘Why should we do it in our own time? What is the incentive? What is in it for us?’ It is a challenge to try and get them to take up the opportunities.

In my section, in regards to professional development for my staff, my staff are casuals, generally I try to get my staff from the school to come and work for me, so they work during the day and then they work after school.

They don’t want to go on and do PD or further study. Most of them don’t want to stay in the sector for more than 12 months. So they don’t have an interest in paying for their own stuff. And I have to pay for it out of my budget as well as their time; otherwise I won’t get them there. So it makes me prioritise what I send the staff to.

In the remote communities a lot of them are on CDEP [Community Development Employment Projects placement], which is employment funding, and that’s only short term. It gives them a little bit of training, unless they are really, you know, we’ve got to travel 300km to come to Alice Springs to do some training after hours. And you get some that do. But the whole service closes for the day, so they can travel in. So they can – I am thinking of a couple that do, actually close the service for the day, travel in, do the things. So the service and the community have to agree to that as well. It is not as simple as just coming in to do that. The community has to agree that the centre will be closed, the shire has to agree that it is okay, and then you have to get the people willing to actually all get the transport to travel in, do that, stay overnight and then come back. It costs a lot.

Further, it is obvious that responsibility for bearing the costs of professional development in settings is a question that poses much conflict between management and staff, as pointed out by the following participant:

Well I find sometimes, when they try to get us to pay for professional development and I say [The Service] doesn’t have the money. And also I say well you know, it is $25 for a workshop, you know you could buy, pay for it yourself, you know, this is your personal professional development and it is a certificate and put it in your portfolio, and it’s oh, they don’t want to pay for themselves. Then the other issue is that they actually want to be paid for the time that they come to PD. And that is just absolutely astounding. Oh my goodness, no, just come for you.
This is for you, not for anyone else, because you know you might not be at that service all that time. You give to them now, but this is for you, for your life, you can take it with you. Take ownership of that, pay for it yourself if you need to and take ownership of that. I don’t think I’ve ever had anybody pay for my professional development, it has always been for me to take with me, and I get very proud of what I’ve done, I’ve done this, and you know, I try and encourage them to do that.

I just pay for all my studies here and also I’ve met some really interesting people in mental health, psychology and I just like to read a lot. We really don’t have money in our budget for professional development. However, in saying that there is some allowance for us. It depends what it is, it has to be looked at on a case-by-case thing.

I am here [at this workshop] because it’s free.

It cost a lot to get me up here [to this workshop].

Educators’ perceptions of the quality, and of the relevance of the professional development offered to them, influences their enthusiasm, motivation and attendance at these events. According to the participants in this research, early childhood educators prefer professional development programs that are based on participant interactions, rather than non-interactive modes of learning. One participant commented:

There are certain PD facilitators that we have where educators will go to these events every time. You get educators breaking down the door.

It is the motivational speaker that brings staff to PD. That is what is really frustrating because we offer a lot of training on our calendar and I was head of training...they are interactive, they are just so good, but it is just getting people to go and see that it is not one of these, sit down and listen type workshops. Um, you know, getting that out there as well, that’s really hard. And nothing is as tiring as working on the floor, it’s so exhausting and emotionally draining, physically draining, you don’t want to go off at the end of the day to a workshop. There is a lot of frustration.

Focus group participants pointed out that it is critical to advertise professional development programs in a manner that attracts the attention of directors, educators and other professionals. In a busy schedule, it is easy to just scan emails or to not read them at all. Consequently, educators and other professionals miss some professional development opportunities. It was also pointed out that, directors in particular, who most frequently receive the initial notices about professional development opportunities do not always pass on this information to their staff. This may be due to an embedded culture of non-involvement in professional development activities in the setting, and the perceived difficulties of providing staff time to attend professional development programs during working hours. Participants in the focus groups pointed out that directors’ sometimes encountered difficulty around finding and paying for replacements while permanent staff attend seminars and workshops. There is often an expectation that those who attend professional development or conferences, supported by employees’ workplaces, would pass the information on to the rest of the staff. However, passing on information often did not happen, as raised by the following participant:

Like you mentioned before about the professional development, some services are not interested in staff meetings, especially when you don’t get paid for them. Part of our work for the service support is an expectation that their coordinator or group leader shares what they learn with the staff at the staff meeting, but as I said, a lot of services don’t often have staff meetings.
To gain financial support from particular services it is a requirement that settings provide professional development opportunities, but it seemed that this was not always happening in the sector. The following participant raised these official requirements:

> It is actually a direct requirement when you guys sign the ISS [Inclusion Support Subsidy] application form for inclusion support funding. You know, you are actually signing, if you read the page with the acknowledgement and agreement, you are actually signing for providing opportunities for staff for professional development and in order to enhance the inclusion of a child and or children in the service. Now it is actually a requirement of the Inclusion Support Process...for providing and building, or contributing to the building of the capacity and up-skilling the staff and you know, making opportunities and everything.

The early childhood sector faces issues associated with the commitment of some staff to remaining in the field for significant periods of time, or in considering early childhood care and education as a career. Professional commitment can also have an impact on how professional development is regarded and taken up by individual staff members. Attending professional development programs is important to those who are committed to building a career in early childhood education. For some educators and other professionals, the sector is viewed as a stepping-stone to other things. The following comment points out some of the frustrations one participant, committed to building a career in the sector, felt when she first started working as a young employee in the field:

> I am one of these people that kind of sat there in the beginning when I was 15 in childcare going hang on, something is not right. You know what I mean? Like I couldn’t actually find out what was supposed to be happening because I did my training in three months...

And I mean this is a huge thing for me that about a year and a half after I got my Diploma and someone was speaking to me about theorists. And I thought, okay let’s start doing some research and that’s when I took the time to actually talk to others and to come out and say, tell me, show me ... I don’t know how many girls I have said to, ‘don’t go fast tracking, don’t do it. Go and learn it all.

You will benefit for it.’ I mean the whole thing is that this is what I wanted to do but you know ... it has always been an interest of mine. I have always seen it as my career, but there are so many people out there that do their Diploma and use it as a stepping-stone into other things.

All focus group participants indicated that attending relevant and engaging professional development activities and conferences were highly beneficial, especially in terms of learning new skills and networking opportunities. Many found these events inspirational and they were keen to bring the new knowledge back into their workplaces, as indicated in the following comment:

> I don’t think I’d ever been to one when I first started and I’d only been in the role for a really short time. It was inspirational for me, and I guess I made a lot of networking through being there.
Supporting Further Studies At TAFE Or University
Many of the focus group participants expressed a strong desire to undertake further studies associated with developing their knowledge and skills around diversity, difference and inclusion. Some participants also indicated their interest in undertaking further research in the areas of diversity, difference and inclusion through a university. However, similar issues arose around undertaking further study to those identified in relation to professional development. Few of the participants had encountered workplaces that fully supported staff in undertaking further studies, despite the direct benefits that this may have had for services. Few received encouragement, financial support, or time release from employers, which placed considerable burden on staff who did take up further studies. The opportunities that some were given were often nominal and dependent on the circumstances of particular settings. The following comments were typical of responses in this area:

Yes, but I don’t feel supported by my setting financially.

The cost of working in community services - you are not supported.

Yeah, it would be more TAFE training. They have conferences and all that and there is some support, but it is really tough.

No, we are not supported at all. There is no incentive for me to study childcare.

It depends how big your service is, like for us to go to a conference, it is just not viable unless you can find funding out there … like I was really interested in the Happiness conference...but the cost of that was WOW, there was no way we could raise it; it was crazy...Flights and your accommodation, there was no way we could afford something like that, but to attend something like that and bring that back into your centre would be amazing. And sometimes bringing it back to your centre is very hard because you get back to reality, and there are all those things that you have to do and you’ve got this great positive feeling when you go to conferences.

We try to get study time, it is not always available depending on how many staff you have.

For the OSHC’s [Out of Hours School Care] that are linked to a school, the award doesn’t provide us with any study leave; the old one did, but the new one doesn’t. So we need to – the only way I can get leave to upgrade my skills, which I will have to under the licensing, because I’ve got a Bachelor of Higher Education, you know, high school … … um, is to convince them that we won’t get licensed without qualifications and for them to write that into my contract.

Some settings did consider further study critical to the quality of the services and education offered to children and families. In a couple of instances, participants indicated that their managers or directors offered incentives to get their staff to undertake further studies, but this was not the norm. The following comments highlight this point:

At the last service I was working in we were actually offered an incentive to do further study. I think it was basically paid for by the service and I think on completion if you stayed a further six months or so you got $1,000 bonus something like that. It was only small but people weren’t really seeing the $1,000 they were seeing it was paid for. Do you know what I mean? … but in saying that they also supported staff in regards to time … they got study time … our service is very big on running traineeships, training and time out, on the floor during work time … again support time during the day to do study.

Our service is offering the managers a fast track through the advanced program. It is only being offered to their current managers at the moment. It will be interesting to
see what happens over say the next course of maybe the next 12 months ... or more than that.

In the centre where I work, those of us that aren’t qualified are encouraged to do our Cert III or our diplomas, so we are actually a very qualified centre compared to a lot in Darwin.

However, despite the support offered by some settings, it was often difficult for educators or carers to maintain the level of commitment required to undertake further study and to juggle work and family lives:

I got support to do TAFE. But the time and energy that it takes to do the advanced diploma and a full time job as well it is so challenging. So now I have put it on the backburner. It was challenging. Family, a full time job, plus your study, it was very intense.

The staff that are studying attend it after hours, so you’ve got to have staff that want to be passionate about it to get that qualification, because yeah, they are all doing it between 6 and 8pm, and 6 and 9pm after work, because there just isn’t the time during work, because you don’t have staff.

