

Embedding Indigenous Perspectives in ECEC: Asking the Hard Questions

Dr Melinda Miller

Queensland University of Technology





Overview of Doctoral Study



- Action Research methodology
- Two urban long day centres in Queensland
 - Centre A (10 months)
 - Centre B (5 months)
- Twenty-two early childhood educators
 - Twelve participants were involved directly in research on the topic of embedding Indigenous perspectives

Locating the Study

- Study located in a colonising context
 - Historical traces of colonialism in Australian educational institutions
 - Standpoint
 - Contextualised application of theory

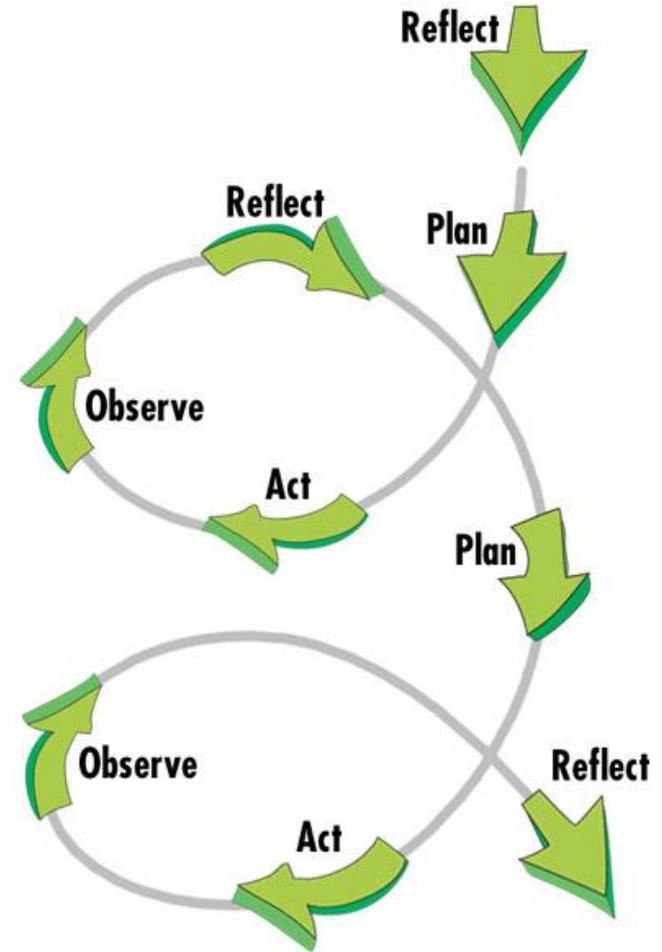


Research Questions

1. How does whiteness impact the work of embedding Indigenous perspectives in two urban early childhood centres?
2. How does a research-based approach to professional development support the work of embedding Indigenous perspectives?

Action Research

- A fluid, unfolding process of research. Involves recursive cycles of questioning, gathering data, critical reflection and deciding on a course of action
- Facilitator: active listening; mentoring; resourcing; interposing
- Rigour: Action research cycles are enacted systematically



Data

- Conversations with a purpose
 - 48 in total
- Semi-structured interviews
 - 14 in total
- Communal Journals
 - Inventories
 - Action plans
 - Photographs

Friday, 19th Sept., 05.

Indigenous Perspectives

One of our short term plans was to organise a small group excursion to take the handprint canvases to Indiginart so John could finish it. Have left a few messages with John however he's been out of town teaching. Today I took the canvases to his shop and was imi wanting for him to get in touch regarding a good time to pick up the finished canvases with 4-6 children. The children will have the opportunity to look around at the art work and chat to John with their ideas, questions etc.

Friday 26th Sept, 2005

John is a great contact to have and may be able to assist with information or other contacts in relation to formal demonstrations of respect in our everyday practices; such as an acknowledgement to Traditional Owners. as part of a weekly (or daily) routine with children + Staff.

