Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy 2015

Family Learning; Office for Children & Young People

AFLS Site End of Year Report:

Christie Downs Kindergarten

(Due: Week 8, Term 4, Friday the 4th of December 2015)

Inquiry Question:

How do we promote children’s cultural identity with support from families and community?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFLS teacher:</td>
<td>Rachel Adams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site Director:</td>
<td>Margie Goodwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Leader:</td>
<td>Michael Austin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Director:</td>
<td>Brendyn Semmens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DATE: 04 / 11 /2015

SIGNED:  Rachel Adams
AFLS teacher

SIGNED:  Margie Goodwin
Director

Government of South Australia
Department for Education and Child Development
INQUIRY ABSTRACT: Christie Downs Kindergarten

Question: How do we promote children’s cultural identity with support from families and community?


NOTICING: Where did your niggle come from? Why is it important?
As a site we value supporting children’s cultural identity and believe it’s an important part of their overall development. We wanted to know if our centre provided a strong place for supporting the development of children’s cultural identity. The aim is to promote children’s cultural identity and further develop the children’s engagement, supporting children in care to maintain their Aboriginal identity, support the families’ beliefs about children’s education, give children pride about their culture - self-pride and provide appropriate and culturally competent support for children’s culture.

MAKING SENSE: What do I need to know? Where can I find out?
Research: Reviewed relevant articles and documents, professional development, onsite professional discussions, review of current methods and identified considerations about culture.
Children: Floorbooks for reflections on learning and documentation and observation sheets.
Families/Community: Events, Surveys, Governing Council/Community Circle/Parent Meetings and Floorbook comments.

MAKING MEANING: What fits together? What could it mean for practice?
Reaffirmed: our belief that culture is important, that we already had strategies in place working to provide support for cultural identity, learning and engagement. Recognised the success of existing strategies. Identified areas of growth, including: Need to document children’s learning in relation to culture and Maintaining awareness of individual children’s connection to culture. Ensuring accountability as educators for our practice.

WORKING WITH MEANING: What does this new learning mean for our practice?
Learning Environment: Review of the presence of culture, Kaurna language program used within the learning environment, children's voice present in displays and curriculum planning.
Documentation: Current strategies for documenting children's learning reflected upon. Observation sheets developed to allow for documentation of children’s Aboriginal identity as well as the EYLF learning outcomes.
Connecting with families: strategies used to gain family feedback reviewed, surveys developed to include culture and cultural events participated in with children and families.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING: What does this learning mean for everyone?
Children: Cultural identity is supported, documentation demonstrates children’s culture and learning and all children will be engaging in a culturally appropriate program.
Families: Cultural knowledge base will grow with input from families through surveys, floorbook comments and participation in parent meetings. Families cultures represented in the centre.
Educators: Recognition and value of Aboriginal staff members’ knowledge, expertise and continual growth in cultural competency and accountability of programming and documentation around children’s culture.
SITE DETAILS

What is the context?

Site Name: Christie Downs Kindergarten
Location: Christie Downs, Southern Adelaide
Partnership: Beach Road Partnership

Key people involved in the Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margie Goodwin</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Margie is our Aboriginal director who brings a wealth of cultural knowledge, expertise and practices to the centre and role models Aboriginal ways for non-Indigenous staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel Adams</td>
<td>AFL Teacher</td>
<td>I am a non-Indigenous teacher who has been working in the AFLS for 3 years now. I work with the 3 year olds in our centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabelle</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Annabelle is a non-Indigenous teacher who has been at the centre for a number of years. She works with 4+ year olds and has previously been the AFL teacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fernandes</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanessa</td>
<td>ECW</td>
<td>Vanessa is an Aboriginal ECW who works with all the children at our centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodward</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlene</td>
<td>ECW</td>
<td>Carlene is an Aboriginal ECW who works with all the children at our centre, but also provides support for the children preparing for school transition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ling</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>ECW / Occasional Care</td>
<td>Josephine is an Aboriginal ECW who organises and runs our Occasional care program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>ECW / PSP</td>
<td>Karen is an Aboriginal ECW and Nanna who works with our children in the Preschool Support Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>PSP</td>
<td>Kyle is a non-Indigenous ECW, who is a 3rd year university student with a major in Special Needs. He works with our children in the Preschool Support Program.</td>
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Context statement:

We are located in the south of Adelaide on Kaurna land along the Fleurieu Peninsula between Christies and Port Noarlunga beaches, the jetty and reef. We are a full time site and offer 15 hours universal access for 4 year olds and 12 hours access for Aboriginal 3 year olds. Our site currently has 23 children accessing the Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy. We offer a range of services including Occasional Care, a Breakfast program, a bus program and toilet training. Our site has a holistic approach to learning and wellbeing, a flexible pedagogy and emergency and extended care for children. We are also a resource hub for Aboriginal education and employment.
In 2014 our site’s AFLS inquiry was: “How do maximise children’s learning opportunities with help from families?”. With what we felt were successful changes to our program including the introduction of planning based around children’s interests we decided to move on from last year’s inquiry. Our focus now shifted from maximising learning opportunities to the children’s culture and cultural development. As an Aboriginal focus site culture is a part of everything we do and it was important for us to know our program was effective for the development of children’s cultural identity.

Observations:

As a site we value supporting children’s cultural identity and believe it’s an important part of their overall development. We wanted to know if our centre provided a strong place for supporting the development of children’s cultural identity. With the majority of our children being Aboriginal it is important that our site is providing a program that supports all the children’s cultures and those of their families. We made the observation that our site has a number of strategies in place to provide culture for the children involved in our centre and program. However, knowing we had strategies and knowing that they are successful is two different things. Which lead us to question: “Were we providing the right support for children’s culture?” and “Did we need to change our practice?”. These questions made us wonder if our strategies were appropriate for our children, their culture and working to create a learning environment that supported the children’s culture and cultural identity, which we believe is so very important.

This one main observation lead to a whole new inquiry for our centre. An inquiry that is linked to the very soul of our centre. With children’s culture and cultural identity as a priority of our centre we believe to children will further engage in the setting and experiences provided. Our observation about the importance we place on children’s culture and cultural identity shows our centres beliefs in the children’s wellbeing, rights to be who they are. It however was not evident in our documentation that we provide such important connections and developments for children. Part of our “niggle” was wanting to know that our centre and program is an effective part of building, supporting and extending children’s cultural identity.

For our centre our inquiry sparked from our beliefs and philosophy about the importance of culture and cultural identity to support the wellbeing and development of young children. Through choosing this question we are reflecting upon our own practice to benefit the children, families and community we work with. As we identified our goals as to promote children’s cultural identity, ensure that Aboriginal children in care don’t lose connection to their culture and to build their self-pride we have developed our inquiry to support our process and allow us to examine ourselves and the important role we play in cultural identity and development for children and how we can use the support of families and community to do so.

Therefore our observation leads to our inquiry question:

How do we promote children’s cultural identity with support from families and community?
Rationale for Inquiry:

This question is important to our centre as the children’s wellbeing is a very important part of our philosophy. Culture is important to the children’s wellbeing and therefore their learning. From our inquiry we want to be promoting children’s cultural identity and further developing the children’s engagement within the program. The aim is to support children in care to maintain their Aboriginal identity and give children pride about their culture - self-pride. All the while providing appropriate and culturally competent support for children’s culture. Culture is also very important for families and community and it is essential that their beliefs are included in our program. As part of this inquiry we aimed to gain feedback on the families beliefs about children’s education and any information about their culture that they feel comfortable to share with us.

The importance of culture and cultural identity is important and stated in many documents, researched throughout the inquiry. Many of the documents state the importance of cultural competency for non-Indigenous educators and the importance of culture for children’s development. Through analysing and reviewing the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) it is obvious that culture is significant and throughout the entire document. It appears in every learning outcome as either an action of an educator or an outcome for children. Culture is apparent in the EYLF principles - ongoing learning and reflective practice and respect for diversity. It is connected to the practice - cultural competency and our site believes, though it is not stated in the EYLF, that it is connected to holistic practices and responsiveness to children. Furthermore our inquiry links to the National Quality Standards (NQS). Culture and identity are stated in Quality Area 1 - Educational Program and Practice in standards 1.1.1 and 1.1.2. Also, though the words culture and identity are not in any more of the NQS standards we believe it connects to Quality Area 5 – Relationships with Children and Quality Area 6 – Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities. Both the EYLF and NQS are important documents to Early Childhood Educators and programs and demonstrate the importance of culture for children.