Participants indicated that it is critical that employers who do offer study leave support and encourage staff to take up these opportunities provide an appropriate amount of time to do the extra work required in courses:

I think it is hugely more beneficial to have a day or a day and a half off each week to actually sit there and do it.

Our research also highlighted early childhood educators’ lack of knowledge about support organisations in the sector. The following comment by a participant working in support services highlights this issue:

I get a lot of phone calls. That is not my main job description but it does take up 90% of my day. I don’t know whether that is my fault or ... I think it is nice for educators to have an ear, like just for someone to sit there and listen to their frustrations you know. It has been a massive learning journey for me, stepping off the floor as an educator and coming in and getting to know the other side of things. Getting to know the organisations that are available. I honestly did not know about half the organisations that supported educators and that is really sad considering I was working in childcare for 11 years.

The data from early and middle childhood educators and IPSP staff from across Western Australia and the Northern Territory suggests that, with structured, innovative support from employers and the creation of incentives, educators and other professionals would like to participate in further formal education and training. Incentives to undertake further formal qualifications related to early and middle childhood education and management being structured into workplaces, and strong leadership with a focus on supporting the educational needs of employees would strengthen the quality of education and care provided for children and families, and create a more critically reflective workforce within this sector. In addition, further training and information about support organisations in the early and middle childhood sector is required for staff across Western Australia and the Northern Territory.
Professional Employment Issues In The Early And Middle Childhood Sectors
EMPLOYMENT ISSUES IN DARWIN IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

Darwin, and the Northern Territory more generally, have particular issues that pose concerns for the early and middle childhood sector and for other relevant associated professional organizations. An itinerant and seasonal workforce, a high cost of living, and large distances between regions, as well as remote townships, plague Darwin as an employment region and this impacts significantly on the early and middle childhood education sector. Finding suitable staff and keeping them for any great length of time is difficult, with many employees only staying for a few months and using the job as a stepping stone to other options, or as a means of raising money in the short term. Further, the profession is also plagued by poor pay and difficult and demanding working conditions, including long hours. Consequently, the early and middle childhood education sector in Darwin and its surrounding regions often experiences a workforce that is inexperienced, untrained, and unmotivated, with few considering the profession as a career. The participants in the focus groups conducted in Darwin raised this as one of their major concerns, which posed great difficulties for directors and managers in the field in particular, as pointed out in the following comment:

We struggle maintaining staff and we often have to do like I suggested, pull people off the street to come and work for us. So we are terribly under qualified. And once we have someone—the turnover—I don't think I—tell me if I am wrong—12 months would be a good stint to have somebody. Yeah, actually it is more like 3 months.

[It is the same across the Territory] but the childcare sector has particularly struggled ... and this is from my employment services background because of the pay. It is—and in the Territory, I don’t know if you are aware of the cost of living up here but it is gynormous. Compared to Sydney we are expensive. So it an expensive place to live. People who come up tend to be up here for 12 months and they move on. So if they are coming up for 12 months they might try two different places, three different places. It's very seasonal too, so people like coming up in June and staying you know for a few months and they then shoot through.

Consequently, directors and managers of settings are often under great stress having to develop training and workplace strategies to cope with an often untrained, itinerant and insecure workforce. However, it is also stressful for other educators working on the floor who have to deal with problems associated with not having enough staff, especially trained staff, on a daily basis. This poses critical difficulties with children who require additional care and support, especially children with disabilities, as pointed out in the following comment by a focus group participant:

We have a real problem with maintaining staff, so we have to become very good at induction. It needs to be quick and clear...one of the things that we found with disability is um, like trying to engage the community. We have a young lad who is on our books and the mum comes in and does disability awareness training with the workers. But it becomes a bit disheartening when she has to do it every six months. You know, there is no consistency of service. So you almost need to pick your experienced staff to work with that individual but then there is that issue, do you have that person solely working with one child because they are the experienced one or is that trade off too high for the service. So you want that people dealing with all the children. It is very hard for the staff.

In addition to the issues raised above, there were other critical concerns around training and support in remote areas of the Northern Territory raised in the focus groups. ISFs pointed out that it was particularly difficult providing adequate training and support in remote areas, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Participants in this research were committed to ‘closing the gap’—that is, ‘the commitment by all Australian governments to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians, and in particular provide a better future for Indigenous children’ (‘Closing the Gap: The Indigenous Reform Agenda’)—however, educators and other professionals felt remarkably under-resourced to undertake this task. As one participant commented, ‘the gap between white Australian and Aboriginal children is not a gap, it is a grand canyon’. Concerns about the itinerant and unqualified workforce in the early and middle childhood sector in the Northern Territory were also intensified when specialist services were required to support children with additional needs.
Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Culture Within Early And Middle Childhood Sectors
Most (70% of 20 respondents) of the IPSP online survey indicated that they get their information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through the communities in which they live and work. This was followed by gaining information and knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through newspapers (60% out of 20 respondents), then by personal experience (50% of 20 respondents), followed by TV (35% of 20 respondents) and the Internet (35% of 20 respondents). 30% of 20 respondents gained information and knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through university, which was followed by TAFE (15% of 20 respondents). This data suggests that most IPSP staff gain their knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues through their communities, and this does not necessarily refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The results suggest that less IPSP staff are getting their information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues through formal education, and are instead relying on personal experience, and the media to gain knowledge. These sources often reflect cultural biases and stereotypes, rather than encourage a capacity for critical thinking and reflection.

Similar findings were represented within the online survey results for early and middle childhood educators. 68.9% of 74 respondents of the early and middle childhood online survey gained their information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures through their communities in which they live and work. 54.1% of 74 respondents gained their information and knowledge through personal experience, which was followed by the Internet (41.9%), and then by newspapers and magazines (37.8%). Others gained their information from TAFE (20.3%) followed by TV (14.9%), and university (14.9%). The significant difference for early and middle childhood educators in relation to IPSP staff was that more educators relied on the Internet for their information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Similarly, formal education played a lesser role for these early and middle childhood respondents.

A key finding from the focus groups across Western Australia and the Northern Territory was that all educators and professionals working across the early and middle childhood sector need ongoing cultural awareness training around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. While some educators and professionals indicated that they had attended one off training workshops, it was apparent that this was not enough to support the complexity of issues that the sector is addressing. All participants universally requested nuanced and area specific training (given the complexity and diversity that exists across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities). For example, it critical that educators are aware of the different kinship systems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, including the roles of aunties, uncles and grandparents having equally strong roles as caregivers to children as biological parents. A mother’s sister can also be referred to as a child’s ‘mother’ (Butler-Bowden & Nowland, 2003). The care, discipline and home education of a child is not necessarily viewed as the sole responsibility of the parents as is generally the case for contemporary, white, Australian families. Another example includes different understandings of engaging in play. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may be unaccustomed to spending time on their own or engaging in solitary activities. Within reason, Aboriginal and Torres Strait children are not generally stopped from engaging in risky play because they are expected to learn from their mistakes (Butler-Bowden & Nowland, 2003). The responsibility to raise a child may be shared between a range of family members. Without adequate and ongoing training, some educators perpetuate dominant stereotypical discourses circulating about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, despite all good intentions. The use of these stereotypes by educators jeopardises quality childcare and education, and sends questionable key messages to all children and families. For example, some educators were more likely to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as having ‘behaviour management issues’ than other children in their settings.

A major issue highlighted across the focus groups was that educators did not perceive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as ‘bicultural’. There are many children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural backgrounds whose first language is not English, and who may speak more than one
home language, with English being a second, third or fourth language. Additionally, in some cases, using Aboriginal English is important to an Aboriginal person’s identity (Butler-Bowden & Nowland, 2003). Features of Aboriginal English are often linked with traditional Aboriginal languages. In some forms of Aboriginal English, questions are avoided. For example, children may start conversations about topics, or make hints about topic areas about which they would like more information, rather than asking a direct question. Children’s silence or delayed response does not mean that they do not understand, but may be a feature of cultural difference.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families are negotiating often conflicting cultural values and priorities, but these complexities are often not identified and supported within early and middle childhood settings. Inclusion Support Facilitators are often brought in to assist settings when situations have escalated to unmanageable circumstances for educators, if they are called in at all. Providing ongoing, carefully planned training would help to support early and middle childhood educators to effectively include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their settings, and alleviate the workload for ISFs.

Other children and families within early and middle childhood settings also require ongoing and systematic cultural awareness training. It was apparent that educators are constantly witnessing or negotiating issues of racism between children, and with families in their settings. In many cases, research participants reported that issues of racism specifically directed toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families were not effectively managed or recognised by educators within settings. This suggests that educators and other professionals require training around federal (Racial Discrimination Act, 1975) and state and territory anti-discrimination law (Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act, 1996; Western Australia Equal Opportunity Act, 1984) relevant to their state or territory, with a focus on recognising racial vilification, and developing strategies to effectively intervene in this behaviour with children, colleagues and the wider community.

Educators also discussed the difficulty of gaining families’ trust with regard to attending early childhood settings, which was understood as an issue related to Aboriginal communities’ experiences with, or being part of, the ‘stolen generation’. The ‘Stolen generation’ is a term that refers to the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, which was official government policy from 1909 to 1969 (although the practice took place before and after these official dates), and was managed the Aborigines Protection Board (APB). The APB, established in 1909 was a government board with the power to remove children without parental consent and without a court order. Children could be put into an institution or mission dormitory, fostered or adopted. The Bringing Them Home Report: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (1997), found that the practice of forced removal was highly traumatic not only for the children but also for their families. The policy broke important cultural, spiritual and family ties, devastating children, families and communities. Bringing Them Home (1997), found that the policy of forced removal was based on racist assumptions about the benefits that would flow from such policies, and was motivated by the aim of ‘breeding out’ Aboriginality.1 Significantly for this research, the continued impact of this policy has resulted in long-term consequences, for example:

people who were members of the Stolen Generations are more likely to suffer from depression, have worse health and a shorter life span than other Indigenous people, and are more likely to be imprisoned than other Indigenous people. 50% of deaths investigated by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were of Indigenous people who have been removed from their families as children. [...] The impact of the Stolen Generations has also passed on to the families, who suffered the loss of the children, and to the next generation - whose parents were part of the Stolen Generations. (Reconciliation Action Network)
Early and middle childhood educators and other professionals need to be aware of the effects of this policy and subsequent practices on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, which may have in some cases, impacted on attitudes to early and middle childhood services.

