

Connections for cultural identity

IOAS Research to Practice forum

Presented by

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We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.



Overview

- Study 1: *'CALD children and families in the NSW child protection system,'* Dr Pooja Sawrikar
- Study 2: *'Preliminary analysis of cultural identity plans, from 2017 NSW open adoptions from out-of-home care,'* A/Prof Amy Conley Wright
- Spotlight on practice: *SSI's Multicultural Foster Care,* Kathy Karatasas
- Discussion: Supporting cultural identity for children in out-of-home care through cultural connections

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*Study 1: 'CALD children and families in
the NSW child protection system,'
Dr Pooja Sawrikar*

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Background

Postdoctoral Fellowship, 2007–2010: ‘CALD children and families in the NSW child protection system’

- Funded by (then) NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) and Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at UNSW
- Recognising and responding to the paucity in research and knowledge on culturally appropriate service provision
- Triangulated three data sources to boost validity of findings:
 1. Stage 1 – Literature review
 2. Stage 2 – Case file reviews - **120 case files across six cultural groups (20 per group) randomly selected and reviewed**
 3. Stage 3 – Interviews with CALD parents/guardians and child protection (CP) staff - **29 CALD family participants, 17 CP staff participants**

See: Sawrikar, P. (2017). *Working with ethnic minorities and across cultures in Western child protection systems*. UK: Routledge.

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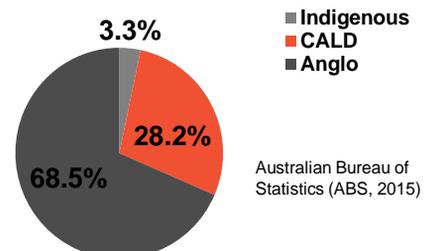
‘CALD’

Migrants different in:

- **Race** – visible differences lead to (social, economic, political) exclusion
- **Language** – English not necessarily first language in country of origin
- **Culture** – high on collectivism (‘familism’) and overt patriarchy
- **Religion** – Christianity not necessarily main religion in country of origin

Includes refugees and asylum seekers but not a sufficient term

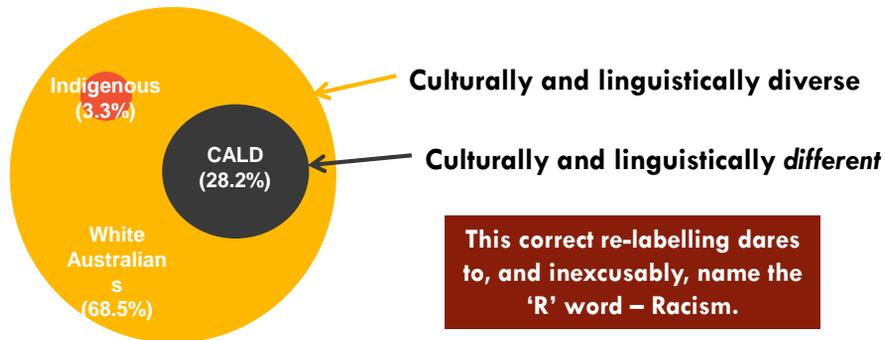
Australia’s Population



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CALD cont'd

CALD is a non-transparent term for people *different* to white Australians, and masks their needs, experiences, and barriers



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Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2015)

Key findings and recommendations for practice

Family cohesion, collectivism, and removal

- **Family cohesion is a definitive characteristic of collectivist families, but this does not mean that the trauma of being removed is worse for them**
 - The trauma of removal is equal across cultures
 - This is because the *importance* of family is the same across cultures
- **Instead, family cohesion should be seen as a protective factor** and appropriately and sufficiently considered when making ROSH assessments for CALD children and families
- **Mandatory consultation with a 'Multicultural Caseworker' would help ensure that ROSH assessments were informed and met the 'balance of probabilities' criteria – that children are better removed than kept with the family**

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Key findings and recommendations for practice (cont'd)