There are many explanations for the importance of culture and cultural identity for children. The EYLF Educators Guide provide a strong description in relation to culture and cultural identity. It states that:

“Culture is the fundamental building block of identity and the development of a strong cultural identity is essential to children’s healthy sense of who they are and where they belong.” and that:

“Cultural identity comes from having access to:

- your culture—its institutions, land, language, knowledge, social resources, economic resources
- the institutions of the community (lifestyle)— its codes for living (social and environmental), nutrition, safety, protection of physical, spiritual and emotional integrity of children and families
- cultural expression and cultural endorsement”

(EYLF Educators Guide, 2010, p21-22)

Another example is the SNAICC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Cultural Needs diagram which offers an explanation to the parts of children’s cultural identity we must consider. It demonstrates the connections of all the elements of children’s cultural identity; elements that are important to their learning and engagement within a program and educational setting. The elements in the diagram are: History – where do they come from?, personal identity – who are they?, extended family and community – who do they belong to?, land and water – where do they belong?, cultural expression – what do they do? and cultural values, beliefs and practice - What do they believe?. All these elements must be considered
when developing children’s cultural identity. We aim to identify, answer and include as many of these for each child as possible within our centre and program.

The DECD Early Learning & Quality Reform (2013, p.3) states that;

“Culture is central to our feelings of ‘being’ and ‘belonging’ and also to our sense of identity. If children and families are to feel welcome and are to develop a positive sense of identity in our settings then we need to think about how each family’s culture is visible in what we do.”

This statement shows that culture within educational settings is very important. If the families’ cultures aren’t important it will impact on how they interact with the centre and staff. Through this inquiry we used this information a basis to analyse our centre as an educational setting and to identify whether or not we are successfully meeting the needs of children to support their cultural identity, and when possible involve families and community.

Importance of Aboriginal Educators

Through this inquiry we not only identified the importance of culture and cultural identity for children within educational settings but also acknowledge the importance and fundamental part Aboriginal educators play in providing culturally supportive environments for Aboriginal children. Employing Aboriginal Staff members assists in many important ways. It assists in building Aboriginal community capacity and incorporates culture into mainstream society. Provides the possibility for the transmission of cultural knowledge, languages and cultural experiences through activities and excursions. They bring expertise, experience, values and beliefs which support cultural safety and reinforce cultural practices such as respect for Elders and Aboriginal child rearing practices which support flexible behaviour management strategies. Aboriginal educators support families to feel comfortable and for the children to engage positively with the transition from home to kindy. They are positive role models for all children, support the reconciliation process and are a connection for children to their Elders, Aunties or extended family members. They support non-Indigenous staff in the Aboriginal ways of knowing and being and supporting cultural competencies. Importantly, Aboriginal staff assist all staff to gain understanding of the historical background of dispossession and oppression of Aboriginal people in this country and how this has impacted on contemporary lifestyles. Our site acknowledges the importance and vital part of our centre and program that is all our Aboriginal Educators. They provide a strong connection to culture that Aboriginal children can only gain through interactions with Aboriginal people.

Cultural competence and Ethical considerations:

With our inquiry question focussing on culture, most of the considerations made by our centre were about cultural competence. This included non-aboriginal staff growing in cultural competence as all have been working in the strategy for a range of years. We needed to be aware of the different and diverse cultures of our children and families. There needed to be strong knowledge sharing between Aboriginal staff and non-Aboriginal staff. However, most importantly, we needed to consider how to give families a voice on how they would like their children’s cultural identity supported at our centre. Some of the ethical considerations included seeking consents and permissions from families where necessary and acting within the Code of Ethics when working with children and families.
## MAKING SENSE