Some educators also discussed the difficulty of different understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perceptions of time, and children being left in settings after they had closed. In addition, some families did not understand the payment structure required for childcare services. This suggests the need for community education around early and middle childhood education in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that a shared understanding about time and payment can be effectively communicated between services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Research participants identified complex intersectional identity issues at play for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Some of these issues included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were: differently abled, suffering from ongoing complex health problems, came from same-sex families (and were thus open to racism, homophobia, and rejection from their own communities), foster children, and socio-economically disadvantaged children and families. Some children were identified from at least two, and frequently three of these categories, which educators found difficult to negotiate without adequate and ongoing training and support. One ISF reported the following situation about an Aboriginal child from a same-sex family:

you know [it] happens sometimes with staff and services where you know the child gets a label and that it doesn’t get further investigated. When [completing] a Service Support Plan, there is much more to the child than meets the eye and actually when we unpack – like a child of same sex parents who is also Indigenous. He goes out to the communities quite often for holiday breaks and weekends, so when he comes back he is all over the place and he is very different. He is also attending pre-
school and he is absolutely struggling in the pre-school environment. The children in that classroom, and the feedback the coordinator is getting, is that he is not really being supported either. He is sort of just written off because of the family situation. He is struggling trying to enter a play situation and one of the first times I went out there he was playing basketball with some of the other children and the staff person who hasn’t got a Certificate III yet, so has no qualifications at this point in time, said he can’t play this game. So the child went and sat on the side and sobbed uncontrollably...No one gets it. And like we talked about that with the director and one of the staff that is attending the service. They really [need] to think about the role they are in because it is, yeah, it was very, very difficult.

This situation suggests that education around inclusion, difference and diversity, and undertaking early childhood training more broadly is critical to providing a quality childcare and education environment for all children. In addition, it reveals the complexity of identity, and opportunities for marginalisation experienced by children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that educators need to be skilled enough to negotiate. Further education about intersectional identity, gender and same-sex families would also be of great benefit to early and middle childhood educators.

Research participants identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in remote locations as particularly disadvantaged. One ISF, for whom English was a second language, visiting a setting in remote location commented on how the Aboriginal community felt about communicating in English:

[Many Aboriginal] communities in early childhood settings don’t want to talk in English because they feel afraid, or afraid to make mistakes, so then ... I say look, I am making mistakes all the time and probably, yeah, some people can think that I’m stupid or something like that, but you know, I am ... afraid of that because the way that I have practised and practised every day, um, I will
improve my English. So I think you can do the same, you know, but always I talk with [Aboriginal people] in a very sensitive manner and so soft as well, and the first thing that I do when I visit ... is you know, ask how do you feel today?

This ISF also drew attention to the different understandings of time and communication in some Aboriginal communities, which she handled with care, patience and respect. She commented:

> at the beginning, we just talk five minutes, and then a [lot] of silence and then probably ten minutes later someone says something and then I just start talking, because I don’t want to be asking [too much, or to be] ...impulsive because this is [important]. We are trying to offer professional development, but we are purely mainstream oriented. English is very different ... and also because I think there is a kind of prejudice...for a long time too. And I think that there is some [responsibility] to provide equity as well. If we are you know, just telling [Aboriginal people] okay, here we are and we understand you but you have to do this. You know, it is a contradiction I think. And also [Aboriginal people] are very clever.

This ISF identifies the complexity, and inherent power relations, in offering professional development, in which (white) trainers are frequently positioned as ‘experts’ who share information about a specific topic area with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, who have much of their own wisdom to share. She also identifies the responsibility of ISFs to provide an equitable environment and working relationship with (remote) Aboriginal settings.

Research participants identified the need for settings and organisations to review and update their resources around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Many settings had outdated and consequently inappropriate resources that were no longer useful for educators or children. Such resources included ‘multicultural boxes’ containing outdated toys and storybooks. One participant shared a story of a setting in which ‘multicultural’ resources were mixed up so that Fijian dolls wearing African tribal clothing were passed off as Aboriginal dolls. There were also reports of inappropriate children’s literature featuring Aboriginal characters as subservient, and lacking agency. This suggests that settings and resource libraries need to replace their resources with culturally appropriate material, which is up-to-date. Participants also identified the ways in which such ‘multicultural boxes’ had been borrowed for processes of accreditation, and quickly removed when this process was successfully completed. This suggests that the use of such resources was tokenistic, and more than likely, not integrated into a carefully planned curriculum that effectively engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from other cultures did not have an understanding of contemporary Aboriginal culture. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children understood themselves as ‘people who lived in the past’, without a clear present and a clear future. In some cases, this was echoed in the lack of contemporary and innovative resources, teaching strategies, and training around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures being accessed by early and middle childhood settings. Research participants also identified the necessity of systematically and thoughtfully integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues across the curriculum, rather than celebrating Aboriginal/multicultural days in isolation, which research participants identified as ‘tokenistic’.
In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set specific targets for ‘Closing the Gap’ between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and other Australian children. Targets relevant to this research include:

- To halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade.
- To ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities within five years.
- To halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade.

Two of the ‘building blocks’ COAG identifies to work towards these goals are ‘Early Childhood’ and ‘Schooling’.

Within the context of the Northern Territory, the territory government has committed to the following targets within Early Childhood:

- Services to improve the skills of families and to educate young people about pregnancy, birth and parenting including through ongoing funding of playgroups.
- Continuation of the operation of the nine crèches established under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and capital funding to finish construction of one crèche and to provide upgrades to two existing crèches.

It is critical that early and middle childhood educators and other professionals commit to education and training around these important issues to positively impact the lives of all children, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.
Multiculturalism In Early And Middle Childhood Settings
67.1% of 73 respondents in the early and middle childhood online survey received their information about issues of ethnicity and cultural background from the community, and personal experience. 49.3% of 73 respondents gained their information and knowledge through the Internet, followed by 41.1% who gained knowledge through newspapers and magazines, followed by TAFE (32.9%), and then TV (21.9% of 73 respondents). Less educators receive their information from more formal education, with 20.5% of 73 respondents gaining their knowledge through university.

70% of 20 respondents for the online IPSP survey received their information about issues of ethnicity and cultural background from their communities and through newspapers and magazines equally. 60% of respondents relied on personal experience, TV (55%), followed by university (40%), and the Internet (35%). The least number of respondents (15%) identified TAFE as the source of their knowledge about ethnicity and cultural diversity.

The data suggests that IPSP staff are more reliant on newspapers and magazines as a source of information in this area, while early and middle childhood educators rely on the communities in which they live and work, and personal experience. Personal experience and media play a significant role as sources of information in comparison to formal education around issues of ethnicity and cultural background across the sector. As noted throughout this report, the lack of sourcing such information through formal education can result in a lack of reflexivity and cultural bias around these issues.

PERTH

Western Australia has an estimated resident population of 2.29 million as of 30th June 2010 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). This was an increase of 276,400 (13.7%) since 2005. Almost three-quarters (74.0%) of the state’s population resided in Perth in June 2010, increasing by 210,200 people since June 2005 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In more recent years, Western Australia has seen an increase in diversity with regard to the multiculturalism experienced in the city and surrounding regions. Although a large proportion of Western Australian residents were born in Australia, 27% (530,500, according to 2006 data) of Western Australian residents reported that they were born overseas. Western Australia had the highest proportion of overseas-born residents of all states and territories and compares to 22% for Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Perth had the highest proportion of its resident population born overseas (31%, according to 2006 data), followed by the South West (17%) and Lower Great Southern region (17%). The Kimberley SD had the lowest proportion of its population born overseas (7.8%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

Perth also has a significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population estimated at 15% of the Australian Aboriginal population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Immigrants have largely come from Europe, South Africa, and more recently from South East Asia and India. Participants in the Perth focus group raised some important issues around the inclusion of children and families from cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in early and middle childhood education. Concerns were raised about a failure to move beyond superficial inclusion and ‘touristic’ or tokenistic educational approaches to cultural diversity. Practices identified by participants tended to reinforce cultural stereotypes and not fully engage with the potential depth of learning about difference that is possible in multicultural contexts. The following Perth participant raised some critical issues:

I just think that it’s important to have everybody feel as though they belong. We obviously have parents of different cultures ... and I think that there is a lot that is going unnoticed. There are a lot of barriers there that we are just not recognising and there is a lot more that could be incorporated within our service. We don’t have a huge range of diversity in different cultures but we have got a few different cultures. Um, but it is mainly Asian culture. I just don’t think we sort of get enough value from – for everybody, the children and us as well, to be able to learn. I feel as though I am not learning enough, I am not learning enough ...so we just go on our merry way doing what we do ... and it is not enough, you know (Perth participant).
Multicultural days / picnics were the most common practices around inclusion in the settings in which the participants worked. These days included inviting children and their families to wear their national dress and to bring along traditional foods from their cultures to share with others. However, these activities do little to challenge the dominant and powerful position of the dominant culture in settings, or challenge stereotypes and biases held by children, staff and families through critical thinking discussions, or encourage more inclusive practices that fully include and result in a sharing of that power and privilege with other cultures. Participants identified feeling frustrated about how to move beyond superficial and tokenistic approaches to the inclusion of different cultures, as the following comments show:

We have had the multicultural day and now we are all sort of warm and friendly to each other, but...let’s go back to what we always do, you know—that is a major challenge. I don’t know what to do - I mean, that is what this project is about.

