Preparing the ground for partnership

Exploring quality assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care: A literature review and background paper

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Contents

List of figures and tables  v
List of shortened forms  vi
Explanation of terms  vii
Executive summary  xiii
   The structure of this paper  xiii
   Culture as a central factor in child care provision  xiv
   Designing a national Indigenous framework: process and practice  xv
   Postscript  xvii
Recommendations  xix
Key considerations  xx
Introduction  xxiii
   The beginning of a journey  xxiii

PART 1: CULTURE AS A CENTRAL FACTOR IN CHILD CARE PROVISION  1

Background  1
   Child care provision in Australia  1
   Quality assurance for mainstream child care in Australia  3
   The quality areas  4

Indigenous child care—culture and quality  7
   Child care services for Indigenous families  7
   What is special about Indigenous child care?  8
   The importance of culture in child care  9
   Exploring definitions of culture  11
   Exploring ways to maintain a strong cultural identity  12
   Exploring the complexities of culturally appropriate practice  13
   The diversity of Indigenous peoples and the uniting factors  14

Measuring quality in child care: an overview  17
   A brief history  17
   National and international research into quality  17
   Indigenous knowledge influencing mainstream practice  20
   What is normal child development?  23
   Some considerations for measuring quality  24
List of figures and tables

Figures
Figure 1: Children learning and old women dancing. vii
Figure 2: Wet areas at Pen Green Centre in the United Kingdom 22
Figure 3: Sleepy Lizard as an illustration of quality assurance 27
Figure 4: Characteristics of a sleepy lizard 28
Figure 5: A way to work out a ‘standard’ 29
Figure 6: A ‘best practice’ moment 32
Figure 7: Key elements and ongoing cycle of a quality assurance process 44
Figure 8: The culture iceberg 48
Figure 9: Family mapping 57
Figure 10: Warrki Jarrnjaku 58
Figure 11: ‘Everyone working together and listening’ 59

Tables
Table 1: An extract from a paper presented as a keynote address at the Our children our future conference, Adelaide, May, 2003 (Priest, King, Brown & Nangala 2003) 60
List of shortened forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACRS</td>
<td>Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARMSU</td>
<td>Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEIEC</td>
<td>Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECS</td>
<td>South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEET</td>
<td>South Australian Department of Education, Employment and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEETYA</td>
<td>Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>South Australian Department of Human Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECDC</td>
<td>Early Child Development and Care</td>
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<td>FaCS</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDC</td>
<td>Family day care</td>
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<td>LDC</td>
<td>Long day care</td>
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<tr>
<td>MACS</td>
<td>Multifunctional Aboriginal children's services</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCEETYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCAC</td>
<td>National Childcare Accreditation Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>OSHC</td>
<td>Outside school hours care</td>
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<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality assurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>QIAS</td>
<td>Quality Improvement and Accreditation System</td>
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<td>SNAICC</td>
<td>Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care</td>
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Explanation of terms

**Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy**
Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy—a series of projects exploring Aboriginal child rearing practices in the desert regions of central Australia. The project is also known as Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku.

**Anangu**
The people, as distinct from animals, land, plants (Pitjantjatjara, Pintupi, Luritja language groups).

**Balanda**
Non-Aboriginal person (Yolngu language group).

**Both ways**
‘Both ways’ usually refers to the environment in a service, such as a school on a remote Aboriginal community. A learning environment will be both ways where there is a blend of mainstream and Indigenous cultural knowledge being taught.

**Dreaming**
see Jukurrpa.

**Family mapping**
Family mapping is an innovative research technique that is being explored in Warrki Jarrinjaku Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy. Not wanting to rely on recording their stories in English, Aboriginal women are experimenting with using their own ‘written language’ (family mapping) to describe their child rearing practices—the drawings and designs seen in the Western Desert paintings. Figure 1 provides an example:

![Figure 1: Children learning and old women dancing.](http://www.inac.gc.ca)

*This design depicts children learning about Tjukurpa. Old women dancing with little children. Included with permission from Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi.*

**First Nations**
When the first Europeans arrived in Canada, they called the people they encountered ‘Indians’ because they thought they were in India. Today, the terms to describe Aboriginal peoples in Canada is continually evolving. The term ‘First Nations’ came into common usage in the 1970s to replace ‘band’ or ‘Indian’ which some people found offensive. The term First Nations is, however, rarely used as a synonym for all Aboriginal peoples in Canada, for example it usually doesn’t include Inuit or Métis people (Canadian Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development [http://www.inac.gc.ca]).
**Humpy**
A humpy is a makeshift dwelling made from available materials, for example, tree branches, sheets of galvanised iron or a car bonnet. One side of the humpy is left open to accommodate a camp fire. The humpy is also known as a wiltja (Pitjantjatjara language groups).

**Indigenous Child Care Plan**
The Indigenous Child Care Plan is an initiative that is currently being developed by the Australian Government with the aim to identify the child care needs and preferences of Indigenous families and children and guide the development of new and existing child care services.

**Indigenous**
The term ‘Indigenous’ is used in this paper as a general term to cover all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. When the emphasis is on presenting specific cultural perspectives the names of language groups may also be used.

**Indigenous Quality Assurance Project Partners**
The viability of developing quality assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services is being explored by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services in partnership with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care and the National Childcare Accreditation Council. These three agencies are referred to as the Indigenous Quality Assurance project partners.

**Jukurrpa**
The Dreaming, the Law (Warlpiri language). Jukurrpa is the period in the remote past when ancestral beings created the social, moral and physical universe. Jukurrpa is also in the present and has ongoing reality through the continuity of the practices that constitute Anangu and Yapa Law and culture.

**Kardiya**
Non-Aboriginal person (Warlpiri language).
Language groups

There are more than 200 Australian Indigenous languages, although less than 20 languages are strong. An Australian website (http://www.dnathan.com/) provides detail on the following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages:

- Aborigin English
- Anjumarla
- Arabana
- Alyawarri
- Anbara
- Anmatyerre
- Alyawarri
- Anbara
- Anmatyerre
- Arrente
- Awabakal
- Ayapathu
- Bundjalung
- Bunuba
- Darug
- Dyirbal
- Gooniyandi
- Gumbaynggir
- Gunggari
- Guugu Yimithirr
- Ilgar
- Jagera/Yuragubul
- Jaru
- Jiwarli
- Kija
- Kukatja
- Luritja
- Kamaroi/Gamilaraay
- Kaurna
- Kriol, pidgins
- Kuku Yalanji
- Kutthung
- Luritja/Pintupi
- Martuthunira
- Mawng
- Meriam Mir
- Murrinh-Patha
- Narrungga
- Ngadjon Ngarrindjeri
- Ngiyampaa
- Nhirri
- Noongar
- Ngaanyatjarra
- Ngaatjatjarra
- Pintupi
- Paakantyi
- Pakanh
- Palawa Kani
- Pitjantjatjara
- Pitta Pitta
- Tjapukai
- Uw Oy kangand
- Warlpiri
- Warrungu
- Wemba Wemba
- Wiradjuri
- Woi wurrung
- Yandrruwandha
- Yanyuwa
- Yankunytjatjara
- Yindjibarni
- Yolngu
- Yorta Yorta
- Yugambeh
- Yulkutja

Licensed centre

Minimum standards must be met in order to become a licensed child care centre. State and territory government legislation determine the licensing requirements for child care services. Licensing in all states/territories relates to factors such as minimum safety standards for the building, staff qualifications, and the ratio of staff to children. Many Indigenous services are licensed.

Mainstream

Refers to the greater number or majority. It is used as a general term to identify the most usual or widespread culture in a country—for example, the culture that is prevalent in the national government, health and education systems.
<p>| <strong>National Childcare Accreditation Council</strong> | The National Childcare Accreditation Council Incorporated is responsible for the implementation and administration of the following quality assurance systems across Australia – Quality Improvement and Accreditation System for long day care services, Family Day Care Quality Assurance, and Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance. The QA systems are an initiative of the Australian Government and aim to ensure that children in care have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that will foster all aspects of their development (for further information see <a href="http://www.ncac.gov.au">http://www.ncac.gov.au</a>). |
| <strong>Quality assurance</strong> | Quality assurance is a formal process that aims to ensure that quality is embedded in the services provided and that children in care have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that will foster all aspects of their development. For more detail see the web site for the National Childcare Accreditation Council <a href="http://www.ncac.gov.au">http://www.ncac.gov.au</a>. |
| <strong>Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care</strong> | The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care is the national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. SNAICC was formally established in 1981 after the creation of such a body was proposed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at ‘The First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar’ held in Melbourne in 1979 (see <a href="http://www.snaicc.asn.au">http://www.snaicc.asn.au</a>). |
| <strong>Stronger Families and Communities Strategy</strong> | The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is a funding initiative of the Australian Government. Between the years 2004 and 2008 the strategy will have a particular emphasis on early childhood initiatives and resources that can be used to achieve better outcomes for children and their families. This focus on early childhood development has been guided by the latest national and international research into the importance of the early years of a child’s life. For more information about the strategy see <a href="http://www.facs.gov.au">http://www.facs.gov.au</a>. |
| <strong>Tjukurpa</strong> | Pitjantjatjara and Luritja languages—meaning the same as Jukurrpa. |
| <strong>Tjukurrpa</strong> | Pintupi language, same meaning as Jukurrpa. |
| <strong>Traditional</strong> | ‘Traditional’ people generally refers to Indigenous people who have English as a second or third language, and who usually live in the most remote and isolated regions of Australia. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Walytja, Waltja</strong></td>
<td>Family, extended family, all family (Pitjantjatjara, Pintupi, Luritja languages).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Waltja</strong></td>
<td>As above, but also used as an abbreviation for the Aboriginal organisation Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi (<a href="http://www.waltja.org">http://www.waltja.org</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi</strong></td>
<td>Luritja for ‘Doing good work for families’. The name of an Aboriginal organisation based in Alice Springs, Northern Territory. Principal service provider of the Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy (<a href="http://www.waltja.org">http://www.waltja.org</a>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Warrki Jarrinjaku</strong></td>
<td>‘Working together’ in Warlpiri, pronounced wah key jarr in jarkoo. Abbreviation for Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku (Warlpiri for ‘working together everyone and listening’), also known as the Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yapa</strong></td>
<td>The people (Aboriginal), as distinct from animals, land, plants (Warlpiri language).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yolngu</strong></td>
<td>The people (Aboriginal), as distinct from animals, land, plants (Yolngu language group East Arnhem Land).</td>
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Executive summary

This document captures the beginning of a journey to explore the viability of developing a quality assurance (QA) system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services in Australia. The Australian Government is undertaking this work in collaboration with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care and the National Childcare Accreditation Council.

The focus of this paper is on reviewing a selection of current national and international research, including gathering personal views from Indigenous peoples in Australia. The aim is to identify the key themes and issues that need to be considered to create a strong foundation from which to proceed. This review will form the basis of the material used by the Indigenous QA project partners to prepare for a national consultation process.

While the literature search did not reveal any Indigenous specific QA for child care or any other human services, in Australia or overseas, there is a notable trend in this direction. At the social policy level of governments across the globe there is an emerging recognition of the key place Indigenous knowledge has in improving the quality of services for Indigenous children (World Bank; Family Law Council 2004; Canadian First Nations Partnership Program; New Zealand Government Early Childhood Development Unit). It is recommended that the following key findings from the literature review be seriously considered at all stages of the viability study into Indigenous QA:

- Quality is a subjective, evolving and culturally bound concept.
- A genuine, ongoing partnership approach is imperative to designing and implementing a national process for Indigenous QA.
- Indigenous cultures are not homogeneous.

The structure of this paper

This document is structured in two parts:

**Part 1:** Explores notions of quality in child care. A selection of national and international research into quality child care is reviewed. This includes examining the cultural values that underpin the current definitions of quality and how this may relate to Indigenous QA. One of the key challenges in designing an Indigenous QA process will be defining what aspects of an Indigenous child’s development is not effectively addressed by the mainstream QA systems. In other words, what is it that needs to be measured as part of Indigenous QA?

**Part 2:** Explores some of the complexities involved in effectively representing the diversity of Indigenous cultures within a national QA process, and in doing so, focuses on one of the strongest themes emerging from the literature that is, the process of defining quality, and the critical role the process of engagement with Indigenous
people will play in the outcomes of an appropriate national QA system. An overview of work being undertaken in Canada’s First Nations communities, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea is also provided in Part 2.

Culture as a central factor in child care provision

While researchers across the globe agree that quality in child care is important—they also conclude that there is no universal concept of quality in child care. This is because the standards and practice for caring and educating young children are culturally specific, values—based and dynamic (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2001; Moss & Pence 1994). Furthermore, notions of quality care evolve over time with the introduction of new knowledge and experience.

Current definitions of quality are based on research from Europe and America and the standards and practice developed from this research will tend to strengthen ‘western’ cultures (Small 2004; Warri Jarrinjaku Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy (ACRS) Project Team 2002). For Indigenous families this may be problematic. The literature search revealed that the key factor that differentiates an Indigenous child’s quality child care needs from that of a non-Indigenous child is the necessity to actively acknowledge and nurture the development of their cultural identity.

While there is a great diversity of Indigenous cultures around Australia, the review highlighted that Indigenous families share similar aspirations for their children (Lester 2004; Mellor & Corrigan 2004; Yunupingu 1997). Indigenous academic, Professor John Lester (2004) summarises these aspirations when he says that Indigenous families want their children to have access to mainstream education, so they can learn all the skills and develop the capacity they need to successfully master life in contemporary environments. These same parents also want their children’s cultural identity as an Indigenous person to be equally paramount (Lester 2004).

Mainstream quality standards and practice aim to prepare all children to master life in contemporary environments. What the current care and education services do not necessarily do very well is to first recognise, in order to nurture, an Indigenous child’s cultural identity. One of the significant challenges therefore, in designing an Indigenous QA process will be defining what ‘cultural identity’ means for the various Indigenous cultures around Australia, and how culture can be strengthened in a child care environment. Some Indigenous communities have described what is culturally safe for their child care services and have adapted the mainstream QA to suit their needs (Bond 2001; Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit 2002), however this process will not be suitable for all Indigenous services around Australia (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warri Jarrinjaku Aboriginal Child Rearing Strategy (ACRS) Project Team 2002).

It will be critical that any national Indigenous QA take into account the diversity of Indigenous cultures and histories around Australia. Indigenous communities are not homogeneous. What is culturally appropriate in one location may not translate to
another. Some Indigenous communities will need time to develop their own quality standards and practice.

Recent studies in Australia indicate that the translation of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing values and practices into services will improve the quality care being provided to Indigenous children (Martin 2005; Family Law Council 2004). The South Australian office of the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services recently commenced work in this area on the remote Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, with the aim to share their findings with the Indigenous QA stakeholders. This will include preparing a discussion paper on traditional Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) child rearing practices and exploring how these translate into Indigenous child care philosophy and practice.

The section of this paper titled ‘An Indigenous perspective on quality’, written by Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep, a Kokatha woman from the far west coast of South Australia, is also important for identifying the essential understanding, processes and expectations for Indigenous child care and Indigenous QA framework. Australian researchers (Martin 2005; Fasoli 2004; Mellor & Corrigan 2004) have identified the need for more research to be undertaken to explore and describe the inter-relationship between cultural identity and quality care for Indigenous children, and that the research design and methodology needs to be developed from an Indigenous paradigm (Martin 2005).

Designing a national Indigenous framework: process and practice

The process of negotiation and development of Indigenous QA is critical.

The exercise and process of defining quality will in itself produce beneficial outcomes for all the key stakeholders, if undertaken appropriately (World Bank Group http://www.worldbank.org). The quality of the process will determine whether or not the QA systems that are established will improve the quality of the services being measured. Katz (1999, cited in Ikupu & Glover 2002) describes five perspectives that are important to consider:

1. The top-down perspective is the view of the administration, for example, the funding body. It involves assessing bureaucratic functions such as policy, provision of access, administration, funding and resources.

2. The bottom-up perspective is the view of the children. This involves assessing how children experience the service.

3. The outside–inside perspective is the view of the families. This involves assessing how the families experience the service.

4. The inside perspective is the view of teachers, carers and/or early childhood professionals. This involves assessing how the service is experienced by the teachers, carers and/or early childhood professionals.

5. The outside perspective is the view of the community. This involves assessing how the community and larger society are served by the service.
This multiplicity of perspectives aims to ensure that no voice is overlooked in the process of defining and measuring quality (Katz 1999, cited in Ikupu & Glover 2002; Dahlberg et al 1999). For this to occur, a new style of leadership will need to emerge where the power is shared, and no one stakeholder has more control over the process than the other. It is vital that the work is allowed to evolve through a process where the power is shared. It is important to ‘wait for everyone to build the knowledge together’ (Coleman-Sleep 2004, pers. comm.).

Professor Peter Moss (2005) University of London warns that challenging accepted realities in early childhood is dangerous; however, it is crucial that mainstream views of quality are challenged. Moss (2005) explains that challenging dominant discourse is important because it makes room for other narratives to be heard and with new narratives come new possibilities for children, for families and communities. Developing Indigenous QA will undoubtedly challenge accepted realities, and in doing so it will open up many new opportunities. Moss (2005) remembers the French philosopher Foucault who said that although not everything is bad everything is dangerous expansion brings new risks (Dahlberg & Moss 2005). One of the key risks is that Indigenous children’s voices, and that of their families, will not be heard effectively. Genuinely giving Indigenous Australians a voice will take time, commitment, and using the available funding and resources differently it will require ‘doing things differently’ (Vanstone 2005).

The national consultation process will need to take into account that some Indigenous voices are harder to access than others. It is important to remember that simply having Indigenous people present does not necessarily mean that their voices will be heard. For example, Indigenous people living in remote locations have to overcome multiple barriers to be included and heard in a consultation process. Some of the reasons for this include:

- English is their third or fourth language
- their mode of expression is usually deliberate and purposeful compared to mainstream communication styles (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002; Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001)
- they are not involved throughout the whole process. Many decisions are made without them being included.

To overcome these barriers and ensure traditional Aboriginal voices are heard it will be important to involve highly specialised facilitators who are effective in communicating across cultures for example, the Aboriginal organisation Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi (Waltja), who are recognised in Australia for their ability to work in partnership with traditional people (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002).

Part 2 of this paper explores in more detail the complexities involved in effectively communicating across cultures, and some of the techniques Waltja uses to create inter-cultural spaces are explained in the section titled ‘Warrki Jarrinjaku Partnership and Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi’. International developments regarding partnership approaches are also explored.
Canada, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea each provide valuable examples of large-scale processes that relate closely to the development of Indigenous QA. In these countries mainstream concepts of quality child care and education are being re-examined and replaced—and this is occurring in the context of formally valuing the Indigenous knowledge systems in those countries (Canadian First Nations Partnership Program [http://www.fnpp.org]; New Zealand Government Early Childhood Development Unit [http://www.ecdu.govt.nz]; Ikupu & Glover 2002). Because the process is so important it is recommended that the Indigenous QA project partners develop working relationships with these countries, for the purpose of sharing knowledge and expertise in the area of Indigenous child care.

Postscript

Remember that this paper represents the beginning of a journey. New knowledge and insights will emerge along the way. As Julian Pocock (2004, pers. comm.) commented, ‘a stone has been thrown into the pool of water, and this literature review is one of the first ripples forming on the water’s surface’.
Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That Indigenous communities with child care services around Australia are provided with the opportunity and time to explore and describe their own:
- quality standards and practice for child care
- quality standards and practice to strengthen their culture and their children’s cultural identity in child care services.

**Recommendation 2:** That the diversity of Indigenous cultures and histories around Australia be included and respected throughout the process.

