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In this Issue

Well, as everyone is saying, hasn't this year just flown by? The new National Quality Framework and all it entails is nearly upon us, and I know many of you have been working hard to prepare yourselves for the changes this will bring. As always, we hope this issue of *In the LOOP* is one tool that you find helpful on this journey.

In this issue we hope we have something for everyone. To support your work on quality areas four and seven, an article by Bernadette Rutyna discusses the importance of mentoring relationships in children's services and provides practical advice about how to establish these relationships. Tina Millar has identified some great books from the PSCQ funded Noah's Ark Resource Library that will help guide your more general people management. In regard to building a sense of belonging for all, there are two resources advertised in this edition from our colleagues at the Indigenous Professional Support Unit that will support your inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families into your services. Simmi's story about the work of a cultural support worker in central Queensland also highlights the value of inclusivity.

An article by Jenny Cartmel describes one approach to supporting the outside school hours care (OSHC) educators to investigate the *My Time, Our Place* – Framework for School Age Care. This article describes how some OSHC educators have had an opportunity to attend university courses relevant to their work and the great outcomes being gained by this experience. Tina again describes library resources that will support your exploration of *My Time, Our Place*.

There are two articles from proactive members of our Professional Support Networks about work they have been doing to support other educators and services in their local region investigating the National Quality Framework. These are really inspiring stories of regional services getting together to support each other.

There is also an article from Sue Grieshaber and Melinda Miller about the outcomes of an action research project they have recently spent 12 months facilitating and mentoring. There are descriptions of how the participants felt about the project and some of the fabulous outcomes they achieved in exploring their ideas and beliefs about play.

Included with this issue are the latest Professional Support Coordinator Alliance (PSCA) NQF news and final fact sheet. The PSCA is an alliance of all the PSCs from across Australia. We meet and converse regularly and work on issues of significance for child care professional development and support. For more information about the PSCA and the resources we have developed and delivered please visit:

<http://www.pscalliance.org.au/>

I hope you are all able to have some rest at the end of this busy year and spend cherished time with family and friends. We look forward to continuing to support you through the implementation of the National Quality Framework and all this involves. As always please let us know if there are specific things we can do to support you and your service on this journey either on: 1800 112 585 or email info@pscq.org.au

Julie Price
Manager Workforce Partnerships
Health and Community Services Workforce Council



Health and Community Services Workforce Council Inc
 Ground Floor, 303 Adelaide Street Brisbane Q 4000
 Unit 1, Level 2 390 Flinders Street Townsville Q 4810
 P: (07) 3234 0190 F: (07) 3234 0474
 E: info@workforce.org.au W: www.workforce.org.au

The Professional Support Coordinator is an initiative funded by the Australian Government under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. Feedback and queries should initially be directed to the professional Support Coordinator in your state. Further information can be sought by contacting the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Mentoring – learning with others, building capacity

Taking an active role in helping to develop the next generation of workers is essential for workplaces that want to learn and achieve in the future. Mentoring relationships have been accepted as fundamental to fostering learning in the workplace, advancing careers, helping new staff learn the culture and also providing specific developmental and psychosocial support.

Working in child care is complex and multidimensional; effective practice in the early years requires committed, enthusiastic and reflective practitioners. These practitioners require breadth and depth of knowledge, skills and understanding – and the capacity – to build sustainable relationships with children and partner with their parents. Within this environment staff and managers depend on trusting relationships in their teams, effective communication, sharing knowledge, learning and supporting each other. However, the responsibility for learning and development extends to all members of a team, not just to managers.

Learning in the workplace

Much of the literature about learning on the job suggests that there are two important types of personal learning. One involves learning about the context of work and seeing ourselves in relation to others; this can be called “relational job learning” and essentially it means understanding about the connectedness of our job in relation to others. The second type of personal learning relates to interpersonal skills. People need to be able to understand and apply skills and abilities that enable better working relationships. This is termed “personal skills development”. Focused learning in both areas builds self-esteem and promotes competency and improved capacity to solve problems. Mentoring has been shown to be an effective way to enhance personal learning.