I think educating the staff to not take on stereotypes as well. One of the staff I felt was doing that. I had to think about how to deal with it...for me it is ... thinking outside the square really.

Both of these participants point out that educators need to 'think outside the square' to develop practices that are more fully inclusive than current practices. ‘Thinking outside the square’ requires more depth of understanding of the way that exclusion operates in settings and in communities more generally. Another educator working in support services raised the following concerns about current practices in some settings:

I get hundreds of calls about multicultural calendars. Everyone wants a multicultural calendar. I am thinking, well that’s fantastic that you want to celebrate these wonderful days but why are you celebrating, what happens when it is over, you know, why are you celebrating Chinese New Year ... let’s have a think about why you are doing the multicultural calendar. What do you do every day to involve these children and these families?

Educators have become increasingly aware of the benefits of including grandparents in early and middle childhood education. Grandparents are often carers of grandchildren while children’s parents are at work and they often have more time to support early and middle childhood education programs in their grand children’s settings than children’s parents. Grandparents are therefore an important human resource in children’s early education, with a myriad of historical and traditional cultural stories based on their lives to share. Once again, to move beyond tokenism, and to fully include what grandparents from different cultures have to share, educators need to ‘think outside the square’ to develop more effective educational strategies for their inclusion. The following comment by a focus group participant raises concerns around current practices in her setting:

We had grandparents day and it was nice ... the children loved it... but that is not enough ... there is not enough coming out of it for me. I have worked in aged care and I have done home care and I know that talking to people that have lived a long life, they have got a lot to tell you.

Another participant commented:

We invite grandparents to the centre. It is mainly because they can really provide a lot of support to us; we have got so many grandparents. One of the grandparents came in last week to help out; she tells me that she has two degrees, one a Masters; and she was telling me, oh I started when my husband passed away and then we started talking more. You get to know all of these stories... it is very, very interesting. I was very happy that she accepted my invitation personally and then she got engaged with the children, talked to them...our centre is one of the most multicultural centres in Perth and she said I wanted my grandchild to come here because when she grows up she will mix with different cultures and a range of children you know from different backgrounds.
Another pointed out the benefits for children:

It is so exciting to see children playing with adults from different cultural backgrounds and go why are you doing that? You know, and then they talk about it... in the old days... I mean they are kind of learning about the logic about what another culture does. It is quite amazing to see.

DARWIN

Darwin is a small capital city in comparison with others in Australia, with an estimated resident population of 229,700 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In the five years to June 2010, the NT’s population increased by 23,300 people or 11.3%—an average of 2.2% per year compared to 1.8% for Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Its population is largely from Anglo-Celtic and European backgrounds, with a growing multi-ethnic immigration base including people from China, the Philippines, Indonesia, East Timor, Vietnam and India. Darwin has the highest proportional population of Aboriginal people of an Australian Capital city, who were the first inhabitants of the Greater Darwin area. Participants in the Darwin focus groups raised a number of critical issues associated with the education and inclusion of children and their families from CALD backgrounds. These participants identified similar issues around inclusion that were acknowledged by Perth participants, including the need to move beyond superficial and tokenistic practices around cultural inclusion that reinforced stereotypes. However, participants highlighted a number of different practice-based issues associated with cultural diversity and behaviour management problems.

Participants in the Darwin focus group pointed out educators’ perceptions and expectations of children’s behaviours could shift across different cultural groups. Stereotypes and prejudices associated with different cultural groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, often underpinned educators’ practices when dealing with young children’s behaviours, as pointed out in the following comment by an ISF:

One of the things that we have noticed at the moment is, and I have since I’ve been here, is the different cultures in our centre and the different expectations of behaviour of those different cultures and how we deal with that in a behaviour management framework. Um, just there’s been some major conflicts – when I say major, some difficulties for staff in knowing what is acceptable behaviour and what is not and trying not to be prejudiced in the way that we are dealing with people. I am very conscious of that but actually I like being on the ground because I get to see that first hand and when I catch it happening myself, I am thinking they need some cultural awareness training from us, but also knowing what our responsibility is in supporting the children, to understand how they actually fit into the Australian culture. So I think that’s one of the big areas that we are struggling with at the moment.

The same participant was reflective about her own practices around cultural stereotypes and prejudices and was confronted by some of her own personal feelings. When asked about whether staff took their personal stereotypes and prejudices into their workplaces, she commented:

Maybe, maybe not ... for myself I have never dealt with a certain culture before moving to Darwin. And so I had no expectations. Well I really don’t believe I did. And when I saw the effect on staff as well it was sort of a really big, big flip into reality, Oh, yeah, okay, there you go. And um, I am not sure what to do with it.

What was particularly important about one Inclusion Support Facilitator’s story was the acknowledgement that young children are well aware of the prejudicial treatment that they receive from educators. This may influence the way they continue to behave. Further, her comments reflected how young children equally take up the prejudices and engage in the power relations associated with cultural norms in their own cultural backgrounds and play these out in their own behaviours, in this case, gendered power relations:
Um, with one lad I know he thinks he is in trouble for nothing before he even comes up to me. So I already picked the fact that he knows that there’s – we’ve labelled – like I think that he is aware of that. I haven’t asked him…Look I am at the point where I will sit down and have a chat and sort of say, how are you going with the [child’s name] …they are struggling because this is where we come in – you know, like – a lot of it is about the disrespect for the educators, there is more respect for men than there is for women and because we have got lots of female staff, we are struggling with that.

Gender behavioural issues were raised by several of the participants in the Darwin focus group. However, they pointed out that current strategies to deal with gendered power relations were inadequate, failing to challenge the inequalities that children reinforce in their behaviours:

Definitely there is a gender issue. And so you know we are putting in strategies like only getting the males to deal with those kids is a short-term thing. But it is not sustainable really. We don’t think that that is quite right. There is no easy fix is there? It is just making it easier to deal with. It is a cop out. Yeah an absolute cop out.

The following story outlines a critical incident relayed by one of the Darwin participants. It highlights the problems that can arise when educators are unskilled and untrained in the area of cultural diversity and inclusion and when settings have inadequate processes and policies in place. It also raises concerns about the impact of such practices on the social, emotional and educational experiences and outcomes, as well as the wellbeing, of the young children who are in need of this type of support:

[In one place I visited there was a boy who was seen as having behavioural issues; he wouldn’t respond to anyone. I realised the child spoke French, so I said] Okay is there anyone who speaks French? No one did so I dug really, really deep, 20 years back, you know, and tried to dig up a few French words … and instantly the recognition in the child’s face and it went from there, throwing a few words around, you know, and that’s the best I could muster. Ha, ha. But previously it went from doing that and doing a bit of home corner and stuff and the child aimlessly walking around with no recognition.

And there was another child from a Chinese background. I said, oh what is the child’s language? Because, it could be anything from Mandarin, like heaps of options there. They [the early childhood setting] say ‘oh we don’t know’. And that was about three months ago, so they still haven’t managed to find out about that. Last time I visited I went in with [person’s name] and there was no one there – no one available when appointments had been made. So it was not recognised as overly important because the director was off sick I think on the day and the second in charge was unaware of the issue.

We actually did up two or three sets of cultural support plans for those children... I still haven’t received them back signed. I sent them out for the service to sign, you know, and they must have read it because it was stamped received on it, so I know they got it, but none of the staff, actually the three staff I refer to were (a) not aware of cultural support plans and the process…and (b) none of the staff actually knew which child it was referring to. So that then the question came up, oh well, no oh ... Oh well I can’t, I usually don’t work like that because it was kind of confidential. And I said, look you know, I am not sure ...I threw a few names around and one said oh yeah that rings a bell...I think it was that child. And oh, oh, does she only speak French? Oh I wasn’t aware of that. You think how much is the child actually talking? You wonder about that whole being, belonging and becoming stuff, you know. You think, you know, how much chance has the child of being able to develop ... it just pains you, just listening to all this and you actually see it happening, you think, oh my gosh, you know, this poor child, you know, how does the day go for this child? What kind of relationships has this child been able to build, you know. And then there was this note and oh well ... what the child is saying, you know, not understanding what the child is saying, but ... oh well we will just repeat what the child says and ... I am unhappy. I am unhappy.
The issues identified above indicate that early and middle childhood education settings need to have policies and procedures in place so as to prevent the possibility of such incidents happening in their workplaces. The policies and procedures need to address: more positive communication between relevant staff that acknowledges the child’s right to confidentiality; clearer communication channels between ISFs and educators in early and middle childhood education settings; greater responsibility for completing official procedural requirements that move cases forward; more education and training of educators on the floor to be able to recognise children’s language differences and potential linguistic problems and respond more appropriately - rather than mimicking incoherently a child’s language; more education and training around what are perceived as behaviour management issues in children (which may actually be cultural and linguistic differences that require careful attention and skilled negotiation) and how to handle these problems more effectively; and the need for more education and training around cultural awareness.