Culture in short- and long-term placements

- **Particularly important to consider how cultural needs will be met in long-term placements**
 - However, short-term placements can become long-term, so culture important to consider regardless of length of placement
 - E.g. Food, music, links with the community etc.
- **This is true of all children – CALD, Indigenous, and Anglo – but particularly for CALD and Indigenous children because of their systemic threat to cultural safety**
- **Two practices can help maximise good outcomes for CALD children:**
 1. Culturally appropriate placements
 2. Detailed and inclusive/consultative care plans

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Key findings and recommendations for practice (cont'd)

Culturally appropriate placements

- **The search for a culturally appropriate placement may be constrained or influenced by:**
 - *Whether the child is visibly different ...* The cultural needs of non-visibly different children may be overlooked
 - *Whether the child is mixed race ...* The combined cultural needs of the child may be overlooked if they are half-Anglo
 - *The availability of CALD foster carers ...* Cultural stigmas make it difficult to recruit a large enough pool
- **Kinship care should be offered where possible**
- **Developing and implementing outreach programs may help overturn stigmas in the long-term**

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Key findings and recommendations for practice (cont'd)

Barriers to good practice

▪ Within (even culturally appropriate) placements include:

- Emotional abuse, neglect, or other forms of harm (e.g. witnessing DFV) in foster carers' home
- Lack of honesty with foster carers about possibly challenging behaviour from foster children
- Lack of sufficient information to foster carers about foster child/ren
- Unequal support to foster carers from different cultural groups
- Number of children that need to be placed together
- Foster carers more interested in financial reimbursement than caring for children
- Lack of training on the importance of culture to non-matched foster carers
- Non-matched caseworkers unsupportive of a child's cultural needs

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Key findings and recommendations for practice (cont'd)

Attachment

- If children are happy in their placement, then attachment to foster carer needs to be seriously considered
- Moving the child from a stable home into an ethnically-matched placement is not always better for the child
- Training the foster carer to meet the child's cultural needs is seen as sufficient and ideal



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Key findings and recommendations for practice (cont'd)

Care plans

- **Care plans should be detailed and consult with relevant parties aware of the needs of the child**
 - This approach is empowering, inclusive, and tailored to individual needs
- **Language barriers and time constraints may limit the extent to which care plans are inclusive of families' needs**
 - e.g. using interpreters is time intensive and court orders may need to be drawn up in a very short amount of time



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*Study 2: Analysis of cultural identity plans,
from 2017 NSW open adoptions from out-of-home care,
A/Prof Amy Conley Wright*

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Racial-ethnic socialisation

- Racial-ethnic socialisation refers to the **enculturation of a child to be included within their ethnicity**, where the individual displays values, behaviours and traditions of the ethnicity, experiences ethnic pride and learns coping methods to racism (Montgomery & Jordan, 2018).
- **Strong identity of adoptee's culture and positive ethnic identity** of birth culture associated with **higher self-esteem** (Ferrari et al., 2015).
- **Adoptive parents can experience balancing act**: afraid of promoting their child's birth culture too little, but also of going overboard and making child feel different and excluded (Jacobson, 2008)

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NSW Adoption Act

Section 32 Regard to be had to cultural heritage of child

(1) In placing a child (other than an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child) for adoption, the decision maker must take into account the culture, any disability, language and religion of the child and the principle that the child's given name, identity, language and cultural and religious ties should, as far as possible, be preserved.

(2) Without limiting matters that may be taken into account, the decision maker must take into account **whether a prospective adoptive parent of a different cultural heritage** to that of the child has demonstrated the following:

(a) the capacity to assist the child to develop a healthy and positive cultural identity,

(b) knowledge of or a willingness to learn about, and teach the child about, the child's cultural heritage,

(c) a willingness to foster links with that heritage in the child's upbringing,

(d) the capacity to help the child if the child encounters racism or discrimination in school or the wider community.

