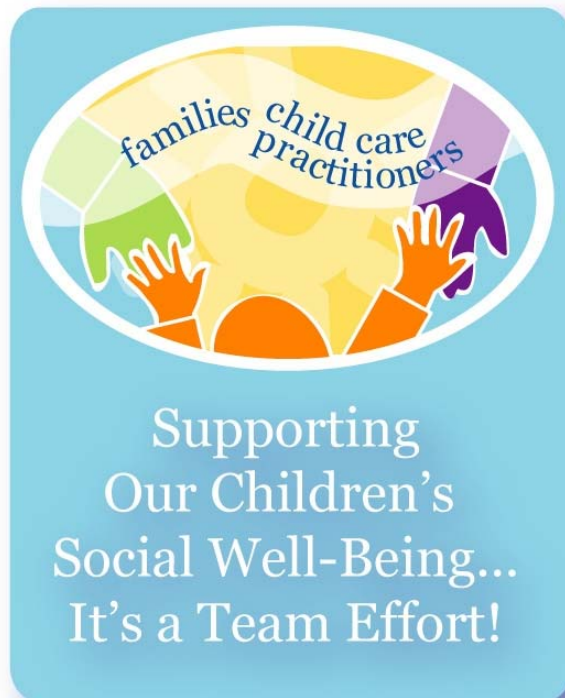


# Workshop

## Cultural Identity



Produced by the Canadian Child Care Federation



CANADIAN  
CHILD CARE  
FEDERATION

FÉDÉRATION  
CANADIENNE DES  
SERVICES DE GARDE  
À L'ENFANCE



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**Free full-colour posters  
to everyone who hosts a workshop  
and submits evaluation forms**

***Return forms by fax or mail to:***  
**Canadian Child Care Federation**  
**201-383 Parkdale Ave.**  
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## Facilitator Information

### Focus

- To create awareness about the significance of cultural identity in development
- To increase understanding as to the role of language in cultural identity
- To generate ways for families and practitioners to work together to support children's cultural identities.

### Materials

- A small plant in a pot
- A clear glass container with water e.g. a rosebowl
- A small digging tool (tiny shovel or knife)
- A small pair of scissors
- Whiteboard or flipchart
- Markers

### Overview

Following an introductory demonstration, this workshop draws on two short stories to illustrate positive cultural identity. The facilitator debriefs the stories and presents some theory, then participants divide into groups to apply the theory to various scenarios. Once the small groups have presented their discussion and answers, the group brainstorms things they could do, as parents and/or practitioners, to support children in building strong cultural identities.

### Background Information

#### *What is cultural identity and why is it important?*

Cultural identity is a sense of belonging to a particular group or groups We develop our cultural identity in our relationships with family, friends, community, geography,

language and other social factors. Community and belonging are particularly important parts of some cultures' belief systems; for example, in Aboriginal and Asian cultures.

Cultural identity is very important to development because it tells us who we are. A strong cultural identity contributes to our overall well-being. It gives us a firm base from which to reach out into the world and allows us to explore and appreciate cultures that are different from our own. Our cultural identity is the foundation for social awareness and connection.

Resilience is an important aspect of cultural identity because individuals who are resilient are better able to move between different cultures and settings and to cope with situations that might otherwise undermine their well-being and sense of identity.

Language and culture are intertwined, which means that language plays an important role in the development of cultural identity. For children whose home language is different from the majority language, the ability to speak the home language is crucial. Children who can speak their home language are able to maintain close family and community relationships. They are able to develop pride in their cultural heritage and a sense of belonging to their community.

For families who remain closely connected with their first culture, the challenge is to retain that culture once the child moves into child care and school. For Aboriginal peoples who have been separated from their traditional culture because of residential schools, the issue is one of regaining the lost culture. Building a strong sense of cultural identity has been found to be very important in helping Aboriginal children overcome the challenges they face. Families who have spent long periods in refugee camps may also have become disconnected from their traditional culture.

### ***How can we learn about other cultures?***

The first step to learning about other cultures is to recognize our own. Because our culture is an integral part of everything we do, we often don't recognize it until we bump up against someone whose beliefs, values and lifestyle is very different from ours. Our own cultural self-awareness allows us to go beyond ourselves to explore other cultures.

The second step in learning about other cultures is to really want to learn. Then we can make the effort to reach out to others to learn how they see and live their lives. In child care, we are often fortunate to work with families and colleagues from many different cultures so we have many opportunities for growth and learning. Often we hesitate to intrude, but people almost always welcome well-intentioned efforts to learn more about their culture.

In thinking about how practitioners can work with families to support cultural identity, it is important to recognize that culture is constantly changing and that it varies from family to family. Because a certain practice has been attributed to the Chinese culture doesn't mean that we can assume that a Chinese family in our program necessarily adheres to that practice. While it can be helpful to know about different cultures in general terms, the families themselves are the best source of information about their culture.