As in the Perth focus group, issues associated with children from refugee backgrounds were also raised in the Darwin focus group. Similar issues were identified including the need for staff education and training around the socio-cultural, political and geographical contexts from which refugees have come, cultural awareness, as well as around the issues they face in new countries. Without this education and training children from refugee backgrounds could be further lost in the system, undermining their social, emotional and physical well being further. As the following comment points out, policy and procedure is critical in this area:

In the northern suburbs there are actually a lot of children from humanitarian and refugee backgrounds. Um, and when we went in to this place none of the staff knew ... there were two staff in the office you know, one after the other came and said ... who is looking after those children?
Refugee Children In Early And Middle Childhood Settings
72.2% of 18 respondents from the online IPSP survey received their information about refugee children and families through the communities in which they worked and lived. This was followed closely by newspapers and magazines (66.7%), then TV (55.6%), and the Internet (38.9%). 33.3% of respondents indicated that they gained their information about refugees from university (33.3%) followed by personal experience (16.7%), then TAFE (11.1%). Significantly, this data suggests that IPSP staff have less personal experience interacting with refugee families. Most people sourced their information from the communities in which they lived and the media, rather than formal education.

50.7% of 71 respondents within the online early and middle childhood education survey gained their information about refugees from the communities in which they worked and lived. This was followed by newspapers and magazines (43.7%), the Internet (42.3%), and TV (36.6%). Personal experience accounted for 33.8%, followed by TAFE (11.3%), and university (9.9%). This data is similar to the IPSP data, which reveals that information about refugees is mainly gathered from the communities in which people work or reside, and the media. While early childhood educators had more personal experience of refugee children than IPSP staff, both cohorts had less formal education about refugee populations and issues. The data from both cohorts suggests that early and middle childhood educators and IPSP staff require more formal education around refugee issues, rather than relying word of mouth in their communities, and also on the potential biases inherent in media representations.

Research participants in the focus groups from the Northern Territory and Western Australia identified the prevalence of children from refugee backgrounds attending early and middle childhood settings. In recent years there has been an increase in African Sudanese refugees settling in Perth, as in other cities and regions in Australia. Refugees, both adults and children, arriving from troubled homelands, have often experienced severe trauma, and as a consequence and require considerable support to settle into their new homelands. Refugee children and their families can experience isolation, racism, and marginalisation in this process of resettlement. Participants observed that children from war zones, or children who have been in Australian detention centres, generally require additional care and that many settings are ill-equipped and ill-prepared to cater for the needs of distressed children.

Best practice around education for refugee children indicates that not only do refugee children need to adapt to their new environments, but early and middle childhood educators and other children also need to adapt to include the refugee child (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen & Frater-Mathieson, 2004). This requires a willingness from early and middle childhood educators to make changes for the benefit of these children. These changes might include revisions of current policies, procedures and practices and the increase in educators’ professional development within this area. There is currently limited research on grief and refugee children in educational settings, despite these settings playing a critical role in the adjustment and mental health of these children (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). Children’s responses to trauma are varied, complex, profound and often culturally inflected. Refugee children and their families are not all a uniform group; each individual will respond to re-settlement differently depending on variables, which include: supportive social and cultural related networks, developmental differences, socio-economic status, and the degree of trauma and loss experienced (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). Such supportive measures are essential for developing resilience in young children’s lives. Challenges for educators include language difficulties, differences in learning styles and educational experiences, cultural differences, and a lack of resources amongst many refugee families. Integrating refugee children within the setting requires targeted resources and additional professional development around these issues in order to develop their knowledge and expertise in this area.

Participants commented on their lack of knowledge, and the lack of knowledge in the sector more broadly, about the particular war zones and ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the children and families. As pointed out in the following comment by a Perth focus group participant, educators need more education and training in understanding the socio-cultural, political and geographical contexts from which these refugees come from:
In the last few years we have been having more African Sudanese arrivals. And you get to know them but it is always a challenge for carers to understand the culture... the staff need to get the sort of education and training to get to know these countries as well.

One educator from the Out of School Hours sector expressed her concern with managing the views of male school aged children from a refugee background attending her service, whose attitudes to his female carers was informed by the religious beliefs and atrocities (organised rape and genocide) the child had witnessed in his country of birth. Educators in early childhood settings expressed their concern with language and cultural barriers experienced by children, and the difficulty of negotiating this with children who have lost their parents, given the lack of consistency with many of the family environments in which these children reside.

Educators and Inclusion Support Facilitators expressed their desire for ongoing education and support about the socio-political context of the refugee children attending their settings, and also, the best ways to support traumatised children, who had often lost family members in the context of war.
Children With Additional Needs And Their Families In Early Atnd Middle Childhood Settings
62.9% of 70 respondents within the early and middle childhood online survey gain information and knowledge about disability from personal experience. 58.6% of 70 respondents gained their knowledge from the community, followed by the Internet (58.6% of 70 respondents), then newspapers and magazines (37.1% of 70 respondents). 34.3% of 70 respondents gained their information and knowledge through TAFE (34.3% of 70 respondents), followed by university (24.3%), and TV (17.1% of 70 respondents). It is significant that early and middle childhood educators gain little information about disability from TV, given that there is minimal representation of people with additional needs featured on this medium.

75% of 20 respondents within the IPSP online survey received their information about people with disabilities through the communities in which they lived and worked. 65% of 20 respondents gained their information and knowledge through newspapers and magazines, then the Internet (45% of 20 respondents) and personal experience (45% of 20 respondents), and TV (35% of 20 respondents). 30% of the 20 respondents received their information about people with disabilities from university (30%), which was followed by TAFE (20% of 20 respondents). These results suggest that IPSP staff rely on the communities in which they live and work, which differs slightly to educators who rely first on personal experience, and then their interactions with community members. Formal educational pathways are not the main avenues through which educators or IPSP staff gain their information about the disability sector.

This data suggests that early childhood educators have more personal experience of working with children with disabilities and their families than IPSP staff. Media (such as newspapers, magazines and the Internet) plays a huge role as a source of information for early and middle childhood professionals and IPSP staff. Significantly, TV plays a lesser role for both cohorts as a source of information due to the minimal televisual representation of people with disabilities.

THE INCLUSION AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM (IPSP) PROGRAM IN CONTEXT

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) program is an Australian Government program that supports the inclusion and professional development needs of eligible child care services. One of the key elements of this program is the Inclusion Support Program (ISP). This program funds Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) and the National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider (NISSP) to support childcare services to improve access and inclusion for children with additional needs. Within the ISP, Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) working in regionally based Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs), support eligible child care services to include all children, including those from the IPSP priority groups.

ISFs play a key role in supporting child care services to develop Service Support Plans (SSPs). The SSP is a planning tool that addresses the service’s current capacity to include all children, including those with additional or high support needs. The SSP is a prerequisite to applications for a number of funded supports available through the IPSP program, including the Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS). The SSP must accompany an application for ISS.

The ISS is paid to support child care services so they can include children with ongoing high support needs in care environments with typically developing peers. In centre based child care services, the ISS is a contribution towards the costs associated with employing an additional educator. The ISS is limited to a flat hourly rate, which is determined by the Department and is indexed annually. Eligibility requirements and subsidy limits apply. Subsidy limits will differ depending on the service type.

The additional educator is employed as an extra member of the team, to share the daily team responsibilities to ensure that all children can access and participate in all aspects of the program. It is inappropriate for the additional educator employed through ISS, or any educator, to only work with a child with ongoing high support needs in a one-to-one capacity, and to the exclusion of
other children or educators in the care environment. It is the services’ responsibility to ensure that the additional educator is employed according to the appropriate industrial laws and that ISS funds are used for approved purposes.

CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES: VOICES FROM THE EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD SECTOR

In the focus groups, some IPSP staff commented that their time is dominated by the priority groups (particularly children with additional needs), and assisting settings with their applications for funding. Most ISFs commented that there is not enough adequate funding to support the current needs of children with disabilities in early and middle childhood settings across Western Australia and the Northern Territory. While adequate funding is an ongoing issue for early and middle childhood settings, ISFs identified this dominant discourse, which is all too frequently mobilised as an excuse by some settings to refuse admission to children who may have additional needs. Some ISFs linked inadequate funding with some settings that discriminate against children with additional needs, with regard to their use of language, and also with excluding children from their settings:

Having worked in private school care and disability, I don’t think that there is enough funding for an educator to work specifically with that child [with additional needs]. I think that it is very poor, the funding that they get. And so these children, you know, I mean, $15 something an hour so you’ve got, you know, the only person you can employ is—without topping up the rate for that amount of money doesn’t have the skills and experience to be... able to assist the child adequately...Services say um, it costs us money to have these children, that is what they are called “these children”, and that is our challenge.

This comment suggests that some educators require further training around how to effectively support and include children with additional needs in their settings. In addition, this comment also indicates that some educators need further professional development around the use of inclusive language, and respectful communication with families.

Another major issue identified by ISFs in the focus groups included the difficulties associated with the funding model, which ISFs and educators thought was contradictory in its focus. Participants commented that while the Service Support Plan is focused around a child care services’ needs, an Inclusion Support Subsidy is attached to supporting a particular child with a disability, rather than funding a service so as to assist in increasing their capacity to include all children. One ISF commented:

It is a real big issue for us. At the moment, the funding contradicts itself because the program ... the disability program is not funded to support environments, so looking at the team and what the team needs to be able to work effectively to make it an environment for all the children is difficult to effectively communicate to centres. The funding is tied to a specific child ... I was having that conversation with someone yesterday and about funding for a specific child; the funding is not just to work with that child, the funding is to work with, to increase the ratio so that there are more people to work, but the funding is still linked to the child’s name and ... you know, it is not adequate funding a lot of the time—the government core contribution—so there are lots of limitations. I think it is a really, really difficult shift to go from spending hours, hours on an application for a specific child and then thinking that’s actually for a whole group of children. It is completely ineffective but I think the real issue is the ratio as well.

