



Keynote presentation by Dr. Karen Martin to the SNAICC National Conference Thursday 29 July 2010. Karen Martin spoke to the following overhead notes. Her speech can be heard online at www.snaicc.asn.au/policy/conference



Who's growing up whom? Roles, relationships and relatedness within Aboriginal Childhood Law

By: Dr Karen Martin

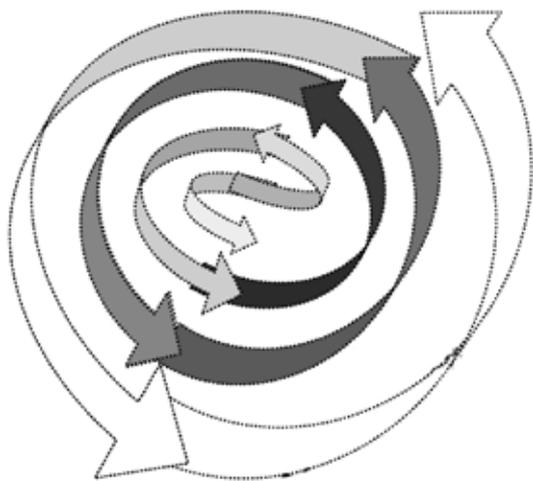
Karen Martin is a Noonuccal woman from Minjerripah (North Stradbroke Island - south east Queensland) and also has Bidjara ancestry (central Queensland). She has taught in Aboriginal Community controlled education services in all phases of schooling. She has lectured in Indigenous Australian Studies (James Cook University, Townsville) and teacher education at QUT (Brisbane).

Karen has also published widely and lectured in Aboriginal early childhood education. Karen's PhD was conferred in March 2007 and was awarded the James Cook University Medal. In November 2007, Karen was jointly awarded the Australian Association of Research in Education

Dissertation award. Thus, Karen's work is used internationally by First Nations and Maori scholars and researchers in the field of education, policy and human services. She was awarded the National NAIDOC Award for Scholar of the Year in 2008.

Karen's more recent publications apply this work in terms of effective changes in the schooling of young Aboriginal children. She is a steering committee member to the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (FaHCSIA) and member to the Expert Advisory Panel: Quality Working Group (Office of Early Childhood).

She is now Associate Professor: Early Childhood, in the newly developed early childhood degree with the School of Education, Southern Cross University (Lismore).



1. Acknowledgements:

- Ancestors
- Traditional Owners
- Elders (of past, present, future)
- All who contribute to our individual and collective stories

2. How do we view and then behave towards our children?

Do you believe young children are:

- helpless, naughty, valuable
- aware, cute, cheeky
- vulnerable, important
- useless
- capable
- annoying

What impact does this have on their identity?

What impact does this have on our identity?

How we behave towards them – uncovers how we see them

Who's growing up whom? Roles, relationships and relatedness within Aboriginal Childhood Law

Dr Karen Martin: Associate Professor School of Education, Southern Cross University (Lismore)

2. The Glass Ceiling Syndrome:

This syndrome refers to setting limits or reaching limits set by others in working with young children.

In this syndrome, adults are always busy – busy making sure they look busy to others.

They've hit the ceiling and:

- don't push anymore, doing something knowing its going nowhere;
- or
- push too too hard, doing anything believing its going somewhere.

3. The Glass Slippers Syndrome:

The romantic view of young children and our role as adults as 'good' or 'nice' people because we work with young children.

It's about 'being nice' and 'looking good' as adults – like Cinderella, slaving away with no recognition but hoping to be rescued.

This syndrome views children as cute, passive, fun, cuddly. If we can't be rescued, we'll rescue the children from the same fate.

We patronise children and make them visible in 'childish' ways – less valuable than the adults.

4. The Glass Walls Syndrome:

This syndrome refers to adults being visible and to some degree, transparent, but not accountable.

When the glass walls exist, folks tend to have found a comfortable and safe spot working with young children, and they're not going to change it – or challenge it.

In that case, not only have they cut other out, they've locked themselves in. And the young children too.