***How can we help children feel that their culture is a part of their playroom?***

Children need to be able to "see" themselves and their families in their playrooms. Familiar music, books, pictures of daily life as the child knows it, kitchen utensils that are used at home, and familiar food all tell children that this is a place where they can feel at home. Seeing their parents chatting comfortably with the practitioners and appearing to enjoy their company reinforces their feelings of security. Having their family and community members take part in centre activities further affirms the child.

***Supporting home language***

There are many reasons to support families in teaching their children their home language. Research suggests that children tend to need a strong base in their home language in order to be successful in the majority language. Bilingual children tend to have better cognitive abilities and do better in school. Perhaps most importantly, children who are able to speak their home language can maintain a connection with their families and their cultural community. Children who are unable to speak their home language may not be able to communicate effectively with relatives and other community members or even, in some cases, with their own parents.

### ***Supporting resiliency***

As members of a number of cultural groups (family, community, various organizations, peers) we learn to adjust our behaviours to the expectations of the setting. Children whose home and community experiences are quite different from those they encounter in the broader community may need to be particularly well-equipped to make this shift. Unfortunately, they might also need to be secure enough in their own identity to withstand possible negative messages and stereotypes.

Resiliency has been associated with four qualities: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose (Krovitz, 1999). A secure environment and a sense of belonging are important factors in strengthening resiliency. Programs that focus on group, rather than individual, achievement and on the importance of effort in overcoming difficulties provide further support for children's resiliency. (Brooker and Weedhead, 2008)

### **Suggestions**

This is a 90 minute workshop with possibilities for extensions or follow up. It is best suited for a group of child care practitioners and families although it can be used with a group composed solely of practitioners. With some adaptations (e.g. in the questions following the scenarios) it could be used with a group composed entirely of parents.

Examples have been provided from Aboriginal and refugee communities. Facilitators should feel free to choose those that are the most applicable or to create examples that are closer to the experience of the practitioners and families.

## The Workshop

### Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)

- Introduce yourself, welcome the group



For the introductory exercise, you will need the potted plant, digging implement, scissors and container half filled with water. Show the plant to the group.

*"I brought this little plant along today to show you. I've had it since it was small and I like it very much. It's been getting bigger and I think the time has come to put it in a new pot. So I'm going to take it out of this pot"*

Carefully remove plant, shake the dirt from its roots and hold it up for people to see.

*"Before I put it in the new pot I'm going to trim it just a bit."*

Trim the leaves slightly by snipping her and there and finally, still holding the plant so people can see, snip off the roots. Hold the plant so people can see.

*"I think it's ready to plant now."*

Place the plant in the container of water.

*There! It's in its new home. Do you think it will grow well?*

Thanks to Lucero Vargis of *Multilinguabilities*, for this exercise

Point out that children, like plants, grow when they are able to stay connected to their roots.

## Objectives

- To show the importance of cultural identity in development
- To look at the role of language in cultural identity
- To find ways that families and practitioners can work together to help children stay connected to their roots

## Shared Experience #1 (5 minutes)

Read these stories to the participants:

*Mitchell is a 20 year old Aboriginal man who lives in a remote community in northern Canada. Mitchell is a firm and vocal advocate for the youth in the community and has been instrumental in the band's decision to invest in improving recreation facilities for the teens. Mitchell says, "I'm proud that I'm an Aboriginal person. Being proud of who we are is what makes us strong. My grandfather taught me that."*

*Suzan's family fled from northern Iraq to Turkey where they lived in a refugee camp for 4 years before coming to Canada when Suzan was 12. Now a 20 year old university student, Suzan says, "It was so hard when we first came to Canada. I was in junior high and the other kids used to make fun of us all the time—our clothes, how we talked. But those kinds of experiences make you stronger." Along with the rest of her family, Suzan works tirelessly to support the small Kurdish community. "When we came to Canada," Suzan explains, "my dad said 'We're starting a new life here but we must not forget our old one. We have to take the best from our old culture and the best from our new one.'"*

## Debrief (5 minutes)

It's been said that there are two important things to give children—roots and wings. In child care programs, we are often very good at giving children wings. We encourage them to be independent and to try new things. We help them build the skills they need to do that. But we usually depend on the families to give them roots. These stories

show us two young people whose families seem to have done a good job of helping them build a strong cultural identity—they are proud of who they are and, because of this, are able to give back to their community.

But even the most supportive and concerned families struggle to help their children maintain a sense of their cultural identity. Their children want desperately to belong. They see in child are and then in school that their home culture is different and they often begin to judge it as inferior. But if they don't value their culture, they are not valuing themselves. If families and practitioners work together to support children's cultural identity, they have a better chance of developing a healthy sense of themselves as people who come from two cultures.