This ISF raises difficult issues around the contradictory discourses ISFs have to negotiate and communicate to early childhood settings in relation to children with additional and/or high support needs, and developing and maintaining an inclusive environment for all children. The focus on an inclusive environment for all children focuses on the needs and goals of the early or middle childhood educators, rather than locating the child as “the problem”. However, to secure funding, settings
are required to link their application to individual children with additional needs, which is perceived by the sector as communicating mixed messages.

While supporting settings to apply for funding to assist their environments to become more inclusive is critical, some ISF’s noted that their time was more frequently spent assisting services to support children to whom funding was attached. One of the implications for this is that other children who were being excluded (not attached to a funding model) in settings were less of a priority, or not a priority at all. This occurred in multiple ways. Either ISFs had all or most of their time taken up by assisting settings to complete applications for funding, and felt that they did not have enough time to attend to other children who were being excluded, or settings were not identifying other children who could benefit from the assistance of an ISF. One ISF commented:

It does become very frustrating for us. Children who need bicultural support, [or] children from Aboriginal backgrounds, they [early childhood educators] sort of say “oh he’s fine, he is coping well”, because they are not always attached to funding for the service. I suppose understanding or knowledge that those children also might need extra support [is critical for educators], or they might need to access what’s available in the community for children from different backgrounds to have a good experience in the service.

This observation by an ISF identifies other children who could benefit from inclusion support strategies, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from different cultural backgrounds. This observation suggests that some educators might need support identifying and supporting diversity and difference in their settings, and developing and implementing inclusive strategies that are not dependent on an external funding model.

ISF’s and educators in the focus groups commented on a dominant discourse in which some educators have lower expectations of children with disabilities, which affects the quality of care and education they offer, or affects their decision to enrol a child with a disability in their setting. One ISF commented:

We should be actually saying, you know, this is the norm and I hate that word, but we’ve got to have some measure ... bar – this is the norm and this is where we should be heading, this is what we should be expecting from everyone and I mean disabled, intellectually disabled people, physically disabled people can still aim towards a bar. Look at so many people who have achieved huge things, but if we lower our expectations for disabled people then that’s where they end up; they are not going to end up achieving huge things.

Similarly, another ISF commented:

Rather than having the expectation up here, or that the learning outcome that I wanted is moderate/high... you know if I put it lower down, you know, that sort of, that equals less effort. And in some peoples’ minds you just have to provide, I guess, fewer tools and put in less time, or you know, facilitate less.

These comments suggest that establishing goals with families and children with additional needs is significant to the progress and experience children have in their settings. With regard to communicating with families, one ISF commented:

A lot [of parents have children] who are dealing with an intellectual disability were protectively saying, my kid is going to reach expectations that ... like I don’t want to set my child up to fail. I’ve heard that so much, I don’t want to set my child up to fail, and what that does...it lowers the expectations.

This observation, and the comments above demonstrate the difficulty some educators and ISF’s experience around employing appropriate language and ideological frameworks around difference and diversity, especially in relation to children with additional needs.
Other participants in the focus groups commented on the difficulties associated with the current funding model and what was perceived by the sector as segregation. One ISF commented:

You know, the government spends all this money in the disability area, on specialist programs and specialist therapists and specialist agencies, separating disability even further. There is very little in mainstream to support access to mainstream services where children with additional needs might be going to child care, or at school. And, at least there is funding directed to younger children, then they [children with additional needs and their families] are left for dead [in relation to funding] when they get older.

This observation suggests that while funding for younger children is not ideal, there are at least some initiatives in place to suggest younger children with additional needs and their families, whereas older children with additional needs and their families are offered less financial support. In addition, this comment suggests that further funding to include children in mainstream early and middle childhood settings is required to provide further options for families who may not choose to send their child to a speciality setting.
Action Research Project
Case Studies
Research participants in this project undertook action research projects based on topic areas around diversity, difference and inclusion that both interested them, and were also directly relevant to their employment position and practice. Research participants were supported by the chief investigators of this research to choose a topic of research directly related to their employment, with the aim of increasing their knowledge and skills in this area, and critically, to improve their practice. They were also supported in the research design and implementation phase, in addition to participating in facilitated critical discussions about how their enhanced knowledge could be implemented at both the levels of policy and practice. Research participants primarily worked in their own time to conduct research, and worked tirelessly on their projects throughout the research process. Most participants found juggling their time and research commitments difficult, with participants encountering varied levels of support from employers to conduct and complete their projects. As stated throughout this report, educators, IPSP staff, and other professionals greatly benefit from employer incentives to be involved in further education, research and training. While greater numbers of early childhood educators began action research projects, most dropped out of the process due to a lack of time and employer support to participate in such a process. More IPSP staff began and completed their action research projects, which may be due to their higher levels of education and more flexibility in their working conditions than early childhood educators.
Researcher: Belinda Pool

Project title:
Children with high support needs living in out of home care attending Children’s Services.

State or Territory in which the research was conducted:
Western Australia

Key research questions:
What can Inclusion Support Facilitators do to support children’s services to include children with high support needs who are living in out of home care?

Methodology employed (i.e. number of focus groups, interviews, surveys completed, target audience, eg. early childhood educators):
The target audience for this research were directors of children’s services, which currently or recently included children with high support needs who were living in out of home care.

Inclusion Support Facilitators
- Reviewed the services to determine who would be invited to participate.
- Planned to complete three interviews with Directors of Children’s Services.

Summary of key findings:
- Foster family children settle into early childhood settings better than children living in the group home;
- The communication and information received from the Department for Child Protection (DCP) was at times inadequate in terms of assisting educators in early childhood settings;
- Disclosure of information about the child from DCP could be more comprehensive to support the educators to include the children;
- Transitions for children to visits could be better planned so that the educators are able to support and prepare children for this transition. There are many people involved in visits including: prison managers, families and DCP. Therefore the educators are often informed at the last minute of a visit for the child; and
- Educators had the most success when they worked together to support the inclusion of children.

The two interviews I was unable to complete were with directors who appeared to be very stressed. Both educators cried when I saw them as a result of the many other stresses in their personal and professional lives. I did not push for them to complete the interviews as it was not appropriate considering how they were feeling.

Both services that could not complete the interviews had excluded children within the past 6 months.

Please list any challenges you experienced undertaking your research project:
The opportunity for director’s to participate in this research project was a considerable challenge. They changed appointments on numerous occasions, and at times the potential to reschedule meetings was restricted due to the completion of the project.

The time commitment required to participate in the project was also a challenge as this was required within a very busy workload. If I and the other participants had a reduced workload during the period of the project the action research could have been more comprehensive.
Please list the benefits you experienced by undertaking this research project:

The group sessions provided the opportunity to learn more about action research and in particular how to incorporate it into our individual contexts. The opportunity to share with the other research participants allowed us to learn from each other’s successes and challenges.

In addition, the project promoted my interest in action research with a view to participate in it again in the future. The project in general provided opportunities for reflection of our service delivery in a range of diversity and difference topics.

Following participation in the project, the opportunity to incorporate more discussion with peers and educators around a broader range of diversity, difference and inclusion issues affecting individuals has already presented. I was able to incorporate broad discussions with educators and they were able to review some diversity and difference issues they had previously not explored.

What are three key recommendations you would make to the early and middle childhood sector to improve diversity, difference and inclusion?

1. **Relationships:**
   **Children, Families, Carers and Guardians,**
   Develop relationships with children, families, carers and guardians and respectfully get to know as much as you can about them. In addition share a little about yourself with them. This will strengthen your relationship and enable you to ensure high quality inclusion for all in your community.

2. **Communities**
   Engage with the community of your service. Learn the history and cultures of the community and incorporate this into your curriculum.

3. **Agencies and Organisations**
   Develop relationships with all relevant agencies and organisations, which influence the inclusion of children, families, carers and guardians, within and outside your community. These relationships will support you to be “inclusion ready” for all within your community.
**Researcher:** Gloria Hackett

**Project title:**
Supporting early and middle childhood professionals to gain a deeper understanding of children’s mental health and well being needs

**State or Territory in which the research was conducted:**
Northern Territory

**Key research questions:**
How can early and middle childhood professionals be better supported to gain a deeper understanding of what they require in order to identify, nurture and more successfully respond to children’s mental health and wellbeing needs?

**Methodology employed (i.e. number of focus groups, interviews, surveys completed, target audience, eg. early childhood educators):**
In the beginning of this project, the research was just going to entail a questionnaire but through trials on this tool with work colleagues, I discovered that answers opened up discussion for more questions. In realising that I would have missed this essential part of gathering information and opportunities for an open-ended approach, I modified my methodology for this project. As a result my approach to the research was through recorded/taped interviews with the permission of the service and the educators who participated.

Focused on Educators in the Long Day Care (LDC) and Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) environments. Initially, this was going to include the Directors/Coordinators in these settings but it would have been too time consuming and the questions were mainly targeted towards educators who worked directly with the children on a regular basis.

Interviews completed included group leaders from the babies, toddlers and 3-5 rooms of one LDC setting, and two educators from one OSHC setting.

**Summary of key findings:**
Educators agreed that mental health is still seen as a stigma in our society today. Educators didn’t really think about children as possibly having mental health needs or to use the term mental health in the same sentence as children. However, when this was discussed during the interview, some of the educators identified that children do of course have mental health needs. Two of the educators interviewed didn’t make a link with children’s mental health being related to challenging behaviours, or factors in the home environment that could impact on children’s wellbeing.

Educators were prompted to think differently about children’s mental health needs and we talked about the EYLF’s role in nurturing this. Educators did agree that having connected relationships were important for children’s wellbeing and sense of belonging. 60% of the staff interviewed were not able to give sufficient examples of all the questions asked on their knowledge of the children in their care. Educators were not aware of what information was available in the community on mental health, and did not know how to access information about mental health. The opportunity to re-interview those staff again would be interesting to see what changes, if any, have taken place in their settings as a result of the interviews.

