Early childhood is the ideal setting for learning about rights and respect

In 1948, the international community, through the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, affirmed that each and every one of us should have access to a number of fundamental human rights.

Decades later they agreed that children, by virtue of their particular vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, must be granted special protection and additional rights. In 1990, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) entered into force (UN, 1989). It quickly became, and remains to this day, the most ratified human rights treaty in history. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia acknowledges the CRC as providing the principles upon which the practice of early childhood educators should be based (DEEWR, 2009). Throughout their early development, children begin to make sense of the physical, social and cultural dimensions of the world. It is through these early learning experiences that their thinking and values begin to be shaped. It is critical that as significant influencers in children’s lives, early childhood professionals seek to instil the behaviours, competencies and values considered important by the wider community.

Early childhood environments provide the ideal setting for children to learn about their rights and develop respect for those around them. Acknowledging this, and based on extensive consultation with the early childhood sector, the Australian Human Rights Commission has recently developed its first series of early childhood education resources. Building Belonging was launched at Early Childhood Australia’s conference in October. It is a comprehensive toolkit of early education resources which includes an ebook, song with actions, educator guide, posters and lesson plans focused on encouraging respect for cultural diversity and tackling racial prejudice in early childhood settings. Teaching respect for cultural diversity will assist children to learn about their cultural background, develop a strong sense of self-identity and wellbeing, appreciate difference and recognise universal characteristics we all share. This will ultimately result in a more respectful and equal world where the realisation of human rights of all children is respected, protected and promoted.

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References