5. What the research tells us about our children:

(and other ways to think about this information)

- Our lifespan is some 20 years shorter than non-Aboriginal Australians (our physical life is short – but our Ancestral lifehood is not)
- Two-thirds of our population is aged under 25 years (being 26 years of age is the beginning of 'Old Age')
- Our babies are therefore being born to younger parents (to be a 'parent' has very different meanings in our communities)
- A high percentage of our children are still in the Child Protection/Child Safety system (to be 'parented' has very different meanings)

6. What the research tells us about our children

(and other ways to think about this information)

- Our youth are over-represented in juvenile detention centres
- Their childhood is different and so is their lifehood*

- Some of our children do not go to school.

Schooling is not natural but being part of a family is

- Some of our children are doing okay or doing well at school

How come we don't hear more about these children?

What does it actually mean to be an Aboriginal child?

7.

- Being Aboriginal IS a problem - the solution is to stop being black, or to assimilate – or close the gap;

It's only a problem for 'others' - eg. confidence vs. being cheeky.

- Aboriginal children are even more helpless, hopeless, useless than adults (we need to 'get them young' and 'spare them of a ??? life');

Have you ever tried to argue with a two year old?

- Children don't really understand anything until they reach the age of 8;

Have you ever tried to cheat at cards with a 5 year old?

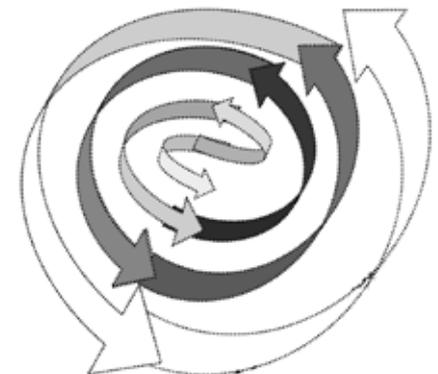
- Young children in particular, can't make decisions for themselves, they need adults to guide them.

Being growled at by a three year old is a blessing, not an insult.

8. Childhood , Lifehood Relatedness

The 'ideal'

- Conception
- Birth
- Childhood
- Young Adulthood
- Adulthood
- Old Age
- Death



9. Childhood , Lifelihood Relatedness

The reality...

- Conception
- Birth
- Childhood
- Young Adulthood
- Adulthood
- Old Age
- Death



10. Here's what some young children have to say about their lives.

The following are responses given by 172 young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (aged approximately 5-6years old) involved in the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (FaHCSIA).

When asked, 'what do you want to be when you grow up', this is what they said:

- 28 want to be policemen/policewomen (1 also wants to be a cheer leader; 1 also wants to be a 'garbage truck man' and 'animal doctor')
- 23 want to be a teacher (1 a music teacher; 1 also a Sizzler's manager; 1 also a McDonald's chick)
- 8 want to be a fireman/fire'girl' (2 also want to be police; 1 also wants to be a barber)
- 8 want to be a footballer (1 a soccer player)
- 7 want to be a doctor
- 5 want to be a hairdresser (and 1 also a barber)
- 2 want to be in the army

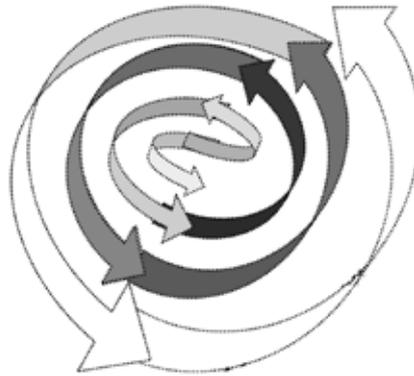
11. This is what else they said they wanted to do when they grow up:

- An astronaut and then the Prime Minister of Australia
- Nothing...
- Grandad, like my dad

12. What I want to do when I grow up:

- Work at McDonalds
- Ride a bike without trainer wheels
- Go on a train by myself
- I want to smoke, grow up my kids and getting into fashion
- Playing with my brother Help mum plant flowers
- Not sure yet

13. What is it we are learning from young children?



**To our Father's Fathers...the pain the sorrow.
To our Children's Children...the glad tomorrow**

(Oodgeroo Noonuccal 1993)

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