Educators reflected on the importance of meeting children’s social and emotional needs more successfully by gathering more information from families. Educators began using the Belonging, Being and Becoming (from the Early Years Learning framework) with a more purposeful focus on meeting children’s mental health needs.
Please list any challenges you experienced undertaking your research project:

Due to the interview times of 30-40 minutes it was a challenge to get services on board with the project. Through our bimonthly newsletter, I encouraged more involvement from services and invited any interested services in the NT to participate. It was difficult to work in around the staff times and services being understaffed delayed the project. My own work schedule also highly increased very unexpectedly due to my manager’s sudden illness and having to fulfil two roles at the same time for most of the beginning of this year.

Please list the benefits you experienced by undertaking this research project:

- I can effectively contribute to conversations relating to children’s mental health needs.
- My own knowledge of what resources are available has increased in this area and not only includes the immediate community, but also very helpful websites from around the globe.
- My relationship with the facilitator of the Kidsmatten project for Early childhood has grown and we share discussions and current resources on mental health.
- Before this project I felt that I had a very good knowledge of reflective practice but I learned a lot more than that. It’s not just reflecting but also putting your reflections to use for it to be useful, rather than revisiting a subject repeatedly and never putting the results of your previous thoughts, conversations or increased knowledge of the last time it was visited to use. It’s not that I haven’t used my reflections previously but sometimes the most challenging situations or really big picture challenges can seem too daunting to work with but in actual fact, to record your new reflections and actually using and putting these into practice, the outcomes of your reflections regardless of how big or how small, can create and or improve change.
- The plays are an excellent tool to engage in discussion with the educators. It’s a very non-intrusive way of getting a message across and because most participants can be characters in the play it really assists participants to not hold back from speaking and sharing their thoughts on the scenes and the attitudes of characters in the play.
- The development of this play has supported me to develop a play with another group I work with. I have skills to develop a new play that we will use to work with families on child and parent interactions.

What are three key recommendations you would make to the early and middle childhood sector to improve diversity, difference and inclusion?

1. We are in discussions with Child Australia to be able to continue to use these plays with services to increase their knowledge and skills, in particular with diversity, difference and inclusion. In my work as the ISA coordinator, I would be strongly recommending that whole services (all the staff as teams attend these workshops and give sound reasons for the benefits of such workshops).
2. I would recommend that educators attend mental health workshops and share their increased knowledge with their teams in staff meetings, reconsider their philosophy and policies and procedures to be inclusive of mental health. This would increase their openness about mental health and provide resources for staff, families and children. This also means supporting educators and families who may also have mental health needs and to appropriately respond to this. Discuss as a team how to remove the stigma from your community through their program.
3. Use reflective practice well during your critical reflections and give staff time to research what reflective practice means individually and what it looks like in a team and measuring and revisiting this regularly.
**Researcher:** Hayley Cann

**Project title:**
Barriers to Inclusion Support Subsidy funding for the inclusion of children with speech and language delay/disorder.

**State or Territory in which the research was conducted:**
Perth East Metro and Midlands: Balcatta to York including rural parts of South West Australia Jurien Bay, Dalwallinu, Moora, Wongan Hills, Muckinbudin, Merredin, Goomalling, Gingin, Toodyay, Merredin, Cunderdin, Bruce Rock, Quairading.

**Key research questions:**

**Child Care Services**
1. At enrolment how do you find out if a child has Speech and Language difficulties or is attending therapy (SALT)?
2. What barriers do you face to gain this information?
3. How do you keep updated on children’s SALT development?
4. How do you include children with SALT difficulties?
5. Who can you ask for help to include these children?
6. How do you support your families?
7. Can you get ISS funding for a child with SALT difficulties?

**Speech and Language Services**
1. How do you know where a child attends Long Day Care (LDC)?
2. Are you able to inform LDC of a child with SALT difficulties?
3. How do you inform them or gain information on a child in LDC?
4. Do you visit children in LDC?
5. What benefits do you see of collaborative working with LDC?
6. What barriers to you see of collaborative working with LDC?

**DSC and DCP Services**
1. How do you keep LDC informed of children under your care?
2. How informed are you of a specific child’s additional needs?
3. Are you aware of any LDC who specialise in supporting children with SALT?
4. Are you aware of ISS funding?

**Methodology employed (i.e. number of focus groups, interviews, surveys completed, target audience, eg. early childhood educators):**

*Interview of three metro Long Day Care facilities; one community based, one privately owned and one corporately owned.*

Information on children’s development varied between the three services. Enrolment packages were identified as the main information source of information gathering. Only one community recognised that they relied upon the parents’ ability to read and write and none of the services offered forms in any other language than English. They also reported that parents were reluctant to share information on their children through fear of services not accepting their children. When asked how many children they felt had speech and language difficulties the response was between 1:2 children or “we have so many that we are concerned about”. None of the services distinguished between language development and ESL difficulties; they grouped the children together.

Services relied upon ISA for initial support and guidance to include children. Some services welcomed support from a speech and language therapist but others felt intimidated by allied health professionals.

They did report frustration that children with speech and language delay/disorder were not considered for ISS even for a six-month period.

*Interview of two Family Day Care facilities.*

Although willing to take part in this research, the carers’ knowledge of inclusion support was fairly limited. However they indicated that they rely on parents sharing information with them and rely on their scheme for support. It was apparent that one carer was quite ambivalent to inclusive practice.
Interview of three rural and one semi-rural Long Day Care facilities

Information and feedback gathered from services indicated that they were happy with the support services they receive through Allied Health and ISA. They demonstrated frustration with the lack of ISS funding for children with severe speech and language delay/disorder. They also reported that parents were hesitant in sharing information regarding their children’s development; firstly because they felt it was a failure and a judgement upon themselves as parents, and secondly they were worried that their child would not be accepted and labelled. They also reported that children under the care of DCP were ‘dumped’ upon them with little history or information on their needs.

Interview of three private speech and language therapists

Although initially quite suspicious of the project one therapist, once she had read the information letter, was happy to respond to the questions via mail. Two with whom I have had personal contact with were happy to be interviewed over the phone. All therapists were extremely interested in the project and reported that they knew very little about Child Australia and Inclusion Support. It is fair to say that two of the therapists are new to Perth and are trained therapists from South Africa. I felt that they gained more information from the interview, in respect of inclusive practice and how to work with our service, which was very positive.

Once again they rely very much on parents sharing the children’s developmental history to enable them to support and assist them. They did not feel it was their place to visit Day Care facilities and worried that untrained staff would attempt therapy.

As reported, I have not yet been able to interview DSC due to the restrictions in polices and procedures.

Summary of key findings:

The initial aim was to look at the barriers to ISS funding for the inclusion of children with speech and language delay/disorder. Interviewing and research was aimed at the following target groups:

- Early Educators
- Long Day Care Services.
- Family Day Care.
- Speech and Language Physiologist
- Private Practice
- State Child Development Centre (CDC)
- Disabilities Service Commission (DSC)
- Department for Child Protection (DCP)

Additionally I wanted to research the diversity between the rural and metro assessment and therapy services and how educators were able to support children with Speech and Language Delay/disorder.

Early educators report that gaining medical and relevant information to assist the inclusion of a child is very difficult to gain from parents particularly at enrolment. They concluded that parents are often reluctant to inform the service for a number of reasons including: fear of their child being rejected, fear of being judged as a poor parent, fear of their child being labelled, and also, parents not realising the importance of sharing the information.

Educators also reported that communication with support services is very varied. The rural services linked with the local hospital services, and have a sound relationship with supportive services, hosting parent workshops and staff training. They received regular visits to assist the inclusion of specific children and felt well equipped to provide an inclusive service. Their main area of concern was the waiting time for ISS funding, which
sometimes took up to 8 weeks to gain approval and that the funding could not be allocated to a child with significant speech and language delay.

The metro services reported that they were often unsure of who or which service was supporting children identified with additional needs. They reported that DSC key workers changed regularly and visits to the services were few and far between. They also advised that there was a big increase of children with speech difficulties entering the service.

Response from private speech and language services highlighted the barriers that some educators face when trying to support children in day care.

Please list any challenges you experienced undertaking your research project:

Unfortunately interviewing DSC, CDC and DCP did not take place. Allied health professionals were unable to participate due to confidentially policies and procedures. However, general discussions confirmed that communication and the license to share information on children’s’ medical history is a barrier that they face on a day-to-day basis. Families advise that they are happy for their child’s medical conditions to be shared for the child’s benefit and become frustrated that they have to go through the history with every different professional they meet.

Please list the benefits you experienced by undertaking this research project:

- On a personal level, I rekindled my enthusiasm for research and interviewing skills.
- On a professional level I enjoyed working with colleagues from other agencies. The findings confirmed and reinforced the project’s aims.

What are three key recommendations you would make to the early and middle childhood sector to improve diversity, difference and inclusion?

1. To improve communication between Allied Health and Educators.
2. Educators need training to be able to gain relevant information at enrolment.
3. To balance the diversity between Rural and Metro Support Services.
**Researcher:** Amanda Stevenson

**Project title:**
What does belonging look like through children’s eyes?

**State or Territory in which the research was conducted:**
Darwin, Northern Territory

**Key research questions:**
- What is belonging?
- What does belonging look like?
- What does belonging feel like?
- How important is it to you to feel like you belong to something?
- How do you know you belong to something?
- How do you make others feel like they belong?
- What do you want to belong to?
- Why do you want to belong to it?
- How do you choose who can belong?
- How can adults help you belong to something?

**Methodology employed (i.e. number of focus groups, interviews, surveys completed, target audience, eg. early childhood educators):**
Individual interviews were conducted with children aged between 5 and 12 years old.