Qualities of Mentors

Mentoring is a developmental process, including elements of coaching, facilitating and counselling, aimed at sharing knowledge and encouraging individual development. Those who decide to mentor need to have the knowledge and abilities required.

The key qualities and skills of an effective mentor are as follows:

- Credibility and experience in the particular field. Breadth of knowledge and skills to be able to make personal and professional connections.
- Having the ability to let go of one’s own ego, status and authority in order to project oneself into the life of the mentee and adopt a listening, supportive role. The mentor must feel comfortable in this role.
- Empathy and interpersonal skills in order to ask appropriate questions regarding the personal development of the mentee.
- Understanding what it means to be in the industry: What makes staff and managers tick? How do teams work best in this context?
- Having the skills and insight to act as a professional and personal “sounding board” for the mentee. This is central to any developmental process aimed at enabling a person to clarify their sense of direction, identify their strengths and realise their potential.
- Having a wide repertoire of language skills in order to frame appropriate questions, respond to different personal narratives and communicate meaningfully, understanding where the mentee is coming from.
- Having the ability to be self-reflective and self-aware in order to nurture these qualities in others (e.g: questioning motivation; separating professional and personal issues).
- Being open and non-judgemental in relation to the mentee’s individual and professional context.

Experience, skills and a genuine desire to help are more valuable assets in a mentoring relationship than age or position. Open and assertive communication and the trust of both parties are essential.

Engagement

Crucial to building and maintaining the mentoring relationship is how the early engagement is undertaken. Quality engagement in learning involves the following:

- Developing a non-judgemental, non-threatening working relationship based on empathy, trust and mutual respect
- Establishing a safe, supportive learning environment
- Creating conditions that encourage openness, honesty, informality and risk-taking
- Defining boundaries and ground rules before commencing the process
- Building rapport and a clear understanding of who does what and why
- Allowing the mentee to determine their own agenda
- Enabling, caring, providing constructive feedback and facilitative



Focused conversations

Many writers maintain that mentoring conversations need to be planned and focused but also have capacity for flexibility. The ideas listed below come from *The Art of Focused Conversation* (Stanfield, 2000) and provide some valuable tips about using particular types of questions to focus a conversation. Stanfield identifies four key levels of questions. Some examples are included within each level:

Objective level – questions based on facts and data and viewed as “external” to the mind:

- Where are you up to?
- What work have you done on your development plan?
- With whom have you begun working and what have you achieved since we last talked?

Reflective level – questions that invite personal reaction to the data or facts presented. Sometimes the responses can be emotional or based on feelings. Questions here are viewed as “internal”:

- What have you enjoyed doing the most? Why?
- What have you enjoyed the least? Why?
- How are you feeling about your development focus so far?

Interpretive level – questions that draw out meanings, values, beliefs and the significance of the issue. Questions here are concerned with: ‘What does this mean?’; and ‘Why?’

- What have you learned about yourself, and others so far?
- What are some issues that continue to worry you? Why?
- What alternatives are you thinking about for dealing with some of the ongoing challenges?

Decisional level – questions that elicit resolution, new directions and actions. This is where the conversation is brought to a close and decisions are made:

- What are you going to do next?
- What is your plan and how are you going to go about achieving it?
- Can I help, and if so, how?
- Are things moving in the right direction?

Mentoring meetings

An effective mentoring relationship depends in part on the strength and integrity of a working partnership that is sometimes bound by an unwritten contract where mutual roles, responsibilities and expectations are made explicit. This partnership is developed over time, and how the meetings are conducted is crucial to its success. In the following, a simple structure is outlined, which can be used to facilitate constructive one-on-one or small group mentoring meetings. The details of each phase are provided.