**Recommendation 3:** That highly specialised facilitators be engaged for the hardest to access Indigenous voices. Appropriately skilled individuals be identified and engaged to facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous children’s voices.

**Recommendation 4:** That a genuine partnership approach be taken at all stages of the exploration, development and implementation of an Indigenous QA process. Strategies to achieve this will need to include:
- involving stakeholders from the five key perspectives identified by Katz (1999, cited in Ikupu & Glover 2002)
- committing to a process where the power is shared
- establishing an environment where the learning about quality in child care for Indigenous children is ‘both ways’, where the teacher and learner roles are interchangeable, and where dominant narratives of quality in child care are challenged for the purpose of transferring power to the range of Indigenous narratives on quality that will emerge.

**Recommendation 5:** That work be undertaken to explore ways to translate traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing values and practices into child care services. This will include exploring child development from an Indigenous perspective.

**Recommendation 6:** That the Indigenous QA project partners explore potential relationships with the Canadian First Nations Partnership Program; New Zealand Government Early Childhood Development Unit; and Papua New Guinea Government.
Key considerations

Consideration 1: There is no single, universal concept of quality child care, as the definitions of quality reflect specific sets of values and beliefs—what is quality practice in one setting, may not necessarily translate to another.

Consideration 2: Design of the Indigenous QA system will need to embrace appropriate quality indicators that are embedded in an understanding of the need for local appropriateness.

Consideration 3: Internationally there is a growing recognition that mainstream standards and practices have not always provided the best quality care for Indigenous children.

Consideration 4: Traditional Indigenous child rearing values and practices are clearly complementary to, and influencing current mainstream views of quality child care.

Consideration 5: It is likely that there will be core Indigenous values and practices in relation to quality care for children, and that these will be shared across the diversity of cultures. The difference will be in how they are interpreted and implemented at the local level in a child care service.

Consideration 6: The literature search did not reveal any Indigenous specific QA for child care or any other human services, in Australia or overseas.

Consideration 7: The literature review identified the following features as the key elements that will need to be taken into account if a national Indigenous QA system is developed in Australia:
1. establish and maintain an on-going process of genuine partnership
2. define quality
3. develop professional training programs to reflect definitions of quality
4. develop standards
5. implement standards and practice
6. evaluation, including ongoing improvement.

Consideration 8: Research indicates that establishing and maintaining a quality process is the most critical factor to ensuring that QA will be relevant and improve the quality of services being delivered to Indigenous children and their families.

Consideration 9: Some cultures do not like to debate or confront and when establishing partnerships it may seem that certain ‘decisions’ have been accepted when in fact this is not the case. This is particularly a concern if one partner takes the lead role and rushes the decision-making process.

Consideration 10: To ensure traditional Indigenous voices are heard it will be important to involve highly specialised facilitators, noting that not all facilitators may be culturally appropriate to all Indigenous child care services across Australia.
Traditional refers to those communities where English is at least a second or third language.

**Consideration 11:** The process used to develop local responses is critical.

**Consideration 12:** Indigenous perspectives of time will need to be considered and respected. In the section of this paper titled ‘An Indigenous perspective on quality’ Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep talks about ‘not feeling rushed’, allowing time for relationships to develop for everyone to build the ideas together, not having one person, or one group of people having more power than everyone else to decide what time things get done.

**Consideration 13:** Establishing and maintaining a quality partnership between key stakeholders needs to occur as part of an ongoing process of communication and dialogue. Consultation alone will not achieve this, programs need to be co-created and ‘generated’.

**Consideration 14:** When it comes to large groups of people it means the whole group works out what ‘quality’ is together so everyone agrees and is happy.

**Consideration 15:** Indigenous cultures are not homogeneous. There is a great diversity of Indigenous cultures within Australia.
Introduction

The beginning of a journey

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) put forward the idea of developing quality assurance (QA) for Indigenous child care at a SNAICC meeting in 2003. Twelve months later at a workshop in Melbourne, Julian Pocock, Coordinator of SNAICC used the analogy of throwing a stone into a pool of water to describe the initial conception of this idea, and went on to explain that the first ripple is beginning to form on the water’s surface (Pocock 2004, pers. comm.). This paper is part of that first ripple. It captures the beginning of a journey to explore the viability of developing QA for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services in Australia. The project partners for this work are SNAICC, the National Childcare Accreditation Council and the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services.

Since 1994 the Australian Government has implemented national QA systems for child care services. Indigenous services have not been included as part of the mainstream QA, unless they have chosen to go through the process voluntarily. They are exempt from mainstream QA in recognition of the differing needs of Indigenous children and their families (http://www.ncac.gov.au). The Australian Government is now considering the viability of an Indigenous QA system, as part of a strengthened commitment to supporting Indigenous child care (see http://www.facs.gov.au).

To realise this commitment the Australian Government is funding a study into the viability of developing a national Indigenous QA through the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. The emphasis of the strategy funding in the years 2004 to 2008 is on early childhood initiatives and resources that can be used to achieve better outcomes for children and their families. This focus is guided by the latest national and international research into the importance of the early years of a child’s life.

This paper will form the basis of the material used by the Indigenous QA project partners to prepare for a national consultation process. The national consultation for the Indigenous QA project will begin in October 2005 as part of the national consultation for the Indigenous Child Care Plan. The Indigenous Child Care Plan national consultation aims to identify the child needs and preferences of Indigenous families and children, and guide the development of new and existing child care services.
Part 1

Culture as a central factor in child care provision

Background

Child care provision in Australia

In Australia, child care was introduced as a formal option for young children and their families during the 1970s. The original services were established to look after children when their parents were unable to do so for various reasons. They were often referred to as neighbourhood centres and their role usually included providing broad support for families and children in the local community (Fasoli 2004).

A range of different service models have evolved to meet the needs of parents who are employed, although three main forms of work-related child care have become widely used and sought after for children between the ages of 0–12 years. These are:

- **Long day care (LDC):** Is a centre-based form of child care service. LDC services provide quality all day or part-time care for children of working families and the general community. Private operators, local councils, community organisations, employers or non-profit organisations may run these services.

- **Family day care (FDC):** Is a network of caregivers who provide flexible care and developmental activities in their own homes for other people's children. An FDC service can provide flexible care including all day care, and part-time or casual care. It is aimed primarily at children from birth to five years but can assist primary school children and older children in special emergency situations.

- **Outside school hours care (OSHC):** Services provide care mainly for primary school children before and/or after school and during vacation time.

Child care provision has since expanded, and at the time of writing, the following services are funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS):
Indigenous playgroups
Provide non-school children with a wide range of culturally appropriate developmental and socialisation activities that are relevant to the community. The social development is aimed at preparing children for pre-school, school and relationships with the wider community. Playgroups also provide an opportunity for families to share common experiences.

Playgroups
Playgroups are for families with children under school age. Most playgroups meet for a couple of hours every week in places like pre-schools, community centres and church halls. The activities at playgroups focus on interactive play and socialising, and help parents/carers to develop their own skills and confidence as well as those of their children. Individual playgroups can develop their own activities to suit the needs of their members including those people with babies.

Employer sponsored child care
The government encourages employers to get involved with the provision of flexible child care to suit their employees’ needs. There are various ways in which employers can do this. They can:

› sponsor a child care service
› reserve places in a service or services that may be convenient to the workplace or to areas where employees live, and/or
› use an agency to find suitable child care places in the wider community.

Family day care
Is a network of caregivers who provide flexible care and developmental activities in their own homes for other people’s children. An FDC service can provide flexible care including all day care, and part-time or casual care. It is aimed primarily at children from birth to five years but can assist primary school children and older children in special emergency situations.

In-home care (IHC)
In-home care is a targeted form of child care where an approved carer provides care in the child’s home. It is only available for families who do have access to an existing child care service, or where an existing service cannot meet their needs.

Innovative children’s services
Innovative children’s services have been developed to provide flexible care to families living in rural and remote communities with dispersed populations, where quality child care may not be available or is not suited to local circumstances. An innovative child care service may include long day care, outside school hours care, occasional care, mobile multi-purpose services, on-farm care, multi-sited care and overnight care. These services are available to assist families and communities where conventional mainstream services do not meet their particular needs.
**Long day care**
Is a centre-based form of child care service. LDC services provide quality all day or part-time care for children of working families and the general community. Private operators, local councils, community organisations, employers or non-profit organisations may run these services.

**Mobile services**
Mobile child care services visit rural and remote areas and may provide flexible child care sessions, playgroup sessions vacation care, on-farm care, parenting and social support for families, home visits, toy and video lending libraries and health programs.

**Multifunctional Aboriginal children’s services (MACS)**
Multifunctional Aboriginal children services are non-profit community based services funded to meet the social and developmental needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Care is provided for pre-school and school aged children and includes LDC, playgroups, OSHC, vacation care and cultural programs.

**Multiple care services**
Multiple care services are approved services designed to provide flexible care to meet the needs of their communities. They offer an integrated service delivery model where more than one care type is available. Care types can include LDC, in-home care, FDC and occasional care. Services are accessible to the general community and focus on care for non-school children but can also provide older children with care outside school hours and during school breaks.

**Occasional care**
Is centre-based child care that supports families by providing flexible care for children from birth to school age. Families can access occasional care regularly on a sessional basis, or irregularly. Occasional care allows the flexibility to leave children for short periods of time in an early childhood learning environment to socialise and interact with other children. Community organisations, non-profit organisations or local councils may run occasional care services.

**Outside school hours care (OSHC)**
Outside school hours care services provide care mainly for primary school children before and/or after school and during vacation time. In some services, care is also provided on pupil-free days during the school term. Some services also provide vacation care or are linked to other vacation care services, to provide care for primary school children all year.

**Quality assurance for mainstream child care in Australia**
The view from Indigenous Australians, and from mainstream national and international research, is that quality practice in child care is important. Poor quality programs have long lasting and negative consequences for children. Conversely,
high quality programs have long lasting, positive benefits for children and society. Research demonstrates that the quality of a child’s experiences in child care can make a difference to their long-term life chances. Epstein (1993, cited in Raban et. al 2005) argues that poor quality programs will be detrimental to the development of any child at any age and represent missed opportunities.

In January 1994 Australia became the first nation to adopt a compulsory QA system for LDC services—known as the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). Australia now also has QA for services that provide OSHC—known as the Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance, and for those providing FDC—known as the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (see {http://www.ncac.gov.au}). The QA systems are an initiative of the Australian Government and aim to ensure that children in care have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions that will foster all aspects of their development ({http://www.ncac.gov.au}). Child care QA has an administrative framework comprising three core partners:

- FaCS
- the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC)
- the Accreditation Decisions Review Committee.

These bodies have individual but interconnected responsibilities for the day-to-day management, monitoring and implementation of the individual QA systems and those services, structures and customers that deliver and use quality child care in Australia.

(For more information see {http://www.ncac.gov.au} and {http://www.adrc.org.au})

The child care QA systems aim to assist families with:

- workforce participation
- early childhood development
- early intervention for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The quality areas

The QA systems for LDC, FDC and OSHC are similar. Presented below, as an example, are the quality areas that must be met by LDC centres in order to be accredited. Please note this list is from the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) Quality Practices Guide (2005), which was recently updated with reclassified standards. The following list is an example of the type of quality areas being addressed in the Australian QA systems:

Quality Area 1: Staff Relationships with children and peers
Quality Area 2: Partnerships with families
Quality Area 3: Programming and evaluation
Quality Area 4: Children's experiences and learning
Preparing the ground for partnership

Quality Area 5: Protective care and safety
Quality Area 6: Health, nutrition and wellbeing
Quality Area 7: Managing to support quality

Each quality area has a number of principles associated with it, which in turn are explored in more depth through a number of indicators. The indicators help determine whether an ‘unsatisfactory’, ‘satisfactory’, ‘good quality’ or ‘high quality’ care rating is achieved when a centre is undergoing accreditation. Further elaboration regarding the quality areas, associated principles and the process for accreditation can be found in Appendix 2.

The QIAS is intended to cater for all children, regardless of age, race or disability. The objective is to provide children with a positive, stimulating environment that fosters self-esteem and confidence. Staff and families can clearly see how the quality areas combine to ensure a quality service is provided.

The mainstream QA systems for child care aim to ensure that children have access to high quality care that best promotes their learning and development in the vital years (NCAC http://www.ncac.gov.au). The QA systems include a principle on respecting the diversity of children's backgrounds. However, there has been some observations that the mainstream QA systems do not necessarily ensure that an Indigenous child’s cultural identity is nurtured (Reck & Walker 2003; Coleman-Sleep 2004, pers. comm.; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002).

Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) explain that every aspect of caring for and educating children is culturally determined:

> It determines how and when babies are fed, as well as where and with whom they sleep. It affects the customary response to an infant’s crying and a toddler’s temper tantrums. It sets the rules for discipline and expectations for developmental attainments. It affects what parents worry about and when they begin to become concerned. It influences how illness is treated and disability is perceived. It approves certain arrangements for child care and disapproves others. In short, culture provides a virtual how-to manual for rearing children and establishes the role expectations for mothers, fathers, grandparents, older siblings, extended family members, and friends (Shonkoff & Phillips 2000, p. 25).

Other studies support these findings and conclude that the rules associated with quality child care are culturally specific and intended to perpetuate a particular set of cultural values and beliefs (Moss & Pence 1994; Nossar 2004; Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). The birth of a new science in the early 1990s known as ethno-paediatrics appears to have marked a significant change to the dominant discourse in early childhood research (Small 1999). Ethno-paediatrics was officially launched at Emory University in America in 1995. This new field of research is being explored by a group of paediatricians, child development researchers and anthropologists with the aim to combine culture, biology and early childhood research. Meredith Small, ethno-paediatrician and Professor of...
Anthropology, Cornell University, explains that ‘the parental practices we follow in the West are merely cultural constructions ... our cultural rules are, in fact, designed to mold a certain kind of citizen ...’ (Small 1999, p. xvi).
Indigenous child care—culture and quality

Child care services for Indigenous families

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families have access to a range of child care options including mainstream and Indigenous specific services, depending on where they live and the availability of services in that region. This literature review is primarily concerned with the Indigenous specific child care services, noting that some Indigenous families will use mainstream services, either by choice or because there is no other option available.

During the 1980s, with the recognition that mainstream services do not always meet the needs of Indigenous children and their families, a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific child care services began to emerge. Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services cater for children aged 0–12 years, and provide a range of different services according to the needs of their community. Managed by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, Multifunctional Aboriginal children’s services provide a flexible service to meet the social and developmental needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The services offer care for pre-school and school aged children including LDC, playgroups, OSHC, including vacation care and cultural programs. The MACS operate primarily as culturally appropriate mainstream LDC centres where child care is for work-related and respite reasons. They aim to provide a place for children to be safe, have a healthy meal, learn some activities that will prepare them for school, play with toys, and ‘keep their culture strong’.

In the late 1990s, services known as innovative childrens services became operational in remote traditionally-oriented Aboriginal communities. Yuendumu, a Yapa (‘the people’ in Warlpiri language) community approximately 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs, was the first to open in October 1997 (Warri Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). Since then a number of services have opened in other remote desert and tropical regions of Australia. With government funding for child care services being tied to work-related care, these services, as with the early MACS, were developed using the licensed LDC centre model. They aimed to deliver a range of culturally appropriate services to families who live traditionally-oriented lifestyles and for whom English is a third or fourth language. These communities often want their child care services to be:

- a safe place for women and children
- a bicultural environment with an emphasis on strengthening their traditional culture/s;
- a place for young mothers to learn parenting skills from older women
- a place where women can wash their clothes, have a shower and bath the baby (few homes have running water and many people live in ‘humpies’)
- a place for families to learn about health, wellbeing and nutrition
- a place for children to be safe, have a healthy meal, learn some activities that will prepare them for school, play with toys, and ‘keep their culture strong’.
Along with the innovative children's service development in the 1990s, a range of non-mainstream service types have emerged to provide flexible child care for Indigenous families living in rural and remote communities. These include crèche, playgroup, OSHC, and enrichment programs specifically designed for Indigenous families. (See also the previous section titled ‘Child care provision in Australia’ for more information).

What is special about Indigenous child care?

The key purpose of this literature review is to collate information on Indigenous perspectives of quality practice, with a focus on exploring what this material may mean for the potential development of an Indigenous QA system in Australia. Undertaking this review in the context of informing a national process raises a number of critical questions, for example What is special about Indigenous child care? Why is Indigenous specific practice important for Indigenous children? Will the needs of Indigenous children vary across Australia? What aspects of an Indigenous child's development is not effectively addressed by the mainstream QA systems? In other words, what is it that needs to be measured as part of an Indigenous QA system? These are fundamental questions and Part 1 is dedicated to exploring a selection of current literature associated with culture and cultural identity in early childhood services. This includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous studies from Australia and overseas. Indigenous academic, Professor John Lester (2004) summarises the views shared by many Indigenous people when he states that Indigenous parents want their children to:

- have a strong cultural identity
- be cared for and educated in an environment that reinforces and nurtures their Indigenous culture
- have access to mainstream education, so they can learn all the skills, develop knowledge and the capacity they need to successfully master aspects of life in contemporary environments.

At a workshop facilitated by the Indigenous QA project partners in Melbourne in November 2004, John Tainton (pers. comm.) explained that QA is about capturing quality practices so they can be passed on to future generations of children and carers. The literature search revealed many best practice examples of Indigenous child care from around Australia (SNAICC & the Centre for Community Child Health 2004; ARMSU 2003a & 2003b; Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warri Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). The special feature that sets Indigenous child care services apart from the mainstream is their endeavour to nurture an Indigenous child's cultural identity. Indigenous child rearing principles and practice in early childhood environments can strengthen and nurture an Indigenous child's cultural identity.

Reck and Walker (2003) explain that for many years the main emphasis of research into children's wellbeing has been on indicators of health and educational progress. They argue that while these types of indicators are important ‘they do not address
Preparing the ground for partnership

cultural identity and spirituality ... the domains that are important to Indigenous people when addressing their children's well-being’ (Reck & Walker 2003, p. 53).

Current national and international research supports the concerns raised by Reck and Walker (2003). The development and nurturing of a strong cultural identity is increasingly recognised as being important for health, development and wellbeing in childhood, adolescence and adult life (Family Law Council 2004; National Health and Medical Research Council 2004; Terrini & McCullum 2003). Other researchers highlight the potential tension between keeping a child’s Indigenous culture strong and the desire for a western education. Partington (1998, cited in Mellor & Corrigan 2004) highlights the problematic nature of a western education for Indigenous people, which he characterises as a double edged sword. A number of other studies express this same concern (for example, Fasoli 2004). Mellor and Corrigan (2004) explain:

For centuries education has been used as a tool of assimilation, and this has been the Indigenous experience of western education. Nevertheless, for those who successfully negotiate it, education provides the key to self-determination and active and equal participation in society (Mellor & Corrigan 2004 p. 1).

A key concern raised in a number of studies, however, is that while child care services aim to build a child’s sense of self and belonging, because cultural identity is not formally valued and recognised as a quality ‘measure’, a child’s cultural identity may not be effectively addressed (Reck & Walker 2003; Coleman-Sleep 2004, pers. comm.; Warri Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). If the national consultation process for Indigenous QA confirms that the key factor that differentiates an Indigenous child’s quality needs from a non-Indigenous child’s is the necessity for emphasis on their cultural identity—indicators to measure the support provided for cultural identity development will need to be explored. This will create an important challenge in the design and implementation of Indigenous QA. Lester (2004) explains that the great diversity of Indigenous cultures in Australia means that there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution that can be implemented across the nation. To address these issues, researchers from Australia are calling for more research to be undertaken into the relationship between culture and quality care (Mellor & Corrigan 2004; Fasoli 2004; National Health and Medical Research Council 2004).

