

Introduction



A major feature that distinguishes Australia from all other countries in the world is the ancestral relatedness of Indigenous people. This relatedness forms the world's oldest living culture ... acknowledgment of Indigenous ancestral relatedness, its values, and how these are realised is distinctly Australian.¹

In Australia, *Belonging, Being and Becoming — the Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) is fundamental for ensuring that children in all early childhood education and care settings experience quality teaching and learning. It is an essential resource for implementing the National Quality Standard.²

The aim of the EYLF is to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years, and through the transition to school. It assists educators to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning.

The *Foundations for Success* guideline builds on the principles, practices and outcomes outlined in the EYLF, to uphold its vision:

all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life.³

Used alongside the EYLF, *Foundations for Success* provides educators with additional guidance to implement a holistic program that extends and enriches learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their Kindergarten Year. A holistic program is one that:

- **reinforces personal and cultural identities**
- **connects with families and communities**
- **provides the foundations for children's successful learning.**

There is a strong emphasis on 'relationships' and the wider context of family and community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born connected to the ancestral relatedness of their culture. This knowledge empowers them with 'who they are' and 'where they belong'.

This guideline outlines strategies educators can use to support children become *two-way strong*. Being *two-way strong* means children build deep and strong foundations in both the traditional and contemporary cultures and languages of their families and community, and those of the broader world, allowing them to move fluently across cultures without compromising their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities.

Clancy et al. agree:

... we use ... a term 'fire-stick period' (a fire stick is a stick that is kept alight to ensure the availability of fire). This term highlights that culture is something that should not be left behind, but rather kept as an integral part of their lives.⁴

All children have the right to an education that values and respects their social and cultural heritage, and supports them to become successful learners and confident and creative individuals.⁵

1. Guiding principles

Quality environments are those where children are encouraged to explore — where they have the opportunity to encounter rich learning experiences that nurture and expand their thinking, language, and physical and social development, and where their cultural identity development is supported.⁶

The *Foundations for Success* guiding principles complement the five principles of the EYLF to support:

1. **secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships**
2. **partnerships**
3. **high expectations and equity**
4. **respect for diversity**
5. **ongoing learning and reflective practice** (see Appendix 1).

Educators use the guiding principles to extend and enrich learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their kindergarten year in the following ways.

1. 'Knowing who you are' and having a positive sense of cultural identity is central to children's social, emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

A kindergarten program is culturally strong and socially and emotionally, safe when relationships honour children's traditional and contemporary cultures and languages, while at the same time building bridges that allow children to move fluently across diverse cultures. Children should experience many opportunities for their developing identities to be a source of individual strength, confidence, pride, belonging and security.

Educators recognise that there are many ways of *living, being* and *knowing*, and that diversity contributes to the richness of our society. They *create connected learning environments that value, respect and build on children's cultures* and broaden their understandings of the world in ways that make them *two-way* strong.

2. Children learn best through responsive and reciprocal relationships that connect with their world.

Responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, times, experiences, ideas and things support children's strong sense of wellbeing. Through secure relationships and consistent emotional support children feel valued and respected. They develop confidence and learn to appreciate their connectedness and interdependence as learners.

Educators nurture positive interactions *that are responsive to children's ways of knowing and learning*. They implement culturally and linguistically sensitive and respectful interactions, in partnership with families and communities, that assist children to develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interact positively and collaborate with others.

3. Strong family and community engagement enables children's health, learning and wellbeing.

Families are children's first and most influential educators, and their engagement is central to creating a holistic kindergarten program. Respectful interactions with families and communities facilitate the sharing of culturally specific knowledge and information about children and their learning that builds involvement, collaboration and negotiation.

Educators *nurture trusting relationships and partnerships that evolve over time*. They are learners, collaborating with co-workers, families, Elders and community members to reinforce and promote for children the continuity and richness of their cultures and languages, and help children feel secure, confident and included.

4. First languages define every child — their knowledge, identity and relationships.

First languages (FLs) are primarily acquired from families, and have been developing from birth, shaping the way children see and describe the world. Language is a powerful communicative tool, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are generally competent users of their developing FLs when they come to kindergarten.

Educators are aware of, recognise and value children's FLs. They support children's continuous development and use of their FLs, and work with adults who speak the same languages as the children to plan and deliver the kindergarten program wherever possible. The program includes a range of strategies and resources to support children to use and strengthen their FLs; and for children who are learning Standard Australian English (SAE) as an additional language, to also use and strengthen their proficiency in SAE.