**What did you need to know? Where did you find out?**

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<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>• Reviewed relevant articles and documents (e.g. Educators Guide)</td>
<td>Many articles, documents, education frameworks and standards were reviewed in relation to the importance of culture, cultural identity and cultural competency. I accessed Professional Development as the Family Literacy teacher through the AFLS to support my cultural competency for working with Aboriginal children. Our site engaged in discussions between staff members about culture, its importance and how the contemporary lifestyles of Aboriginal families reflect the past. We also reviewed our site’s current cultural practices within our program and the learning environment, asking the question – where was culture present?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>• Made connections with article definitions</td>
<td>In my role as the Family Literacy Teacher I worked with the definitions and information drawn from research to build connections between them and our site. I also developed a culture web reflecting upon what culture means for me as a non-Indigenous person and what I needed to consider about culture. Following our review of current strategies involving culture a web was developed to demonstrate our site’s current strategies and possible new strategies we identified as a staff team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families / Community</td>
<td>• Events. E.g. excursions, Surveys, Governing Council/Community Circle/Parent Meetings, Involvement of Aunty Georgina in the centre, Floorbook comments, Informal Conversations</td>
<td>Our centre connects with families through many events including excursions, community and cultural events and Governing Council/Community Circle/Parent Meetings. We seek feedback from parents through surveys, informal conversations and comments in the floorbook and bus sharing book. These strategies are used to gain feedback, information and opinions from as many families as possible through a variety of different methods. We importantly have Aunty Georgina, who is a Kaurna Elder and traditional land owner, working with our centre as the chairperson of our Governing Council to support families and bring cultural expertise, input and values in our centre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>• Floorbooks – Reflections on learning, Documentation, Observation sheets</td>
<td>Upon reflection and sensing the need to know where culture was present for children within their learning and development we sought to gain information from their learning in our centre. To gain information about children’s learning we use floorbooks for documentation and reflections on their learning. Our centre also developed new observation sheets to include a section for Aboriginal identity.</td>
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Key discoveries:
Through working on this inquiry our centre made discoveries about our existing strategies and methods already in place, rather than making completely new discoveries. It has reaffirmed our belief that culture is important and that we already had effective strategies in place working to provide support for cultural identity, learning and engagement. Through analysing and reviewing our centre strategies for culture and cultural identity we were able to conclude that we have strong, positive strategies in place to promote the children’s cultural identity. This inquiry also reaffirmed for our centre that children within our program have access to services that nurture, celebrate and reinforce their culture and support the development of their cultural identity, as is stated in the EYLF Educators Guide (2010, p21-22). We were able to recognise the success of existing strategies, including the use of language in context and culture within the learning environment. All of which strengthen our service as a centre for culture. Through analysing our centre and the presence of culture we were able to identify areas of growth, including the need to document children’s learning in relation to culture and maintaining awareness of individual children’s connection to culture. Through identifying documentation as an area for growth it also became a process that ensured we as educators are accountable for our practice in relation to children’s culture, and also the importance of documenting this information.

WORKING WITH MEANING
What does this new learning mean for your practice?

Three key elements that supported our learning and change within our inquiry were the learning environment, documentation around children’s cultural identity and connecting with families. In each of these areas we identified the strengths of our centre and program and also areas of growth. From the areas of growth we identified actions that would change within our centre and positively impact on our centre. These key elements were essential parts of our inquiry and supported our ability to identify what is important within our centre that provides support and promotion of children’s cultural identity and where culture is present within our centre.

Learning Environment
The learning environment is important to children’s learning in many ways, culture being a main part. Culture can be sensed by children and families when entering the centre and we identified this as an important part of our inquiry. It was important to know how culture is represented and how the children are represented in our learning environment. During a review of the learning environment we took photos, held conversations as a staff team and researched articles on culturally supportive environments. We identified strengths within the learning environment including art and cultural resources present for children and families to see, access to culture through Aboriginal staff members and activities programmed to support cultural identity. As a possible area for growth we identified building stronger connections for children to family and their individual identity. to do this we use the Kaurna language in context, create displays of children’s art and learning stories and use curriculum-planning that includes children’s voice.
Examples of culture in our learning environment:

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<tr>
<th>Image</th>
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<tr>
<td>🎨</td>
<td>Art from families: proudly presented artwork painted by members of our children’s families to demonstrate our strong connections and relationships with families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>📜</td>
<td>Indigenous Map – displayed with photos of past kindy children, some from current children’s families to build connections and give a sense of belonging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>📚</td>
<td>Children’s home language displayed – for use by staff to build connections, create a sense of belonging and to communicate with children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🎨</td>
<td>Aboriginal flag bamboo curtain</td>
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<tr>
<td>📚</td>
<td>Aboriginal images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>📚</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags and resources</td>
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To follow on from the visual displays of culture is an important part of our learning environment, which is the Kaurna Language program. The program builds children’s interest and vocabulary of the Kaurna language and allows children take responsibility for their cultural knowledge and identity through helping with singing the songs and reading the books by leading the group. It also provides important access to language to support their culture. The program includes the use of the Kaurna language books and songs -
- The children also engage with the use of Kaurna language literacy packs they can use at home or at kindy and the use of Kaurna language in program. For example, when saying “wash your hands for fruit” in our centre we use the Kaurna word “murras” instead of hands. This supports the children to do the same and use the Kaurna language in context within our centre.
Documentation

Documentation around children’s cultural identity is important for educators to have awareness of the current stage of development for children. Within our inquiry we reflected upon our centre strategies for documentation and questioned; how we document their learning and whether it is culture specific. Through a review of existing documentation processes and shared conversations as a staff team we identified many strategies that document children’s learning including daily documentation of learning in floorbooks, learning stories and Individual Learning Profiles (ILPs). This led us to further question where we were documenting the specific learning for children around their cultural identity. Providing an area for growth and the need for documentation of children’s cultural identity, development and learning. From this reflection we developed Observation sheets including a section for Aboriginal identity.

