



Exploring Celebrations in Children's Services

Self-Guided Learning Package

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About Self-Guided Learning Packages

Self-Guided Learning Packages can be completed in your own time and convenience and offer an alternative to attending training sessions. This package aims to develop skills and knowledge that will be valuable to you in providing quality education and care programs. Packages are often used for professional development by staff teams, networks and other groups of children's services professionals. You can work through the package with colleagues by reading the package together, discussing the information and collaborating to complete the one assessment task.

Gowrie Victoria Leadership and Learning Consultants are available to support you while working through the package. Feel free to phone or email if you require any assistance completing the tasks within the package. Phone 1800 103 670 (freecall) or (03) 9347 6388 or email psc@gowrievictoria.org.au

Exploring Celebrations in Children's Services

You have chosen to complete the 'Exploring Celebrations in Children's Services' package. The aim of this package is to support learners to develop an understanding about how celebrations can be utilised in child care programs to support children to develop an awareness of and respect for diverse values and beliefs. The learner will be able to describe and implement a range of strategies which will ensure that celebrations are reflective of the values and practices of families, children, Educators and the wider community in which the child care service exists.

Introduction

Celebrations can be as diverse as each of the children in a child care service. When incorporated into children's services appropriately, celebrations can be used to bring people together, to create a feeling of belonging and to develop a sense of community amongst families, educators and children.

The incorporation of celebrations into children's services programs can be an enriching experience for children, educators and families. If incorporated in a sensitive and respectful manner, celebrations can provide an opportunity for children to develop respect for diverse values and beliefs as they learn about practices which are different to their own.