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NSW Supreme Court adoption case file review (2017)

Overall sample: 117 children in 89 adoption cases

Cultural backgrounds: 66% Anglo-Australian, 31% from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds

4 children had birth parents who had Aboriginal heritage, where the birth parent or the child did not identify as Aboriginal

Sub-sample with cultural identity plans: 31 children in 26 adoption cases (five 2-sibling groups)

- Ethnicities represented in the cultural plans were diverse, including: Filipino, Aboriginal, Italian, Irish, Scottish, Persian, Maori, Fijian-Indian, Polish, Chinese, Malaysian, Russian, German, Maltese, Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil, Greek and Vietnamese.
- Most plans (62%) were for a single cultural identity, but a 38% included provisions for the child to connect to two or more cultures.
- While provisions for religion were noted in 50% of cases, these were not as heavily emphasised compared to cultural background.

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Specific activities: Experiences

- Incorporating **food from the relevant culture** into the child's diet (62%)
- **Language learning or exposure**, through resources like books or songs, but most commonly through adoptive parents using some common phrases or words in the home (62%)
- **Attending festivals or cultural/religious events** within the community (96%)
- **Culturally significant objects** to be given to the children or displayed in the home e.g., art, photographs of birth family, maps (73%)
- **Exposure to music, art or dance** within the home environment or through visits and attendance at cultural venues (54%)

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Specific activities: Cognitive practices

- **Reading/research** to learn about culture (54%)
- **Conversations** between PAPs and child about cultural heritage (39%)
- Use of **movies/TV** to learn about culture and language (27%)
- **Adoptive parents' self education** to equip themselves to assist the child to connect to their culture (58%)

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Specific activities: Relationship-based practices

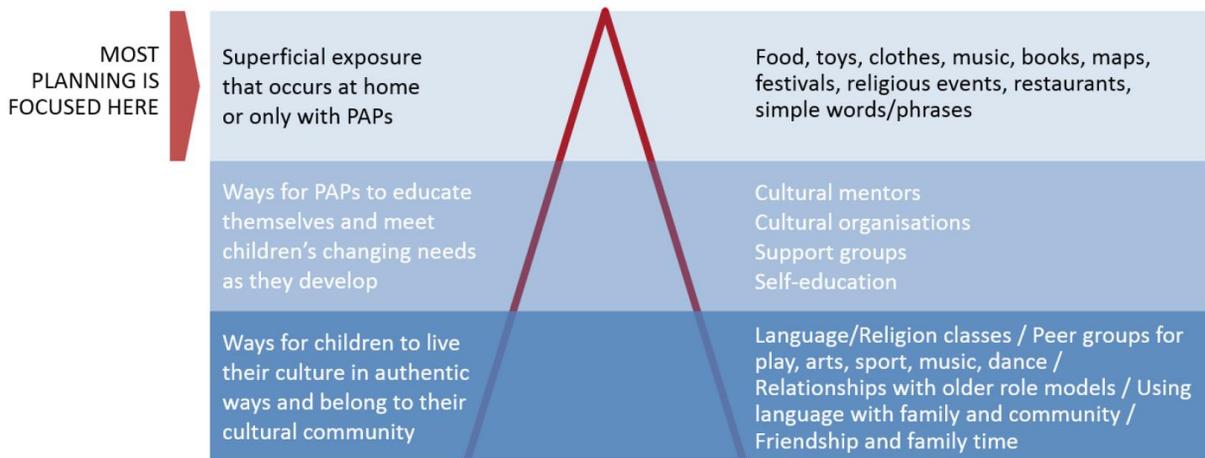
- **Contact with birth family** (expected where possible) including conversations and information on heritage & culture, language learning/sharing, preparing/eating food
- Adoptive parents planned to draw on **prior connections** – e.g., sharing cultural background, family member or friend with shared cultural background (40%)
- Goal to **form relationships with community members or groups** who share child's cultural background (70%)

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Specific activities: Engagement with ethnic communities