Engagement

In this phase the purpose is for both the mentor and mentee to establish and/or build their relationship. Building rapport and engaging well with each other is critical particularly in the first 2-3 sessions. In subsequent meetings both mentor and mentee still need to establish the connection early. It is necessary to become focused and stay present at the start of a meeting when other thoughts are more likely to interfere with people's concentration.

Rapport building will enable the mentor and mentee to get to know more about each others' preferences in terms of working and learning. This will build trust as well as establish ground rules for the relationship and each session. Appropriate disclosure by both mentor and mentee is the key component during engagement

as it is essential to both building and maintaining the relationship

Up to one quarter of the time may need to be given to this phase depending on how "present" both the mentor and mentee are – i.e. not preoccupied or distracted by other issues.

Enactment

This phase constitutes the "work" of the meeting. The mentor and mentee are engaged in a two-way dialogue. During this period, the mentor will need to focus more on the "process" of the discussion while the mentee provides the "content" by initiating discussion topics, reflections and responses to questions. Both need to be focused and fully present in the meeting.

Activities during this phase may include:

- Examining progress since the last session
- Agreeing the objectives /agenda of the session
- Pre-brief or debrief mentee's activities relating to their learning goals and development plan
- Information and fact finding
- Collaborative analysis and problem solving
- Mentee develops potential new responses to problems or issues

Integration

During this phase the mentee can be encouraged to reality-test their new thoughts or responses. The mentor can facilitate this by challenging their assumptions and supporting the mentee to expand their thinking and build commitment and confidence in their own solutions. The mentor can provide resistance to the mentee's thinking which helps build the mentee's self-awareness and clarity. In practice this phase will overlap or iterate with the enactment phase as new thoughts and ideas about their next steps emerge for the mentee.



Conclusion

The main purpose of the conclusion phase is to bring the meeting to a satisfactory close and ensure that each person reflects on the session, understands the main points that were raised and is focused on the next steps. The mentee may have developed some new insights or ideas. These can be reiterated. The following activities are helpful suggestions to build into the last phase of the meeting:

1. Summarising key points from discussions to ensure understanding.
2. Debrief and reflect on how the meeting went. Information from both the mentor and mentee is useful here to show how both parties are adding value to the relationship. Both may comment on any of the following:
 - What did we value most/find useful or helpful?
 - What outcomes did we achieve?
 - What challenges did we experience?
 - What insights or learning did we gain?
 - How will we use and apply this to what we do next?
3. Agree on the next steps. This may involve the mentor checking with the mentee about what they'll do differently as a result of this meeting, while the mentee commits to actions which will be reviewed in subsequent meetings. Both may decide to follow-up online. This process usually builds energy and results.

Over time it has been shown that mentoring practice can include a range of options: one-on-one mentoring relationships; group mentoring; peer-to-peer mentoring; and online mentoring to individuals and groups, to name a few. All staff can build and sustain an attitude of mentoring in the workplace therefore establishing an environment where the focus is on learning and effective practice.

Mentoring can provide the scaffolding for effective career development and professional integration. The mentees gain essential knowledge, career insights, and information that assist successful careers, along with the support and encouragement offered by the mentor. Mentors in their own development may learn innovative approaches, keep abreast of new thinking, and enjoy the fresh views of their less experienced colleagues. Furthermore, as the relationship benefits increase, so does the likelihood that mentoring partners will be more satisfied in their jobs and committed to the organisation.

Bernadette Rutyna
Systems in Action Pty Ltd

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Human Resources in Children's Services

To provide a high standard of quality care, services need to be able to respond to the needs of the children and families within the community, as well as be responsive towards the needs of the staff working at these services. Management of human resources plays a vital role in ensuring effective service delivery.

The library collection at Noah's Ark Children's Services Resource Unit includes many professional books which aim to provide educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage and administer organisations effectively.

Resources cover a wide range of topics including theories and structures of childcare, administration, organisational planning and finance.



The Essential Managers Manual benefits new and experienced managers alike. It covers all the skills you need from motivating and delegating to negotiating and presenting.