Protocol	What?	When?	How?
Welcome to Country	At the beginning of any significant forum many Aboriginal communities will perform a welcoming ceremony for people visiting their country. These ceremonies vary from speeches of welcome to traditional dance and smoking ceremonies.	Any time the function has broad impact on or significance for Aboriginal people, a welcoming ceremony is appropriate; however, it is preferable to have a welcome at all major departmental, interdepartmental and public forums and functions.	Seek advice, including who to contact, from regional Aboriginal Planning Officers and the Koori Human Services Unit. Plan well ahead to allow availability of an appropriate person to conduct the ceremony. Asking at the last minute gives the unfortunate impression that including a Welcome to Country is an afterthought. A fee reflecting travel costs and the time given by community members may be charged for participation in a welcoming ceremony.
Acknowledging traditional owners	The circumstance where the first speaker at a forum recognises and pays respect to traditional owners of the land on which they are speaking. Subsequent speakers may also choose to acknowledge traditional owners; however, this is a matter of personal preference and judgement in relation to the particular occasion. You may wish to seek guidance from Aboriginal people involved in the event.	This can occur with or without a Welcome to Country. Use this for major departmental events, interdepartmental and public forums and functions. Staff are also encouraged to consider acknowledging traditional owners at smaller events.	Seek advice from regional Aboriginal Planning Officers and the Koori Human Services Unit. Consulting with the local Aboriginal community about the preferred form of acknowledgement will help to ensure an appropriate approach. The wording of acknowledgements is discussed in more detail below.
Acknowledging Elders	The circumstance where the first speaker at a forum recognises and pays respect to Aboriginal Elders of the area and those in attendance.	At major events, acknowledgement of Aboriginal Elders (past and present) usually follows acknowledgement of traditional owners. At meetings, it is appropriate to acknowledge Aboriginal Elders separately.	Aboriginal Elders can be acknowledged by name; however, use of 'aunty' or 'uncle' should be checked with community members. At events where the identity of all participants is not clear, it is important to acknowledge 'my Aboriginal Elders'.
Acknowledging local sites of significance	The circumstance where the first speaker at a forum recognises cultural or historical sites of significance in the vicinity of the meeting.	Use this when a departmental event is held on or near a significant site.	Seek advice from regional Aboriginal Planning Officers about how to acknowledge local sites of significance. For example, it may be appropriate for an Aboriginal Elder or Aboriginal community leader to acknowledge the site of a traditional meeting place or of a massacre on behalf of all present.

Centre A: September 2008 – January 2009

Centre A: February 2009 – July 2009

Guiding questions: Why are Indigenous families no longer accessing our service? How can we embed Indigenous perspectives appropriately?

Interposal (discussion & resource): Focus on 'self' as well as curriculum activities – provided McIntosh (1989) article on whiteness

Develop an initial action plan: short-term and long-term goals

Access acknowledgement protocols (standard + local)

Contact with a local Aboriginal artist

Visit to Ngutana-Lui Indigenous Education Centre

Purchase of updated curriculum resources of an Indigenous nature

Interposal (activity): Modelled critical review of positioning of Indigenous knowledge perspectives in the *National Childcare Accreditation Council Quality Practices Guide* (2005). Family history activity focussed on relations between social/political circumstances in Australia and one's cultural positioning/resources.

Questioning, Gathering data, Reflection, Deciding on a course of action

Critical review of curriculum resources (inventory):
Reflection: How does our service promote a sense of belonging for Indigenous families? (Leslie: 02/09/08)

Purchase of Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander flag to display in reception

Reflection: How do we integrate Indigenous perspectives without being tokenistic? We tend to focus strongly on this during NAIDOC [National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee] week... I think we need to thread this focus through everyday life at [Service A] (Janny: 10/10/08)

Brainstorm existing curriculum activities and find out children's perspectives

Planning for long-term goal: sustaining connections with a local Indigenous childcare service. **Interposal (discussion):** How are you framing these connections? Who will benefit? What are you asking Indigenous people to do?

