

# Mindful reflective conversation starters: Respect for diversity

When supporting children's transition to school, schools recognise and address children's diversity in a number of ways. Dockett and Perry (2014) note that 'respect for diversity can only be accomplished when educators reflect critically on their own positions, understandings and expectations, understand other perspectives and embrace the strengths in diversity'. Research demonstrates that when educators are aware of their own perspective on diversity, they are able to better understand others' perspectives and embrace inclusive practice.

The respect for diversity action area of the *Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool* (page 11) has two key focuses which support school reflection - knowing the community and knowing and responding to children. For each focus area there is a description of a range of behaviours across three decision-making levels (school-centred, consultative and collaborative) to assist schools in their reflections and planning.

Action area	Focus	School-centred	Consultative	Collaborative
Respect for diversity	Knowing the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General information about community diversity is acknowledged</li> <li>Orientation programs and delivery are based on school-determined content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposed transition practices are presented to key community leaders</li> <li>School personnel are aware of the diversity within their class and have adapted orientation sessions accordingly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community groups/leaders participate in planning school transition processes</li> <li>School personnel access and incorporate information about families in transition programs</li> </ul>
	Knowing and responding to children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transition procedures and processes are planned in advance of children's attendance</li> <li>Attention is focused on supporting children to adapt to school processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspects of the school transition program and processes are differentiated for some children</li> <li>The knowledge of ECEC service providers is used to adapt transition programs and processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transition programs are constructed in response to children's prior experiences and knowledge</li> <li>Transition programs acknowledge the need to promote social and emotional wellbeing</li> </ul>

Significantly, the respect for diversity action area is also a key element of equity, that is, children and their families have the right to educational opportunities that develop the knowledge, skills, capabilities and qualities they need for the future.

This resource will provide a starting point for principals and teachers to reflect on their professional and personal values in relation to diversity and transition to school. This information is included to assist individuals to understand

the role of their own diversity lens when examining their relationships with children, families, community partners and colleagues.

The suggestions provided in this resource can be used to prompt reflective conversations with staff, community partners and families. There is no right or wrong answer, not every question requires a response. The purpose of this mindful reflection approach is to promote and encourage strength-based discussions with staff, community partners and families.

Below are a series of questions for use in critical reflection on professional and personal values in relation to understandings of diversity and transition to school.

Mindful reflective questions	My reflections
How do I define diversity?	
What national, cultural, linguistic or religious group/s do I belong to? How do my teaching and/or leadership practices reflect this?	
What do I know about the cultural, linguistic, religious and educational backgrounds of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children and families joining my school?</li> <li>• my community?</li> <li>• my staff?</li> </ul>	
How could I learn more about the diversity of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children and families joining my school?</li> <li>• my community?</li> <li>• my staff?</li> </ul>	
What are my understandings of children, families, community and staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• from diverse cultural groups?</li> <li>• with language or dialect different from mine?</li> <li>• with diverse needs?</li> </ul>	
What are the sources of information that I can draw on to build understandings?	
How do I respond to children, families, my community and colleagues based on these understandings?	
Left blank for your own reflective question	
Left blank for your own reflective question	

Below are some starting points for questions that can be used in planning strength-based conversations with staff, community partners and families. These questions aim to acknowledge and build on existing knowledge and understanding of the children and families in the local community.

### Conversations with staff

How have you diversified your practices to support all children and their families in making a successful transition to school?

What was the experience of children and families last year in their transition to school? How can we find out more?

What theories, philosophies and understandings shape and assist my work?  
Who is advantaged when I work in this way? Who is disadvantaged?

Left blank for your own question

Left blank for your own question

### Conversations with community partners (e.g. Elders, Early Childhood Education and Care services, Health services, Community services)

What do you see as the unique qualities of this school and its place in community?

What other sources of data can I consider? Who else from the community can I ask?

I'm interested in hearing about values, culture and traditions and what this might mean for the learning of children in our community.

Left blank for your own question

Left blank for your own question

### Conversations with families

I'm interested in hearing about your family values, culture and traditions and what that might mean for your child's learning.

What do you see as your child's interests, strengths and abilities?

What are your family's priorities or aspirations for your child and how do you feel we can support these goals?

Left blank for your own question

Left blank for your own question

Below is a collection of vox pops gathered from people with diverse professional backgrounds and experiences. The term vox pop comes from the Latin phrase vox populi, meaning, ‘voice of the people’ and is often used to provide a snapshot of public opinion. These vox pops provide a diverse range of views on respect for diversity and inclusion, supporting professional conversations and reflection on current practice.

#### **Susan Cary**

Partnerships and Innovation Officer,  
South East Region,  
Department of Education and Training

##### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

From my perspective, particularly for children and families who are finding it hard to engage with the service system – it is about feeling they belong; creating a place and space where they feel included at all touchpoints.

##### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

Respect for diversity includes the recognition that within any one community, service, organisation or family we have different perspectives and points of view.