5. Children are competent and capable and have been learning since birth.

Recognising children as competent learners means knowing their capabilities and using these as a starting point for new learning. Every child has unique aptitudes and abilities that must be valued and maximised.

Educators believe in the competence and capability of children. They have high expectations and *value, respect and accommodate the diverse experiences, languages and capabilities of all children*. They make decisions that are genuinely inclusive, and carefully adjust their interactions and the environment to support every child's equal access to learning and participation.

6. Children's positive attitudes to learning are essential for success.

Children's early learning influences their life chances. Valuing children's sense of wonder and capturing their enthusiasm towards learning encourages them to engage with learning, to persevere, to take risks and to negotiate with others. Children grow these attitudes in culturally safe environments where they are treated with trust and respect.

Educators *support learning through active involvement in children's play — modelling curiosity, demonstrating a love of learning and implementing intentional teaching strategies to promote learning*. They view themselves together with children as participants within a community of learners, in which all members share in learning.

7. Children are entitled to a voice of their own and to having their rights valued.

The Convention on the Rights of a Child⁷ states that all children have the right to an education that lays the foundations for the rest of their lives, maximises their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages. The Convention also recognises children's right to play, and their right to participate in decisions and actions that affect them.

Educators *engage children as active participants and contributors in a play-based learning environment*. They respect their independence and interdependence within the context of family and community, listen to their ideas, and engage with them in planning, sharing and reflecting on the learning process.

8. Ongoing learning and reflective practice underpin a quality kindergarten program.

Children represent their knowledge and understanding of the world in many ways⁸, and everyday play experiences offer rich opportunities for gathering evidence about their learning. Purposeful and systematic observation and documentation support educator judgments about a child's developing capabilities, inform new learning and enable ongoing reflection on the effectiveness of teaching practices.

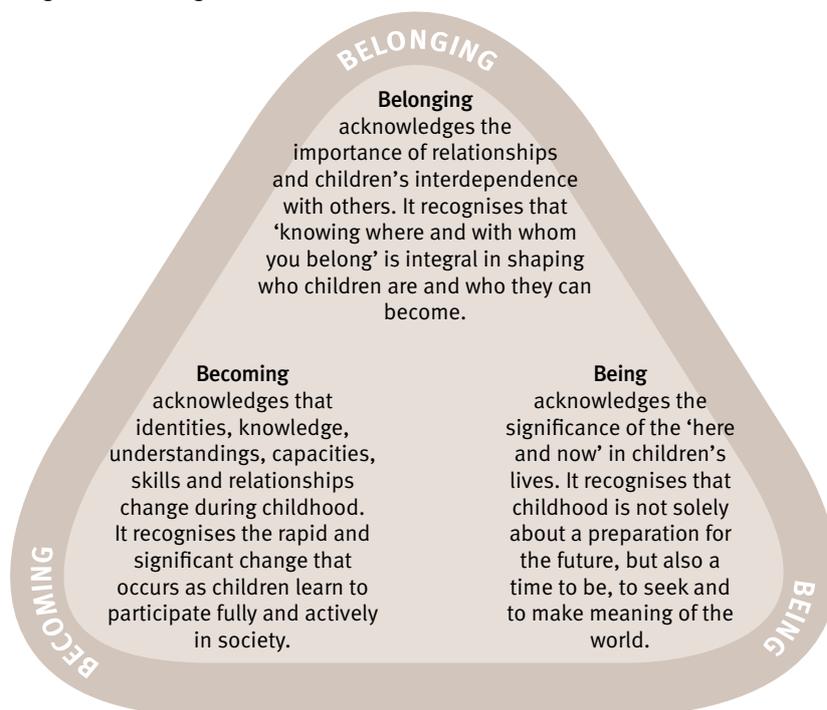
Educators *seek new insights and perspectives that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning*. They implement an ongoing cycle that includes planning, documenting and reflecting for children's learning, and the information gathered is shared with families. They engage in reflective practice and professional enquiry alongside children, families and community.