Phone contact with local Indigenous childcare service - Vicky

Internet research on meaning of Torres Strait Islander flag.
Reflection: Why don't we know the meaning? (Vicky: 13/03/09)

Attend Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Inclusive Workshop – Vicky & Researcher

Interposal (journal): What does the *Apology* mean to you? How is the *Apology* imprinted on your thinking and practices?

Excursion with children to visit and work with local Aboriginal artist

Reflection: (written on staff noticeboard): What evidence is there of changes to practices and our thinking? What new questions do we have?

Questioning, Gathering data, Reflection, Deciding on a course of action

Policy change following proposal to Management Committee: 'Welcome to Country' included for Annual General Meetings. 'Acknowledgement to Traditional Owners' included for General Meetings.

Review of ECA Code of Ethics (2006) and Reconciliation Goals

Visit to local Indigenous childcare service. Arrangements for staff exchange.

Critical review of Service A's Philosophy Statement

Distribution of the *Australian Community Children's Services Special Edition* (May 2009) about the *Apology* to staff and families

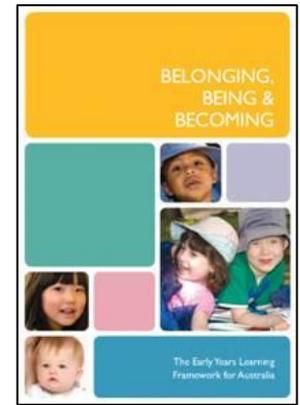
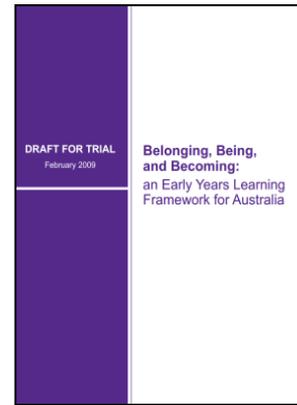
Sharing the learning at the North-side PSCQ Meeting: Janny, Vicky & Researcher

Gathering children's perspectives: Classroom discussions + reading of MacNaughton & Davis (2001)

Evidence of...

- Critical self-reflection and collaborative reflection
- Review of centre resources
- Staff attended cultural workshops
- Purchase and display of an Aboriginal flag and a Torres Strait Islander flag in reception areas
- Connections with local Indigenous people
- Changes to centre policy
- Review of philosophy statement
- Presentations and publications

Early Years Policy



- *Educators recognise that diversity contributes to the richness of our society and provides a valid evidence base about ways of knowing. For Australia it also includes promoting greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being.*
- *They become co-learners with children, families and community, and value the continuity and richness of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders.*

(Early Years Learning Framework, 2009)

Early Years Policy

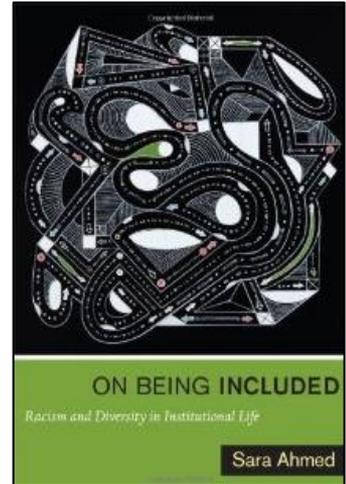


- *Raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and local elders*
- *An environment that reflects the lives of the children and families using the service and the cultural diversity of the broader community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*
- *Images, books and resources that provide a balanced view of contemporary Australians*

(National Quality Standard, 2013)

Theoretical Framework

- Critical whiteness studies
- Critiques of whiteness studies – Sara Ahmed's (2004, 2006, 2013) work on the non-performativity of whiteness and racism and diversity in institutional life