Solutions provides real world answers for directors who work in the challenging and rewarding field of early childhood education.

Managing Children's Services provides the underpinning knowledge and skills necessary to manage and administer children's services programs. Written in three parts, it introduces philosophical and market place perspectives and includes theories and structures of service provision including administration, financial and organisational planning.

Dedicated educators aiming to always provide the best for the children and families are often stretched resulting in tired, exhausted and "burnt out" workers. *Avoiding Burnout* assists in recognising the symptoms of burnout and develops strategies for managing the issues.



7 Habits of Highly Effective People assists the employer and employees by providing clear reference points for everything they do to help understand themselves and others. It can be the catalyst for making the service more dynamic and flexible.

Managing People – Training and Development supports

the manager to gain skills and knowledge to manage the training and development needs of all staff. Management theories and principles are discussed which promote opportunities to plan and develop professional development programs. The learning guide helps put the theory into practice with practical examples, activities and self-check quizzes throughout.

Noah's Ark Resource library is continually sourcing relevant resources for our collection to support all children's services. PSCQ members can also borrow online.

The Library catalogue can be accessed via the Noah's Ark website at www.noahsark.net.au/psqqlibrary.html

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Tina Millar
Noah's Ark Children's Services Resource Unit

My Time, Our Place — Framework for School Age Care

My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care will contribute to the emerging profile of school age care services as significant to wellbeing for school age children. The vision within the document is to extend and enrich children’s experiences in school age care settings. Educators encourage children’s engagement in a range of play and leisure experiences that allow them to feel happy, safe and relaxed, interact with friends, practice social skills, solve problems, try new activities and learn life skills.

Around the State and across Australia there has been a flurry of professional learning activities. Nationally there is a website (www.mytimeourplace.com.au) which provides a wealth of information and sharing opportunities. It will contain newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, blogs and some opportunities for real-time conversations about issues impacting on the sector.

One of the other professional learning opportunities has been a partnership between PSCQ, Brisbane South PSN and the School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University. Jennifer Cartmel, Senior Lecturer in Child and Family studies has taught her regular classes for the course *3013HSV Development, Learning and Practice: Children and Youth* and included educators from local school age care services. This course contained six modules that will help school age care educators develop an understanding of the unique needs of children (5-16 years) and the roles and responsibilities of staff in school age services. The modules included:

- Building relationships with children
- The middle childhood phase
- Programming in school age care

- Research with children
- Partnerships and school age care Services
- Working with stakeholders

The response by students and educators has been overwhelmingly positive. The educators have found it helpful to explore the theory and research that underpins practice in school age care services.

“It was friendly and comforting in that our opinions were accepted and appreciated, but I also found it challenging with the introduction of new theories.”

School Age Care Educator

The students also gained from the examples of practice that the educators discussed during class activities.

One of the key processes that school age care educators have been keen to learn more about is reflective practice. Ongoing learning and reflective practice is a core principle mentioned in the Framework. It is the process that educators will use to transform their practice and create high quality services.

Some educators have been concerned by the term “Critical”, thinking that it is a negative approach criticising what other educators are doing. However critically reflective practice requires educators to think deeply about what they are doing. It requires them to think a lot about themselves, what they value about the lives of children and why they do what they are doing. This is a process about self awareness. Ongoing learning and critical reflection involves problem-solving skills and the ability to see things from the perspective of others even if it is different to one’s own current ideas and thoughts.

The education and training of school age educators needs to better prepare them for the responsibility that they have to children and the wider community. They

need to be encouraged to engage in critical thinking so that they are able to be more reflective and enhance the quality of the services they deliver.

School age care educators are also being reminded to focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as the Framework is based on the values laid out in the Convention. It states that all children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. The Convention also recognises children's rights to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives and respects their familial, cultural and other identities and languages.