Cultural Competence in Children's Services

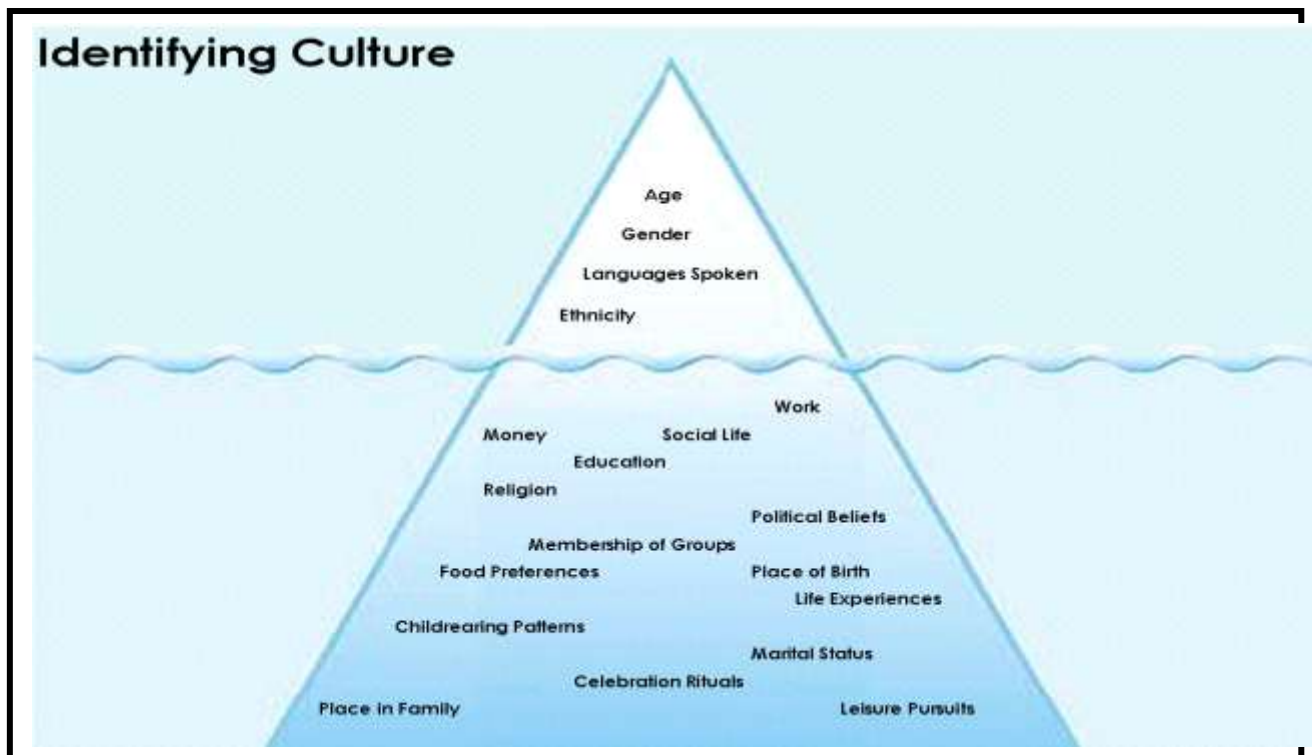
Belonging

'Children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community. *Belonging* acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of *belonging*. *Belonging* is central to *being* and *becoming* in that it shares who children are and who they can become' (EYLF, 2009, p.7).

Understanding Culture

Each person has their own culture which they bring with them to the child care setting. What one person may value or believe in may be very different to the next person, even if both are from the same cultural and linguistic background. For example; Christmas will have different meanings for different people, depending on their values, experiences and beliefs.

The same can be said about all celebrations and religious events. It's important not to assume that what is important to one particular family, may carry the same level of importance for another family. These beliefs and values may change as a person experiences new things or moves through life. Having an understanding of the way that culture and cultural practices influence a family's values and beliefs will enable Early Childhood Educators to incorporate celebrations in a sensitive and respectful manner.



This diagram provides you with a picture of the things which have influenced the development of your values and beliefs, that is, the things that have shaped your culture. Some of these influences are easily visible, such as age and gender and are illustrated here on the tip of the iceberg. However many influences, just as important, are invisible such as those illustrated here below the water line.

NQS 6.2: 'Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about children rearing are respected' (National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, 2009, p26).

Every family using a children's service will have their own unique picture and along with this picture they will have their own cultural beliefs and practices about celebrations. It can often be challenging to gain a complete understanding of the parts of a family's culture that are not easily visible; it is these invisible parts of culture that often influence a family's values and beliefs.

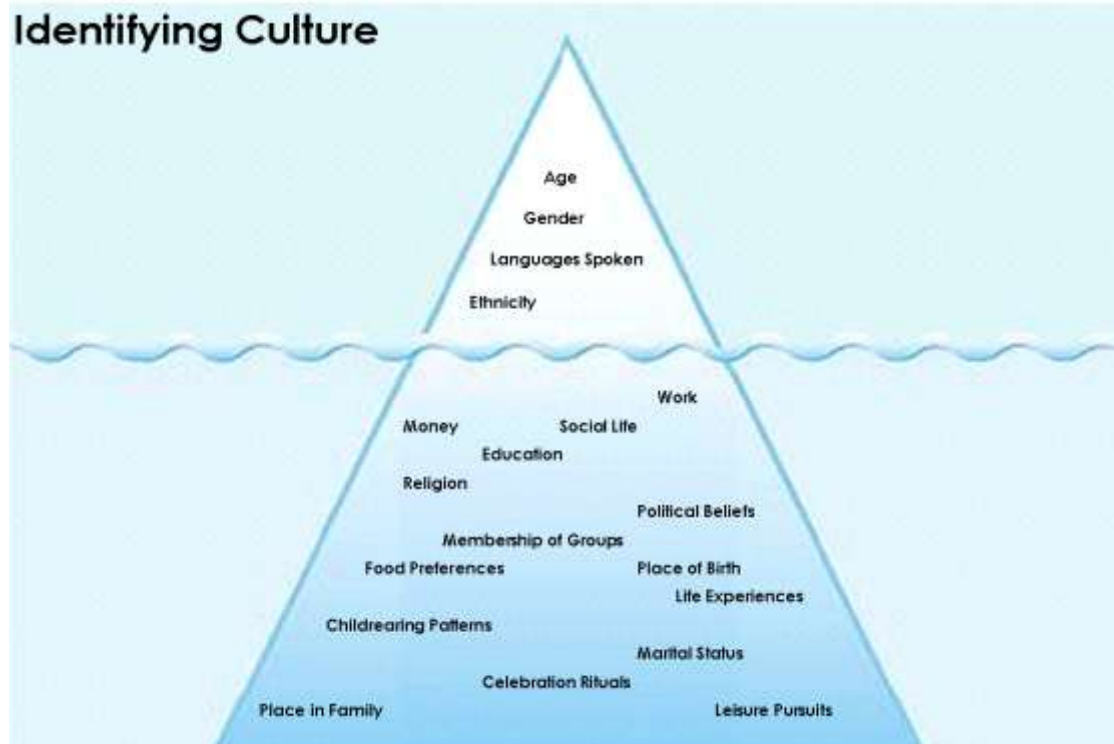
It is important to develop strategies to enable you to gain the information from families to be able to develop a picture of their culture. This information will support the development of appropriate and respectful celebrations. It can be gathered through:

- Enrolment forms
- Informal conversations
- Surveys
- Formal meetings with family members

Self Help Question 1

Identifying Culture

There are some aspects of culture which are visible and easily identifiable. While there are other parts that are harder to identify. Using the diagram below create a picture of your culture by adding in the relevant information e.g. under Age write your own age.



Exploring Cultural Competence

'Children respond to diversity with respect.' (EYLF, 2009, p27).

'Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences' (EYLF, 2009, p16).

Cultural Competence is not about replacing your values, practices and beliefs, with the values, practices and beliefs of others, but rather it is about learning to respect the different attitudes, beliefs and views of others. The EYLF Learning Outcome 1 'Children have a strong sense of identity' includes the Key Component 'Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect' (2009, p24). Therefore, the incorporation of celebrations into children's services should not be about giving up a particular celebration but rather ensuring that children are provided with opportunities which enable them to develop a respect for a wide range of diverse values and beliefs. This can be achieved by children experiencing a range of celebrations which are relevant to the children, educators and the community in which the children's service exists.

The essence of Cultural Competence is about learning to appreciate and respect similarities and difference. This is consistent with the EYLF's Key Component 'Children respond to diversity with respect,' which is part of Learning Outcome 2 (EYLF, 2009, p27). One of the most important social skills that Educators can teach children is the ability to respect difference. To successfully develop these skills, children need to be actively engaged in conversations, look for information, ask questions, see tolerance and respect in action and form their own opinions. Religion and celebrations are an important part of a person's culture and a program

which incorporates cultural diversity in a holistic manner is one which ensures that celebrations and religion are a part of the program.

Useful Resource

www.fka.com.au

Contains articles and information about multiculturalism in Children's Services

Self Help Question 2

What does cultural competence mean to you?

Celebrations and Diversity

Using Celebrations to Explore Similarities and Differences

NQS 1.1.2: 'Curriculum decision making is informed by the context, setting and cultural diversity of the families and the community' (National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, 2009, p12).

NQS 1.2: 'The program for each child takes into account their strengths, capabilities, culture, interests and experiences' (National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, 2009, p12).

Consider utilising celebrations to encourage children to become aware of the diverse values and beliefs that exist within the community. This can be achieved by providing children with access to materials which stimulate discussions about the similarities and differences amongst their peers and the wider community.

Example 1

Discuss with children the fact that red is a colour that is important to many people, however it is used in many different ways. In the Chinese culture, red is the colour that is used in celebrations such as Chinese New Year, to ward off evil spirits and encourage happiness. Red is also one of the colours used in Christmas celebrations, such as Santa's very familiar suit.

Example 2

Families and communities come together for many different reasons. This may include a building or place of significance to celebrate a special occasion or religious event. Provide children with access to blocks and images of various places that people come together to celebrate or worship, for example, church, mosque, sporting hall or community centre. Engage in discussion with children about the many ways that people like to celebrate and the different ways in which this can be done.

Useful Resource

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion>

Information about 6 religions and the ways that the information can be incorporated into children's programs.

Self Help Question 3

Describe one activity which could be used as a part of a celebration to explore similarities and differences

Child Centred Celebrations

'Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of autonomy.' (Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009, p.22)

Child centred celebrations are celebrations which are initiated by a child or group of children in response to an event or achievement, for example successfully riding a bike. These celebrations are often simple in their content and are very meaningful for children.

Self Help Question 4

Describe a memory that you have of a celebration as a child

- What happened?
- What part did you play?
- What are your most vivid memories?
- How do you remember feeling?

Little is needed for a celebration; a small achievement each day can be a reason to celebrate. It is important when incorporating celebrations into the child care program to consider the diverse perspectives of both children and adults. Celebrations and reasons to celebrate may mean different things to different people.

