



Domain 6

Positive sense of identity and culture

Identity and culture underpins all other outcomes for children and young people's wellbeing. ARACY's review of research found a 'positive sense of identity and culture' is fundamental to a child or young person's wellbeing.

Identity and culture are broad reaching themes and are challenging to define for any child or community, as they are very personal, are dependent on a child's awareness of their own identity, and change as a child progresses through life. Identity is influenced by family, country, language, health, feeling loved and safe, involvement in the community and having access to other external influences. Each of these factors both define and are defined by identity and culture.

In this domain, three outcomes of connection to culture, spirituality and cultural diversity, are explored through six indicators and three case studies:



Indicators Case studies

6.1 Connection to culture

6.1.1 Language spoken at home

The language a child or young person speaks has an important role in shaping their identity. The Northern Territory population is linguistically diverse. Nearly half of young people aged 15-24 (46.1%) speak a language other than English.⁽⁵⁾

In Aboriginal communities, language is a channel through which knowledge, heritage and belonging is passed down through generations.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Of the 13 most common Aboriginal languages spoken by children in Australia, five of the top six are spoken in the Northern Territory: Djambarrpuyngu (a Yolngu language from East Arnhem) with 4,264 speakers, Warlpiri (spoken in Central, Big Rivers and Barkly) with 2,276 speakers, Tiwi (spoken on the Tiwi Islands in the Top End) with 2,020 speakers, Murrinh-Patha (spoken at Wadeye in the Top End) with 1,966 speakers and Kunwinjku (spoken in west Arnhem Land in the Top End) with 1,702 speakers.⁽⁶¹⁾

The census question 'Language Spoken at Home' is designed to detect the main language, other than English, spoken at home.⁽⁶²⁾ Where English is recorded for this measure, it indicates only English is spoken at home.

Proportion (%) of young people, aged 15-24, who speak English, Aboriginal languages and other languages at home

	AUSTRALIA	NORTHERN TERRITORY	GREATER DARWIN	TOP END	EAST ARNHEM	BIG RIVERS	BARKLY	CENTRAL
English	72.3%	54.0%	69.6%	16.3%	12.6%	39.2%	42.3%	45.8%
Aboriginal languages	0.4%	21.7%	1.3%	75.2%	77.8%	43.1%	42.9%	27.4%
Other	Mandarin 4.3%	Filipino/ Tagalog 2.2%	Filipino/ Tagalog 3.3%			Filipino/ Tagalog 1.0%		Filipino/ Tagalog 1.8%
	Arabic 1.6%	Greek 1.2%	Greek 2.2%					
	Vietnamese 1.6%		Mandarin 1.2%					

Data source and year: ABS Housing and Population Census, 2016.
Note: Languages spoken at home by less than 1% of the population are not included in this table.

There is a great variety of languages spoken at home by young people, including Filipino/Tagalog, Greek and Mandarin, however the prominent languages, second to English, are the Aboriginal languages. In the NT, over 1 in 5 young people aged 15-24 (21.7%) speak an Aboriginal language at home. In Australia, the proportion is less than 1 in 200 young people (0.4%).





'Learning is supported through everyone connected to the child - teaching, talking testing all the time'

NUTHANMARAM DJAMARRKULINY' MÄRRMA'KURR ROMGURR: GROWING UP CHILDREN IN TWO WORLDS

'We teach them at an early age, the connections, clans...traditions... paintings and totems'... For many Yolŋu families, developing a strong cultural identity is the highest priority in early childhood-through building children's understanding of their connections to people, place and other elements of the natural world. Learning is supported through everyone connected to the child-teaching, talking, testing all the time. While children are learning one word or concept, Yolŋu are also teaching deep, intricate connections: Our truth inside tells us that these connections are there from the beginning-children are surrounded by them and belong in them... These are the things that keep children healthy and strong. And this is our law that has always been there and all we have to do is exercise it and teach our children that deep meaning', said Associate Professor Elaine Lāwurrpa Maypilama, Project Leader.

In response to community concerns that early childhood services need to better understand how Yolŋu grow up their children, Yolŋu and non-Aboriginal researchers worked together on a longitudinal study in Galiwin'ku. The findings illuminate a range of priorities and strengths in Yolŋu child development and parenting. In these rich and supportive learning environments, Yolŋu constantly monitor and assess their children's development, celebrate individual children's strengths and accommodate their different needs.

