

2024 Meeting Minutes

Here is a concise qualitative summary of the key points from our meetings this past year for reflection (assisted by ChatGPT) :

The meetings explored the concept of "welcome" - how we welcome others, what it means to welcome, and how people experience welcome.

Some key points: - Welcome involves language, culture, philosophy, and environment. It's complex, as we welcome diverse groups (children, families, educators, community).

Welcome can be both unintentional and intentional. It's linked to relationships, place, and country. Welcome involves procedures, attitudes, and deeper emotional connection.

How people experience welcome depends on the stage of the relationship. Welcome establishes connections and a sense of belonging. Technology, visual cues, and body language shape the welcome experience.

Welcome is about creating a culture of safety, trust, and inclusion where differences are celebrated. It requires intentionality, empathy, and flexibility to navigate differing beliefs and perspectives.

Examples explored highlighted how children can be actively involved in welcoming, and how the physical environment communicates welcome through aesthetics, accessibility, and flexibility.

Overall, welcome is a multifaceted, reciprocal process that reflects an organisations values, relationships, and commitment to inclusive practices. Navigating the complexities of welcome is an ongoing ethical responsibility.

The ideas explored during our meetings noted several key components that the physical environment can influence towards feelings of safety and inclusion in a welcome :-

1. Aesthetics and sensory experience - that the environment "has its own language" and can "resonate" with people, creating a sense of belonging through its visual, tactile, and other sensory qualities;
2. Accessibility and flexibility - Environments that are accessible, adaptable, and allow for autonomous exploration are described as more welcoming. The ability to "leave traces" and make one's mark on the space contributes to a sense of belonging;
3. Preparation and organisation - Spaces that are "prepared and organized" yet still "growing" and "adaptive" to the community convey care and intentionality;
4. Opportunities for involvement and participation - Environments that offer opportunities for children and families to actively engage, contribute, and shape the space foster a greater sense of inclusion and ownership. This allows all to leave one's "mark" on the community fostering a greater sense of ownership; and finally,
5. Alignment with personal values - The environment should reflect the organization's values, philosophy, and culture, creating coherence and authenticity in the welcome experience.

Overall the welcome suggests that the physical environment acts as a form of "language" that can communicate safety, trust, and belonging when designed with intentionality around inclusivity, flexibility, and alignment with the community's needs and values.

When the community's values, philosophy, and culture align with one's own, it creates a stronger sense of fit and belonging.

At the heart of welcome some of the most common factors that contribute to a person's sense of belonging in a community include but are not limited to :-

1. Relationships and Connections - emphasizes that welcome is fundamentally about establishing connections and relationships, both interpersonal and with the physical place;
2. Trust and Emotional Safety - feeling emotionally safe, trusting the community, and being able to be one's authentic self are described as crucial for a sense of belonging;
3. Inclusion and Celebrating Differences - the environment and culture should embrace diversity, difference, and otherness, actively celebrating and making space for diverse perspectives and identities;
4. Familiarity and Comfort - Feeling comfortable, "at home," and familiar with the customs, language, and expectations of the community can enhance the welcome experience.

If we agree welcome creates the sense of belonging it is a multifaceted experience rooted in meaningful relationships, emotional safety, inclusion, active participation, and alignment between the individual and the community.