The importance of culture in child care

A great many studies cite culture as being the fundamental building block of identity (for example, http://www.ChildCareExchange.com; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000; Small 2004). Culturally sensitive care strengthens a child’s emerging sense of self and connection with his or her family and broader community (Centre for Child and Family Studies, California Department of Education http://www.cde.ca.gov). Through cultural learning children gain a feeling of belonging, a sense of personal history, and a security in knowing who they are and where they come from. When young children are cared for by their parents and other family members, the process of cultural learning occurs naturally. When a child must be cared for outside the home, there is a
growing recognition that it is important they receive culturally sensitive care. Senior Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) women from central Australia (Warriki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002) express the same concerns and explain the importance of culture in child care from their perspective:

... you learn about your culture, your values and beliefs from everything you do and everything around you. For non-Aboriginal people, mainstream child care and schools reflect Kardiya [non-Aboriginal] culture. The books, TV, the way people dress, the way people talk to each other—all these things help to keep Kardiya culture strong. Yapa ['people' in Warlpiri] culture is reflected in how Yapa live and what they do and their responsibilities and relationships. Yapa child care and schools need to be like Yapa camp and way of living if they are going to keep Yapa culture strong (Warriki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002 p. 17).

Jessica Ball (2002) Coordinator, First Nations Partnerships Programs shares similar concerns to that of the Senior Yapa and Anangu women. In a recent article she comments on the culture represented in mainstream early childhood training programs in Canada:

Far from being culturally neutral, curricula for training early childhood educators are cultural constructions grounded in the world views, beliefs, and norms of those who conceptualise and teach the curricula.

The training experiences that shape the care-giving practices of early childhood educators and other out-of-home caregivers can exert a major influence upon which culture, and which aspects of that culture, are sustained. Children reproduce the culture of their primary caregivers, peers, and the media with which they interact from their earliest years. Caregivers and teachers continuously perpetuate their own culture by encouraging particular response styles, forms of interaction, ways of understanding events, and enactments of implicit beliefs (Ball, cited on http://www.fnpp.org).

This view is expressed across a number of early childhood studies from the 1990s onwards (Dahlberg & Moss 2005; Moss & Pence 1994; Small 1999; Shonkoff & Phillips 2000; Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warriki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002; Nossar 2004).

Many Indigenous people from around Australia share these views and stress the importance of nurturing their children's cultural identity. Wendy Nungarrayi Brown, Senior Yapa (Aboriginal) woman from Yuendumu in the remote desert regions of central Australia explains 'all the rules for living come from Jukurrpa [Dreaming the Law] ... it's the main thing to keep our families strong' (Priest, King, Brown & Nangala 2003). Sharron Williams (2003) a Narungga Kaurna woman from South Australia asserts that ‘culture is essential to the development of a child—a child’s sense of worth and meaning is inextricably tied up in their sense of belonging and identity’ (Williams 2003, p. 122).

A child’s participation in their family’s culture gives them the power to influence their environment and to have impact in the world around them.
Exploring definitions of culture

A key concern raised in a number of studies is that definitions of culture and detailed explanations of the complexities involved in creating culturally safe environments are usually avoided (Terreni & McCallum 2003; Mellor & Corrigan 2004; Thomas 2002). Williams (2003) suggests ‘it is important that we examine what we mean when we say “cultural”. We use it all the time in terms such as “culturally appropriate”, “loss of culture”, “reconnecting with one’s culture”’ (Williams 2003, p. 122). Identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tells us something about the origin of a child, whereas ‘cultural identity comes from the specific ways that a family practices daily the beliefs, values, rules, traditions ... ’ (Breeze, Greer & Derman-Sparks 1996). Thomas (2002) defines culturally appropriate as ‘the delivery of programmes and services so that they are consistent with the communication styles, meaning systems and social networks of clients’ (Thomas 2002).

New Zealand authors Lisa Terreni and Judi McCallum (2003) explore definitions of culture and culturally inclusive practice on a government web site developed to support practitioners to establish culturally appropriate early childhood services (http://www.ecd.govt.nz/publications/research).

Culture is a set of fundamental ideas, practices and experiences of a group of people that are symbolically transmitted generation to generation through a learning process. Culture also refers to the beliefs, norms, and attitudes that are used to guide our behaviours and solve problems (Chen & Starosta 1998, cited in Terreni & McCallum 2003).

Terreni and McCallum (2003) describe culture as multi-layered, and highlight at least two levels of experience:

1. the concrete and explicit manifestations of culture for example, language, festivals, food, and dress
2. the implicit assumptions individuals hold about existence that determine the beliefs, norms and attitudes of a culture.

Overt signs of culture manifest themselves in symbols or phenomena that are concrete and explicit, for example, language, festivals, food, and dress. It is often these overt signs that are most easily identifiable and which can be more easily shared with others. Terreni and McCallum (2003) argue that it is the implicit assumptions individuals hold about existence that determine the beliefs, norms and attitudes of a culture—and these lie beneath the concrete and explicit manifestations of the culture and are often more difficult to identify or be aware of.

Terreni and McCallum (2003) stated that:

‘Early childhood practitioners, in their efforts to be culturally inclusive, often explore with children the concrete and explicit aspects of different cultures. For example, by including a wide variety of different cultural objects in the family area; providing a range of culturally diverse dress-ups; preparing, cooking and eating different types of food; and presenting photographs and art objects from
Preparing the ground for partnership

different cultures in the environment. It is also in these areas that parents often make valid contributions to the program, for example, by teaching a song or telling a story from their culture, or preparing food’ (Terrini & McCallum 2003 p.2 & 3).

The implicit aspects of culture are addressed far less often. However, if early childhood practitioners make efforts to increase their knowledge of the implicit beliefs and orientations that inform the practices of a culture, it can ‘lead to deeper understanding of cultural difference and increase the possibility of quality inter-cultural communication’ (Terrini & McCallum 2003 p.3). They explore in more detail a framework for unpacking the implicit assumptions about culture. This is discussed in more detail in Part 2 in the context of designing a national process for Indigenous QA.

Exploring ways to maintain a strong cultural identity

It is a sad fact that many First Nations people in Canada do not know their own culture of origin or their traditional language, and their identities as members of a cultural community have been fragmented as a result of colonisation (Ball 2002). In Australia many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also believe they have lost connection to their Indigenous knowledge as a result of the stolen generations and other colonising activities (SNAICC 2004). At the SNAICC Parenting Project National Workshop, William Gulf, Woorabinda senior health worker commented:

... there are lots of different tribes and different ways ... of course most of our cultural ways are gone but still ... of what culture we’ve got today new cultures can be adopted in a positive form (cited in SNAICC 2004 p. 37).

Karen Martin (2005) explains this in another way when she says:

... our world is always about being related ... it is about being related to people, to the sky, the salt water, the animals, the plants, the land ... that is how we hold who we are ... it is that we are related to everything else ... what is happening to our people now is we are not experiencing that relatedness ... it is important that we pay attention to our responsibilities and keep our relatedness strong ... we need that relatedness back ... we need to re-present the stories of our relatedness (Karen Martin 2005 p.2).

The Indigenous Parenting Project (SNAICC 2004a) stressed that it is urgent to begin documenting the Elders’ cultural knowledge in order to capture their experience and ensure traditional methods do not continue to be lost.

Small (2004) explains that different parenting styles and child care practices are not necessarily ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ but appropriate or inappropriate for the culture the parents and children live in. Research from Australia indicates that a key feature of an inappropriate early childhood care and education environment for an Indigenous child is one where they become dislocated from their culture, and where their sense of belonging, and being connected to the world around them is disrupted (Family Law Council 2004; National Health and Medical Research Council 2004; Williams 2003; Warrrk Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). As Moore, Harris and Skelton (2004, p. 54) explain ‘both Indigenous and non-Indigenous child rearing systems work perfectly well—the issue is what happens when they come in contact with one another’. They
continue by stating that Indigenous children are often reported to have difficulties coping with the ‘western’ style pre-school and school setting. These findings are consistent with other studies that indicate that a cooperative and consistent relationship between home and school appear to be critical to students’ success (Moore et. al 2003).

How do children become competent in their own culture if they are immersed in someone else’s? How do they develop an identity that keeps them rooted in their culture and firmly attached to their family? Only when professionals understand culturally sensitive care and are in close communication with families can they understand how to work toward positive outcomes for children’s identity, sense of belonging, and cultural competence (Gonzalez-Mena, cited in Fasoli 2004, p. 7).

To improve the quality of services for Indigenous children in various countries around the globe, child care professionals are increasingly being asked to consider practices that address issues of bicultural and multicultural care and education. The literature search revealed a substantial amount of information on ways child care staff can include Indigenous children and their families into mainstream services (ARMSU 2003a; Terrini & McCullum 2003; Booze et. al 1996). This includes the emergence of cultural competency frameworks that aim to measure an organisation’s ability to deliver culturally appropriate services to Indigenous peoples and other minority groups (http://www.cde.ca.gov; RPR Consulting 2004). However, while these resources are extremely valuable they alone cannot guarantee that the cultural appropriateness of a service will be improved. There is a growing recognition, at a national and international level, that more research into the complexity involved in creating culturally appropriate environments, in a diversity of cultural settings is needed (Thomas 2002; Mellor & Corrigan 2004; Fasoli 2004).

Exploring the complexities of culturally appropriate practice

Culturally appropriate practice in child care aims to ensure that what every child experiences feels culturally safe, that they have a sense of belonging and connection, the sense of being at ‘home’. However, as Thomas (2002) points out, if there is a significant cultural difference between the culture of the service and the culture of the client, it is extremely difficult to create an environment where the communication styles and meaning systems of clients are genuinely reflected. In a recent publication titled ‘Creating culturally consistent and inclusive early childhood programs for all children’ the authors stated:

Culture is often thought of in terms of art, artefacts, foods, music. However, these are the material products of culture, they do not define it. Culture is much more—encompassing how a specific group views and interacts with the world and including explicit and implicit rules for behaviour (Booze et. al 1996).

Concurring with the above, Australian researcher Dr Lyn Fasoli (2004), Associate Professor Indigenous Early Childhood Research, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education warns, “too often a kind of “tourist” curriculum has been
implemented to address cultural diversity’. For example, Fasoli (2004) comments that Indigenous children living in remote communities in the Northern Territory do not have English as a first language. However, programs for young children do not officially address their first language needs and, in children’s services, staff do not receive training and ongoing knowledge and development in their courses for working with non-English speaking children. This situation raises a number of questions—for example, How can a service be culturally safe if it is unable to address the first language needs of a child? Do services need to be accountable for being culturally unsafe? How can culturally safe and culturally inclusive be accurately measured? A number of Australian researchers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, believe that these questions cannot be effectively addressed without research being undertaken into the interrelationship between culture and quality practice (Hughes 2004, cited in Mellor & Corrigan 2004).

... along with the obvious multiple factors of socio-economic status and language, cultural influences are obviously important to learning outcomes and there needs to be much more research attention paid to exactly what is the influence of culture ... (Hughes, cited Mellor & Corrigan 2004, p. ii).

Hughes (2004, cited in Mellor & Corrigan 2004) continues by arguing that Indigenous children are treated as if they belong to one culture and their learning needs are the same, when this is not the case. Integral to cultural ‘inclusivity’ is culturally appropriate pedagogy, and critical to the interrelationship between culture and pedagogy is the recognition that there is not one Indigenous culture’ (Mellor & Corrigan 2004, p. 50). Mellor and Corrigan emphasise the point that there is an overwhelming tendency to acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous cultures on the one hand, and then on the other to treat Indigenous cultures as if they are a single culture (Mellor & Corrigan 2004). A key issue being highlighted is that the Indigenous community is not homogeneous—what is ‘best practice’ in one location may not translate to another (Mellor & Corrigan 2004; Fasoli 2004).

When discussing the potential and complexity involved in developing a national Indigenous QA Karen Martin (2004), a Quandamoopah and Bidjara woman from Stradbroke Island, remembers the anthropologist, WB Stanner who worked for many years alongside Indigenous peoples in Australia:

> The greatest gift from Aboriginal cultures is to unite hearts and establish order
> (Stanner, cited by Karen Martin 2004, pers. comm.).

Martin uses this quote to focus attention on the uniting factors in Indigenous cultures and the strong sense of connectedness to all things that is a common theme.

The diversity of Indigenous peoples and the uniting factors

There are many different Indigenous cultures across Australia, and the diversity between these cultures is reflected on many levels (Rowse 2001, cited in Mellor & Corrigan 2004). For example:
Preparing the ground for partnership

- relations between and within kinship groups
- whether or not Indigenous people are in the majority or minority in their particular locality
- whether or not English is a first language
- the extent and impact of colonisation, including the effect of being a part of the stolen generations, and the extent to which individuals and their families have experienced separation from their Indigenous culture
- the extent of economic and social disadvantage. For example, there is a growing ‘middle class’ of Indigenous people who have access to employment, housing, food, health and other essential services in a similar way to non-Indigenous Australians—whereas other Indigenous families live in ‘third world’ conditions; in extreme poverty, in overcrowded housing with no running water and with limited access to fresh, nutritious food.

The diverse circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s lives and the interactions between their various life experiences, raise different educational and child care issues and highlight the importance of an approach based on recognition of diversity (Mellor & Corrigan 2004). The lack of clarity around the differences between Indigenous cultures ultimately leads to a lack of accountability to Indigenous children and confusion at the policy and service delivery level. Mellor and Corrigan (2004) state that it is not possible to be ‘culturally inclusive’ when there is a lack of clarity about the culture itself. Culture and creating ‘culturally inclusive’ spaces is discussed in more detail in Part 2.

Along with the pronunciation in the literature that Indigenous cultures in Australia are extremely diverse, the other statement that is often presented in informal conversations is that: ‘we are all one people’ (Nungarrayi Brown 2004, pers. comm.). When Senior Yapa women discuss this in detail, they talk about all people being one, not only Indigenous people, they include non-Indigenous people as well. Senior women describe the principles that underpin all matters regarding the rearing of their children. It is in these principles that the belief that ‘we are one people’ is held. The principles of child rearing describe the child’s relationships and responsibilities between everything in their environment—people, animals, land, and family. The principles define how they are connected to and responsible for all things (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002).

While an English interpretation of the key principles is provided, ‘it is important to note that they can be conceptually challenging and difficult to define within a western cultural framework’ (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, p. 16). An understanding of the concept, ‘we are one people’ cannot be readily explained by separating the meanings and relationships between the people, animals, land and family. For the purpose of providing a more accessible explanation, the principle of Waltja (‘family’ in English), when explained in more detail perhaps provides the most easily accessible description for the concept.
A simple English translation for the word Waltja (in Luritja) Walytja (Pitjantjatjara) Walartja (in Warlpiri) is ‘family’.

It does mean family but is much broader ... Waltja is not strictly limited to those to whom you are related through blood or marriage ... it can refer to anyone with whom a significant relationship has been shared, including people and animals ... Waltja refers to a sense of belonging together or a shared identity ... (Wariki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, p. 24).

Martin (2005) explains that the relatedness is not only with people. From an Indigenous world view the relatedness extends to everything in the environment and beyond.

Many other Indigenous people explain the common links between their cultures in terms of a shared experience of colonisation and/or in terms of the common aspects of their cultures. For example, the importance placed on maintaining strong relationships with family, including extended family: ‘there is a lot of diversity, but we are still one mob’ (participant at the SNAICC National Indigenous QA workshop in Melbourne 2004, pers. comm.). Karen Martin (2004a) provides an example of the interconnectedness that underpins Indigenous knowledge when she explains ‘you may not know your ancestors, but they know you’.
Measuring quality in child care: an overview

A brief history

Research into quality for child care services became popular in the late 1980s and 1990s. This was at a time when there was the growing awareness of the importance of the early years of a child’s life. It is now widely accepted that the first eight years of a child’s life is fundamental to shaping their future health, development and well-being (OECD 2001) and that high quality experiences from birth to three years has the maximum impact on children's development, and can avert the need for later costly intervention. This knowledge has brought with it a desire to improve the quality of a range of services for young children.

As a result of this increased awareness about the importance of the early years, child care is being redefined. The focus is shifting from simply providing a safe place for children to be while their families cannot care for them for a variety of reasons, to exploring the potential these services have in meeting a range of developmental and support outcomes for children and their families.

Quality child care services provide more than just child care—quality services foster the development of positive relationships between carers, children and their families. They provide experiences for children that expand their thinking and language, helping them to learn and develop (National Childcare Accreditation Council -http://www.ncac.gov.au)

Within this framework, QA in child care becomes a vehicle to protect and nurture a child’s future.

National and international research into quality

Most studies in the past five to 10 years start from the premise that quality is a relative and dynamic concept based on values and beliefs (Woodhead 1996; Small 1999; Moss & Pence 1994). Alan Pence from Canada and Peter Moss from the United Kingdom have written a number of books that have challenged mainstream assumptions of quality practice in child care. In a book titled Valuing quality in early childhood services: New approaches to defining quality they explain:

‘Quality’ in early childhood services is a relative concept, not an objective reality. Definitions of quality reflect the values and beliefs, needs and agendas, influence and empowerment of various stakeholder groups having an interest in these services. Quality is also a dynamic concept; definitions evolve over time ...

(Moss & Pence 1994, p. 1).

The central concern of the entire book is on the process of definition, and how the many and varied perspectives of different stakeholder groups can be heard, respected and incorporated (Moss & Pence 1994). However, while it is generally accepted that quality is a concept grounded in cultural mores, Australia continues to rely on research undertaken in other places to define quality practices and standards.
in early childhood (Penn 2004, cited in Fasoli 2004). This research has described many different theoretical perspectives on children's learning and development—maturation, behavioural, developmental psychology, and constructivist, all of which impact on the care provided for young children. In summary, the debates have centred on 'nature versus nurture' and direct instruction versus discovery through play. Raban et. al (2003b) identified three key tensions that have been debated in the national and international literature on quality practice:

The first tension addresses views of children's natural development from within, unfolding with the passage of time, in contrast to the influence of social contexts as mediated through adult interactions and the impact of experience.

The second tension recognises the need to cherish and respect the individuality of each child, while engendering collective responsibility for group action and experience.

The third tension has particular consequences for provision and practice. It is concerned with the view of childhood as a special time in its own right as opposed to an opportunity for the future (Raban et. al 2003b, p. 59).

Such debates have tended to assume that one is right and the others wrong (Raban et. al 2003b). National and international research over the past five to 10 years is, however, shifting focus to recognising instead the merit of multi-perspectives of quality (Dahlberg & Moss 2005; Evans 1996; Ikupu & Glover 2002). More recent concepts of quality require that we consider these multi-perspectives of quality. This is an important shift in thinking, although as with all cultural changes it may take some time to be fully realised in the Australian context. Sensitivity to cultural difference requires organisations to have a close look at their own culture. Many non-Indigenous agencies will need to reinvent themselves.

Katz (1999, cited in Ikupu & Glover 2002) describes five perspectives that are important for defining and measuring quality. This multiplicity of perspectives aims to ensure that no voice is overlooked.

1. The **top-down perspective** is the view of the administration, for example the funding body. It involves assessing bureaucratic functions such as policy, provision of access, administration, funding and resources.

2. The **bottom-up perspective** is the view of the children. This involves assessing how children experience the service.

3. The **outside-inside perspective** is the view of the families. This involves assessing how the families experience the service.

4. The **inside perspective** is the view of teachers, carers and/or early childhood professionals. This involves assessing how the service is experienced by the teachers, carers and/or early childhood professionals.