**Summary of key findings:**
All of the children interviewed shared a very simple understanding and opinion that links to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The first link to belonging was family, then friends, then pets, then groups such as school, sports clubs etc. They all thought that if you didn’t belong to a family that you would die, because there would be no one to look after you, feed you, give you a home and love. There were links to depression expressed by the older children and what impact it has on you if no body likes you.

Overall feeling like they belonged was extremely important and that children need to be surrounded by positive role models to teach them not only how to feel like they belong, but also how to make others feel like they belong, especially if they find it difficult on their own to make this happen.

Please list any challenges you experienced undertaking your research project:
The only real challenge I had was that I wanted to do this project on a much bigger scale. (I wanted a real answer, which would mean researching on a much bigger scale, involving a much larger number of children). I had to understand that this reflective project was about learning the process and it was my first time undertaking research. I had to work with certain limitations of time and resources. I also had to change my methodology due to the red tape involved in doing such a project in a school environment. So I went from holding focus groups to individual interviews.

Please list the benefits you experienced by undertaking this research project:
I learnt to be reflective of my own practices and the way in which my staff and I interact with children, and the way this impacts on children having a sense of belonging to our centre. I will be able to pass this information on to staff, as well as the reflective skills I have learnt through this project. Then I will hold a staff meeting where we will review our policy regarding inclusion and discuss how we will include belonging and how we will make this happen for all children. Also, I really enjoyed participating in this from of research. I will look into furthering my skills and participate in more projects like this one.

What are three key recommendations you would make to the early and middle childhood sector to improve diversity, difference and inclusion?
1. Listen to children; we can’t really understand them by assuming we know what they know.
2. Reflecting on oneself before others; having a real understanding of our own beliefs and perspectives; possibly being more open to learning new ways of understanding and appreciating inclusion, belonging, diversity and difference.
3. Being a positive role model to not only children but also for staff, families and all other people. Share information and research findings.
Researcher: Diane Cox

Project title:
Supporting early and middle childhood professionals to recognise and respond to the bicultural needs of children and their families

State or Territory in which the research was conducted:
Northern Territory

Key research questions:
How can early and middle childhood professionals be better supported to recognise and respond appropriately to bicultural needs?

Methodology employed (i.e. number of focus groups, interviews, surveys completed, target audience, eg. early childhood educators):
- Focused on Long Day Care and interviewed a number of staff;
- Primarily targeted early childhood educators after some reconsideration (initially aimed at covering a broader range of early and middle childhood staff. Time constraints as well as availability of staff narrowed down the research target groups);
- Interviews conducted included individual meetings with professionals and recordings of interviews, using a voice recorder, captured more in depth information.

Summary of key findings:
- Staff identified the need for more time to read up on latest research and incorporate this into their program;
- Hence there’s a lack of knowledge of latest research in the area of bicultural support;
- There’s room for capacity building in staff to develop their ability to accept children as active and competent learners and respect children’s individual needs;
- Children are often treated the same as everyone else without staff recognising the need for, and value of bicultural support;
- Bicultural support for staff is not seen as important; staff’s additional needs are not recognised and addressed accordingly which raises questions around educators being able to successfully access research and PD/and implementing new knowledge in the program; and
- In retrospect: Most services truly appreciate regular and frequent visits from ISFs, and support under the IPSP program can be delivered with much higher quality with best results when this occurs.

Please list any challenges you experienced undertaking your research project:
- Time constraints – availability of staff for interviews, shortage of staff on the day of interview; visits to services had to be integrated into regular work schedule;
- Staff weren’t aware of the project in some instances because the request for participation remained with the management of the service; this holds particularly true for Primary School operated services with the principle filling the director’s or coordinator’s position; and
- High percentage of staff had English as their second, fourth or fifth language. This significantly increased the amount of time needed to complete the interview.
Please list the benefits you experienced by undertaking this research project:

- As an Inclusion Support Facilitator, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of what needs staff in early childhood services have around the subject of bicultural support;
- Most importantly the project enabled me to improve the relationships I have as an ISF with my allocated services;
- One of the services that volunteered for the project has successfully improved their inclusion practices around a child from indigenous background, and is for the first time completely solution focused. I’ve been working with the service for three years and this is the first time the service has been proactive rather than reactive;
- The project developed my own skills to think critically and reflect on circumstances and my own performance in my capacity as an ISF; and
- Undertaking the project increased my networking skills and built my own capacity to undertake research in a focus area.

What are three key recommendations you would make to the early and middle childhood sector to improve diversity, difference and inclusion?

1. Put yourself in the shoes of the family or child and reflect on how being different might feel, and be proactive rather than reactive (be inclusion ready before you need to be and improve as you go!);
2. Up-skill yourself regularly, i.e. participate in conferences and regular PD to keep abreast of recent research;
3. Regularly consider and reflect on the learning environment and how diversity can be incorporated reflecting families, cultures, the community, and individuals (which would highlight why it’s worth celebrating our differences).
**Researcher:** Maggie Bracegirdle

**Project title:**
Inclusion and enrolment

**State or Territory in which the research was conducted:**
Western Australia

**Key research questions:**
1. Using your own words, what is your understanding of the word “inclusion”?
2. What is your understanding of The Disability Discrimination Act?
3. How does your service identify inclusion in the enrolment process?
4. What, if any, is your understanding of social role valorization?
5. What do you identify as possible barriers for families that are marginalized in accessing child care?
6. If you/your service required support, are you aware of the agencies that may be of assistance?
7. What is your awareness of the Disability Services Commission LAC (Local Area Coordinator) role?
8. Reflecting upon your understanding of The Early Years Learning Framework, how would you utilize it to enhance inclusive practice?
9. If you could change anything about your services enrolment practices/policies/procedures pertaining to inclusion, what would that look like?

**Methodology employed (i.e. number of focus groups, interviews, surveys completed, target audience, eg. early childhood educators):**

**Participants:**
The six participants involved in this research project were provided with verbal and written information describing the purpose of the project. The participants were surveyed using two methods for the purpose of their time and convenience. They either participated over the phone or in person. Each participant provided signed consent agreeing to participate once they had the project explained to them and were provided with a written overview of the project.

**Summary of key findings:**
The data collected from this small research project indicates that educators require ongoing support in the areas of developing knowledge on policies and networking local resources (especially building networks and knowledge of DSC and LAC roles). There is a need to expand awareness of The Disability Discrimination Act and on theoretical foundations in social justice and inclusion. Whilst it is clear that the respondents have a basic knowledge of what inclusion may mean to them, an ongoing development of continuous awareness of what a family may experience and how wounding occurs is required.

**Please list any challenges you experienced undertaking your research project:**
Time constraints experienced by both researcher and participants to complete and participate in the project.

**Please list the benefits you experienced by undertaking this research project:**
I received a greater awareness about the lack of understanding from services of fundamental legislation pertaining to discrimination.

**What are three key recommendations you would make to the early and middle childhood sector to improve diversity, difference and inclusion?**
Professional Development in the areas of legislation pertaining to social justice;
Essential Professional Development in Social Role Valorization.
Case Studies: closing comments

The commitment of researchers to undertake research design and implementation revealed an excellent commitment to enhancing their research skills and knowledge in their chosen area. These projects, along with other data from this project informed the development of the performed ethnographies, or plays, which are part of a resource package targeting diversity, difference and inclusion through an innovative, interactive learning process. Some participants have chosen to continue their projects beyond the life of this research, with support from the chief investigators. Another researcher has chosen to write her own play as an educational tool in her work environment.
This research highlights the significance of early and middle childhood educators, IPSP staff and other professionals increasing their knowledge, skills and practices around diversity, difference and inclusion. It is important that all educators and other professionals engage in ongoing critical reflective practice around diversity and difference and the social inequalities that prevail across these areas, not only in the broader society, but also within the early and middle childhood sector. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) developed the concept of a ‘hierarchy of difference’ in which some areas of social inequality are prioritised more so than others. This means that educators and other professionals prioritise areas of social justice that are considered personally and professionally more relevant and worthy of support. This personal and professional preference for taking up certain areas of social justice over others is primarily based on individual (dis)comfort levels.

In this research, educators and other professionals indicated that they require further education and qualifications across all areas of diversity, difference and inclusion. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and refugee children and their families are critical areas requiring significant educational and professional development intervention. It is critical to develop effective pedagogical approaches in early childhood and middle childhood educators and other professionals to address the inequities that exist across all areas of diversity, difference and inclusion (such as multiculturalism, biculturalism, children with additional needs, class and socio-economic status, gender, sexuality, mental health, foster children). All participants involved in this research stressed the need for more innovative pedagogical approaches to explore diversity, difference and inclusion, with some acknowledging it was important to move beyond the tokenistic approaches that tend to be employed in the sector.

The performed ethnographies, or plays, included in the educational resource developed from this research, employ an innovative pedagogical approach to engaging early and middle childhood professionals in reflective practice, critical thinking, and the development of strategies for policy and practice around diversity, difference and inclusion. The resource was developed by the chief investigators to address the fact that many early and middle childhood educators and other professionals in this research pointed out that they preferred to learn in an interactive, participatory, and collaborative manner. However, of the upmost importance is the need to provide early and middle childhood educators and other professionals the time release required to effectively engage in the professional development opportunities offered by this resource. In addition, the resource will be more effective for educators and other professionals who are committed to reviewing policies and practices across their setting, in line with current research and best practice around diversity, difference and inclusion.


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1 The enquiry was established by the federal Attorney-General, Michael Lavarch, on 11 May 1995. It was in response to efforts made by key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and communities concerned that the general public’s ignorance of the history of forcible removal was hindering the recognition of the needs of its victims and their families and the provision of services.