A brief look at the daily and weekly milestones in a child's life can provide Educators with an indication of what may be important to them. Some of these events may hold more importance than a larger festival. Significant events in a child's life can include:

- Getting a new pet
- First steps
- Grandma coming to visit

- Dry pants
- Footy team winning
- Learning to ride a bike

Self Help Question 5

What celebrations do the children in your children’s service like to celebrate and how do they do so? List five things they would celebrate.

If you were in charge of celebrations at your service, what would you choose to celebrate? List 5 things you would celebrate.

Educators can play an important role in facilitating a child centred celebration and this can be done in several ways.

This could include:

- ensuring children have the agency to make choices about the celebrations they would like to participate in
- engaging families to give advice on customs
- encouraging and supporting family members to be involved in sharing their customs and celebrations with your service
- ensuring that children have the resources and time necessary to be able to celebrate effectively
- creating an awareness of the celebration amongst the rest of the group
- notifying the wider child care community about the celebration e.g. taking photos to display on the service notice board, or displaying children’s artwork and drawings about the celebration
- providing young children and toddlers with materials which reflect a significant event or celebration which they have recently participated in.

Many child centred celebrations are inexpensive and can be enjoyed by either small or large groups of children depending on the celebration, the needs of the group and the form of child care, such as Long Day Care, Outside School Hours Care, Family Day Care, In Home Care or Occasional Care.

Case Study

Karaoke

Written by Denise Rundle and Khan-Tho Nguyen

We have had a restaurant set-up in our dramatic play area for about six weeks. In the past two weeks, the play has taken a 'dramatic turn'. One child in our group has been using the antennae on our portable phone as a microphone and this coincided with the restaurant set-up. This child's interest sparked another's artwork - he drew himself singing karaoke at home, complete with video pictures and remote control. This led to a discussion about karaoke amongst the Vietnamese-speaking children and with one of the educators, they set about making our own set-up. They discussed which songs they would like and drew pictures to represent them. The children insisted that the words be written on the pictures. Some children looked at the song picture cards that we use for an idea of what to draw; others drew from their own imagination.

This coincided with the local school donating some old toys to us and, lo and behold, a plastic microphone and guitar were amongst the treasures!! The children were now VERY excited.

Many children have had a turn, even children who we have never heard sing before. One child has made a remote control and a 'CD' that goes into our television. This play has been extended outside with some children making a stage area out of the outdoor blocks and then selling tickets to the audience. They quickly tired of the six available songs and have made another ten. Two more paintings have been produced to reflect this experience - one of a guitar and another of 'Dad steam cleaning the carpet where we watch TV and sing karaoke. Dad is thinking about singing karaoke when he is finished.'

All of this occurred initially in our predominantly Vietnamese-English bilingual group and we hadn't offered the karaoke to the afternoon group (mixture of English, Vietnamese, Hakka, Cantonese, Turkish and Tagalog-speaking children). One day we forgot to put it away and the children wondered what it was. At first the group of children in the restaurant were not interested in using it until another child entered and took charge. Soon many children were having a turn. However, this group of children have approached the karaoke as a novelty experience being offered to them rather than an experience that has a context for them (even though some of these children do have karaoke at home). It just shows that ideas that come from children engage their interests on a much deeper and sophisticated level. If only it was always this easy!!

So what is so great about incorporating child initiated celebrations into the program, apart from the entertainment factor for Educators?

- Children are enthusiastic, engaged and cooperative in this play (real learning is happening)
- Songs are represented by children's pictures and written in English, Vietnamese and/or Chinese prints (understanding symbols, literacy and diversity)
- Many children singing songs alone and the flow-on effect of group singing, with some children singing or copying actions for the first time (self-esteem, cultural pride, confidence)
- 'Real' work produced that families support (positive feedback from families)
- Children sharing work with peers and families (children proud of their achievements)
- Ideas coming from the cultural contexts of children and their home experiences (diversity, children initiating their own learning)
- Educators having fun (increased job satisfaction).

Taken from FKA Children's Services, Resource Issue 112, 2002

Self Help Question 6

Describe a child-centred celebration which occurred at your service.

What was your role?

Identifying Needs

Working with Families

NQS 6.1: 'Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained' (National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, 2009, p26).

Orientation is an ideal time to begin to find out about the cultural practices of families, including what they celebrate and how they would like their child to learn about and participate in diverse celebrations. Many families from diverse cultural backgrounds choose to participate in celebrating events even though it is not a part of their religious or cultural background because the celebration is important within the community in which they live.

