



*Beliefs of early childhood teachers about
vulnerable culturally diverse families:
What do we know and need to know?*

Dr Kerry Hodge and Dr Rebekah Grace

Children and Families Research Centre
Macquarie University



*Engaging vulnerable families
through early childhood programs*



Good long-term developmental outcomes for children (e.g., Perry Preschool Project – Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997)

Long tradition of parent involvement in programs



Potential barriers to partnerships



- Lack of recognition of parents as experts about their child (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000)
- Time, language difficulties (Hand & Wise, 2006)
- Relationships with disadvantaged families harder to establish (Galinsky et al., 1992)
- Clash of cultures – values, routines, communication styles (Gonzales-Mena, 2005; Rogoff, 1990)



Finding a good fit or common ground



Common ground (Clark, 1996)

- Is what you believe you and the other person share (beliefs, assumptions, knowledge and awareness)
- Is based on your actual experience of the other person AND on your beliefs about the group that you believe the other person belongs to
- Changes with increased interaction



Comparing parent and teacher beliefs about EC programs



Ebbeck & Glover (2000)

Interviewed 101 immigrant families and 100 EC teachers
Families from Pan-Pacific countries within 6 years; children 0-8

Some teacher-parent agreement that EC programs should

- Involve parents in decision making
- Help parents understand children better
- Help parents enjoy parenthood

Teachers thought it more important than parents did to...

- Provide help in emergency
- Give parents time to themselves
- Give parents opportunities to work with their child in the EC program

Different cultures had different views



Comparing parent and teacher beliefs about childrearing



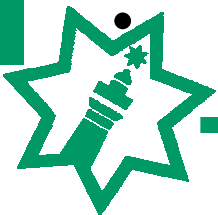
Wise and Da Silva (2007)

Childcare workers

Families: Vietnamese, Somali, Anglo/other

Questionnaire re parenting goals, discipline, beliefs, expectations for reaching developmental milestones (motor, independence, cognitive, obedience/self-regulation)

- Teachers and parents differ?
- Variations according to culture?
- Differences larger if cultures of teacher-parent pairs differ?



Comparing parent perspectives about childhood



Brooker (2002)

<i>Anglo</i>	<i>Bangladeshi</i>
Learn through play	Learn when taught
Adult vs child worlds	Mixed-age world
Child plays, is indulged	Child helps
Independent	Interdependent
Child talks, is busy	Child listens
Individualist	Collectivist



Indigenous families and their engagement with early childhood services



Lower levels of engagement due to:

- mistrust
- fear of racism
- accessibility
- availability

Many Indigenous families see early education as very important and want to play a role (e.g. Windy, Jenvey, & Drysdale, 2003).



Relationships between People and Place



Fasoli and Ford (2001)

A narrative approach.

Participants: 3 Aboriginal educators over an 18 month period, and a small reference group of Aboriginal educators.

Main finding: There are differences in cultural meanings that surround relationships

- between parents and staff,
- between staff and children,
- between older and younger children.

SDN Children's Services (2005)

The importance of understanding local customs and consulting Elders.



Mainstream understandings

MacNaughton and Davis (2001)



Twenty five non-Indigenous early childhood teachers asked to complete questionnaires and interviews.

They were asked: (1) how they portrayed Indigenous Australians within their curriculum, (2) what resources they used, and (3) how relevant they think it is to teach young children about the Indigenous culture.

Results:

- 1 did not incorporate any teaching of Aboriginal culture.
- 10 thought it unnecessary or inappropriate to talk with the children about current issues.
- 2 challenged colonial understandings of Australia's Indigenous people.



Indigenous teachers for Indigenous children. Is this the only way?



Parents prefer working with Indigenous teachers (e.g. De Gioia et al, 2003).

Indigenous teachers can experience racism, even from within the Aboriginal communities (Hall).

Only 30% of Indigenous children attend an early childhood service with an Indigenous teacher.

All teachers must be prepared to work in partnership with all children and their families.



*In conclusion:
What do we know?*

- Cultural differences can affect how families engage with early childhood programs.
- It is important to establish common ground.
- Accommodating differences is not always easy.

What do we need to know?

1. To what extent are teachers and parents able to accommodate difference?
2. Where are the points of resistance? Can they be resolved?
3. How does teacher practice and training need to change?
4. What is the child's perspective?



Contacting us



kerry.hodge@mq.edu.au

rebekah.grace@mq.edu.au

Children and Families Research Centre
Institute of Early Childhood
Macquarie University NSW 2109
Australia