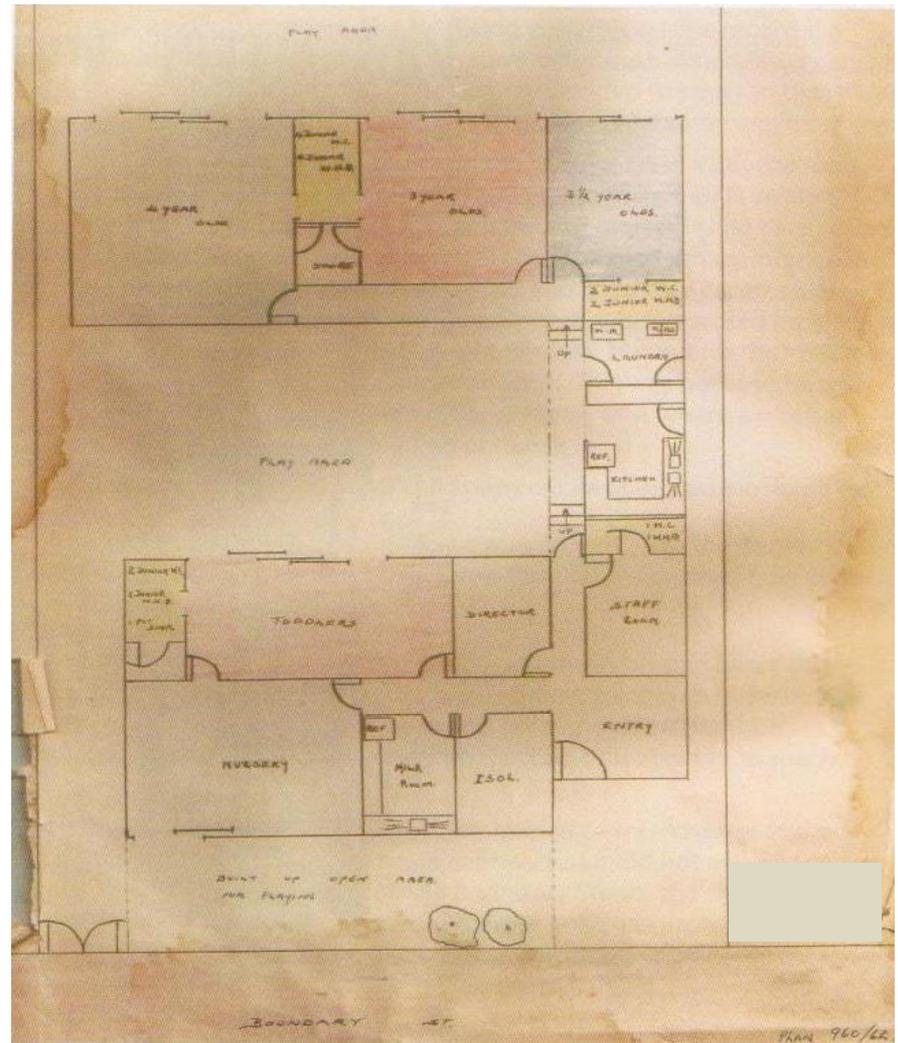
Balancing Theoretical Limitations

- Contextualised study of whiteness (Moreton-Robinson, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008)
- Layered framework: whiteness as property; whiteness and institutions; whiteness and identity
- Architectural lens on whiteness

Critical
Whiteness
Studies

Standpoint

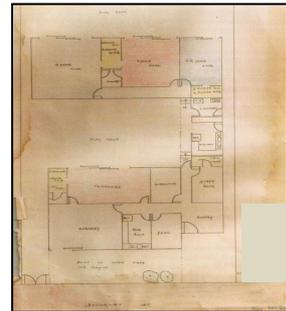
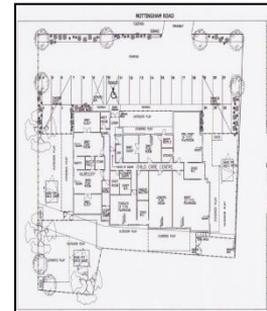
The buildings are central to the research because they tell a story in process – race relations in Australia are embodied within architecture and institutional practices. Connecting whiteness to the structural and institutional properties of the research sites enabled me to think more laterally and locate the different ways whiteness operates in research spaces.