I think we need to pay attention to what makes up family – including the western view of individualism versus the collectivist view of child rearing, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ alongside the many different family makeup of single parents, same sex parenting, extended, kinship and foster carers.

#### **Julie Rogers**

Cultural Advisor, Cultural  
Capability – Statewide,  
Children’s Health Queensland  
Hospital and Health Service

##### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

As an Aboriginal person, inclusion means my cultural identity is valued, respected and incorporated into all aspects of a program or service.

##### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

Respect for diversity means being open to learn, understand, value and incorporate cultures that are different from your own into all aspects of programs or services.

#### **Matthew Cox**

Director, Logan Together

##### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

That whoever you are, you feel deep down inside that this society and this country is for you. That you have a place, you are valued and it’s yours as much as anyone else’s. And, importantly, for you to take your place, you don’t have to pretend to be someone you are not.

##### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

That you are humble enough to recognise that there are many ways to live on this earth and that yours is but one way. And that you are happy enough in yourself not to feel that you or others lack something. Hopefully you might also be fascinated by the same essential human-ness that sits inside us all, despite the endlessly different ways we seem to look, think, feel and live.

#### **Gabrielle Sinclair**

Deputy Director-General, Early Childhood and Community Engagement Division,  
Department of Education and Training

##### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

We all have a responsibility to contribute to an inclusive and just society and we do this by promoting and protecting the rights of others. The most successful, vibrant and creative communities in history were ones in which all people were guaranteed the right to safety and freedom of movement, had equity of opportunity and could live without prejudice or bias. In the Division, we influence, lead and build inclusive teams which challenge the status quo, seek others’ perspectives and listen to the voices of the most vulnerable. In this way, we will make a difference for young children and their families.

##### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

To me respect for diversity means not only understanding and appreciating that every person is unique, but going one step further and understanding the world is seen and experienced from multiple perspectives. It is acknowledging the reality that these perspectives are the foundation point for addressing public issues and supporting attractive, resilient, harmonious, fair and innovative communities. It is putting into action that famous quote “Through the eyes of a child you will see the world just as it ought to be”.

### **Sue Southey**

Co-Director, Springwood  
Community Kindergarten

#### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

Inclusion means providing the things that each child needs to maximise their potential. This might mean extra support, changes to routines or environments or making a bigger effort to get to know the family. It also means valuing the differences between children (or adults) and teaching our children how to respect and appreciate individual differences.

#### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

Respect for diversity means responding, noticing and celebrating difference, for example highlighting the things that an individual child can do and can contribute rather than what they can't do.

### **Associate Professor Anne Petriwskyj**

Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Early Childhood, Faculty of Education,  
Queensland University of Technology

#### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

Inclusion means that all children are able to participate, succeed, and feel valued. It implies respect for diversity, a focus on the strengths each child brings and their rights to ongoing development, learning and wellbeing.

In relation to transition to school, inclusion takes account of children and family perspectives and involves critical reflection on whose voices are heard in debate and decision making, and whose purposes are served by specific decisions or actions. This means considering whether we have been truly respectful of diversity, whether relationships have been genuinely reciprocal, and whether we have honestly built on child and family strengths and preferences instead of focussing negatively on their challenges.

#### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

Respecting diversity means actively listening to children and families, using respectful language, making adjustments to assist children and families in feeling welcomed, and recognising contributions. My view of diversity is very broad, incorporating abilities (giftedness, disability, chronic illness); cultural and linguistic background (Indigenous, Australian South Sea Islander, migrant, refugee); other family and community context (geographic isolation, socio-economic background, families with complex circumstances) and personal characteristics (personality, confidence, learning style).

In relation to transition to school, respect for diversity implies taking account of the varied experiences and expectations of children and families, the influence of the local communities, and the transitions capital (i.e. personal resources and strengths) each child and family bring.

### **Kerri Giebel**

Early Childhood Education and Care Director North Queensland Region  
Manager, Department of Education and Training

#### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

To make our organisations inclusive we need to consider how welcoming our organisation is through artefacts, buildings, people and language. As Mohandas K. Gandhi stated, 'I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stifled. I want all the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible'.

#### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

As Stephen Covey stated, 'Strength lies in differences, not in similarities' and in North Queensland region the rich diversity of our people is definitely our strength.