The observation sheets mentioned above, were developed to consistently maintain and monitor children’s learning based on EYLF outcomes. However, to strengthen our documentation and allow the possibility for documenting children’s cultural learning we added a section for children’s Aboriginal identity. The observation sheets then supported the children’s cultural identity, development and learning, our inquiry and our ability to evaluate our program for each child individually. This provides us as educators more opportunity to keep a record of their learning about culture, their cultural identity and supports our accountability as a site.

Connecting with families

Connecting with families is an element of our program that we identify as a strength. For our inquiry we sought to ensure that our methods for involving families were successful strategies. To confirm our strategies as successful we reviewed our current strategies for connecting with families. Our strengths for connecting with families are evident within our Governing council/Community Circle chaired by Aunty Georgina Williams who is a Kaurna Elder and traditional land owner. Aunty Georgina takes us on country with excursions to Kuitpo Forest or Bashams Beach to visit Kondili the southern right whale. Also, through community and cultural Events, excursions, strong relationships with families, our ability to adapt plans for parent meetings and the number of methods used to gain feedback, including floorbooks, surveys, identity webs and conversations. We identified that though we have many strengths there is also the possibility for growth and change through determining the best strategy to gain parent/family feedback, including trialling new survey structures and questions. From this reflection we developed new surveys for families about children including a section about culture and trialled a new format for parent meetings at kindy.

Cultural learning in the community and with families is important for children’s cultural identity. Children engaging in learning with community and families are provided with important cultural connections and opportunities for identifying with their culture. It allows children opportunities to connect with Elders, Aunties and community members and provides the children an opportunity to share their culture. Our children connect to cultural learning in the community through cultural/community events. This year we participated in a number of events including the Launch of Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning held by Reconciliation Australia at Tauondi College, a Reconciliation Week Performance in Noarlunga Centre, the NAIDOC Week March and also visited the Elders at St Basil’s. To use families as a support base for children’s cultural learning we have Nanna’s working within the kindy program. They support the Kaurna Language program and work with the children using the Kaurna Literacy packs. Including family members in the program builds connections for children to their own culture, promoting their cultural identity.
What are the broader implications of your findings for children, families, and communities?

Our inquiry has supported new developments within our centre which provide positive changes for children, families and educators. For children this inquiry has led to their cultural identity being supported, the documentation of their learning demonstrates culture as well as learning and that all children will be engaging in a culturally appropriate program. Families and community will become a cultural knowledge base as it will grow with their input through surveys, floorbook comments and participation in parent meetings. Their cultures are also being represented in the centre through displaying art work connected to family members of children in our centre. Educators have benefitted through the recognition and value of Aboriginal staff members knowledge, expertise and experience, the continual growth in cultural competency and the accountability of programming and documentation around children’s culture.

Where to next?

From here, we are able to identify that our strong knowledge base around developing children’s cultural identity provides possibilities for sharing our knowledge and methods within AFLS sites and centres and our partnership. This inquiry has supported new methods for documentation of children’s cultural identity and learning, which will continue into the future to ensure the accountability of educators in supporting and promoting cultural identity. We will continue gaining cultural information from families to support their children and input this into our program. The positive outcomes, knowledge and discoveries of this inquiry leads our centre into a future where we will be using our new knowledge and strategies to work toward a new inquiry.

Concluding comments:

Our inquiry on promoting children’s cultural identity is an important one that every centre should take. All children have the right to a culturally supportive and appropriate place for learning that builds upon their strengths, their families’ values and promotes who they are. This inquiry has led to positive discoveries of strengths within our centre, its program and how our educators work with children. We acknowledge the importance of Aboriginal educators to support and guide our work with children around culture, who without working with I would not be as culturally competent as I am today. Though we discovered many strengths, we also discovered areas for growth and change that only further strengthened our ability to promote children’s culture, provide them with self-pride and ensure they don’t lose their culture. Upon finishing this inquiry our centre ends the year knowing we are an effective learning environment and centre for culture and the cultural identities of the children and families within our centre.