My reflections on reconciliation

Cultural competence and reconciliation are recurrent topics in our line of work. But when it comes to putting these into practice, we’re often faced with more questions than answers. I’d like to put forth my perspective and hopefully it might help my colleagues in taking the first step towards their reconciliation journey.

I suggest that teachers and educators engage in their own learning journey and build knowledge and understanding of their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Talk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, professionals and families in your local area. Engage in professional development opportunities, such as language courses and cultural awareness training. It is then that you will feel more confident about delivering a curriculum that is inclusive and respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. It is also then that you will be able to educate the future of our nation on the need for genuine reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

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As the director of an Aboriginal Early Childhood Service, and as an Aboriginal woman, I am proud that Aboriginal culture, customs and values are embedded in our everyday practice. Fellow teachers and educators often ask how they can implement Aboriginal culture in children’s curriculum, especially in the lead up to significant dates such as National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day. I have found that my colleagues want to be respectful and inclusive in their approach but often lack knowledge, context, confidence and understanding. The advice I give to my fellow early childhood professionals is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are Australia’s histories and cultures. It should not be something that is uncomfortable to talk about in centres with fewer or no Indigenous children, because it is the truth.

Just as we do for children’s learning in subjects such as sustainable practices, lifecycles and physical and emotional health, we must first gain the knowledge and understanding ourselves and then model it. That same practice needs to be applied when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. It needs to be authentic, inclusive, respectful and honest.

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