Standpoint

- **Researcher Positioning**

On the surface, my own sense of belonging was connected to familiarity with childcare institutions and the everyday practices of educators centred on education and care. I gained access to the research sites because I had been evaluated by the participants as someone who could speak the language of childcare and of diversity, and who could potentially contribute to what was actioned, and what could become actionable, in childcare spaces. My presence was acceptable because I ‘fitted’ the contours of the buildings – how they were shaped by white bodies and professional discourse oriented around early childhood education.



Consultation: Racialising Practices

- Data showed a general reliance on benevolence to satisfy non-Indigenous desires to access, manipulate and 'own' aspects of Indigeneity, meaning Indigenous people and organisations were continually 'required' for participation, information and authority. Motivation for initiating contact was usually reactionary.
- This relationship upheld **colonial constructions of duty, service and brokerage** that underpinned the majority of interactional patterns.

Consultation: Data Extract

- Participant:** *A lady came through here and she told us I could send two staff up to the new [Aboriginal] school. She said, “You’re welcome to go up and have a look”. She said, “ring me”, and her name was Aunty Rosemary or something and she was a lovely lady but I just never got around to it. (Monica: 25.02.09)*
- Researcher:** *(Four months later) Did anything come out of contacting the [Aboriginal] school? (Researcher: 26.06.09)*
- Participant:** *No. The lady rang me back and she said they don’t really do external visits or anything like that. They don’t want people coming disrupting the rooms and everything. I said, “Well we’d just stand back” and they just said, “No”. (Monica: 26.06.09)*

Consultation: Data Extract

For me, I would like to explore that more within [the centre], but it's really hard because we don't have any Indigenous families, and for me, I don't want to do the tokenistic thing of "Let's do a dot painting and let's ..." you know. I want it to be ingrained within, but I think the barrier is not having any [Indigenous] parents there to help and explore that with ... it's also knowing what's culturally appropriate too. We do that whole project around NAIDOC [National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee] and I know one of the staff was really looking into it because we do Aboriginal art, but art tells a story and we don't know the story. (Jenny: 12.09.08)

Process and Content: Racialising Practices

- Data showed a general reliance on 'traditional' or static forms of representation in pedagogic practice, often linked to issues with a lack of knowledge and colonial constructions of what is widely acceptable or permissible in mainstream educational spaces. Representations outside these boundaries generated notions of 'risk' for parents, educators and children.

Process and Content: Data Extract



I was a bit thingy about the Aboriginal flag because I've got flags up on my roof and I wanted to put an Aboriginal flag but I didn't know how parents would respond to that. It was about that sorry time and I'm thinking, I don't know how parents are going to respond to that, but if it's alright ... I didn't want to offend anybody and I know it does offend people. Especially when they might not come to me, they might whinge to [the director] and going back to [the director] and whinging to her because I mean she's got enough without that ... I just thought that would be something – because we want to put flags all along our roof and that was one flag I did want to get my hands on. (Rachael: 55, 567: 25.02.09)

Process and Content: Data Extract

Journal Entry (Kylie: 29.05.09)

What a night!!! It was the wettest night on record but we still had an excellent turnout of Staff and we had three families attend ... It is especially important for the children to be exposed to various activities that include experiences from their own cultural background. It took a while for the parents to relax and to start to share experiences of things they enjoyed from their childhood ... However, as time went on we got a variety of game ideas that we think the children will enjoy taking part in ... As a result, we are going to have another Multicultural Night in October.

What we're going to do is set up five tables of different cultures. I've already got two volunteers to do three tables. I've just got to get two more. We've got Sri Lankan, we've got Japanese, [a fellow educator] is doing Chinese anyway, we've got an Aboriginal that – dad's coming, but dad doesn't know it yet. I know a father who is Maori so I'm working on him ... They're the experts and they're going to teach and that's what We actually wrote in the letter that we would like to learn from you, things, like games and songs, that we can incorporate about your child's culture into their everyday programming in their rooms. (Kylie: Conversation: 08.05.09)