- Intention to **visit a place** where the child could be directly exposed to their culture (85%)
- Incorporating **cultural customs or traditions** into the family home by celebrating days of cultural/religious significance (e.g., Diwali) (54%)
- **Language learning or exposure** outside the home (26%)
- Drawing on **resources available in school** - usually in relation to cases with children of Aboriginal heritage (23%)
- **Attending sporting matches as a spectator or joining local clubs/sports** classes attended by other children with shared cultural background (15%)
- Playgroups, day-care or kid's clubs where **children are able to interact with others** from the same cultural background (27%)

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Studies have found that the most commonly utilized practices require the least amount of integration, involving little contact with people of the children's ethnicity/race¹

¹Vonk, M. E., Lee, J., & Crolley-Simic, J. (2010). Cultural socialization practices in domestic and international transracial adoption. *Adoption Quarterly*, 13(3-4), 227-247.

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Key findings

- **CALD is a murky label**
Criteria that prompted the creation of a cultural plan appeared to be inconsistent, particularly when children were not visibly different than ethnic Anglo-Australians
- **Focusing on culture and ignoring race**
NSW Adoption Act Section 32 Regard to be had to cultural heritage of child,
“(d) the capacity to help the child if the child encounters racism or discrimination in school or the wider community” – not detailed in plans, part of assessment
- **Nature of plans can be tokenistic and not address identity formation over time**
Plans consist mainly of one-off events or general statements about exposure, learning about the cultural the way an outsider would (eg research, documentaries or visits), rather than how people of that culture would learn.

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Recommendations for making plans more meaningful

- **Adoptive parents’ attitudes: their self-awareness is the more important than cultural tasks**
Plans are task-focused and child-focused, with little attention to adoptive parent’s attitude, which is more important than cultural tasks. They model openness, appreciation for diversity, and control the experiences to which the child is exposed
- **Ongoing contact with birth family can lead to an authentic, individualised approach to cultural identity**
Things like, cooking, speaking language and talking about family history/customs/ values together are real example of cultural socialization, involving modelling and tradition
- **A variety of socialisation agents are important**
Role models of the same cultural background is KEY to identity formation. Identity is formed through repeated reinforcement and modelling, not through visits and viewing.

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*Kathy Karatasas,
Spotlight on practice: Multicultural Foster Care*

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SSI Supports





SSI Multicultural Foster Care

strengthening children through culture

SSI Multicultural Foster Care supports children from CALD backgrounds who are in out-of-home care

Children in care that are supported to maintain a connection to their culture, religion and language have better outcomes than those who are not supported in this way



Helping Australia's diverse foster children stay connected to their cultures



<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/helping-australia-s-diverse-foster-children-stay-connected-to-their-cultures>

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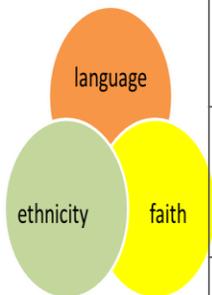
Connections for cultural identity

SSI's cultural responsive practice captures includes a number of program elements to strengthen children through culture. It includes:

- Shared understanding of the meaning of culture
- Cultural matching children with CALD foster carers
- Culturally aware and responsive carers
- Culturally aware and responsive staff
- Large pool of bilingual staff
- Active individualized cultural care plans
- Cultural support and training groups for carers
- Building evidence based practice
- Leading advocacy, collaboration and cultural community connections
- Culturally responsive child safe organisation

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Connections for cultural identity



Cultural element	Practice considerations
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the child's first language? • Is there a carer or caseworker who speaks the child's language? • Is there a bilingual support worker?
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where were the child or their parents or grandparents' born? • How connected have been/is the family to their ethnic community? • Are there refugee/trauma issues associated with the country of birth?
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the child's or parents or grandparent's faith? • How active have parents/grandparents been in practicing the faith? • What are the expectations of the child's practice? • What role does faith have in every day life?

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Connection with at least one bilingual person



Cultural reflective training

Reviewing cultural care plan

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My Life & Me resources

- Workbook
- Companion guide
- Children's guide
- All about my child
- Having difficult conversations



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Q&A: Supporting cultural identity for children in out-of-home care through cultural connections

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