



## National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program



# Talking about practice: Exploring Reconciliation in early childhood practice

## In this *Talking about practice* series (TAPS) we are exploring the place of Reconciliation in early childhood education and care practice.

Exploring Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community in early childhood education is an important part of becoming culturally competent. Just like other aspects of recognising and supporting diversity embedding Reconciliation in meaningful ways occurs over time, by our connection with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and through daily experiences with children and families in local neighbourhoods. It is as much about what we do every day, the actions we take and words we use for example, as it is about what we think, what we understand and what we believe about our own culture and Australia's rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. It is multilayered, interconnected and because it is so different across Australia, at times complex.

Knowing about and putting the ideas of Reconciliation into practice can seem overwhelming and difficult to embed in our work with children and families. This resource aims to help educator teams talk about how we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in our work and give you some practical ways to take action. The ideas you will hear about are just some examples of how educators have come to understand Reconciliation. Their stories illustrate the complexities and the benefits of becoming more culturally competent.

To help you explore the TAPS video on Reconciliation we have set up a number of discussion points that will help in exploring this idea, how we think about it and how we can start to implement it in practice with children and families across Australia.



## So what exactly is Reconciliation and why should we think about it?

Reconciliation is a term that is used widely to describe the unifying process that brings Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the broader Australian community into a more respectful relationship that restores justice and equity for everyone. Early childhood educators join with our colleagues in many other parts of the Australian community including business and sporting clubs, who have been working for many years to support Reconciliation in Australia.



In its broadest sense 'Reconciliation' means coming together. In Australia it is the term used to refer to the bringing together of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or Indigenous, and non-Indigenous Australians. Supporting reconciliation means working to overcome the reasons there is division and inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

One of the most important areas of division and inequality is the difference in health, income and living standards of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. For example, Indigenous people have a life expectancy some 17 years shorter than the national average, the rate of unemployment for Indigenous people is four times higher than for other Australians and Indigenous people are 11 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous people.

Another important cause of division is misunderstanding, prejudice and racism, as many non-Indigenous people still know little about Indigenous people and history.

<http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/education-kit/what-is-reconciliation/#what>

Embedding Reconciliation is part of the expectation of the *National Quality Framework* (NQF) to value Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and features strongly in the Learning Frameworks and the Quality Standards. It is something for us all to consider in our practice with children and their families irrespective of where we are in Australia or the diversity present in the communities we are part of.

The Guiding principles of the NQF are explicit and require services to attend to diversity as a matter of principle:

- The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.
- Children are successful, competent and capable learners.
- Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the Framework.
- Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.
- The role of parents and families is respected and supported.
- Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.



## Reflection questions

- Within your teams talk about what you understand by the concept of Reconciliation?
- Is the term familiar? Where have you heard the idea being promoted or discussed?
- Reflect on the comments made by the educators in the TAPS in relation to the idea of Reconciliation, in particular how they have used and understood the concept in their settings?
- Consider how the concept of Reconciliation could become part of your service program and practice?
- How could your team learn more about the idea of Reconciliation?

### Links and further information:

These web links might also be helpful as you talk within your teams about Reconciliation.

#### Roadmap for Reconciliation by Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

[www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/)

#### Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia's website includes a Resources section, which includes a page on 'What is reconciliation'. This is a good, short statement about what is Reconciliation in Australia.

[www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)

#### ANTaR Victoria's Reconciliation

ANTaR Victoria is a Reconciliation organisation that believes 'Reconciliation is whitefella business'.

<http://antarvictoria.org.au/>

#### Australian Government

This website details an Australian Government perspective on Reconciliation with a extensive collection of links to written and visual materials.

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/reconciliation>

#### The Healing Foundation

The Healing Foundation website details work that supports culturally strong, community developed, locally-run programs in communities across Australia to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

<http://healingfoundation.org.au/>



## Reconciliation is about learning more ...

A central theme of much of the discussion about Reconciliation is becoming more knowledgeable about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and culture past and present. It is also an opportunity for us to challenge our assumptions and prejudices and in particular find out more about our local community.

The practitioners in the video shared some stories about how they have made deliberate efforts to find out more about their local community and invite local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to help them understand how they might explore and share these ideas with children, families and the staff team. They advise that these processes take time and intentional efforts and that there is no magic recipe for becoming culturally competent. They also advise, and this is reinforced by numerous commentators, experts and community members, that mistakes will be made as we attempt to understand and act in this space but that it is the effort that counts, it is our intentions to build relationships of respect that are evident when we give things a go.



Make contact with your local Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU) which is funded by the Australian Department of Education under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) to provide professional development and support to Indigenous early childhood services. For state and territory details: <http://education.gov.au/inclusion-and-professional-support-program>



## Reflection questions

- Within your teams talk about what you understand of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and culture past and present?
- Can you identify agencies, organisations, or individuals who may be able to help you gain this knowledge?
- Are there any places or sites of particular importance that you might get to know and that might help the children to understand the story of the first peoples of the land where your service is situated?
- Check out some of the websites listed above or visit a local museum or art gallery for some local information.
- Get in touch with your local government. They often have people who can help or will be able to point you in the right direction.
- Invite the children and families into the process—they may be able to help you find local resources and information.



## Reconciliation in practice

A decision to engage with and explore Reconciliation in early childhood education and care will ultimately lead to making a curriculum decision that helps children to learn about and value Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There are many ways to put these commitments into practice.

The video highlights some practice ideas. There are of course many many more, some of which will be created by discussions with local community members or colleagues, others that will emerge from your growing understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

You might want to start with exploring a way to celebrate the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (August each year) in your service. This day is promoted by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) which is the national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families: [www.snaicc.org.au/](http://www.snaicc.org.au/). Stay in touch with the website and watch out for resources and promotion ideas that will help you get started.



## Reflection questions

- Within your teams talk about how you understand the Guiding Principle *Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued*.
- Discuss the ideas about Reconciliation in practice shared on the video.
- What do you think about exploring these ideas with children?
- How could you work with the children and families in your community to find out and learn about the traditional owners of the land where your service is based?
- Consider how you might talk to children about traditional ownership and the connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land?
- How could you share a story of justice and equity like that of Vincent Lingiari and the Wave Hill walk off made famous by the song written by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody *From little things big things grow* with children and families?  
(<http://indigenousrights.net.au/section.asp?SID=11>)
- Are there other stories of rights and inclusion that you could share with children? Perhaps local stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people standing up for rights and justice?

For example the now famous story and image of AFL player Nicky Winmar's gesture lifting his jumper and pointing proudly to the colour of his skin at Victoria Park in 1993 or Eddie Koiki Mabo who campaigned for Indigenous land rights and played an important part in the landmark decision of the High Court of Australia which overturned the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* ('land belonging to nothing, no one') which characterised Australian law with regards to land and title.

Exploring Reconciliation is finally about rights. About the right of Australia's first peoples to feel valued and the right of all Australians to know the history and culture of the land we call home—the land we play on, learn through and enjoy each day.



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