

Building Yolngu skills, knowledge, and priorities into early childhood assessment and support: Protocol for a qualitative study ^[1]

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Abstract

Background: Yolngu or Yolngu are a group of indigenous Australian people inhabiting north-eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. Recent government policy addressing disparities in outcomes between Indigenous and other children in Australia has resulted in the rapid introduction of early childhood interventions in remote Aboriginal communities. This is despite minimal research into their appropriateness or effectiveness for these contexts.

Objective: This research aims to privilege Aboriginal early childhood knowledge, priorities and practices and to strengthen the evidence base for culturally responsive and relevant assessment processes and support that distinguishes “difference” from “deficit” to facilitate optimal child development.

Methods: This collaborative qualitative research employs video ethnography, participant observation and in-depth interviews, involving Aboriginal families and researchers in design, implementation, interpretation and dissemination using a locally developed, culturally responsive research approach. Longitudinal case studies are being conducted with 6 families over 5 years and emerging findings are being explored with a further 50 families and key community informants. Data from all sources are analyzed inductively using a collaborative and iterative process. The study findings, grounded in an in-depth understanding of the cultural context of the study but with relevance to policy and practice more widely, are informing the development of a Web-based educational resource and targeted knowledge exchange activities.

Results: This paper focuses only on the research approach used in this project. The findings will be reported in detail in future publications. In response to community concerns about lack of recognition of Aboriginal early childhood strengths, priorities and knowledge, this collaborative community-driven project strengthens the evidence base for developing culturally responsive and relevant early childhood services and assessment processes to support optimal child development. The study findings are guiding the development of a Web-based educational resource for staff working with Aboriginal communities and families in the field of early child development. This website will also function as a community-developed tool for strengthening and maintaining Aboriginal knowledge and practice related to child development and child rearing. It will be widely accessible to community members through a range of platforms (eg, mobile phones and tablets) and will provide a model for other cultural contexts.

Conclusions: This project will facilitate wider recognition and reflection of cultural knowledge and practice in early childhood programs and policies and will support strengthening and maintenance of cultural knowledge. The culturally responsive and highly collaborative approach to community-based research on which this project is based will also inform future research through

sharing knowledge about the research process as well as research findings.

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