Photo: Mother and child, everyone will talk to the child... day and night

6.1.2 Aboriginal culture

Aboriginal spirituality and a connection to country help to guide a child's development, as well as teaching a child moral values of caring for others, responsibility and resilience.⁽⁶³⁾

For a lot of Aboriginal people, culture is central to life and everything stems from it. It is inherent in everything; country, language, family, diet, custom, ceremony. It shapes ways of communicating and relating to others, connection to plants and animals, who you can marry and what you can eat, among many other things.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014-15 found that more than 4 in 5 Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory (81%), identify with clan, tribal or language group, which is greater than the 3 in 5 Aboriginal people across Australia (62%). The survey also found that a greater proportion of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory (83%) were involved in cultural events, ceremonies or organisations in the previous year, than all Aboriginal Australians throughout the country (62%).

Aboriginal art centres are important cultural and creative community spaces. There are approximately 28 remote art centres in the Northern Territory, spread throughout the regions.⁽⁶⁴⁾ An art centre offers a space for sharing of culture between members of the community and with visitors, helping to maintain traditions and knowledge.

Connection to Aboriginal culture is intricate, often stemming from practices in the family, in ceremonies and on country and as such, there is not a measure to adequately represent this connection.

6.1.3 Community education

Throughout the Northern Territory, a range of community initiatives provide the opportunity for children and young people to engage in activities which promote their culture and connect with the wider community. These range from large scale multicultural community events in major cities, to smaller community initiatives in rural and remote locations. In educational settings, language, culture, art, literature and sporting classes built into the curriculum also build and maintain strong links to cultural heritage and expression.

Cultural education more commonly occurs in the home and as such, it is not recorded in available datasets. The Register of Cultural Organisations does however record the number of not-for-profit organisations who support culture and the arts. Organisations are listed on the register when their purpose is to foster literature; community, visual and performing arts; music; television, video, radio and film; and arts or languages of Aboriginal people. Public art galleries, museums or libraries are not included.

Number of organisations promoting culture and the arts



Data source and year: Register of Cultural Organisations – Australian Government, 2019.

Note: 1. Numbers reflect Registered Cultural Organisations (organisations that can receive tax deductible donations and which promote cultural arts and language diversity). 2. NT data includes one Territory wide organisation.

As at September 2019, of the 1,799 organisations promoting culture and the arts funded by the Australian Government, 42 were based in the NT. Many of these organisations, whilst based in Greater Darwin serviced the NT more broadly.





'When we take kids out bush they are learning as soon as we get there'

TIME ON COUNTRY

'Kurdu kurdu (kids) don't know about their culture anymore, we need to teach them. Nyurru wiyi (long time ago) kids used to live on the country but now days they only got country visit. That's why it's really important for them to learn on country visit from all the elders. We can teach them everything about culture, hunting, dancing, bush tucker and the old people'. (Yuendumu elder)

At Yuendumu School, a country visit program is embedded into the annual school calendar and is an essential component of the school's bilingual curriculum. It was started with support from the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) in 2006. Since then, an annual week-long country visit has been a significant community event. The visits involve the whole school population (up to

250 students) who are joined by parents, family members and elders over two or three camps. It is a time of learning and sharing between the generations. The highlight of the camp is 'painting up' where students learn their design, songs and dances from community elders. 'We went to Jurlpungu for country visit and we went hunting for kangaroo and had big fun in the bush. We ate the kangaroo we got. It was so tasty', a child shared.

A young Warlpiri educator shared, 'When we take kids out bush they are learning as soon as we get there. They all find something and we teachers have to explain it to them: when, where, what. But we learn a lot from kids too when we are out; they teach us. We need to make sure we go with old people, learn a lot more from them, deeper'.

Photo: Some of the Yuendumu group painted up at a country visit

6.2 Spirituality

Having a positive sense of identity and culture includes considering an individual's spirituality. Modern spirituality has evolved from the traditional understanding of holding a religious belief. Today, it encompasses many shared and individual practises; most of which consider development of a sense of peace and purpose. Spirituality can be different for each person and may involve an appreciation for a sacred or higher being or supernatural dimension, be centred around nature and the environment, or personal and inner truth and growth. A sense of spiritual growth and understanding can play an important role in a child's social and moral wellbeing, as well as general cultural understanding and acceptance.

6.2.1 Aboriginal spirituality

Aboriginal spirituality is a way of life and can be part of everything. It is often imparted to Aboriginal children at a young age and helps them to identify who they are, their relationship to the land, the environment, animals and plants, spirits, their community and their family. Central to Aboriginal spirituality is the Dreaming, an abstract, holistic structure which encompasses spiritual and physical dimensions of Aboriginal culture, in the past, present and future.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Importantly, the Dreaming is tightly linked to country, and therefore connection to country plays a crucial role in an Aboriginal child and young person's identity and culture.

