Review of Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention

PRECI Round 4 Consultation Report

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PROFESSIONALS & RESEARCHERS IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

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Two online consultations were facilitated by Denise Luscombe and Kerry Bull in February 2025 as part of the Review of Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). Professionals who participated in the earlier rounds of consultations in July-August 2024, December 2024 and January 2025 were invited to participate. Professionals who had not previously participated in consultations were also invited to attend in order to provide an additional opportunity for engagement in the project. 148 professionals including allied health practitioners, early childhood educators and teachers, academics, managers and paediatricians attended. They represented service providers (private, not-for-profit, government), early childhood education and care services, peak bodies, professional bodies, advocacy organisations (disability-specific, family, siblings), health (hospital and community health) and education departments.

Participants received pre-reading material that included a draft template of the culturally safe, diversity affirming and everyday settings principles and associated practices to support the consultation.

The following is a summary of what we heard at the two February consultations.

1. Cultural safety

Participants provided feedback on the pre-reading document provided on Cultural Safety. They wanted assurance that this was developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers, families and communities. Whilst many found the overview and rationale clear, others provided comments and recommendations on terminology (e.g. people/peoples, First Nations) and sentence structure. Participants endorsed the proposal to have a looks like/doesn't look like resource and the inclusion of 'how we know when it's working well' in the associated tipsheet on cultural safety.

Recommendations included:
- support practitioners and services to better understand how to know from parents/ carers when they are providing culturally safe practices
- provide clarity about what measuring/monitoring looks like
- provide clarity about what "centred" means in practice (e.g. "their cultures are centred and valued in service design and delivery")
- consider renaming the principle to "Cultural Safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples" to make this distinction explicit.
- acknowledge that cultural safety applies to CALD families, but make it clear this principle specifically addresses the unique experiences and systemic barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (e.g., intergenerational trauma)
- ensure cultural safety is assessed and defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- suggest including self-assessment tools for services to monitor and improve their performance against cultural safety principles.
- start the principle's rationale with strengths-based language before addressing exclusion and barriers
- emphasise mutuality and collaborative practice between families and services, ensuring that families feel welcomed, respected, and centred in-service delivery

2. Diversity affirming

There was a recommendation in both consultations to strengthen the focus on children and families from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse communities. Some participants wanted further clarity and distinction between this principle and the Cultural Safety principle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, parents/carers, families and communities.

There was some discussion about terminology, particularly related to the use of the terms neurodiverse, neurodiversity and autistic and the need to be in line with the Autism CRC, National Framework for assessing children's functional strengths and support needs in Australia. There was commentary about the need to know the individual preferences of children and parents/carers. Some called for a change to be affirming of all disabilities, including neuroaffirming and a note that the deaf and hard of hearing community is a culture. There was a call for clearer guidance on how to measure and monitor diversity-affirming practices, linking them to continuous quality improvement. Specific suggestions for the looks/like/doesn't look like resource were also provided.

Recommendations included:

- noting that the EYLF acknowledges the 'Funds of Knowledge' of children and families as a positive way to affirm children and their families.
- ensuring trauma informed practice is noted in the framework
- including religious diversity
- referencing culture as well as race and ethnicity
- ensuring we honour diversity, not just affirm
- encouraging services to provide education and training to build practitioner competence in diversity-affirming and culturally safe practices
- encouraging services to address systemic barriers, ensuring equitable access and opportunities.
- adapting assessment tools and intervention practices to avoid cultural bias and false-negative results
- actively seek input from families about their beliefs, culture, and identities, avoiding assumptions based on group affiliation including collaborative goal-setting that reflect children's strengths, interests, and family identities, rather than imposing external standards.

3. Everyday settings

Participants approved of the title of this principle and provided specific feedback about additions to the Looks like/Doesn't look like resource that will be considered as this tool is developed. There was some discussion about the difference between participation and engagement and input about the way in which the 'National Framework for assessing strengths and support needs in Australia' manages the issue of when children require support or modifications to access everyday environments. Some participants called for acknowledgement about the reasons why some children may need to receive some services in a setting other than their natural setting for a period of time (e.g. for some children, at times, with complex physical disabilities)

Recommendations included:

- Reflect that everyday settings include diverse environments where children and families want to spend time
- Remove exclusionary language (e.g., "same age without disability") and emphasise inclusive spaces for all abilities
- Replace terms like "capacity" with more developmentally appropriate language.
- Ensure the rationale reflects universal principles of childhood development and interest-led approaches
- Include considerations for children with complex needs who may require services outside natural settings
- Emphasise family and child-led goal setting and choice of environments.
- Include risk and safety assessments as part of planning for everyday settings.
- Recognise the time and relationship-building required to support families in accessing everyday environments
- Reflect diverse community contexts, including rural and remote access challenges
- Ensure the document addresses access and equity issues for children in out-of-home care.

4. School-age children and their families

Participants discussed how the framework should include the specific needs of school-aged children and their families. Participants sought assurance that there was consultation with teachers and/or others involved in school systems. They made specific recommendations of areas that could be included in the looks like/doesn't look like tool. They also suggested key documents that should be reviewed including: ARACY- NEST, Australian Early Development Census, Out of School hours care framework - My Time Our Place, AITSL teacher standards and the

ABLES. It was also noted that the EYLF continues to apply to the first few years of school.

Recommendations included:

- Children should be engaged in setting their own goals and making decisions about their learning and development.
- A team around the child should include teachers, support staff, specialists, and families, all working towards shared goals.
- Children should participate meaningfully in their learning environment alongside peers with appropriate adjustments.
- Families should remain active decision-makers and collaborators in their child's educational journey.
- Schools should be connected to local networks, ensuring children's needs are met within their own community.

5. Rural and remote settings

Participants discussed how the framework should include the specific needs of rural and remote children and their families. They made specific recommendations of areas that could be included in the looks like/doesn't look like tool.

Recommendations included:

- Consider that universal best practice principles should remain the same, but delivery must be adapted to address geographical and systemic challenges
- Services should be culturally appropriate, community-driven, and reflect local strengths and knowledge
- Acknowledge telepractice, fly-in fly-out models, and training local community members to ensure sustainable support
- Practitioners and teams should receive adequate support to deliver safe, effective, and context-specific services.
- Services should build on community resilience and ensure the voices of local families are heard and respected.

6. Decision-making framework

There was general agreement that a decision-making framework and associated resources would be helpful but caution about how to get service 'buy-in' for the framework. Participants suggested that the decision-making framework should reflect the EYLF Cycle of Planning. There were also specific recommendations for each step of the planning cycle that will be considered in further development of the framework and associated tools and resources.

The project team will consider all the comments and questions for the final Practice Framework.

Contact us

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