

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIGENOUS CHILDREN: INFLUENCES AND ISSUES

**Presentation by
Isabella Adams
Dip Teach, BA, BEd, MEd
September 2005**



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Strategies:

- 1960s:** Commonwealth funded pre-schools in urban and Aboriginal communities in territories - mainstream training for Indigenous people.
- 1970s:** Commonwealth funded Indigenous pre-schools and training programs.
- 1980s:** Integration of pre-school education into primary school sector – increased focus on childcare and health – supplementary Commonwealth funding.
- 1990s:** Integration of specific Indigenous programs into mainstream programs –supplementary Commonwealth funding.
- 2000s:** Inclusion of Indigenous groups in mainstream programs-supplementary Commonwealth funding.

PREMISES FOR STRATEGIES

Premises for Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Strategies:

- 1960s:** Assimilation view that Indigenous children have to learn and behave like “white” children.
- 1970s:** Indigenous children viewed as culturally “disadvantaged” and intellectually “deficit” and need compensatory programs.
- 1980s:** Indigenous children viewed as able to learn but are socially and economically “disadvantaged”.
- 1990s:** Indigenous children viewed as able to learn but are victims of negative contemporary issues.
- 2000s:** Indigenous children viewed as able to learn and to be included in mainstream programs.

OUTCOMES AND INFLUENCES

Research/Review Findings on Indigenous Children

1. **Australian Background Report to OECD Review of Early Childhood Education and Care – 2000**
2. **National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Review – 2003**
3. **Australian Council of Educational Research Longitudinal Study on English Literacy and Numeracy Learning for Indigenous Students in the Early Years – 2003**
4. **WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) — *The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, 2004**

EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGIES

Current Situation for Indigenous Children

- Disproportionate numbers have no pre-school experience.
- Attendance rates and quality of early childhood experience is unknown.
- Greater frequencies of health and social problems.
- Readiness for school is questionable.
- Lower achievement of educational outcomes.
- Lower levels of positive self-identity and self-esteem.
- No provision of a holistic approach to education that recognises their whole development and relationships with family and community.
- Marginalised and very little acknowledgement of their strengths.
- Schools generally do not cater for their developmental needs.
- General sense that there is no purpose in them going to school.
- Lower belief and confidence in achievement of success in school.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

- ❖ **Employment and representation of Indigenous people in the research, planning, administration, management and delivery of early childhood programs and services.**
- ❖ **Provision of cross-portfolio early childhood programs and services that are accessible, relevant and appropriate for Indigenous children and families.**
- ❖ **Provision of inclusive early childhood learning environments.**
- ❖ **Customisation of training in all areas of early childhood for Indigenous people – build capacity and leadership of Indigenous women.**
- ❖ **Indigenous cultural awareness programs for all early childhood program and services personnel.**
- ❖ **Training for early childhood program and services personnel on Indigenous cultural traits, learning styles and strengths.**
- ❖ **Cultural considerations in defining and measuring quality of early childhood programs and services.**
- ❖ **Flexibility in regulatory requirements for early childhood services.**

PRINCIPLES FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Underpinning these suggestions for improvements are the following principles:

- **Commitment to reconciliation and partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.**
- **Valuing of Indigenous children and people as the first Australians.**
- **Right of Indigenous families and communities to resources for early childhood services.**
- **Indigenous representation, involvement, and active participation on decision-making bodies that determine policy, practice, programs and services for early childhood.**
- **Elimination of racism, paternalism, and tokenism.**
- **Inclusion of Indigenous cultures and peoples in terminology such as *mainstream, equity, equality, and social justice.***