All families have the right to access programs that are respectful of their beliefs, values and choices. Consultation should occur with all families regularly. Encourage families to discuss with you the important celebrations that take place in their child's life. By providing an inviting space where communication can take place in different forms, families are more likely to share these important daily occurrences.

Communication with families should incorporate important moments to celebrate and honour. For example: 'Today we climbed up the big A-frames...' 'Today we celebrated Tien's move into a big bed.' This is a great way for Educators and families to acknowledge what is happening for the child in the various environments. Celebrate the important milestones in a child's development with a card to their families. It is important to remember that celebrations can be small as well as big events.

There are many strategies which Educators can implement to ensure that celebrations are respectful. Some of these include:

- providing opportunities for children to participate in 'open ended' celebration activities, for example items can be added to a collage table to enable children who participate in Easter to create Easter baskets (if they choose to do so). For those children who do not celebrate Easter the same materials could be used as part of a general construction experience
- providing a flexible program which enables children to have agency about the activities which they participate in
- minimise tokenism
- celebrate traditions and customs which are relevant to your children and community
- ensuring that the same amount of time and energy is dedicated to ALL celebrations
- inviting Educators and families to share their own personal experiences of celebrations

- ensuring that resources such as picture story books, images and music are reflective of contemporary celebrations which children can relate to
- ensuring that families who do not wish to be involved in celebrations have options for 'opting out'
- balancing family values about receiving gifts and products from their children and Educators values about avoiding product based activities by developing creative and meaningful gifts for families e.g. a CD Rom of photos of their child's progress though out the year or a card from Educators to celebrate an important milestone e.g. taking a first step.

Planning For Celebrations

It is important when incorporating celebrations into a children's services program to develop a plan about how these will occur. This will ensure that all celebrations are presented in a way which is responsive, organised and relevant to families and children.

Step 1 - Self Reflection

'Reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Its intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning. As professionals, early childhood educators examine what happens in their settings and reflect on what they might change' (Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009, p13).

Before implementing any plan it is important to spend time reflecting on your own values and beliefs. This will ensure that you are equipped to respond to any questions which may arise. Questions to prompt reflection include:

- What do you believe about celebrations for children? (How will you communicate this to those at your service?)
- How will you determine what celebrations are important to the children, Educators and families at your service? (Who and what are you going to ask?)
- What would you like celebrations to look like/feel like?
- What will you consider celebrating that you have not celebrated before?
- How can you make celebrations appropriate for children?

Step 2 - Information Gathering and Consultation

There are many, varied ways to incorporate celebrations. If celebrations are inclusive of all children and families then it is only reasonable to expect that the way that they are implemented will vary from year to year as the profile of the families using the service changes. Celebration plans will therefore also be different every year. For a celebrations' plan to be truly inclusive it must be reflective of the needs of children, families, Educators and the wider community in which the service exists. The key to developing an inclusive celebrations plan is ensuring that it is based on a sound knowledge of family, children, Educators' and community needs.

Information and consultation should occur with:

- Families
- Children
- Educators
- Local community members and organisations
- Other stakeholders within your service

- Local Migrant Resource Centres (these will be able to provide you with information about the profile of local communities in your area and the local celebrations which are planned for the following year).

Useful Resource

Calendar of Cultural and Religious Dates, Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship. <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/a-diverse-australia/calendar-australia>

Step 3 - Implementation

Once you have gathered the information required to ensure that the plan will be responsive and inclusive of family, child, Educator and community needs, a plan will need to be developed. All the information which you have gathered can then be transferred into this plan.

When developing the plan, it is important to consider the logistics of actually implementing the celebrations. There are several things which may need to be incorporated. These include:

- Accessing resources (where will you go to get what you need)
- Promotion of the celebration (how will you promote the celebration)
- Flexibility to incorporate child-centred and child-initiated celebrations
- Time allocated (how long will the celebration go for)
- Flexibility (how will ensure that children and families have a choice about how/ if they participate in the celebration)
- Holistic approach (how will you ensure that the celebration is reflected through out the program in a developmentally appropriate manner)
- Commitment to creativity (how will you ensure that the celebration activities are not product oriented)
- Ensuring the relevance of celebrations (how will you ensure that celebrations challenge stereotypes and assumptions).