5. The **outside perspective** is the view of the community. This involves assessing how the community and larger society are served by the service.
In contrast to the Euro-American views of quality practice Senior Anangu and Yapa from remote central Australia describe the four principles that underpin all matters regarding the rearing of their children. It is in these four principles that the belief that 'we are one people' is held:

**Tjukurpa** (in Luritja and Pitjantjatjara) **Jukurrpa** (in Warlpiri):
The Dreaming, the Law;  
**Walitja** (in Luritja) **Walytja** (Pitjantjatjara) **Walartja** (in Warlpiri):
Family, extended family, all family;  
**Ngura** (in Luritja and Pitjantjatjara) **Ngurrara** (in Warlpiri):
The home, the Land, the country, this place;  
**Kanyini** (in Luritja and Pitjantjatjara) **Mardarni** (in Warlpiri):

The four principles describe the child's relationships and responsibilities between everything in their environment—people, animals, land, and family. The principles define how they are connected to and responsible for all things. These views on quality in child care raise a number of critical questions for the development of Indigenous QA. What would early childhood care and education look like if everything was designed and implemented from the point of view of relationships with all things in the environment? What would happen if the knowledge held by Senior Yapa and Anangu women were given an equivalent level of status as early childhood professionals and university professors?

One example of the struggle to shift the current paradigm on quality comes from Senior Anangu and Yapa women from central Australia. The women talk about their struggle, over many years, to gain recognition for their cultures' quality child rearing, learning and developmental practices as outlined above. As with other Indigenous groups around Australia the women are calling for their cultural knowledge to be respected and treated on an equitable basis with Euro-American 'western' culture (Martin 2005; Walitja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002; SNAICC 2004). The Senior women believe that it is their children's cultural knowledge and identity that will keep them strong in their childhood, adolescence and adult life. Their views are increasingly being shared by mainstream research organisations in Australia and overseas (National Health and Medical Research Council 2004; Ball 2002). As part of their struggle, Senior women recorded their child rearing practices in two important publications:


As a result of the work the women have undertaken with Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (Waltja) in Alice Springs, their cultural knowledge is being recognised by Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics across Australia, and more recently internationally. The University of South Australia has placed their publications on the required reading list for all students studying to be early childhood professionals. However, even though Anangu and Yapa cultural knowledge is gaining recognition at a national and international level and in their own child care services, in the wider Australian community there is a long way to go before their cultural knowledge will be valued on an equitable basis to that of the Euro-western knowledge (Waltja staff and management committee members 2004, pers. comm.). The emerging recognition for their work coincides with recent studies from Australia that assert that the knowledge held within traditional Indigenous cultures is important to creating quality environments for Indigenous children.

There is a large body of evidence available indicating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in particular need to connect with their culture, and are at risk of psychological harm if this is not facilitated (Family Law Council 2004, p. 35).

The Family Law Council (2004) report indicates that this can be achieved through the formal recognition of traditional Indigenous child rearing and parenting practices, and the translation of these cultural values into services provided to Indigenous children.

**Indigenous knowledge influencing mainstream practice**

Researchers across the globe agree that definitions of quality are relative, value-based and dynamic (Dahlberg and Moss 2005; OECD 2001; Moss & Pence 1994). The dynamic nature of quality refers to the way beliefs and practices naturally evolve with the introduction of new knowledge and experience. A key finding from the literature is that Indigenous cultural practices are increasingly being recognised as important to maintaining the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children (Family Law Council 2004; National Health and Medical Research Council 2004).

In some cases these practices will improve the quality of care for non-Indigenous children (Small 1999; Whalley 2004). A significant feature shared by many Indigenous cultures around the world is the belief that it is important, for the health of the entire community, to place children at the centre of decision-making within the family and wider community (Warri Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). Child-centred practice is beginning to be promoted for ‘mainstream’ programs for children in Australia and overseas. For example, the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) is a research centre based at the University of Melbourne and their vision and purpose is to collaborate with governments to embed children’s voices in policies and practices (http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au).

Ridge (2003) describes child-centred practice as the commitment to actively engage children and include their ideas and perspectives in the decisions and practices that impact on them. Ridge (2003) explains that in early childhood environments, children’s opinions are often not heard directly from the children themselves. Rather,
proxies speak on their behalf, for example, parents, carers, teachers, and so on. However, children will have their own issues, views and perspectives and they may not be the same as the adults would identify.

The current challenge for many early childhood practitioners is to translate child-centred philosophy into policy and practice (CEIEC <http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/LED/CEIEC>). Traditional Indigenous child rearing principles and practice provide many examples of ways to translate child-centred philosophy into practice (Small 1999; Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). Traditional Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal people from central Australia) clearly place children at the centre. Children’s voices are heard, listened to, and acted upon by adults.

Research conducted by the Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team (2002) identified a number of distinct features of traditional Aboriginal child rearing practice. In Anangu and Yapa culture babies and young children are seen as small adults. These ‘little people’ have a set place in the family and the community, along with all the responsibilities of Law and culture. They may be addressed as ‘my young auntie’, ‘my mother again’ or ‘my young grandfather’ (Waltja 2001). As part of their early childhood development young children have almost complete freedom to choose and demand whatever they desire. This is in contrast to Kardiya (non-Anangu and non-Yapa) culture where babies are required to develop routines as directed by adults (Jacobs 1988, cited in Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). Anangu and Yapa children sleep, eat and play whenever and wherever they choose. If babies cry they are immediately picked up and held; it is considered cruel to do otherwise.

It is significant, however, that the practice of responding to a child’s wants as well as needs does not negate the existence of behaviour controls (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). Children are encouraged to behave in very specific ways. For example, an important feature of Anangu and Yapa culture is the emphasis placed on a child’s ability to learn compassion for others and to share. Unselfishness and compassion are seen as highly desirable behaviours. Parents and family members demonstrate this by never denying children what they want. Generosity is seen as the natural way of behaving and consequently becomes so (Hamilton 1981, cited in Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). There is no concept of ‘mine’ in regard to a plaything. Children are actively encouraged to give away objects if another child desires them.

Small (1999) provides further examples of where mainstream concepts of quality can be enhanced by the inclusion of traditional Indigenous knowledge and practice. One example given by Small is the traditional practice of carrying a baby in a sling on the adult’s body. Small (1999, 2004) explains that in the majority of cultures babies spend almost all their time being carried in this way. The advantages for the baby are numerous. Infants being held close to an adult’s body are the centre of activity, a precondition for developing healthy esteem for themselves and others. They can see, hear and touch far more effectively, creating greatly enriched environmental experiences. Research also indicates that infants held close to an adult’s body will
develop a more secure attachment to the parent, producing a calmer child, compared to those children who are separated from their parents to sleep. Small (1999, 2004) declares that ‘baby wearing’ is a successful method for optimal neurological development in infants. Wax (2004, cited in Nossar 2004) explains the benefits of ‘baby wearing’ in another way and states that parents in Africa carry their children so they feel loved.

There are many examples of child rearing methods from traditional Indigenous cultures being recognised as quality practice within mainstream contexts (for example, Small 2004; Nossar 2004; Warrk Iarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002; Whalley 2004). Another comes from the renowned Pen Green early childhood centre in London (Whalley 2004; http://www.pengreen.org). The Director of Pen Green and an early childhood professional, Dr Margy Whalley (2004) emphasises the importance of a child-centred approach where the voices and decisions of children are heard. The quality of care at Pen Green is solidly focused on the needs of the child. Staff actively engage children in decision-making and continually explore ways to ensure the child care environment reflects the perspectives of children (http://www.pengreen.org).

Figure 2 below shows the wet areas at Pen Green Centre. These environments are clearly designed from the perspective of the child. They provide a rich experience for children who want to play with running water, splash around, get dirty and completely drenched.

Figure 2: Wet areas at Pen Green Centre in the United Kingdom
Children can play with running water in a trough, or go to the tiled water room where they can get completely wet and experiment with taps and shower fixtures. Photos courtesy of Pen Green centre (http://www.pengreen.org).
This approach is consistent with traditional Yapa and Anangu cultures where child rearing philosophy and practice is firmly centred around the child and the child has a large degree of autonomy. As previously mentioned, child-centred practice is expressed in many ways, including the sleeping patterns of Yapa and Anangu children. Yapa and Anangu cultures require that children never sleep on their own; are never left crying; and the children themselves choose when and where they fall asleep (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002).

Whalley (2004) has translated this Indigenous sleeping practice into the Pen Green child care centre, where instead of using cots, the centre has baskets on the floor and babies and young children choose when they want to sleep, crawling in and out of the baskets as they desire. The Pen Green centre is also a registered trainer provider for child care QA (http://www.pengreen.org), and has the status of being one of the first centres of excellence chosen by the British Government.

What is normal child development?

The literature revealed that every society has developed traditions to guide quality practice (Small 1999; 2004; Nossar 2004). Small (1999) explains that notions of quality in child care are based on a person’s cultural learning, their knowledge and value system.

Most people form opinions and believe they have the correct answer, the most appropriate approach for bringing up a healthy and happy child. What no one sees is the personal and cultural influences that have brought them to their opinions (Small 1999, p. xv).

With the growing recognition that quality is relative (Moss & Pence 1994), a number of Australian researchers are calling for a more critical consideration of our assumptions about what is quality and what is ‘normal’ child development for Indigenous children (Fasoli 2004). The reliance on only one way of thinking about children’s development and learning is increasingly being questioned.

Fasoli (2004) asks whether our assumptions about developmental norms actually represent what is normal for the children with whom we work? Many of the norms we use and the practices that stem from them were originally generated by research done in the United States, and these may not be applicable.

Fasoli (2004) goes on to explain that this is not an argument to discard child development knowledge. It is an argument for a more critical consideration of our assumptions about what is a ‘normal’ child. An Australian research team comment that ‘over a period of time, sets of assumptions, or paradigms, can remain unchallenged and then become accepted ways of influencing our views of child development’ (Raban et. al 2003a, pp. 68–69) when the reality is that these assumptions may not produce the best quality of care for children.
Children who do not develop according to the dominant views of child development and expected pattern are considered to be different; and difference has come to mean deficient in some way (Fasoli 2004). Children from cultures different to western, mainstream cultures are often considered to be deficient when they do not ‘do’ what children from the mainstream do (Williams-Kennedy 2004, cited in Fasoli 2004). What is rarely taken into account is what they can do that mainstream children cannot.

Some considerations for measuring quality

**Quality programming cannot occur without a ‘quality’ process**

Quality programming cannot occur without a ‘quality’ process. The World Bank Group (2004) supports a range of initiatives, in many different countries, to support quality in early childhood (http://www.worldbank.org). The following quote is from an organisation funded by the World Bank, the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, Washington DC:

> The value of defining quality is in the impact the process has on those who participate in it ... The exercise and process of defining quality needs as much emphasis as the specific indicators you identify ... (Evans 1999, p. 28).

Given the impact of earlier Australian policies on Indigenous Australians, this emphasis on the process is paramount. Monitoring the process of exploring the viability of an Indigenous QA system from the perspective of how it is being perceived by Indigenous stakeholders will help to ensure that the concerns and viewpoints of Indigenous peoples are kept at the forefront of the process.

**Establishing quality in child care is complex**

Fasoli (2004) explains that the key to maintaining high quality child care includes two broad groups of indicators:

- **Structural indicators**: these relate to the quantifiable aspects of the care environment and are relatively easy to measure. For example, structural indicators include low adult to child ratios, smaller group sizes, higher levels of staff qualifications and appropriately compensated staff.

- **Process indicators**: these relate to the process, for example, the relationships between the carer and the child, the impact of different teaching practices, the ways that play is used in helping children learn and the importance of both child and adult led activity. Process indicators are subtle indicators—they are much more difficult to measure, but potentially much more critical indicators of quality (Fasoli 2004).

A report published by the Victorian Auditor General’s Office (Baragwanath 1998, cited in Raban et. al 2003b) looked at the key aspects of quality that specialists in Australia agreed influenced educational outcomes for children:

- interactions
- programming
Preparing the ground for partnership

- health and hygiene
- safety
- human resource management
- environment.

From the above list of agreed criterion interactions between staff and children was seen as the most important determinant of quality (cited in Raban et. al 2003b, p. 57). Unfortunately the report also found that these positive interactions, so important in the early years, were not found in a large number of centres. Research from the United States produced similar findings. What these studies highlight is that it is often difficult to assure quality beyond a minimum standard of physical safety. For example, if a service meets licensing standards a parent can feel fairly secure in knowing that their children will be physically safe while they are in care—although there is much less guarantee that they will be emotionally and/or developmentally ‘safe’ (Raban et. al 2003b).

The Early Childhood Consortium, a research team from the University of Melbourne comment that there are few instruments available for the description and evaluation of quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings (Raban et. al 2005). They argue that current accreditation systems, including the QIAS in Australia are limited. Current measures for quality can be associated with aspects of a child care service that address issues of:

- access
- efficient administration
- hours of availability and parental choice
- educational and other outcomes for children and their families.

Members of the consortium propose that these static models of quality may well be reassessed through a more dynamic model of quality seen as ‘processes’ experienced by children and their families, through pedagogical practices and other interactions. They argue that the key to more effective QA systems is to have a transparent QA process that readily identifies people’s beliefs and values (Raban et. al. 2005).

**Staff as the cornerstone of excellence**

Research into quality in early childhood care and education has consistently shown that staff are the cornerstone of excellence, and that staff training makes a difference to services provided to children (Frede 1995, cited in Raban et. al 2005). Research studies have indicated that the key factor that discriminates between mediocre and good quality care is staff development and education (Pasha & Wesley 1998, cited in Raban et. al 2005).
An Indigenous perspective on quality

*By Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep*

Bronwyn is a Kokatha women from the far west coast of South Australia. This section is important for identifying the essential understanding, processes and expectations for Indigenous child care and an Indigenous QA framework.

**Quality comes from the heart and soul of each person**

‘Quality’ is to do with the things that support a person to learn and grow, and it is about how much this pleases a person or meets with his or her approval (‘standard’). When it comes to large groups of people it means the whole group works out what ‘quality’ is together so everyone agrees and is happy. It takes time for this to happen and means everyone concerned sharing time, space, talking and walking together and listening.

QA is also about working to make care and education better all the time for children. To do this there is one very important thing to keep in mind aside from paper work and thick folders on ‘what’ and ‘how’ to make QA happen. That is a way of seeing things where no matter what happens, it is humans who must make it work. Quality comes from the heart and soul of each person, so it is important for people to first know and look at themselves before it is known what can be given to others that is right and helpful. This is important in making sure that what is said is the same as what really happens.

![Image of a sleepy lizard]

**Figure 3: Sleepy Lizard as an illustration of quality assurance**

The author of this section of the paper comes from the far west coast of South Australia, in the country around Ceduna. The sleepy lizard is a common food source for Aboriginal people from this area and it is used to illustrate the meaning of QA for Aboriginal children. When the sleepy lizard is big, fat and carrying eggs it is considered to be highly desirable—a standard of excellence. It is perfect quality because it holds lots of nutrition and meat and it can feed more than one person—it means the country is healthy. Artist Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep.
QA is a promise that is meant to bring about a feeling of trust. This promise is usually given in a written way that shows what to do, and how to do it in a way that shows respect of basic human rights. It is important to make sure QA in Indigenous child care services is happening all the time not just when a person thinks or remembers it. There needs to be parts that make sure everyone does what they are meant to be doing, a part that walks Indigenous child care services workers along a path that shows how to make things better. To see how QA is worked out see Figures 3, 4 and 5.

The characteristics of a sleepy lizard

![Image of a sleepy lizard]

**Figure 4: Characteristics of a sleepy lizard**

A sleepy lizard has hard scaly skin with soft scaly creamy coloured underside. It has short legs, stumpy fat tail, an almost diamond shaped head, strong jaws and has black, white and grey brown and cream colours. It is very close to the ground. When it walks the tail drags on the ground. Artist Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep.
### Sleepy lizard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skinny (any size)</strong></td>
<td>Does not meet standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave it alone, it might be sick, or lacking nutrition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fat and middle size</strong></td>
<td>Minimum standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okay to catch and eat but not enough</td>
<td>Okay but not very desirable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big and fat</strong></td>
<td>Average to high standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More meat, fatter tail, mor nourishing, tastier—catch and eat</td>
<td>Desirable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big, fat and carrying eggs</strong></td>
<td>Standard of excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect, lots of nutrition and meat, will feed more than one person—catch and eat</td>
<td>Highly desirable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5: A way to work out a ‘standard’*

It is the thinking, doing and being taught by extended family through the old cultural ways that people learn to understand quality practice—what is good to eat or not. Reasons the sleepy lizard may not be good to eat include: it may cause sickness; it is not nutritious enough; or not quite ready to eat; it needs longer to mature; or seed stock for future crops. Artist Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep.
Time, relationships, family, Tjukulpa and children's learning

Important things to look at and make happen in an Indigenous child care service from an Indigenous way of seeing things are:

- time
- relationships
- family
- Tjukulpa
- children's learning and giving and getting messages from other people.

Time

Time is important in a different way to most non-Indigenous Australians. The Indigenous way looks at time and how it works in with space, talking together (dialogue), and safety.

Space—Space for people to be on their own where there is freedom to do what they want without worries. To think what they want to think without anyone else ‘poking their nose in’. To give space that lets people make up their own mind where there does not have to be an answer or action coming from the thinking. Space to let people feel powerful inside themselves and do things in a way that is special to them, and space to share with others when ready to do so.

Talking together (dialogue)—Time to talk with others either by using body signs or talking words without feeling ‘no good’ or rushed. When talking it is important a person finishes what they are saying and never walk between people talking. This is rude; it is better to go behind and around. Truth, humour and indirect talk that leave out direct questioning are critical to quality talks.

Safety—Safety is very important otherwise there is no moving ahead. Part of safety is time to make decisions when a person is ready to do so, not when someone else says so, and make sure there is intellectual, emotional, physical and cultural safety in order to talk and do things with others. Safety for people to be who they truly are and be proud of it and their culture, and to be honest without feeling threatened.

Relationships

Relationships need time to be built and to sit right in the middle of culture in ways that are right and have great meaning. It is important for relationships to support, make better and keep culture going. A relationship that looks after different ways people talk, learn, share and do things is important for all over good health, happiness, peace and safety. Ways of behaving and where a person fits in an Indigenous group is very important. It is a must to know and understand these and how they work to make sure there is a sense of belonging, sense of security, and maintain peace and harmony. These ways of looking after relationships are used more strongly within groups that stay surrounded more fully in the old ways of their Indigenous culture. Relationships tell who teaches the children and at what time in their lives.
Family

Family is very important, especially the bigger picture of family members—extended family. Each person has a place and a role in family and Indigenous groups even if they have not lived among Indigenous groups before. Being given a position in a family takes time before it happens and needs trust.

Children’s learning

Children’s learning from an Indigenous way of seeing things is very important. One reason is they are the future; what is taught and learned is important in keeping the culture alive and to their identity. Learning about culture makes sure the children are strong, proud of being Indigenous, and are healthy all round. As adults they will be the ones making decisions to protect and keep alive their culture. It is fair to say that the culture children are surrounded by is the culture that will come naturally and is more likely to be valued, respected and kept alive. This is one reason why Indigenous child care services must work to keep the Indigenous culture alive and well. An important question to ask is ‘by whose rules, values and world view are Indigenous children cared for and taught, along with how their behaviours are seen and dealt with?’ Indigenous culture in the early years is full of encouragement in the way children are taught and cared for rather than being ‘bossed’, bullied or told what to do. Added to this is the question around ‘assimilation’ versus ‘integration’ versus ‘walking together’, which needs to be looked at more closely. There are four main areas that are very important to children’s teaching and learning. These are the instruction, curriculum, environment and the learner.