The title, "My Time, Our Place", acknowledges the development of the individual child occurring in a community setting. It highlights the need for children to be able to make choices and become involved in problem solving and decision making while contributing to their school age care community. It emphasises that programs in school age care services compliment rather than duplicate the school day. The Framework will be applicable to services offering recreation, play and leisure-based programs within schools or other venues, including services offered in long day care centres and by family day care providers.

The image of the child and changes in childhood, family structures and increased workforce participation contribute to the context in which the Framework was developed. Children are considered to be fully formed individuals with perspectives of their own. They are viewed as strong, competent, resourceful and developing in their social context. These images shape the community responses to policies and programs that strive to nurture children's wellbeing, development and learning.



Children are now living in more diverse life circumstances where their activities are increasingly regulated. They are being reared in social circumstances that are different to previous generations of children. These circumstances shape expectations for programs for school age care services. The impact of out of school care provision on children's lives is dependent upon the quality of the out of school care programs. High quality programs allow children to construct knowledge and help develop their sense of identity, independence and ability to make decisions for themselves.

The Outcomes for Children described in the Framework acknowledge the development of the middle childhood period. Further, the roles and responsibilities of the educators in school age care are described by the principles of school age care pedagogy which underpin practice. The educators draw on a rich repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children's learning by adopting holistic approaches, collaborating with children and acting with intentionality. They also create physical and social school age care environments that have a positive impact on children's development, wellbeing and community-building and that value the cultural and social contexts of children and their families.

The Framework will be a foundation document for the National Quality Standard. It provides direction and guidance for each of the Quality Areas and in particular Outcome 1, about the educational program and practice that engages, stimulates and enhances children's learning and development. *My Time Our Place* – Framework for School Age Care will provide support and status for school age care services which is the fastest growing child care sector in Australia.

Dr Jennifer Cartmel
Griffith University

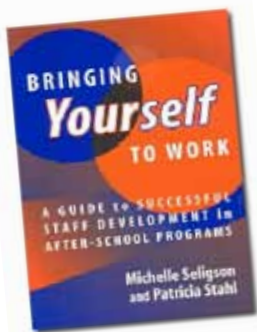
My Time, Our Place

Resources to support services for the new Framework for School Age Care

Australia's first national Framework for School Age Care aims to extend and enrich children's wellbeing and development in school age care settings. With the new Framework now hot off the press, the Resource Library is ready to support and provide resources to these services to support new learning in relation to the Framework.

The Framework acknowledges the importance of play, leisure and learning and aims to extend and enrich children's wellbeing and development in school age care settings. One of the elements of the framework is the "five principles". These principles reflect the theories and research relating to play, leisure and learning. Listed below is a small selection of books from the Noah's Ark Resource Library that have been identified as providing further information for services in relation to these five principles.

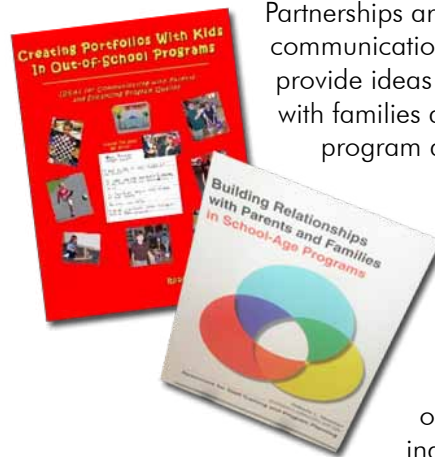
Principle 1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships



Bringing Yourself to Work: A Guide to Successful Staff Development in After-School Programs will help directors and staff to create healthier learning environments for children and youth in after-school programs. It includes advice for dealing with issues commonly faced by staff, such as: learning how to respond to difficult situations with

colleagues, children and parents; a self-assessment tool for analysing individual self-awareness; the ability to relate to others and an understanding of one's role within a group setting; and it outlines the support and skills that staff need to increase self-awareness, sustain healthy relationships and improve group dynamics.