2. Building learning bridges

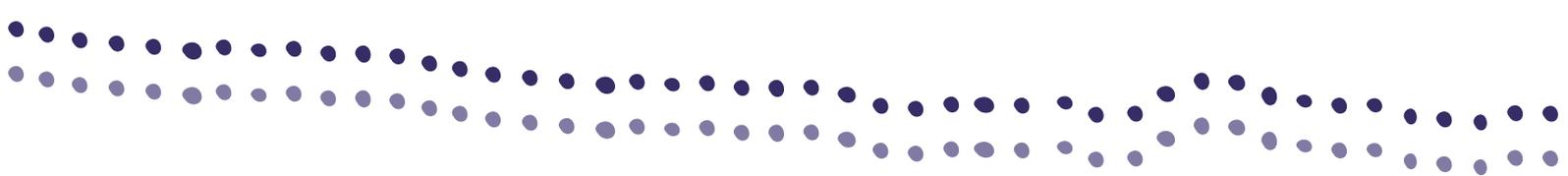
Every aspect of caring for and educating children is culturally determined ... it determines how and when babies are fed, as well as where and with whom they will sleep. It affects the customary response to an infant's crying and a toddler's temper tantrums. It sets the rules for discipline and expectations for developmental attainments. It affects what parents worry about and when they begin to become concerned. It influences how illness is treated and disability is perceived ... In short, culture provides a virtual how-to manual for rearing children and establishes the role expectations for mothers, fathers, grandparents, older siblings, extended family members and friends.⁹

Fundamental to the EYLF is a view of children's lives as characterised by *belonging, being and becoming*.¹⁰



Culture plays a complex role in shaping children's *belonging, being and becoming*. From birth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are connected to family, community, culture and place. Their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships. Karen Martin explains:

... our world is always about being related ... it is about being related to people, to the sky, the salt water, the animals, the plants, the land ... that is how we hold who we are ... it is that we are related to everything else.¹¹



In what ways will I build learning bridges with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families?

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families encounter a kindergarten program for the first time, they will generally experience a contemporary Western world view of childhood, learning and development. A world view forms the cultural fabric of every program, from how the environment looks and feels, to the nature of relationships within it — the languages used and the ways in which families are engaged in a program.

The *Foundations for Success* guideline embraces the understanding that there are many valid world views of childhood and learning and development. Drawing on socio-cultural theories, learning is viewed as a social process; participatory, building on what children already know; and cultural in nature. This perspective challenges educators to question their practices as they respond to the diverse ways children experience *belonging, being and becoming*.¹²

By acknowledging children’s deep sense of cultural connectedness, and the many ways children experience *belonging, being and becoming*, educators can begin to *build learning bridges*. A learning bridge is a means to build valued, respected and safe relationships for learning and living. It enables children, families and community members to move to and from home and other social contexts to the contexts of a kindergarten program and schooling.

A learning bridge is not just for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. It requires a collaborative, two-way process that enables educators to build on culturally valued approaches to learning for children and their families. As Terry Cross, Director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association of the First Nations, Canada, advises:

*a bridge is only any good if there are strong foundations on both sides.*¹³

Effective educators understand that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may share ways of *belonging, being and becoming* in relation to young children that differ from those of non-Indigenous cultures. Their professional judgments will integrate an awareness of their own world view with their knowledge of the culturally valued approaches to childhood, children and learning embedded within the community.

Educators build successful learning bridges when they:

- nurture strong and respectful family and community partnerships and engagement
- critically reflect on their own values, views and understandings of childhood, children and learning
- value and utilise the culturally valued knowledge about children’s learning and development held within the community
- demonstrate an ongoing commitment to developing their own as well as children’s cultural competence
- build their own awareness and understanding about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, history and contemporary societies.¹⁴



In what ways will I build language learning bridges with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

2.1 Building language learning bridges

Language is the medium by which children have been communicating and understanding since birth. It shapes a child's everyday experiences and is strongly linked to culture, country and identity. Through language, relationships are developed, culture is taught, information is transmitted, knowledge is learned and stories are told. Within traditional languages, stories of communities, connections to country, seas, waterways and sky, spiritual beliefs and cultural practices are passed down from generation to generation. These knowledges are uniquely Australian, developed from and within local Australian environments.¹⁵

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children come from rich and diverse family, cultural and language backgrounds. The language/s they acquire will be dependent on the language/s spoken by their primary caregivers when they are very young. Some children will acquire SAE as a first language. However, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are likely to have first languages that are:

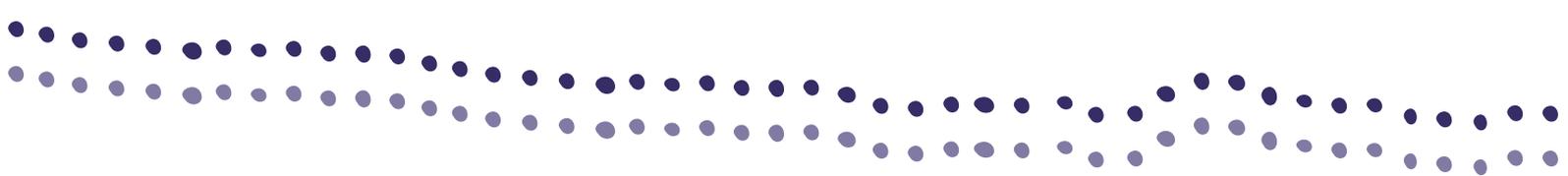
- traditional languages — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages that originated prior to European colonisation and which continue to be spoken by children today in a few areas of Queensland
- contact languages — new languages that have formed since colonisation. These include several creole languages which are spoken in Queensland.

Contact languages such as creoles may superficially resemble SAE. This can result in educators mistakenly assuming that these languages are not real languages, or that children who speak these languages will automatically learn to switch to using SAE. It can result in children who speak these languages not having their languages valued or their English language learning needs recognised and addressed.

Language is integral to a child's sense of identity and wellbeing. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, this means recognising and valuing their developing first language, and having an awareness that children may also identify with languages that are part of their heritage but that they may not speak.

Educators build successful language learning bridges when they:

- know about, recognise and value the languages spoken by the children in their kindergarten. In Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, children are likely to have a creole or related language variety as their first language. There are places in Queensland where children will have a traditional language as their first language
- implement a kindergarten program that:
 - supports children to use and strengthen their first languages
 - supports children who are learning SAE as an additional language to use and strengthen their proficiency in SAE as well as their first language; and
 - involves adults who speak the same language/s as the children
- develop respectful, reciprocal cross-cultural relationships that encourage families, community and co-workers to play an active role in children's language learning
- recognise that, although children may not be proficient in a traditional language, they may strongly identify with one or more languages that are part of their heritage.



When Indigenous children come to preschool they can already talk and listen. Many know how to read the land. They come with understanding of links between land, people and learning ... These children already know how to look to nature – nature is the writer, creating shapes and renewing the environment.¹⁶

In what ways will I build literacy and numeracy learning bridges with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

2.2 Building literacy and numeracy learning bridges

Literacy and numeracy refer to the multiple, interrelated ways that children create and make meaning within the cultural and social contexts of their community.¹⁷ From birth, children begin to acquire understanding about literacy and numeracy through their everyday family and community relationships and experiences. By the time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enter a kindergarten program, they will have attained a rich variety of socially and culturally valued literacies, including oral literacies, and numeracies.

For some children, however, a discontinuity may exist between their experience of literacies and numeracies in the context of family and community and the literacy and numeracy practices required when they reach school. *Lessons from the Longitudinal Literacy and Numeracy Study for Indigenous Students (LLANS)* reports that:

In Indigenous cultures, young children are surrounded by a rich and linguistically complex environment that provides experiences that support both literacy and numeracy development; however, the intricacies of early childhood experiences in Indigenous communities are often misunderstood or marginalised by educators.¹⁸

Effective educators acknowledge that Western literacy and numeracy is only one form of literacy and numeracy, and develop a kindergarten program which values and builds on what children know and can do. They respect that learning to use and understand non-verbal body language may be a key aspect of literacy development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, along with understanding of the natural environment and the complex relationships in their extended family networks. From an early age, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are encouraged to communicate using a variety of signs and gestures. In addition, although their linguistic systems for representing number may differ from the English language system, many children will have a rich foundation of numerical and other mathematical understanding on which to build.¹⁹

Educators build successful literacy and numeracy learning bridges when they:

- educate themselves about the culturally valued conceptual skills children have already acquired
- implement purposeful and meaningful learning opportunities that incorporate and build on the oral traditions and stories, songs, dance, music, symbols, environmental patterns and relationships, and material art and cultures of the community
- make intentional connections for children that broaden their experiences with the texts, letter–sound relationships, symbols, pattern systems and mathematical concepts of the broader world
- saturate the learning environment with Western and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sounds, signs and symbols, oral and written texts, visual and creative arts, technologies and media
- facilitate partnerships with families that connect the literacy and numeracy experiences of the kindergarten program with children’s experiences in the home.

Educators should refer to the Learning Area *Being a communicator* in Section 4 of this guideline for practices that intentionally build successful language, literacy and numeracy learning bridges with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.



The decision-making process