Instruction—The Indigenous way, sees adults chosen to instruct via kinship who have the needed skills and knowledge to do so with the child. A combination of both formal and informal teaching approaches are expertly used in teaching and learning that respects children as ‘one of a kind’, smart, able to do many things for themselves, to choose and make decisions in their best interest. Sensitivity, flexibility, encouragement, tolerance and patience are critical. Correction is given using encouragement with respect and being ‘tuned in’ to the child.

Curriculum—There is no written curriculum for Indigenous learning. Rather this is set by philosophies, ‘Tjukulpa’, principles and practices handed down from generation to generation. There is a strong focus on living/survival skills, relationships and ‘Tjukulpa’. The child lets the adults know what they need to learn that is special to them. There is a strong sense of freedom, space and plenty of time. Teaching and learning needs to happen on the ‘spur of the moment’ as well as special times. Time is of no real consequence, gaining the skill, knowledge and understanding is. Special knowledge is given at the right time for the child to know. This right time is put together with what the adult thinks is right.

Environment—Many Indigenous children and adults find the bricks and mortar place of learning stifling/choking. This is unhelpful for learning to happen at its best. There is a preference for the outdoors. A curriculum that is stiff and does not bend fails to value and “take on board” or include differences. It is likely to meet the needs of some
Preparing the ground for partnership

children, those whose way of learning gets information and uses it in one kind of way. This means learners who use a different way of getting and using information can find learning hard (for example, sight/visual, touch and movement ways of learning). The environment needs to be uncluttered/ not ‘junked up’, relaxed, friendly, warm, and trusting giving a feeling of being free and makes a person want to do things and learn.

**Learner**—Indigenous child learners, like any learner, show by their behaviours what they need to learn. The main thing here is if, and how, the adult understands, sees, values and ‘takes on board’ these learning cues and signs. In the Indigenous culture these are taken on board and used by adults and older siblings within the extended family. Indigenous children usually like to feel in control of their choices, decisions and learning so they can explore, discover, practice and problem solve in their own way and time without adult interference unless needed. Indigenous children usually watch very closely. Children’s learning, like adult learning is individualised with encouragement, guidance, modelling and at times with step-by-step teaching (explicit teaching). The learners are the decision-makers about what they want to learn and are given plenty of time, space, learning moments and modelling to do so. There is often a strong sense of wanting to be like the older siblings and adults. This wanting to be like them can often be what leads a child in choosing what to learn.

![Figure 6: A ‘best practice’ moment](image)


**Thinking, doing and being taught best practice through the old cultural ways**

It is the thinking and doing taught by extended family through the old cultural ways that teach what, how, why and the wherefore of what is good to eat or not. Reasons can be: it may cause sickness; not nutritious enough; or not quite ready to eat—needs longer to mature; or seed stock for future crops.
Best practice looks like:

**Children being happy:**
- busy doing things that have meaning and makes sure children have great learning happening
- talking and sharing with others that feel good
- sharing, taking turns
- respecting each others’ choices.

**Children feeling powerful to:**
- make choices with adults tuned in to the child
- be free to talk about things and make decisions
- say ‘no’.

**Space for:**
- solo play
- having their own thoughts.

**Time:**
- to finish what is being done
- to feel full or had enough
- to celebrate what has been done well and gaining the new skills and working toward becoming extra skilled
- to make choices
- for doing things on the ‘spur of the moment’.

**Make excellent relationships:**
- by teaching children through planned or on the ‘spur of the moment’ experiences
- through lots of conversations all the time between all adults and children
- as parents/ family spend time in the centre because it is more that just ‘pick-up or drop-off’
- as parents /family talk with centre workers about their children’s work and how they are doing.

**Best practice feels like:**
- don’t need anything
- safe
- relaxed/calm/comfortable
- happy
- want to do things
Preparing the ground for partnership

- want to and feel strong to talk to other children and adults
- feel cared for
- feel important and precious.

**Best practice sounds like:**

- laughing, talking (in first language), squealing, quiet chatting
- noises from different games and things happening (for example, swings creaking, bat and ball being hit, children’s feet running, jumping (thumping), skipping
- musical toys
- a wide range of activities available (for example, woodwork, music, singing, computers, rhymes)
- Indigenous, classical and other cultural music varieties
- rest time music (relaxation)
- noises from children’s programs.

**Best practice is:**

- everyone all together talking, laughing, playing, sharing and walking the same way for the children to be healthy, strong and smart
- adults’ heart and soul
  - is right for children
  - works hard for children
  - shows children the right ways of learning, living, loving, respecting, accepting and letting each other know how precious they are
  - giving plenty of chances to practice and play
- a place where children go to play and learn that is healthy, safe, happy, fun, living, clever and homely
- a place where children’s needs are first and the most important thing
- where everyone wants to learn and change wrong ways of thinking and doing things
- where and when Indigenous people are making choices/decisions without the okay or permission from government first
- Indigenous family, community and staff are together in the same centre
- Indigenous culture can be seen, heard, felt and considered valuable
- about people and their commitment, value and love of children.
Indigenous perspectives of mainstream quality assurance

The previous sections explored Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives of quality in child care. This section differs in that it provides four examples of Indigenous peoples’ experiences of being involved in the mainstream QA process:

- a national perspective from Multifunctional Aboriginal children’s services by Debbie Bond
- a locally developed response to mainstream QA
- quality management and Indigenous aged care
- the Nunga code—Nunga (Aboriginal) children’s perspectives on quality.

The first is a viewpoint of quality from staff working in Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) around Australia, which were recorded in an unpublished paper in 2001. The second is an example of a locally developed response to the mainstream QA systems. The third is a summary of an article on quality management and Indigenous aged care. The fourth is an example from a locally run school program that published their experiences in a book in the late 1980s (Williams 1988). This example has been included because it provides a rare, published, insight, into Nunga (Aboriginal) children's experiences of a QA process. In this example the children play a key role in directing, measuring and improving the ‘quality’ of their learning environment.

It is important to note that there was a limited amount of information available on Indigenous people's experiences of QA. It is possible that these views have been recorded in workshops and by staff in non-government organisations, however they have not been published.

A national perspective from Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services

During 2001, Debbie Bond, Aboriginal woman, grandmother and early childhood professional from the Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit (ARMSU), South Australia, undertook a national review of MACS. As part of this review, staff from these centres across Australia were asked about their views on the mainstream QA process for LDC centres. Bond provides feedback regarding the QIAS system, highlights some of the concerns of staff from MACS, and makes a number of suggestions for change to the national QIAS system.

Staff from most MACS services agreed that the national system of QA should remain a voluntary one for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services. Staff felt that they would prefer to approach the accreditation system when they felt they were ready. MACS staff also requested that support be made available to them when they were ready, and that possibly funding could be provided for visits to accredited centres to gain greater knowledge and understanding of what was required (Bond 2001).
Bond (2001) explains that staff and parents from all the MACS centres could appreciate the benefits of the QIAS system if it helped to:

- improve the interactions between staff, children and families
- improve the quality of programming provided to children
- increase the understanding and knowledge of parents and staff in relation to why certain rules and policies were in place in the child care services.

Parents in particular reported that they valued understanding the importance of reviewing health and safety issues, and being able to see what kinds of activities their children were doing during the day and how this related to their learning and development (Bond 2001).

A number of problems with the current QA systems were reported by MACS staff (Bond 2001). These included:

- Staff from most centres felt that some of the quality areas in the QIAS system would be difficult to implement, for example, where parent participation is minimal, or there is a high turnover of staff it would be difficult to meet the minimum standards.
- The wording of the QIAS was considered confusing and difficult to understand. Many parents and staff reported that they struggled to understand the language or the ‘jargon’ attached to discussions on quality practices in child care.
- There were many fears associated with the QIAS process. This was summed up by staff from Kaurna Plains Child Care Service in South Australia who felt that they:
  - lacked a basic knowledge and understanding of the QIAS
  - lacked an understanding of what would be expected of them if they went through the QIAS process
  - did not know where to begin to understand and implement the QIAS
  - did not understand what is meant by ‘culturally appropriate’
  - did not know how they could ensure their staff would undertake the appropriate training and development
  - would want an Indigenous reviewer, if and when they chose to go through the QIAS process.

Bond (2001) reports that staff from every centre felt that having an Indigenous validator, or at least a validator trained in Indigenous cultures and history, was essential. There was also a call to have an Indigenous voice/s on the NCAC. Bond (2001) explains that one centre described non-Indigenous individuals as not being on the same cultural wave length, and because of this they could not quite understand the Koorie way of servicing the needs of Koorie children (Bond 2001). At the time of the review, the NCAC board had an Indigenous representative, but most validators knew nothing about Indigenous cultures or MACS and how they operated. It was felt that the existing validators could only relate to mainstream child care services and quality standards.
In summary, Bond (2001) explains that the Indigenous child care centres included in the review would like to be able to go through the QIAS process equitably. Equity in this context is defined as valuing the Indigenous knowledge underpinning the service on an equitable basis with the mainstream knowledge of quality. In the QIAS for LDC as currently designed and implemented in Australia, there is no recognition of the specialist Indigenous knowledge available from MACS and other Indigenous services.

A locally developed response to mainstream quality assurance

In South Australia, the Aboriginal Resource Management Support Unit (ARMSU) have published a resource to promote cultural understanding for people working with Aboriginal families, ‘to assist people to notice, respect and support the distinct and often subtle differences that distinguish an Aboriginal identity from others’ (ARMSU 2003b). This publication looks at the relevant principles and indicators of high quality care from the mainstream QA, and supplements these with qualifying statements from an Aboriginal perspective. An example is included below to demonstrate the different knowledge and skills Indigenous children may bring to a service:

Principle 6.4: Programs foster personal and interpersonal development
Indicator: Each child has many opportunities to experience personal and interpersonal competence in the course of the day.

[Qualifying statement]: Aboriginal children may have well developed interpersonal skills built through having had opportunities to form a range of relationships with children and adults in their extended family. The child may have lived or spent significant amounts of time with a range of relations other than the immediate family. Self-help skills tend to be fostered early in Aboriginal children. Children may be encouraged to rely less on adult intervention to sort out non-serious conflicts and problems in play or interactions with others.

Indicator: Cross-group friendships that mix children from various ages, gender, cultures or abilities are encouraged.

[Qualifying statement]: Aboriginal children may be used to playing and spending time with a group of children—brothers, sisters, cousins and friends of mixed ages.

Indicator: Staff actively encourage children to have positive attitudes towards each other and empathise with the feelings of others.

Indicator: Each child’s positive behaviour with peers such as sharing, initiating and in playing in socially positive ways in encouraged.

[Qualifying statement]: In Aboriginal families, older siblings and cousins are usually expected to share, provide protection and be a role model for friends and younger or more dependent children. Aboriginal children may learn a great deal from older brothers, sisters, cousins and friends (for example, language, self-help skills and games). Children are usually encouraged to share food, toys and other possessions. A sense of fairness may be well developed.
Indicator: Staff explain in simple terms the reasons for rules and the consequences of behaviour, including the effects of behaviour on others.

[Qualifying statement]: Certain child care behaviour rules may be very unfamiliar to an Aboriginal child. Allow the child time and familiarity to take these on. Demonstrate the relevance and benefit of the rules. Aboriginal children may be more accustomed to indirect methods of discipline. Discipline may be shared by a range of family members and may include loaded conversation, humour, surprised reactions, laughter, or teasing from the group when a child is behaving badly. Other methods may include directing attention away from the child towards another who is behaving in a desirable manner and allowing the child to experience the natural consequences of inappropriate behaviours. Affectionate teasing and joking may be used with children as a way of helping them to develop an emotional resilience (ARMSU 2003b).

This local response from South Australia is an important achievement for ARMSU and the Aboriginal child care services involved. It demonstrates that it is possible to work in partnership with services to develop locally relevant resources and responses to QA.

The key point to be considered with this example is that the process used to develop local responses is critical. The ARMSU resource would not be relevant to the South Australian Aboriginal child care services if they had not achieved and maintained a truly collaborative approach throughout. The importance and efficacy of partnership approaches are discussed in more detail in Part 2.

Quality management and Indigenous aged care

Recent reform in aged care legislation in Australia has meant aged care facilities need to go through a QA process and meet a set of QA standards to achieve accreditation and ongoing funding. All aged care services must go through this process. There are no exceptions, and no Indigenous specific QA (Thurecht 2002). What is offered to Indigenous aged care services is a limited amount of flexibility in how the standards are measured, and the support material is written in plain English. The information outlined here will allow for a general understanding of some of the issues experienced by staff from Indigenous aged care services as reported by Thurecht (2002).

The article describes some of the challenges the QA process has imposed on Indigenous aged care facilities. Thurecht (2002) explains that Indigenous people support the QA standards as they ‘are based on principles that underpin the way Aboriginal people have always run their hostels’ (Thurecht 2002, p. 16). However, in some instances staff have felt that the QA process has put their services under a great deal of pressure, and they believe this has unwittingly compromised the quality of care.

1 Please note that it has not been possible to explore what is meant by a ‘limited amount of flexibility’ in this review.
Thurecht (2002) describes how the QA process has required staff to shift their focus from caring for the old people to trying to understand and work with ‘complex organisational systems and institutional structures’ (Thurecht 2002, p. 16). The key barriers she identifies include the need for staff to spend many hours:

- preparing and storing complex records
- filling in complicated forms and paper work.

Rather than change the principles underpinning the aged care QA, Thurecht (2002) argues for more flexible ways of monitoring and reporting on activities and improvements that are made in the services.

The Nunga code: Nunga children’s perspectives on quality

*The Nunga Code* was prepared and published by the Education Department of South Australia (Williams 1988). Although written in the late 1980s, suggestions from *The Nunga Code* are potentially still relevant for young Indigenous children today. *The Nunga Code* was originally designed and implemented as a strategy for the classroom, although with the changes in focus to early learning in child care in recent years, it could potentially be adapted to a child care environment for Nunga children today. Williams (1988) reported that focusing on children’s languages within the learning environment helped Indigenous children develop confidence and pride in their cultures, building on their self-esteem. *The Nunga Code* classroom became a place of sharing where the teachers also became the students.

Within the sessions we talked, reflected, brainstormed, made word lists, wrote Nunga words and stories and had fun. Together we shared languages. My children frequently became the teachers of their Nunga language, which became a very important part in our classroom. There is a freedom of speech code you could say, and we have an agreement to share our language with each other (Williams 1988, p. 9).

In *The Nunga Code* the children themselves put forward what they considered to be successful teaching and learning strategies. They suggested:

- teachers need to model behaviour, for reading, writing, anything they wish to teach
- big books be used to read and share together as a class
- that big books be made by and about the children in the class and their languages and lifestyles
- that stories and texts they enjoyed could be altered to make them about the children themselves, the local community and experiences the children know well
- excursions to broaden their knowledge of the world and to provide a stimulus for further reading and writing
- excursions could be used to promote their culture, as a reward and to get to know one another. They also suggested having excursions to the teachers’ homes
making use of photographs in the classroom as they could—

– provide stimulus for writing
– be used to make books
– be used to share with others and as a reminder of the things they had done together

lots of group activities should be provided, as these were opportunities to share, learn together, have fun and cooperate.

In *The Nunga Code* the teachers also collated the following observations from their experiences over the years to help create curriculum specific for Indigenous children (Williams 1988). The children:

- enjoyed a set routine and repetition
- liked reading repetitive stories so they could remember dialogue
- liked seeing, feeling and hearing activities and experiences
- learn by doing things physically
- enjoy physical education and the arts
- do not like practice or pretend work like scribbling, but preferred to do the real thing
- have a highly developed sense of responsibility and share things
- have lots of responsibilities at home, therefore take the initiative
- have very strong family obligations and loyalty
- do not like negative attention in group situations
- found close, trusting class and family relationships to be really important
- like to be on the same level as the teacher and involved in what the teacher is doing
- like to find out and talk to the teachers about the teachers’ family and friends
- seem to be more mature in living and life situations, for example, sharing things, taking initiative, organising things and leading activities
- have strong survival skills
- enjoy helping younger children.
Conclusion: Part 1

National and international researchers agree that quality in child care is important. Research tells us that all children need to grow physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially, and that quality, formal child care services have the potential to nurture and enhance a child’s development. However, what constitutes a quality environment for children being cared for and educated outside their family home has been the subject of much debate over the past five to 10 years. While the review of the literature did not reveal any Indigenous specific QA systems in Australia or internationally—for child care or any other human services—there is a notable move in this direction.

The first significant theme to emerge from the literature is that researchers around the globe conclude that there is no single, universal concept of quality child care. A number of studies, including a recent OECD report, accept that definitions of quality reflect specific sets of values and beliefs—what is quality practice in one setting, may not necessarily translate to another (OECD 2001; Raban et. al 2003b; Moss & Pence 1994; Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001). Instead, the standards and practice in relation to caring for and educating young children are culturally specific and will mould a certain kind of citizen (Small 1999). Current definitions of quality in child care are based on research from Europe and the United States, and the standards and practice developed from this research are more likely to strengthen mainstream ‘western’ cultures (Small 2004; Moss & Pence 1994).

The next significant theme emerging from the literature is that beliefs about what constitutes quality in child care evolve over time with the introduction of new knowledge and experience (Moss & Pence 1994). Early views of quality tended to centre on the physical safety of the child the key concern being to ensure that children attending child care would be protected from physical danger and reunited with their parents unharmed. In recent years a more expanded view of quality has emerged. It is now widely accepted that quality environments provide much more than child care (Whalley 2004; World Bank <http://www.worldbank.org>; OECD 2001; NCAC <http://www.ncac.gov.au>). Quality environments are those where children are encouraged to explore—where they have the opportunity to encounter rich learning experiences that nurture and expand their thinking, language, physical and social development, and where their cultural identity development is supported.

In relation to mainstream views of quality care for Indigenous children, the literature revealed a significant evolution in thinking in this area. Internationally there is a growing recognition that mainstream standards and practices have not always provided the best quality care for Indigenous children (World Bank <http://www.worldbank.org>; Royal Australasian College of Physicians 2004; National Health and Medical Research Council 2004). Significantly, in some of the most recent literature, traditional Indigenous child rearing values and practices are clearly complementary to and influencing current mainstream views of quality child care (Whalley 2004; Small 2004). One area this can be observed is in the growing recognition of the importance of a child-centred approach in the care and education of children.
A child-focused approach is one where the voices, opinions and decisions of children are sought, and where the environment is sensitive to the holistic development and learning needs of the child. Notably, many Indigenous cultures around the globe have firmly embedded a child-centred approach in their traditional values and practices (Nossar 2004; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002; Small 1999). Traditional in this context refers to the depth of cultural knowledge held by a few Indigenous Elders and Senior women, whose knowledge and expertise is comparable to the university professor or other highly skilled professionals in the field of mainstream early childhood care and education (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). The cultural knowledge held within traditional Indigenous cultures is increasingly considered to be critical to creating quality environments for Indigenous children that support their cultural identity development. This is important because the literature revealed that the key factor that differentiates an Indigenous child’s quality child care needs from that of a non-Indigenous child is the necessity to actively support the development of their cultural identity.

The Family Law Council (2004), the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children literature review (Penman 2004), and the Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team (2002) reports describe some of the most current thinking in this area from Australia, and point to the need for further attention by governments and service providers—in the areas of policy translation and practice.

Key factors that were repeated in much of the literature from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples include:

- ‘the Indigenous community is not homogeneous’ (Lester 2004; Mellor & Corrigan 2004)
- ‘we are all one people’ (Nungarrayi Brown 2002).