In understanding our role in making our organisations fully inclusive, we need to be aware and understand the difference between:

1. Equity  
- who has the key to enter our organisation?
2. Diversity  
- who is actually in the organisation?
3. Inclusivity  
- who actually feels welcome in the organisation? (E Schanzer)

### **Natalie Swayn**

Director, Autism Hub and  
Reading Centre, Department of  
Education and Training

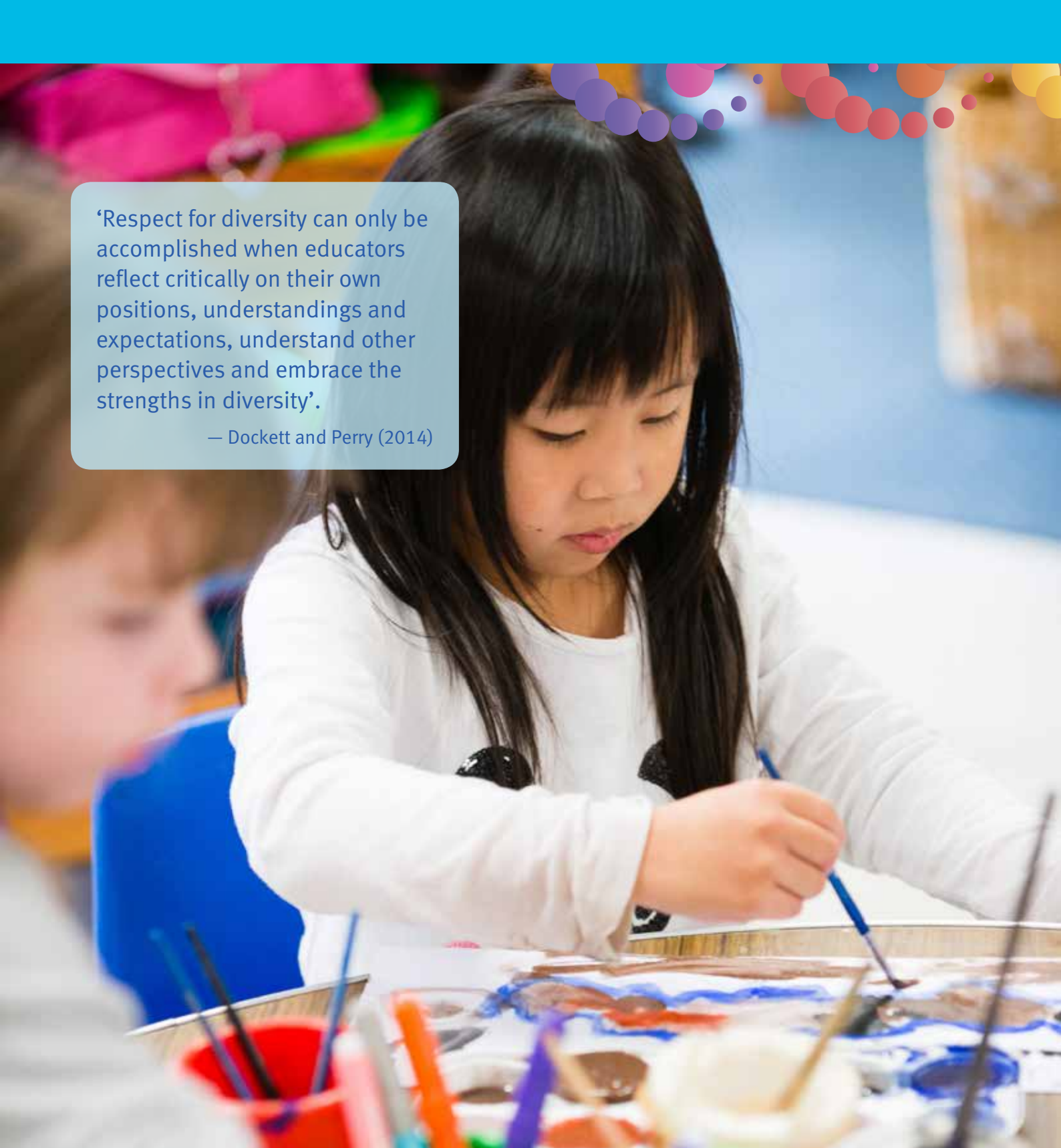
#### ***What does inclusion mean to you?***

My favourite quote is, 'Equity is who has the keys to the room. Diversity is who is in the room. Inclusion is who feels welcome in the room.' (E Schanzer)

To me it's every family feeling and believing they are welcome, and that their child is welcome in all aspects of a service/school/agency.

#### ***What does respect for diversity mean to you?***

It means viewing diversity as a strength and creating opportunities for everyone to share their knowledge and expertise relevant to their experience.



‘Respect for diversity can only be accomplished when educators reflect critically on their own positions, understandings and expectations, understand other perspectives and embrace the strengths in diversity’.

— Dockett and Perry (2014)

## Get in touch

For any questions about this *Mindful reflective conversation starter* or transitions, contact the Early Learning Pathways team on: [Transitions@det.qld.gov.au](mailto:Transitions@det.qld.gov.au)

## More support

Regional Transition and Partnerships and Innovation officers are available to support schools with their transition planning. Find contact details for appointed officers in your region via this page on OnePortal: <https://oneportal.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/forschools/Pages/Transitiontoschoolsupportcontacts.aspx>

Reference for Quote: Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2014). *Continuity of Learning: A resource to support effective transition to school and school age care*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Department of Education.