### **Theory (10 minutes)**

Draw on the background information above to discuss:

- What "cultural identity" means
- Why cultural identity is so important to children's development
- The relationship between culture and language

Then present the following points about ways that practitioners can work with families to develop cultural awareness:

- Learn about each child's culture—families are the best resource
- Support children's home language
- Involve families in creating curriculum and in classroom activities.
- Participate together in traditional events—in community or recreated in classroom
- Encourage meaningful involvement of elders and others from the community

### **Shared Experience #2 (20 minutes)**

Ask participants to divide into small groups. If the group is composed of parents and practitioners, it might be useful to mix them in the groups.

Distribute one of the following scenarios to each group. (Choose the ones that seem most relevant or create other scenarios that are particularly appropriate to the group.)

**Scenario A:**

Adan will spend his first day in child care tomorrow. Until now he has been at home with his parents and his grandfather. His family came from Somalia as refugees just before Adan was born four years ago. Prior to that, they lived in a refugee camp for three years. Adan's father and mother are learning to speak English but the family speaks Somalian at home.

- When Adan's parents registered him at the centre, they asked if they should start speaking English to him at home to help him with his transition. As the director, what advice would you give them?
- What are some things you could do to ease Adan's transition to child care?
- What information could Adan's family give you to help you to make him feel more comfortable in the new setting?
- How could you work with Adan's family over time to help support him in developing a strong cultural identity?

**Scenario B:**

River, aged four, has just moved to the city from a nearby First Nations reservation. Tomorrow will be his first day in child care. His parents are quite connected with Aboriginal culture and hope that River will grow up feeling proud of his Aboriginal heritage.

- What are some things you could do to ease River's transition to child care?
- What information could River's family give you to help you to make him feel more comfortable in the new setting?
- How could you work with River's family over time to help support him in developing a strong cultural identity?

### ***Scenario C:***

Meganne, a child care practitioner notices that four year old Mei Ling is sitting in her cubby with a sad expression on her face. She approaches and sits down beside her. "Mei Ling, I notice that you look unhappy. Are you feeling sad?" Mei Ling nods and tears well up in her eyes. "Would you like to tell me about it?" asks Meganne gently. "The kids say that I have worms in my lunch," Mei Ling sobs. "They say I dress funny!"

- What could you say to Mei Ling?
- What could you do to help the other children be more accepting of Mei Ling's food and clothing?
- How could you work with Mei Ling's family to create a classroom environment that includes her culture?

### ***Scenario D:***

When Samira's parents come to visit the child care centre, her mother is wearing a burka. You notice one of the children giggling to another and pointing at her. You hear the word "ghost."

- What might you say to the children?
- If Samira's parents decide to bring her to the centre, what are some things you could do to help her feel comfortable there?
- How could you work with Samira's family over time to help support her in feeling proud of her culture?

### ***Scenario E:***

When 5 year old Dakota came to the child care, the practitioners were excited to have an Aboriginal child in their centre. In order to honour him, they planned a special day where they danced to pow-wow music, made bannock, and listened to Aboriginal legends. They talked with Dakota about his First Nations heritage. By the end of the day, Dakota seemed angry and withdrawn. The practitioners were puzzled.

- What might have gone wrong here?
- What might have happened instead?

### ***Scenario F:***

Because of its diverse population, the child care centre has decided to hold a Festival of Lights rather than a Christmas concert. Some of the staff and families are upset. "We're so careful to respect other cultures that we don't get to celebrate our own," they complain.

We increase the chances that a change will be accepted if we ensure that the people who are affected by it are able to play a role in the decision.

- What process could a program use to decide how to handle celebrations?
- How could the situation be explained to families and staff so they could make an informed decision that is respectful of all families?

### **Debrief, Theory and Application (30 minutes)**

Ask each group to read the scenario and present the answers to their questions. Discuss, integrating theory as indicated. As the participants speak, note important points from the discussion that show concrete things that practitioners and families can do to support children's cultural identity. Read through these at the end of the discussion.

### **Commitment (5 minutes)**

Ask participants to commit to one thing that they will do differently in the coming week as a result of the workshop. They could write this on a piece of paper and take it home as a reminder. Practitioners might choose to do this as a group, planning for a change they will make in their program.

### **Evaluation/Feedback (5 minutes)**

Evaluation forms are included ....Please ask participants to complete these at the end of the session and to put them in an envelope placed somewhere in the room. Responses are intended to be anonymous.

## Possible Extension

One of the first steps in developing cultural competence is to develop your own cultural awareness. Here are some questions that practitioners and/or families can use to explore their own cultural identity:

- What is your cultural background?
- What are some things that you value because your culture values those things?
- How well do your beliefs and values fit in with your culture's values?
- Have clashes between your values and those promoted by your culture harmed you?
- What things would you like to pass on to children from your culture?

## Resources

Bliss, B. (1994). Activities that promote racial and cultural awareness. *Family Child Care Connections* 4(3), 1-4. [web.aces.uiuc.edu/vista/pdf\\_pubs/CHLDCARE.PDF](http://web.aces.uiuc.edu/vista/pdf_pubs/CHLDCARE.PDF)

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