These seemingly contradictory statements form the basis of the key findings from this review. ‘In essence this means we are different, but we are related’ (Karen Martin 2004, pers. comm.). The statement ‘the Indigenous community is not homogeneous’ recognises the diversity of cultures and perspectives of Indigenous people. They are autonomous yet inter-related. It is emphasised to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard and represented in national policy initiatives (Lester 2004; Mellor & Corrigan 2004). In recent years COAG has translated this statement into government policy with the acknowledgement that ‘there is no one size fits all” for Indigenous Australians. Instead governments and Indigenous communities aim to work together to explore solutions at a local level (Vanstone 2005).

The second statement ‘we are all one people’, while not as prevalent in the literature reviewed, recognises the shared history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. It also acknowledges the common threads that bind Indigenous cultures together (Karen Martin 2004, pers. comm.). In translating this statement into Indigenous QA, it is likely that there will be core Indigenous values and practices in relation to quality care for children, and that these will be shared across the diversity of cultures. The difference will be in how they are interpreted and implemented at the local level in a child care service.
Part 2

Designing a national Indigenous framework: process and practice

Exploring the elements of a national QA process

The literature search did not reveal any Indigenous specific QA for child care or any other human services, in Australia or overseas. However there is enough research to draw from to inform the viability study. The literature identified the following features as the key elements that will need to be considered in developing national Indigenous QA in Australia:

1. establish and maintain an on-going process of genuine partnership
2. define quality
3. develop professional training programs to reflect definitions of quality
4. develop standards
5. implement standards and practice
6. evaluation, including ongoing improvement

Of the elements listed above, research indicates that establishing and maintaining a quality process is the most critical factor to ensuring that QA will be relevant and improve the quality of services being delivered to Indigenous children and their families (World Bank (http://www.worldbank.org)). As a result Part 2 of this paper focuses almost entirely on exploring a selection of research related to designing and implementing a national process in partnership with Indigenous people—including the complexities involved in effectively representing the diversity of Indigenous cultures within this. In Figure 7 the process is placed in the centre of the diagram to highlight the key role the process plays in all features of a QA system—defining quality; developing and implementing professional training programs, standards and practice; and evaluating the QA system and making ongoing improvements.
Why focus on the process of defining quality?

Quality is a subjective concept because it is based on people's individual belief systems and values. For this reason, defining quality and quality indicators for Indigenous child care will require appropriate partnership and negotiations with all stakeholders. This should be undertaken using a collaborative ‘everybody listening and working together’ approach. A paper by Evans (1996, p. 13) from the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development states that ‘the process of defining quality should be the first step in assuring quality services will exist’. The quality of the process will therefore determine whether or not the QA that is established will improve the quality of the services being measured.

Work currently being undertaken in partnership with Indigenous peoples in Canada, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea all emphasise the importance of the process itself. Innovative partnerships in these countries will be discussed in more detail in the following country profile section titled ‘Intercultural frameworks’. The Canadian example in particular clearly demonstrates that a quality process can achieve many more positive outcomes for families and children than anticipated (Ball 2002). Research from Canada and the World Bank demonstrates that meaningful partnerships with all the key stakeholders will translate into services, and a QA approach that will be meaningful to the children, staff and families at the centres (http://www.worldbank.org; Ball 2002).

If the partnership approach and process is inadequate however, research demonstrates that the very people who need to participate in, and implement the quality practice will feel excluded from the process; they may not understand why particular decisions and rules apply and, as Fasoli (2004) points out, even more critical is that too often...
decisions are made by those who think they know what is ‘best’—when the reality is that their decisions may in fact be based on inadequate knowledge and inappropriate assumptions and therefore may be damaging to children.

There is considerable research evidence, and a general recognition within the OECD countries, that mainstream programs and services have not always provided the best quality of care to Indigenous children ([http://www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org); OECD 2001). For example, in December 1997, the Australian Government announced its response to Bringing them home: National inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. The inquiry found that former child separation policies had caused Indigenous parenting skills to be undermined, leading directly to risks for the next and further generations ([http://www.facs.gov.au](http://www.facs.gov.au); SNAICC 2004a).

Thomas (2002) provides an overview of the New Zealand literature on Maori people’s access to mainstream programs and services and identifies the key reasons why they have often failed to improve the life chances for Maori children. The areas of focus Thomas (2002) identifies are very similar to those discussed in the Australian and Canadian literature (COAG 2001; Ball 2002). For example, the key issues include:

- lack of adequate community consultation
- lack of Maori participation in the planning and delivery of programs and services
- the delivery of services in ways that are incompatible with, or inappropriate for the cultural styles of Maori clients (Te Puni Kokiri 1999, cited in Thomas 2002).

Indigenous nations in many countries throughout the world continue to suffer similar problems; they are over-represented in statistics of poverty, suicide, crime, early death and poor health (Nee-Benham & Cooper 2000). They also experience similar problems when it comes to education—low achievement, low attendance rates, high numbers leaving school early and low numbers attending tertiary institutions. In Australia there have been improvements but changes are slow and stories of tragedy and despair continue to dominate news items and reports.

There is a sense of urgency in many sectors, as census data continues to confirm that despite government funding and individual and community effort, the life chances of Indigenous children remain significantly lower than that of non-Indigenous children ([http://www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). As Mellor and Corrigan (2004) express in a recent review:

> The distressing, but inescapable, response to the question of why the existing policies and substantial funding are not generating a greater improvement in Indigenous learning outcomes is that we really do not know [the answer]… (Mellor & Corrigan 2004, p. 51).

To begin to address these issues governments in Australia and overseas are calling for ‘Indigenous communities and governments to engage as partners, with shared responsibility’ in the development of policy and practices, and in the design and delivery of services (COAG 2001). In a recent address to the National Press Club, the
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone, identified practices to support the COAG objectives:

We [the Australian Government] want dramatic change ... one key aspect to this change ... is genuinely giving Indigenous Australians a voice... Indigenous Australians, as individuals, in their families and communities can only be said to have a real voice when governments actually listen directly to them. Over the past 40 years intermediaries in various guises have been created to speak on behalf of Indigenous communities ... [these include] consultants, lobbyists, service providers and assorted others ... It's been very convenient for successive governments to talk to these groups. Talking to the vast and diverse range of communities with different cultures, in different places with different opportunities and with different aspirations is a much, much harder task (Vanstone 2005, p. 2).

The following sections of this paper are dedicated to exploring a selection of literature related to partnership processes and intercultural understandings in early childhood contexts. This includes:

- a discussion on culture and intercultural frameworks
- examples of locally driven partnership approaches in Australia
- national partnership approaches from Canada, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea, because of their potential relevance in an Australia context.

Intercultural frameworks

The following discussion on intercultural communication explores in more detail issues that were raised in Part 1 of this paper. The findings from Part 1 revealed that the key factor that differentiates an Indigenous child’s quality child care needs from that of a non-Indigenous child is the necessity to actively acknowledge and nurture the development of their cultural identity. One of the significant challenges therefore, in designing an Indigenous QA process will be defining what ‘cultural identity’ means for the various Indigenous cultures around Australia, and how culture can be strengthened in a child care environment. In an earlier section titled ‘Exploring definitions of culture’, culture is discussed in the context of culturally appropriate practice in early childhood care and education settings. This section further explores understandings of culture in the context of establishing effective partnerships between peoples of differing cultures for the purpose of defining quality.

Two broad levels of cultural experience were identified in Part 1 of this paper (Terreni & McCallum 2003):

1. **the concrete and explicit** manifestations of culture (for example language, festivals, food, and dress)

2. **the implicit assumptions** individuals hold about existence that determines the beliefs, norms and attitudes of a culture.
The **concrete and explicit** signs of culture are readily identifiable and can be easily shared with others. For example, early childhood practitioners can readily explore the concrete and explicit aspects of different cultures with children by displaying various cultural objects; by including activities such as cooking and eating different types of food; or by inviting family members to contribute to the program by telling a story from their culture. However, the implicit aspects of culture are addressed far less often because these ‘lie beneath the surface’ and are often more difficult to identify. It is the implicit assumptions individuals hold about existence, however, that determine the beliefs, norms and attitudes of a culture.

Terreni and McCallum (2003) assert that increasing our knowledge of the implicit beliefs and orientations that inform the practices of a culture can deepen our knowledge of the differences between cultures and result in a greater readiness to engage in ‘quality’ intercultural communication. Gaining an understanding of the implicit assumptions of culture will also deepen our knowledge of what ‘cultural identity’ means for the various Indigenous cultures around Australia, and how culture can be strengthened in a child care environment.

The **culture iceberg** (see Figure 8) is a diagrammatic representation of the explicit and implicit manifestations of culture. It is taken from a publication titled ‘Providing culturally competent care in early childhood services in New Zealand Part 1: Considering culture’ (Terreni & McCallum 2003). In this publication the authors propose a framework for unpacking the implicit assumptions about culture.
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003) identify three key dimensions common to all cultures:

1. relationships with people
2. relationships with time
3. relationships with nature.

They argue that it is the way cultures resolve these issues that form the basis of cultural difference.

**Relationships with people**

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003) define a range of ‘relational orientations’ to describe the way different cultures understand and experience their relationships with people. They refer to these orientations as:

- individualism or communitarianism
- neutral or emotional
Preparing the ground for partnership

- achievement or ascription
- specific or diffuse
- universalism or particularism.

Terrini and McCallum (2003) emphasise that the orientations need to be viewed as being on a continuum rather than polarised. Very often a culture will fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum rather than at one end or the other.

**Individualism or communitarianism: The individual or the group**

**Individualism** refers a culture that is primarily orientated towards individual needs and wants—the individual comes first. Underlying this cultural orientation is the belief that once individual needs are met, the individual is then better able to contribute to the group. An individualist culture is motivated and driven by individual goals.

**Communitarianism** describes a culture that is orientated primarily towards the needs of the group. This cultural orientation perceives that the whole community must be strong in order to adequately meet the needs of individuals. A communitarian culture is motivated and driven by common goals and objectives. For example Myers (1986, cited in Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002) explains that in Pintupi (Aboriginal language group in remote central Australia) socialisation of children focuses on the children being able to communicate appropriate ‘understanding’ of their relationship to the group. In understanding, ‘one acknowledges one’s relatedness to another, and is able to subdue one’s will in order to sustain relatedness’ (Myers 1986, p. 151 cited in Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). As children grow and demonstrate that they are developing their ‘understanding’ they are gradually introduced to more knowledge. Karen Martin (2005) explains this in another way when she says:

> ... we are related to people, to the sky, the salt water, the animals, the plants, the land ... that is how we hold who we are ... it is that we are related to everything else ... what is happening to our people now is we are not experiencing that relatedness ... it is important that we pay attention to our responsibilities and keep our relatedness strong ... (Karen Martin 2005).

**Neutral or emotional: The style of emotional expression**

A **neutral** culture is one in which members do not overtly communicate their feelings and prefer to keep them more controlled and subdued. Neutral cultures tend to use humour, understatement and irony rather than being overtly emotional. The tolerance of silence, tone, use of words, and the amount of non-verbal communication, such as eye contact, distance, touch and gesture also depend on cultural orientation.

An **emotional** culture which is much more expressive emotionally uses a more expressive style of communicating. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003) describe these cultures as having more overt ‘laughing, smiling, grimacing, scowling, gesturing’ as people attempt to find expression for their emotions.
Achievement or ascription: How is status assigned?

An achievement orientation refers to those cultures that assign status to individuals based on their achievements. For example, access to education is not restricted by age or gender but rather by academic achievement. In a culture that is oriented to individual achievement it is not unusual to find young educated men and women in positions of responsibility and leadership whose age, appearance and gender may not be accorded the same status in a culture that ascribes status (Terrini & McCallum 2003).

When status is achieved through ascription individuals may be given higher status due to their age, class, or gender. For example, in traditional Aboriginal culture access to particular knowledge is determined by age, sex and proved readiness (Warri K Jarr rinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). Elders are given status because of their age. Men and women have specific roles and responsibilities and therefore some cultural knowledge is restricted to gender. Knowledge is restricted because it may be dangerous for men to witness or learn about women's specific knowledge, and vice versa. It is considered dangerous to the point that they may become sick or even die (Warri K Jarr rinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002).

Specific or diffuse: The range of personal involvement

Specific cultures tend to perceive relationships as being in separate areas. This means that the status associated with a relationship will be likely to remain within the context of that relationship. For example, the status of a teacher tends to be confined to the specific context of the school and does not necessarily flow on into other relationships outside of this context.

Specific cultures tend to keep their public and private space quite separate. Public space tends to be large and segregated into many sections, which means that a member of this culture may have a relationship with someone in a particular context but not in another. For example, a person may have a relationship with someone at work but this relationship may not carry over into a social context. Terrini and McCallum (2003) comment that people from specific cultures are often perceived as very friendly, relaxed and accessible because admitting someone into one area of their public lives is not necessarily a big commitment. It does not mean that person also enters into your private space.

Whereas diffuse cultures tend to have relationships that are less segregated. This means the status accompanying a person’s occupation, for example, is carried with them into other areas of their life rather than being confined to the work context. In a diffuse culture a person’s life space is harder to enter and permission is needed to ‘come in’. The public space is relatively small and the private space large and diffuse, which means that once admitted as a friend, admission is granted into many aspects of the person’s private life. In a diffuse culture, developing and building a personal relationship is important for respect and trust to be established between people, and this applies in any context. Personal and professional relationships are not experienced as being in separate contexts (Terrini & McCallum 2003).
Universalism or particularism: Do rules or relationships have priority?

**Universalist** cultures focus on citizens adhering to a universal set of standards, laws and rules. There is a belief that by applying set rules to everybody will mean that all people will be treated as equally.

**Particularist** cultures primarily focus on people and how rules apply to the particular circumstances of any given situation. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003) explain that rules will be disregarded if they are considered to be inappropriate—the importance of a relationship takes precedence. There is a belief that all people will be treated equally if the rules of the culture are considered within the context of any given situation.

Terrini and McCallum (2003) comment that although these two positions seem polarised, the reality is that both kinds of judgements are often used. For example, in an early childhood context the particular circumstances of a family or child may involve a ‘bending’ of the rules. If a parent has particular difficulties in collecting their child at a pre-arranged time, it may be possible within a universalist framework to negotiate a new time. The key factor to consider is that in a universalist culture negotiating a new time is considered to be ‘bending’ the rules, whereas in a particularist culture reaching a new decision about the time a child will be collected is considered to be the rule.

**Relationships with time**

The way cultures orient themselves to time is another key area where differences between cultures become apparent (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003) argue that cultures will tend to have an orientation towards the past, present or future:

**Past:** Cultures that place a high value on tradition, relationships with ancestors and strong family ties generally have an orientation to the past. Successes, achievements, knowledge and wisdom gained from the past have a place in guiding behaviour in the present and future.

**Present:** Cultures that have an orientation to the present see the past as unimportant and the future vague and unpredictable, only the here and now is deemed important.

**Future:** Cultures that have a future orientation tend to view change as highly important and the future as being potentially bolder, brighter and better than the past or present (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003).

Martin (2004a) provides an alternative view of time from the Quandamoopah and Bidjara (Aboriginal) people ‘all things are connected ... past, present, future ... in the circle you know your relationships and you are known and valued no matter how you live this out’. Other Indigenous people from Australia share this multi-dimensional and circular view of time. The Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team (2002) describe
Preparing the ground for partnership

Concepts of time from the perspective of Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) people living in remote communities of central Australia. They explain that Jukurrpa (the Dreaming, the Law) belongs in the present, and is also a period in the remote past when the ancestral beings created the Yapa (Aboriginal) social, moral and physical universe (Vaarzon-Morel 1995, cited in Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002). Jukurrpa is in the past, present and future simultaneously.

Stanner (1987, cited in Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002) noted that the word time is not present in Aboriginal languages. In contemporary Aboriginal cultures in the desert regions, people’s lives are not usually tied to routines in the same way as they are in mainstream culture. Rather, there is usually a ‘right time’ to do something, which will be marked by a particular event. For example, the cold season may start when the first cold day arrives, rather than by a date in the calendar. In Yapa (Aboriginal) child rearing practices the ‘right time’ to feed a baby is when they are hungry. The ‘right time’ for a child to sleep is when they fall asleep. This is in contrast to the mainstream practice of establishing routines for sleeping, feeding and activity (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002, cited in Terrini and McCallum 2003).

Time management: Sequentially or synchronically

Cultures that orientate themselves to sequential time tend to view time as a line of events that happen in sequence—the past, present and future are seen to follow one another. When managing time from a sequential point of view schedules and time frames are usually considered to be fundamental. Punctuality is important, and lateness may cause anxiety. ‘Time is viewed as a commodity to be used up and lateness deprives the other of precious minutes in a world where “time is money”’ (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1998, p. 128).

Cultures that experience time synchronically usually view activities happening in a more circular manner. Synchronic cultures are less concerned with punctuality and schedules. Within Indigenous cultures relationships with others and the environment have a high priority and Martin (2005) explains that time and relationships are best understood within a circle as a result. ‘Circles are the best forms for describing relationships ... circles easily incorporate change ... there is no starting point or end point so all things have equal value’ (Martin 2005).

Terrini and McCallum (2003) explain that an awareness about different orientations to time can help foster understanding about time management behaviours that might appear rude or discourteous.

Relationships with nature

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998, cited in Terrini & McCallum 2003) describe two main orientations to nature:

1. societies that believe nature can be controlled by humans through the imposition of human ‘will’

2. societies that believe that humans are part of nature and must abide by the directions and forces of nature.
In highly industrialised societies, like the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, the mastery-over-nature view is quite dominant. Physical control of the environment by machines and technology are ways of controlling nature. Terrini and McCallum (2003) argue that this view sees nature as something that can be controlled and subjugated by the individual and extols the belief that humans control their own destinies.

Whereas a cultural orientation that sees society as part of nature emphasises its relationship to the environment and the need to respond to external circumstances. Terrini and McCallum (2003) argue that these cultures accept the arbitrary nature of events that can occur beyond the control of human beings.

Debating and reaching decisions

Terrini and McCallum (2003) caution that some cultures do not like to debate or confront, and when establishing partnerships it may seem that certain ‘decisions’ have been accepted when in fact this is not the case. This is particularly a concern if one partner takes the lead role and rushes the decision-making process. Terrini and McCallum (2003) relate this to situations that happen in an early childhood context. Many early childhood educators have expressed frustration with parents from different cultural groups who appear to have acknowledged and understood information or directives given to them by staff but later their actions reveal that this information has not been taken on board.

Defining intercultural

Russell Taylor, the former chief executive officer of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra, states that it is necessary for the cultural knowledge and experiences of Indigenous people to be respected and given currency in the same way that non-Indigenous knowledge is (Taylor 2003, p. 45). To achieve this aim he argues that is essential to create and work within an ‘intercultural space’. Intercultural is defined as:

... the ‘meeting of two distinct cultures’ through processes and interactions which retain the distinctive integrity and difference of both cultures and which may involve a blending of elements of both cultures but never the domination of one over another ...(Taylor 2003, p. 45).

Indigenous researcher, Martin Nakata (2002 cited in Taylor 2003) describes the intercultural space as a place of tension that will require ongoing discussion and negotiation between the key players. Russell Taylor concurs:

... Any broad inter-cultural understandings, however well defined and understood, will nevertheless require testing, clarification, refining and checking as to their legitimacy and relevance at the local level ... this is of paramount importance and simply cannot be overlooked ... this means that any practice manual or code of ethics must be flexible and not prescriptive ... it must be organic by definition ... (Taylor 2003, p. 45).
Taylor’s last point about flexibility and a lack of prescription is particularly important in light of the diversity of Indigenous cultures in Australia. In order to be successful, the design of the Indigenous QA system will need to embrace appropriate quality indicators that are embedded in an understanding of the need for local appropriateness.