While this is an important indicator of wellbeing for Aboriginal children and young people, we do not have a quantitative measure of spirituality for young Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. The learning and development in connection with the Dreaming occurs with family, elders and community, often during times of being on country.

6.2.2 Religions

Throughout a child's development, formal religious or cultural settings can be places where children are taught to socialise beyond their family or formal schooling, and are places of emotional and spiritual support where children are taught different resilience practices. Family and community religion has a strong influence on young children.⁽⁶⁶⁾

The most common religions with which Northern Territory residents identify are Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Hinduism and Sikhism are the fastest growing religions in the Northern Territory⁽⁵⁾ while traditional Christian religions are declining. Across Australia, the proportion of people who report no religion has been steadily increasing, and between 2011 and 2016 an additional 2.2 million people reported as having no religion.⁽⁶⁷⁾

Proportion (%) of population, aged 15-24, identifying with a religion



Data source and year: ABS Housing and Population Census, 2016.
Note: For the purposes of this report religion does not include secular or other spiritual beliefs.

In 2016 in the NT, there were slightly fewer young people who identified with a religion (51.3%) than for Australia (53.4%). Across the NT, the proportion of young people identifying with a religion ranges from 45% in Big Rivers to 78.7% in East Arnhem.



6.3 Cultural diversity

Australia and the Northern Territory are made up of diverse cultural communities. The culture of a child or individual not only influences how they see the world and their identity but also through practices and celebrations impact how other children grow up understanding and accepting the world. Accepting other cultures is central to social cohesion.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Multiculturalism has different definitions, but most commonly it considers the different places people are born, their ancestry, their religion and languages they speak. National research has found Australians not only support multiculturalism, but also think it is good for the country. The Scanlon Foundation has found, through ongoing surveys since 2013, that Australians are increasingly agreeing 'multiculturalism is good for Australia'.⁽⁶⁹⁾ From the same surveys, the Scanlon Foundation reported young people aged 18-24 have the greatest proportion of the population agreeing or strongly agreeing to the benefit of multiculturalism in Australia.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Multiculturalism is supported in the Territory through the Northern Territory Multicultural Participation Framework, which encourages multicultural celebrations, support for migration and settling in, and support for multicultural community facilities.⁽⁷⁰⁾

6.3.1 Overseas-born

Australia has a large population of individuals born overseas, with 7.3 million migrants in 2018.⁽⁷¹⁾ Those aged 30-34 have the highest proportion of overseas-born, and are at an age when they may have young families. The Northern Territory has the second lowest proportion of the population born overseas (20%) among all Australian states and territories.⁽⁵⁾

When understanding cultural diversity, it is important to consider the country of birth of children and young people as well as the country of birth of their parents.

Proportion (%) of population, aged 0-24, born overseas



Data source and year: ABS Housing and Population Census, 2016.

In the NT about 1 in 10 children and young people were born overseas (10.1%), which is less than for Australia (13.3%). There was variation across the NT with greater proportions of young people in Greater Darwin (14.1%) and Central (9.8%) being born overseas.

Proportion (%) of Australian born population, aged 0-24, who have both parents born overseas



Data source and year: ABS Housing and Population Census, 2016.

About 1 in 6 NT children and young people (15.8%) had both parents born overseas. Across the NT, children and young people in Greater Darwin (22.4%) and Central (14.2%) were much more likely to have both parents born overseas.

‘We are all interconnected – paying respect to ancestors is very important for me’



PAYING RESPECT TO ANCESTORS

‘My name is Leila and I am a Cantonese Toi Sun woman. There are different traditions in Chinese cultures; this is the story for me and my family.

We believe we are part of our ancestry. We carry to the next generation. It is important to pay respect. There is an obligation in this as we are the link from the ancestors to future generations.

After a child is born, we have a baby blessing at home. People who believe in ancestor worshipping do this. It is done at home because we don’t want to take the baby to the temple in case of bad spirits.

There is a ceremony to bless the baby. We do this for two reasons. Firstly, to inform the ancestors of the birth of the child. And secondly, to ask the ancestors to bless the child with a peaceful and healthy life.

We are all interconnected - paying respect to ancestors is very important to me’

Photo: Leila with her daughter Melanie (holding Joseph, two years), granddaughters Tiffany (on the left, with Bruno, 18 months) and Jessica (on the right, with Xander, five months)