Step 4 Critical Reflection

Careful, honest and reflective evaluation of the celebrations plan is crucial in ensuring that the plan continues to develop and evolve. When evaluating a plan it is important to seek feedback from children, Educators and families. It is also important to engage in self-reflection to ascertain if you were able to achieve your aims and aspirations. When evaluating the plan it is important to consider:

- Were the celebrations reflective of all families and children?
- Did families feel welcome to participate in celebrations?
- Was the time allocated to celebrations sufficient?
- Were experiences developmentally appropriate?
- Were appropriate alternatives offered for families who chose not to participate in celebrations?
- Did the children demonstrate an increased awareness and respect for diverse values and beliefs?
- Was the program able to incorporate child- initiated celebrations?
- Were the resources needed for the celebrations adequate and appropriate?
- If you could do it all again what would you do differently?
- What have you learned about celebrations?

Self Help Question 7

How do you decide which celebrations are important to the children, Educators and families with whom you work?

Developing policies and procedures for celebrations

NQS 6.1.2: 'Families have opportunities and support to be involved in the program and in service activities' (National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, 2009, p26).

NQS.6.1.3: 'Families have opportunities to influence and shape the service, to review service policies and contribute to service decisions' (National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care, 2009, p26).

It is important for all services to have a clear policy about celebrations and how they will be acknowledged within the service. This policy will ensure that all families and Educators have an understanding about the service's values and practices. The policy should be developed in conjunction with families, children and Educators and should be flexible enough to cater for a range of diverse values and beliefs about celebrations.

There are several things which need to be considered when developing a policy about celebrations. These include:

- The cultural and linguistic needs of the children, families and staff. Policies should be translated to ensure that all families are able to provide input
- Policies should be developed as part of a collaborative process; talk to families and children (where developmentally appropriate) about how they would like to be involved and use bilingual staff to communicate with families
- Policies should reflect the community in which services exists. This will ensure that they are reflective of local needs
- Incorporate a system of evaluating and modifying policies annually. As families change each year policies should be reviewed to ensure they reflect the changing needs of families
- Ensuring the policy respects the right of families and children to not participate in celebrations
- Utilising celebrations to explore concepts of diversity

A policy about celebrations should reflect a commitment to the principles of cultural diversity and should include statements which focus on:

- Respecting the values and beliefs of children, families and staff
- Ensuring that the variety of celebrations acknowledged reflects the beliefs of all families
- Providing flexibility and choice for children who do not wish to participate in celebrations
- The value of process oriented activities

- Incorporating diversity in a meaningful and holistic manner
 - Promoting discussions with children about diverse beliefs and cultural practices
 - Ensuring that celebrations are not the only way that cultural diversity is acknowledged within the program
 - Ensuring that celebrations reflect the values and practices of the local community.
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Assessment Task

1. Case Study

Your service has a commitment to respecting families' values and beliefs and has always ensured that all practices reflect the service's policy about equity, diversity and inclusion. It is Christmas time at your service and you are about to begin your usual Christmas celebrations. You have planned a Christmas concert that the children will need to rehearse, a Christmas party for the children, decorations and a tree trimming day.

Over the years this part of your program has always been something you, the children and the families have delighted in. Only this year service management is considering banning Christmas celebrations as they fear the celebrations may offend people. Management have asked Educators for their views.

- Is banning Christmas demonstrating respect for ALL families' values and beliefs? List five reasons why/ why not?
- What other celebrations are happening during December this year? Are they relevant to the families and children at your service?
- Describe five things you would need to incorporate to ensure that the Christmas celebrations are inclusive of all children and families beliefs.
- Describe five strategies that you would need to incorporate to ensure that families who do not celebrate Christmas will not feel excluded from the service.

2. Developing a Celebrations Plan

• Step 1 - Self Reflection

List five strategies you will use to determine which celebrations are important to the children, Educators and families at your service.

• Step 2 - Gathering Information and Consultation

List five cultural or community groups in the local area in which your child care service exists. List two things that each group celebrates.

• Step 3 - Implementation

List five places that you will access to obtain the resources you need for your celebrations plan.

Describe four strategies that you will use to promote celebrations.

List five strategies that you will use to ensure that celebration activities are developmentally appropriate and inclusive of all children in the service

• Step 4 – Evaluation

Write five questions that you could use to gather information from families which would enable you to evaluate the effectiveness of your plan.