This flexibility is evident in the New Zealand approach to children’s services. The Maori word ‘Whaariki’ translates into English as ‘weaving a mat for everyone to stand on’ (Tyler 2002). Tyler (2002) explains the metaphor of weaving as a way to describe the process of the evolving curriculum in a children’s service. The aim is to cater for the needs of each individual child in the service. This is achieved by ‘weaving’ together the children’s various experiences, interactions and the choices they make and not predetermining the curriculum content. In this way, the weaving represents a process for creating intercultural spaces.

Another form of ‘weaving’ occurs when the meaning and value of cultural knowledge and practices are reinterpreted within cultural communities, implicitly and explicitly, individually and in dialogue. Pence and Ball (2003) stress the importance of the process, which includes establishing and maintaining a quality partnership between key stakeholders. In endeavouring to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into policies and programs, Ball (2003) explains that this needs to occur as part of an ongoing process of communication and dialogue. Consultation alone will not achieve this, programs need to be co-created and ‘generated’ as part of a partnership where Indigenous knowledge is valued on an equitable basis with mainstream, and where Elders and academics work together side by side.

Indigenous process and ways of working in intercultural partnerships

There is a Canadian example of a large-scale partnership framework from the Canadian First Nation peoples. This involves Aboriginal Elders and academics co-creating knowledge in the generative curriculum model and this is explored in more detail later in this section. In contrast, Australia does not yet have large-scale initiatives that aim to establish intercultural spaces. Australia does, however, have many examples of locally driven initiatives where knowledge has been co-created.

One example was discussed in Part 1 in the section titled ‘A locally developed response to mainstream quality assurance’. In this example, a valuable resource was developed for child care centres in South Australia. This resource is well received by many Aboriginal communities in South Australia, and the reason for this can largely be linked to the process undertaken by Aboriginal Resource Management Support Unit (ARMSU) to develop the publication. Local child care workers and Aboriginal families were actively involved throughout the development of the resource (ARMSU 2003b). While the ARMSU example will not be culturally appropriate to all Indigenous child care services around Australia, it is an example of a good process. See the section in Part 1 titled ‘A locally developed response to mainstream quality assurance’ for more detail.
Preparing the ground for partnership

The following three examples from Australia provide further insight into ways to achieve a ‘meeting of two distinct cultures’ through processes and interactions which retain the distinctive integrity and difference of both cultures (Taylor 2003, p. 45):

- Exploring Indigenous concepts of time
- Mawul Rom Project
- Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership

Exploring Indigenous concepts of time

Nee-Benham & Cooper (2000) state that an important aspect of many Indigenous societies is harmony and unity, sharing, co-operating and doing things together. Decisions are not made, nor actions taken, without input from the whole family or group. In fact community involvement is a key factor for all First Nations peoples (Nee-Benham & Cooper 2000).

In Part 1 of this paper, Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep describes the concept of time from an Indigenous perspective. She explains that time for Aboriginal people are often experienced in a different way to most non-Indigenous people. Time is not one dimensional, where ‘good practice’ is simply about arriving ‘on time’ and finishing a meeting ‘on time’. The experience of time is multi-dimensional. It encompasses a range of experiences. Time relates to how a person feels within a particular space or environment; whether or not they feel that the space is physically, emotionally and psychologically safe; whether or not they feel they can be themselves and express what they want to communicate in a way that feels comfortable to them; and whether or not they feel they will be respected and listened to. Coleman-Sleep raises a critical point. For a quality process to occur in a national Indigenous QA process, Indigenous perspectives of time will need to be considered and respected. Bronwyn talks about ‘not feeling rushed’; allowing time for relationships to develop; for everyone to build the ideas together; not having one person, or one group of people having more power than everyone else to decide what time things get done.

Mawul Rom Project

The Mawul Rom Project is a university accredited training program that teaches people mediation and leadership skills from two distinct cultural perspectives - Yolngu (Aboriginal people from East Arnhem Land) and Balanda (non-Aboriginal) (http://www.mawul.com).

The Mawul Rom ceremony belongs to the Yolngu people of East Arnhem Land and has been used traditionally for centuries as a conflict resolution and healing process to restore relationships between individuals and clan nations (http://www.mawul.com). Reverend Dr Djiniyini Gondarra OAM, from the Yolngu people explains:

We need to break down some of the barriers ... the Mawul Rom ceremony is a practical way to find what we have in common ... something that can bring us together ... not as black or white but as people (http://www.mawul.com).
While the Mawul Rom Project is not directly related to quality child care, the training model provides a rare example of a bicultural program where Indigenous knowledge has an equal standing to mainstream knowledge. Leaders from the Yolngu people have joined with leading academics from the fields of mediation and conflict resolution to offer a cross-cultural program. The training program is made available to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across Australia.

According to the creators of the Mawul Rom Project, this model of training is unique in the world (http://www.mawul.com). The outstanding feature of this training program is that it relies as much on traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge as it does on mainstream academic knowledge. The Canadian and New Zealand models appear to share some similarities—however, what makes the Mawul Rom Project unique is that the program has been designed as much for Yolngu (Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land), as it has been for other Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

This is unlike most study programs designed for Indigenous people, which are intended to be delivered to Indigenous people only. These types of courses are essentially mainstream training programs that have been adapted to become ‘culturally appropriate’. The Mawul Rom Project is important because the Yolngu knowledge ‘stands alone’ in the curriculum—it has as much significance than the mainstream component. The aim is to teach a combination of mainstream academic knowledge and Indigenous ‘academic’ knowledge.

For more information visit the Mawul Rom Project website at http://www.mawul.com.

**Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership and Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi**

The Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership is similar to the Mawul Rom Project in that it aimed to create child care service models based on traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge of child rearing, and balancing this with mainstream knowledge where appropriate (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS 2002). The project was not completed as originally planned although the partnership approach that developed has been recorded (Priest, Nungarrayi, King & Nangala 2003; Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team 2002; Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi 2001).

State, territory and the Australian governments are currently calling for Indigenous communities and governments to engage as partners, with shared responsibility in the development of policy and practices, and in the design and delivery of services (Priest, Nungarrayi, King and Nangala 2003; COAG http://www.indigenous.gov.au/coag/trial/). The current policy environment is unprecedented in Australia and represents a period of major transition. Entering into full partnership involves the sharing of power, work, information and resources for a common vision, and mutual benefit. A paradigm shift in the relationship within and between government departments and Indigenous people is taking place (Priest, Nungarrayi, King & Nangala 2003).
In the desert regions of central Australia such a shift occurred and an authentic partnership was achieved for a time (Priest, Nungarrayi, King & Nangala 2003). Senior Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) women, living semi-traditional lifestyles in the remote desert regions of central Australia, named the partnership approach Warrki Jarrinjaku Jintangkamanu Purananjaku, (Warrki Jarrinjaku) Warlpiri for ‘working together everyone and listening’. A key feature of this work is that the Senior Anangu and Yapa women explored an innovative research technique known as ‘family mapping’ with support from staff from the Aboriginal organisation Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi, 2001). Not wanting to rely on recording their stories in English, Anangu and Yapa (women experimented with using their own ‘written language’ (family mapping) to describe their child rearing practices—the drawings and designs seen in the Western Desert paintings. Figure 9 provides an example:

**Figure 9: Family mapping**

*This design depicts four old women teaching young children about Tjukurpa while they are all sitting around the camp fire. Included with permission from Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi.*

Significantly, ‘family mapping’ was also used to develop a shared language between the project partners and to encourage genuine inter-cultural communication. Again, not wanting to have English as the shared language within the group, the Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) women used their own ‘written language’ (family mapping) to develop a language that could be shared with their project partners. The Anangu and Yapa women used this to communicate and explain their ideas and share knowledge. For example, Wendy Nungarrayi Brown, Senior Yapa woman explains the Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership using Yapa written language in Figures 10 and 11. In English this translates as:

> We need to work together as one, and to follow—supporting one another. This is important ... Kardiya (‘white fella’) and Yapa (Aboriginal) working together and supporting each other (Nungarrayi Brown 2002, cited in Priest, Brown, King and Nangala 2003).

The U shapes in these figures represent people—Anangu, Yapa (Aboriginal) and Kardiya (non-Aboriginal people) and the circles show the places where people work and have meetings. The large circle is Canberra, and the four smaller circles are the services and government departments. The ‘feet’ link everything and everyone into one entity everyone working together, listening and supporting each other (Priest, Nungarrayi, King and Nangala 2003).
Priest, Nungarrayi, King and Nangala (2003) explain that entering into partnership involves the sharing of power, work, information and resources for a common vision, and mutual benefit. While it may not always be possible to achieve an equal partnership for various reasons, they emphasise the importance of aiming for this at all times.

The difference between consultation and working together in partnership is explained by identifying that ‘consultation’ with an Indigenous community is undertaken at a number of levels with differing amounts of input and power sharing. ‘Consultation’ may be for the purpose of:

**Providing information and clarification** — This is where the government body has made all the decisions about ‘what’ is going to happen and ‘how’ it will happen. Government representatives provide information and clarification to the community.

**Discussion on ‘how’** — This is where the government body has made the decisions about ‘what’ is going to happen, and they discuss ‘how’ it will be done with the community.

**Discussion of both ‘what’ and ‘how’** — This is where no decisions have yet been made, and where the government and the community sit down together to decide on ‘what’ is going to happen and ‘how’ it will happen — this can be referred to as genuine negotiation and partnership or ‘Warrki Jarrinjaku’.

In the Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership Anangu and Yapa cultural knowledge is officially recognised as being equally valuable to mainstream knowledge. The Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership recognises that there is a ‘gap’ in the mainstream knowledge base.
and this creates an environment where genuine collaboration and partnership can occur. The Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership acknowledges that governments, related professionals and Anangu and Yapa need to work together to combine their knowledge and expertise.

Table 1 is from a keynote address presented at an Australian conference in May 2003 ‘Our children the future’. It provides an overview of what the Senior women mean when they say they want their culture to be recognised on an equitable basis. The table suggests the major differences between the principles underlying conventional practice and the Warrki Jarrinjaku partnership in central Australia. Table 1 is prepared in English as the intended audience is primarily non-Anangu and non-Yapa people working in government departments and universities. It explains in more detail the meaning of Figures 10 and 11.

Figure 11: ‘Everyone working together and listening’

Represents the women’s vision and a way forward. Senior Yapa and Anangu women are hoping to see the Wanki jarrinjaku process adopted throughout all the layers of government—(Priest, King, Brown & Nangala 2003). Included with permission from the authors and Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Organisation.
Table 1: An extract from a paper presented as a keynote address at the Our children our future conference, Adelaide, May, 2003 (Priest, King, Brown & Nangala 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional practice</th>
<th>Warri Jarrinjaku partnership</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream knowledge is believed to be superior to Anangu culture in its ability to deal with the health and wellbeing crisis in Anangu communities. It is assumed that Anangu are deficient in a number of areas. The aim is to ‘fix the problem’ by addressing Anangu deficiencies.</td>
<td>Anangu cultural knowledge is formally recognised as being of equal value to mainstream knowledge. The limitations of mainstream knowledge, in relation to its ability to ‘fix the crisis’ for Anangu is recognised. Senior Anangu are treated as experts in their field. The aim is to build on Anangu strengths and expertise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key features of conventional practice include: ◗ service models are designed by non-Anangu ◗ service delivery is heavily reliant on non-Anangu ◗ the service coordinator is non-Anangu ◗ non-Anangu are paid a full-time wage, Anangu are on Community Employment Development Project payments ◗ it is believed that services cannot operate without non-Anangu staff ◗ the service may be described as being ‘both ways’ however, in reality it is dominated by mainstream culture and values ◗ Anangu often avoid working in the service ◗ non-Anangu usually hold the most powerful positions and make many decisions on behalf of Anangu.</td>
<td>Key features of Warri jarrinjaku include: ◗ service models designed by Anangu in genuine partnership with professional non-Anangu who facilitate the process ◗ service delivery relies heavily on Anangu ◗ the coordinator is Anangu ◗ Anangu and non-Anangu are paid a wage ◗ non-Anangu staff perform a specific function in the service—they are not the ‘boss’ ◗ the program cannot function without Anangu ◗ the aim is to equally value and respect quality practices from both mainstream and Anangu culture ◗ Anangu specifically ask to work in the service ◗ Anangu have greater choice, opportunity and self-reliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government–service provider relationship: ◗ the primary relationship is with non-Anangu ◗ non-Anangu staff speak on behalf of Anangu ◗ ‘gate keeping’ by non-Anangu staff ◗ non-Anangu staff focus on the difficulties they encounter providing services to Anangu.</td>
<td>The government–service provider relationship: ◗ the primary relationship is with Anangu ◗ Anangu speak for themselves ◗ open and transparent communication between Anangu, the service provider and government is promoted ◗ government and non-government personnel concentrate on providing quality information to Anangu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance is measured by: ◗ the experiences of non-Anangu staff ◗ reports provided by non-Anangu staff ◗ the outputs.</td>
<td>Performance is measured by: ◗ the experiences of Anangu ◗ reports provided by Anangu ◗ the outcomes for Anangu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The training is primarily ‘one-way’: ◗ the focus is on teaching Anangu ◗ most of the training is imposed ◗ Anangu often choose not to attend the training provided.</td>
<td>The training model is ‘two-way’: ◗ Anangu cultural knowledge is formally recognised as being of equal value to mainstream knowledge ◗ Anangu are the teachers ◗ Anangu want to undertake training ◗ Anangu specifically ask to attend training.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The steering committee is dominated by non-Anangu professionals and government representatives who:

- have access to all the critical knowledge associated with the service being developed
- make the decisions and then inform Anangu about what has been decided. The process may involve asking Anangu if they agree with the decision.

The steering committee is made up solely of Anangu. A separate group is formed with professional people and government representatives. The aim is to:

- ensure Anangu have access to quality information and advice to enable them to make informed decisions
- facilitate the decisions made by Anangu.
Overview of international developments

The following country profiles of Canada, New Zealand and Papua New provide a snapshot of the Indigenous population and current developments with regard to partnership approaches with Indigenous peoples. Australia as yet does not have any nationally driven partnership approaches that aim to co-create knowledge alongside Indigenous peoples. The following national initiatives from Canada, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea are included for their potential relevance to the design and implementation of a national Indigenous QA in Australia.

Country profile: Australia

**Full country name:** Commonwealth of Australia  
**Area:** 7.68 million square kilometres  
**Population:** 19.5 million  
**People:** 92% Caucasian, 7% Asian, 1% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
**Official language/s:** English

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people community profile**

Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are unique in the world. They have the longest continuous cultural history of all peoples, with origins dating back at least 70,000 years.

At the time of European contact there were between 600 to 700 different language groups, all with distinct cultures, covering the entire continent. Although there was diversity across the cultures, and the various language groups lived in a huge range of geographic conditions from deserts, to tropical rainforests, to snow fields—the cultures all shared a common system—in English this system is called ‘the Dreaming’ or ‘the Law’, although the various language groups each have their own word for this shared system of ‘Law’—for example, **Tjukurpa** (in Luritja and Pitjantjatjara), **Jukurrpa** (in Warlpiri).

There are more than 200 Australian Indigenous languages remaining, although less than 20 languages are strong, and even these are endangered. The others have been destroyed, live in the memories of the elderly, or are being revived by their communities. For further information on Australian Indigenous languages see David Nathan’s web site at [http://www.dnathan.com](http://www.dnathan.com).

**Quality children’s care and early education**

Since 1994 Australia has been the only nation to have a national QA process for mainstream child care. In late 2004, the federal governments in both Canada and the United Kingdom committed to establishing a national QA system for child care. Papua New Guinea is currently developing a national process for measuring the quality of their Elementary Education Program (Ikupu & Glover 2002).
As previously discussed, the national QA systems for child care centres in Australia is based on quality principles that address areas that are deemed essential for quality care. The national focus in Australia demonstrates a valuable commitment from the Australian Government and it provides a powerful vehicle to promote the needs of children.

Country profile: Canada

**Full country name:** Canada

**Area:** 9.97 million square kilometres

**Population:** 31.28 million

**People:** British descent, French descent, Italian descent, Aboriginal peoples, plus significant minorities of German, Ukrainian, Dutch, Greek, Polish and Chinese descent

**Official language/s:** French, English

**Indigenous community profile**

Aboriginal peoples have occupied the territory now called Canada for thousands of years. At the time of French and British colonisation the Aboriginal peoples of Canada had developed a multitude of languages, customs, religious beliefs, trading patterns, arts and crafts, laws and governments. There are approximately 540 First Nations bands or tribal organisations registered in Canada, each with its own culture, dialect, and traditional territories (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development [http://www.inac.gc.ca](http://www.inac.gc.ca)).

When the first Europeans arrived in North America, they called the people they encountered ‘Indians’ because they thought they were in India. Today, the terms to describe Aboriginal peoples are continually evolving. The term ‘First Nations’ came into common usage in the 1970s to replace ‘band’ or ‘Indian’ which some people found offensive. The term First Nations is, however, rarely used as a synonym for all Aboriginal peoples in Canada, for example it usually doesn’t include Inuit or Métis people (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development [http://www.inac.gc.ca](http://www.inac.gc.ca) and [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca)).

**Quality children’s care and early education**

In December 2004, the new federal government in Canada promised to introduce legislation that would lead to the development of an early child care and education system in Canada. The Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance on December 21 2004 sets out key policy recommendations to help ensure a universal system of high quality early learning and child care for Canada. Canadian Prime Minister, Paul Martin, in an interview on 17 December 2004 explains:

> First of all, this is not day care, this is early learning and child care. We want to make sure that children are ready to excel as soon as they go to formal school, regardless of income (House of Commons Finance Committee proceedings, December 2004 [http://www.parl.gc.ca/FINA]).
The First Nations generative curriculum model

Aboriginal self-government – Canada

In August 1995, the Government of Canada adopted a new approach to negotiating with Aboriginal people. This involved a move towards self-government arrangements, with the aim to recognise Aboriginal people’s right to make decisions about matters internal to their communities; integral to their unique cultures, traditions and languages; and connected with their relationship to the land and resources. Under the federal policy, Aboriginal groups in Canada may negotiate self-government arrangements over a variety of subject matter, including government structure, land management, health care, child care, child welfare, education, housing and economic development. Innovative and highly effective partnerships have been established between First Nations communities, the Canadian government and universities (Ball 2003). Most First Nations communities are actively engaged in a range of efforts to revitalise their cultures and assert the legitimacy of their cultural values and practices.

The generative curriculum model: Early childhood care and development

The First Nations Partnership Program (http://www.fnpp.org) has provided a framework through which communities and members of a university-based team have worked together over the past 12 years to deliver an innovative program of post-secondary training for community members wanting qualifications in the field of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). The content and outcomes of the training are reached through the ‘co-creation’ of the curriculum. Indigenous specific knowledge is valued on an equitable basis to Euro-western research. Indigenous Elders and academics work alongside each other to develop a bicultural curriculum that is designed, and evolves according to the specific needs of the local community. This is known as the ‘generative curriculum model’. The key features include:

... the curriculum and the outcomes are not predetermined, but rather are generated each time the programme is delivered in order to reflect the unique indigenous knowledge and the particular needs, goals, and circumstances of the communities participating in the programme (Ball 2002).

... the roles of teacher and learner are fluid and interchangeable. Elders, other community members and academics co-create understandings of quality child care as the following statement indicates: ‘Bringing together the two worlds of western academia and aboriginal communities ... opens a door to developing culturally specific understandings of children, their families, and their ECCD programme needs in varying eco-cultural contexts’ (http://www.fnpp.org).

A critical evaluation of the generative curriculum model demonstrates that this partnership process achieves ‘unprecedented educational outcomes, vocational outcomes, and capacity-building, as well as personal and community transformations that reach far beyond the classroom’ (Ball 2003). First Nations partners have said that one of the keys elements of the ECCD program is that it fosters community healing through cultural reconnection. Ball (2003) explains that these ‘value-added’ outcomes result from the elevation of Indigenous knowledge to a core place in the curriculum,
from the reinstatement of Elders’ traditional roles in teaching about the language and culture of the community, and from the creation of a self-sustaining, intergenerational community of learners.

Country profile: New Zealand

Full country name: New Zealand (or Aotearoa, the Maori name for New Zealand)

Area: 268 680 square kilometres

Population: 4 million

People: 75% New Zealand European (Pakeha), 10% Maori, 5% other European, 4.5% Polynesian, 5% Asian, 0.5% other

Official language/s: Maori, English

Indigenous community profile

The Maori people are the Indigenous people of Aotearoa (New Zealand). It is estimated that they first arrived in waka hourua (voyaging canoes) from their ancestral homeland of Hawaiki over 1000 years ago (<http://www.ecdu.govt.nz>). Today Maori (the tangata whenua or Indigenous people) make up approximately 10 per cent of the population.

In New Zealand there is one Maori language and one Maori culture (<http://www.ecdu.govt.nz>). There are variations in the dialect and day-to-day practices between Maori people, although essentially the culture and language is one.

Quality children’s care and education

In New Zealand the term ‘early childhood education’ refers to education and child care for young children and infants—from birth to six years of age (<http://www.minedu.govt.nz>). The early childhood education sector and the Ministry of Education have developed a 10-year strategic plan for New Zealand early childhood education—Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki. The role of government is focused on the development of curriculum, regulating for minimum standards, and support for the provision of quality early childhood education and care through funding and a range of initiatives set out in the strategic plan.

Te Whaariki curriculum

The curriculum for early childhood care and education is referred to as Te Whaariki (Tyler 2002). Te Whaariki was chosen as the title of the curriculum as it provides New Zealanders with a metaphorical reference to weaving. The Maori word Whaariki translates into English as a woven mat for all to stand on. The early childhood curriculum is envisaged as Whaariki, a woven mat made up of the principles, strands and goals and these are woven into a curriculum, based on the interests and aspirations of the child or children attending the early childhood service (Tyler 2002).
In order to understand Te Whaariki and its philosophical base, teachers and parents must understand that the weaving of the curriculum may be different for each child. The weaving metaphor describes a complex learning pattern that increases in complexity as the child engages with the environment and develops strategies for learning and understanding. This is in contrast to a curriculum that is based on steps of development where the child will start at the bottom and work through a series of experiences in order to reach the top and move to the next level in their educational journey (Tyler 2002).

Te Whaariki allows for a range of patterns of learning and each is as important as the other for the individual child. Tyler (2002) explains that the curriculum is a relatively new framework in New Zealand and it represents a significant change for many early childhood teachers who have been trained in different theories of early childhood development. Tyler (2002) explains that many early childhood teachers are still coming to terms with some of the theory that underpins Te Whaariki.

The system in New Zealand is unique because of this formal commitment from the government to preserve and nurture Maori culture in learning and care environments for children. As part of the national commitment, New Zealand has two official languages Maori and English.

It is important to mention here that there are some significant differences between the demographic features of Maori peoples in New Zealand and Indigenous peoples in Australia. In New Zealand there is one Maori language, and one Maori culture. The situation in Australia is much more complex because there is a great diversity of Indigenous cultures and languages (Lester 2004; Mellor & Corrigan 2004).

Country profile: Papua New Guinea

**Full country name:** The Independent State of Papua New Guinea  
**Area:** 462,840 square kilometres  
**Population:** 5.29 million  
**People:** 95% Melanesian, 5% Polynesian, Micronesian, Chinese  
**Official language/s:** English, Tok Pisin and Motu

**Indigenous community profile**

It is believed that the first inhabitants of Papua New Guinea migrated from Asia about 50,000 years ago (http://www.michie.net/pngindex.html). There are over 800 languages in Papua New Guinea, representing about one-third of the world’s indigenous languages. In a country of over five million people with over 800 different languages, Papua New Guinea cannot be compared with any other country due to its rich cultural diversity. More than 200 cultures, each with different traditions, have been identified and it is expected more will be identified in the future.
Quality children's care and early education

Papua New Guinea is currently developing a national system for measuring the quality of their national Elementary Education Program. This is being undertaken in partnership with the University of South Australia. As with the Canadian First Nations and New Zealand examples, the approach being taken in Papua New Guinea is focusing on the process. Ikupu and Glover (2002) argue for a contextual approach to examining issues of quality that recognise and value multiple perspectives:

In discussing quality as it relates to programs for young children, Martin Woodhead commented ‘Quality is relative, but not arbitrary’ (Woodhead 1996, p.10). Noting the dominance of Euro-American models of quality on research, policy, training and practice are ‘both untenable and unhelpful’. However, he also suggested that embracing the opposite extreme, that is relativism, was also unhelpful, believing that answer lies somewhere in the middle.

This is certainly true for Papua New Guinea. Measuring the quality of PNG’s massive Elementary Education Program using standards or criteria developed in another social context would not be a particularly useful exercise. The PNG context is both unique and dynamic and requires quality to be examined from a position of multiplicity since it involves multiple perspectives, multiple stakeholders and multiple benefits. It is important, therefore, to take a contextual approach to examining issues of quality ... (Ikupu & Glover 2002).
Conclusion: Part 2

The process of consultation and working together with Indigenous communities will play a critical role in the outcome of the Indigenous QA viability study being facilitated by FaCS. This paper emphasises the importance of working to the COAG vision of governments and Indigenous communities working together (Vanstone 2005). In a recent address to the National Press Club, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone identified practices to support the COAG objectives

‘we [the Australian Government] want dramatic change ... one key aspect to this change... is genuinely giving Indigenous Australians a voice’ ... (Vanstone 2005, p. 2).

The literature review located a number of locally driven partnership approaches in Australia where Indigenous Australians have ‘genuinely been given a voice’. The Indigenous QA consultations, however, will be developed at a national level. As a result, ‘best practice’ national partnership approaches from overseas were also explored for their potential relevance in an Australian context. In the field of Indigenous child care, some of the most progressive work on a large scale is being undertaken in Canada, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. In these countries mainstream concepts of quality child care and education are being re-examined and replaced — and this is occurring in the context of formally valuing the Indigenous knowledge systems in those countries. This shift to formally recognise the value of Indigenous cultural knowledge in the care and education of children is considered to be a key factor in the unprecedented success of many of the First Nations Partnerships Programs (Ball 2002; Canadian First Nations Partnership Program http://www.fnpp.org).

In New Zealand the federal government has officially named Te Whaariki as the national process used to develop and implement the curriculum for early childhood care and education. The focus of the New Zealand Government is clearly centred on the process itself, rather than the end product. This is an important consideration. Te Whaariki is founded on the understanding that if close attention is paid to the quality of the process the end product will take care of itself. The end product or outcome will be of high quality because it will be something that everyone values and wants to participate in. Papua New Guinea is currently developing a national system for measuring the quality of their national Elementary Education Program. The approach being taken focuses on the process.

One of the most important messages emerging from the national and international literature was expressed by Karen Martin at the Indigenous QA project partners workshop in Melbourne (Martin 2004). Karen Martin, a Quandamoopah and Bidjara woman from North Stradbroke Island in Queensland, described the importance of ‘clearing the space’ before embarking on a process of defining quality care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. She described the practice of her ancestors who, before commencing negotiations and partnership, would sit together
in a circle. The ground within that circle would be cleared and brushed smooth, and in doing so made ready for the partnership to grow from a place of respect. The project partners have committed to a genuine partnerships approach that has no pre-determined outcomes.
Appendix 1: Terms of reference

Terms of reference

The primary aim of the literature review was to collate research material and information on Indigenous perspectives of culturally appropriate quality child care—including best practice examples, lessons learned, and the identification of gaps in the literature with the aim to inform the potential development of Indigenous child care QA in Australia. Priorities within this aim were to:

1. **Undertake a selective literature review to explore:**
   - Indigenous perspectives of quality child care
   - Indigenous perspectives of culturally appropriate services/environments
   - best practice examples of:
     - Indigenous QA systems in other sectors in Australia and overseas with the aim to consider their application to Indigenous children’s services
     - bicultural and bilingual learning and care environments
   - the guidelines, principles and practice underpinning mainstream QA for children’s services and consider their application to Indigenous child care services
   - factors that will facilitate the process of developing Indigenous QA for child care
   - key barriers to the implementation of Indigenous QA.

2. **Prepare a working paper with the aim to build on the literature review by including:**
   - input from key stakeholders including the NCAC, SNAICC, Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Organisation (Waltja), specialist academics, key Indigenous services and organisations located in urban, rural and remote areas. This input primarily achieved by attending a national workshop organised by SNAICC in November 2004
   - recommendations that would include:
     - a discussion on where to from here
     - identifying what can be taken from the review and applied to the development of Indigenous QA for child care.

**Search strategies**

*Library searches*

The library searches included:

- FaCS library
- specialist academic and other institutions library searches including University of South Australia, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander...
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Studies, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit, Northern Territory University, The University of Melbourne, Macquarie University.

**Australian web site searches**

Searches were undertaken on Australian, state and territory government and non-government web sites to locate information on Indigenous QA and/or cultural competency frameworks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, child care, education, training, disability programs and aged care. The web sites of various Indigenous organisations were also searched. Examples of the sites visited are:

- Aboriginal Education South Australia [http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au](http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au)
- Australasian Legal Information Institute [http://www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au)
- Mawul Rom Project [http://www.mawul.com](http://www.mawul.com)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Network [http://www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au](http://www.natsiew.nexus.edu.au)
- Secretariat of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care [http://www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au)
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International web site searches

Searches were undertaken on international web sites to locate information on Indigenous QA and/or cultural competency frameworks that could potentially be relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care in Australia. The focus was on those countries where the Indigenous population shares some similar experiences and history of colonisation to that of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia—for example, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Examples of the sites visited are:

- Bernard van Leer Foundation http://www.bernardvanleer.org
- California Department of Education http://www.cde.ca.gov
- Canadian Child Care Federation http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/home
- Canadian Childcare Resource and Research Unit
- Canadian Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development http://www.inac.gc.ca
- Canadian First Nations Partnership Program http://www.fnpp.org
- http://www.childcarecanada.org
- Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada http://www.action.web.ca/home/ccaac
- Child Care Exchange http://www.ChildCareExchange.com
- Minnesota Association for Education of Young Children http://www.mnaeyc.org
- New Zealand Government Early Childhood Development Unit http://www.ecdu.govt.nz
- New Zealand Ministry of Education http://www.minedu.govt.nz
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development http://www.oecd.org/home
- Papua New Guinea early childhood information found on Ingentaconnect online research services http://www.ingentaconnect.com and http://www.findarticles.com
- Papua New Guinea Teacher Education http://www.pngteachereducation.com
- Pen Green Center, United Kingdom http://www.pengreen.org
- UNICEF http://www.unicef.org
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World Forum on Early Childhood Care and Education [http://www.worldforumfoundation.org]

Other online directory searches

Various online directories were searched. For example:

- [http://www.au.dir.yahoo.com/regional/countries/australia/society_and_culture/cultures_and_groups/cultures/aboriginal/]
- [http://www.home.vicnet.net.au/~ozlit/aborignl.html]
- [http://www.ldb.org/oz-indi.htm]
- [http://www.indigenous.gibsonnet.net]
- [http://www.michie.net].

Attendance at the SNAICC workshop in Melbourne on 10 November 2004:

The author attended a workshop where the Indigenous QA project partners brought together representatives from the Indigenous child care sector along with other key stakeholders including specialist academics and early childhood professionals to explore the potential of developing a national Indigenous QA for child care.

Limitations of the review

This is a selective rather than comprehensive literature review. Not everything that has been written is covered in this review. The focus was on collating a selection of current national and international research with an emphasis on gathering views from Indigenous peoples in Australia where possible. The key limitations of this review include:

- There is a lack of information on the topic of Indigenous QA, both in Australia and overseas.
- Literature associated with ‘grass roots’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is often published on an in-house basis, intended for limited and regionalised audiences. This makes the information less well known and difficult to locate, as it often does not appear in a database or literature searches. In contrast, academic studies are easier to identify and locate. The isolated nature of many Indigenous organisations, spread out across vast areas of Australia, can also be a limiting factor in the flow of communication and materials around the country.
The review team

A small review team was formed comprising of:

- Indigenous content editors
- Author
- research assistant
- chief editorial assistant
- editorial assistant

Short biographies of the review team members are presented below.

**Indigenous content editors**

**Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep**

Bronwyn Coleman-Sleep is a Kokatha woman, grandmother, mother, artist and early childhood professional from Ceduna, located in the far west coast of South Australia. Since 1987 Bronwyn has worked in early childhood and is currently employed by the Department of Education and Children's Services as the Coordinator of Early Learning Programs.

Bronwyn has authored and co-authored a number of books and reports for Indigenous families and early childhood service providers. This includes, ‘Reach for the Rainbow: Best practice in early childhood services for Aboriginal children and their families’ published in 2000 by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. Bronwyn authored a section of this report titled ‘An Indigenous perspective on quality’.

**Karen Martin**

Karen Martin is a Quandamoopah and Bidjara woman from North Stradbroke Island, south-east Queensland. Karen has worked for many years in early childhood and is currently living in Brisbane. Karen is a qualified early childhood teacher and has worked in many educational roles including curriculum development, policy, as a university lecturer in Indigenous studies and has developed and conducted professional development courses including cross-cultural awareness programs. Karen is currently completing her PhD at the School of Indigenous Australian Studies, James Cook University.

**Author**

**Kathryn Priest**

Kathryn has worked for the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) since 1998. Between 1998 and 2001, Kathryn’s primary responsibility involved working closely with traditional Anangu and Yapa (Aboriginal) women living in remote desert communities in central Australia to develop early childhood services.
Kathryn is now located in the FaCS Adelaide office although she has continued to work closely with Anangu and Yapa women from central Australia, and the Aboriginal organisation Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi (Waltja). Together they have initiated and progressed a number of innovative research projects that involved Senior Anangu and Yapa women recording their cultural child rearing and parenting practices. This work is recorded in the following two publications:


During 2002 Kathryn undertook a Visiting Research Fellowship with Swinburne Institute of Social Research), Melbourne. Kathryn has a postgraduate degree in cultural studies and an undergraduate degree in Aboriginal studies, visual arts and drama from Flinders University, Adelaide. Kathryn’s earlier qualifications were in costume and fashion design.

**Research assistant**

*Sarah Rose*

Sarah has a Bachelor of Early Childhood from the University of South Australia and a Master of Education, specialising in children’s literature, from the University of Southern Queensland. She is the author of over 20 books used as school readers in the first year of school in Australia as well as countries overseas including the United States, Canada and New Zealand.

**Chief editorial assistant**

*Donna Broadhurst*

Donna has qualifications in early childhood and psychology and has worked at the University of South Australia where she was part of the teaching team in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. She has participated in a number of research projects with colleagues from the University of South Australia. She is currently working in Adelaide for a small private company which designs, delivers and manages projects in the international development arena. Her current role has a focus on Papua New Guinea. Donna has provided editorial services on a number of publications including *Warrki jarrinjaku jintangkamanu purananjaku* (‘working together everyone and listening’) Aboriginal child rearing and associated research: A review of the literature.

**Editorial assistant**

*Barbara Jackson*

Barbara has worked as an editorial assistant on a number of papers related to Aboriginal child rearing practices including the Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team (2002).
Appendix 2: The quality areas

Please note: The following information on the 7 quality areas is taken from The QIAS Source Book (2001), and will be replaced by The QIAS Quality Practices Guide (2005) when this new publication is released in July 2005. Appendix 2 has been included as a guide and to provide an example of the type of quality areas that are considered important in Australian QA systems.

Presented below, as an example, are the 7 quality areas that must be met by long day care centres in order to be accredited. Each quality area has a number of principles associated with it, which in turn are explored in more depth through a number of indicators. The indicators help determine whether an ‘unsatisfactory’, ‘satisfactory’, or ‘high quality care’ rating is achieved when a centre is undergoing accreditation. Further information regarding quality assurance processes for child care services can be found on the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) web site at <http://www.ncac.gov.au>.

Quality area 1: Staff relationships with children and peers
1.1: Staff interact with each child in a warm and friendly way
1.2: Staff guide each child's behaviour in a positive way.
1.3: Staff initiate and maintain respectful communication with each child
1.4 Staff respect each child’s background and abilities
1.5: Staff treat all children equitably
1.6: Staff communicate effectively to promote respect and professional teamwork

Quality area 2: Partnerships with families
2.1: Staff and families communicate effectively to exchange information about each child and centre.
2.2: Staff encourage family participation and involvement in the centre.
2.3: The centre has orientation processes for children and families

Quality area 3: Programming and Evaluation
3.1: The program reflects a clear statement of centre philosophy
3.2: Each child's learning is documented and is used in planning the program
3.3: The program assists each child to be a successful learner

Quality area 4: Children's experiences and learning
4.1: Staff encourage each child to make choices and participate in play
4.2 Staff promote each child’s ability to develop and maintain relationships
4.3 Staff promote each child’s language and literacy abilities
4.4 Staff promote each child’s problem solving and mathematical abilities
4.5 Staff promote each child’s enjoyment of and participation in the expressive arts
4.6 Staff promote each child’s physical abilities

**Quality area 5: Protective care and safety**
5.2 Staff act to protect each child
5.3 Staff supervise children at all times
5.4 Staff ensure that potentially dangerous products, plants and objects are inaccessible to children
5.5 The centre ensures that buildings and equipment are safe
5.6 The centre promotes occupational health and safety

**Quality area 6: Health, nutrition and wellbeing**
6.1 Staff promote healthy eating habits
6.2 Staff implement effective and current food safety and hygiene practices
6.3 Staff encourage children to follow simple rules of hygiene
6.4 Staff ensure toileting and nappy changing procedures are positive experiences
6.5 Staff support each child’s needs for rest, sleep and comfort
6.6 The centre acts to control the spread of infectious diseases and maintains records of immunisations

**Quality area 7: Managing to support quality**
7.1 Written information about the centre’s management is readily available to families
7.2 Written information about the centre’s management is readily available to staff
7.3 Staffing policies and practices facilitate continuity of care for each child
7.4 Management provides professional development opportunities for staff

To acquire accreditation each service or centre must undergo a similar five-step procedure:

**Step 1 — Registration**
Each service registers with the NCAC and pays an annual registration fee.

**Step 2 — Self-study and continuing improvement**
On a cyclical basis, each service makes a self-assessment of the quality of its practice by consulting with all staff, parents and children at the service. The service rates the quality of its practice for each of the principles against standards outlined in the guide books. A self-study report must also be submitted.
**Step 3 — Validation**
A peer validator, trained by the NCAC, visits the service to validate its quality practices. Validators complete a validation report and collect validation surveys completed by the staff and families during the few weeks prior to the visit.

**Step 4 — Moderation**
Moderators assess the quality of the service's practice, based on the self-study report, the validation surveys and the validation report. A quality profile of the service is then prepared.

**Step 5 — Accreditation decision**
The NCAC makes the accreditation decision, based on the preceding four steps. To be accredited, a service must achieve a composite rating of satisfactory or higher in all quality areas. The self-study reports and continuing improvement cycle then continue for each centre ensuring the quality of service is maintained.
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Preparing the ground for partnership
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