Principle 2. Partnerships



Partnerships are based on effective communication. These two resources provide ideas for communicating with families as well as enhancing program quality.

Creating Portfolios with Kids in Out-of-School Programs includes guidelines for conducting and documenting observations of individual children as well as tips for collecting representative items to build individual portfolios with children which then can be shared with families.

In *Building Relationships with Parents and Families In School-Age Programs*, school age care coordinators and educators will find staff training activities and tools for working with families. The resource is divided into three sections:

- Reaching out to parents as partners
- Assessing the Needs, Interests and Concerns of Parents
- Making Connections with Parents



Principle 3. High Expectations and Equity



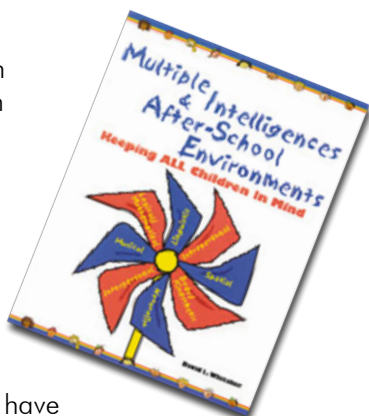
This principle confirms the belief that school age care educators who are committed to equity believe in all children's capacities to access opportunities and succeed regardless of diverse circumstances or abilities.

The resource *Can I Play Too* provides new ideas, knowledge and strategies for a school age care service to enable access for all children in school age care programs. It discusses definition of disability, appropriate language use specifically in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act, and touches on other partners in the inclusion process including families.

Principle 4. Respect for Diversity

Being aware of and understanding diversity in school age care relies on educators keeping all children in mind.

Multiple Intelligences and After-School Environments provides information and ideas for the school age care environment to have activities and resources that meet all children's needs. It discusses the theory of multiple intelligences and provides the reader with concrete ways in which adults can provide activities, opportunities and experiences that meet a diverse array of learning styles. Included are lists of materials and activities under headings such as creating, constructing,



discovering, relaxing, pretending, reading and writing and playing games.

Principle 5. Ongoing Learning and Reflective Practice



Seeking ways to build professional knowledge within the school age care sector is a continuous task. Collaboration with the community is vital in this role. Reflective practice enables the educator to

gather insights into their practice to be able to examine their environment and be able to change as the need arises. *School Age Ideas and Activities* is one of many resources held in

the library to assist the educator with ideas, suggestions and activities support reflection by asking individuals questions to encourage deep thought and discussions.

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Tina Millar
Noah's Ark Children's Services Resource Unit

Action Research, Play and the *Early Years Learning Framework*

The “R” word (Research) is not something early childhood educators usually associate with what they do as part of everyday practice, and as we found, the idea of making action research part of daily practice can be quite daunting. But eighteen educators who were involved in a year-long action research project about play and the *Early Years Learning Framework* worked out how to do exactly that.

They embarked on innovative projects that were unique to their settings and services, and which brought about planned change. In what follows we provide some background information about action research, introduce projects in which participants were involved, and give examples of what was achieved over the year for the participants and for us as facilitators and mentors.

Background to the Action Research Projects

Action research allows educators to investigate aspects of their work in their own setting over time. Undertaking an action research project can be daunting at first because there is no set plan for the research. Rather, educators begin with questions about an aspect of their practice and collect information (data) to learn more. Plans for changes to practices are then implemented, and further questions are asked about what occurred and why. Action research is an unfolding process that requires educators to embrace uncertainty in the early stages of a project. If you have questions about aspects of your practice, then action research provides a useful means of investigating these questions in a sustained and purposeful way.

The 18 participants with whom we worked were highly motivated. They were keen to investigate

everyday practices in their settings that related to play. Participants were able to identify easily an aspect of play they wanted to explore that would provoke them to think about current practices, plan for change and ultimately improve practice. Once they had settled on their topic of investigation, participants began cycles of critical reflection, data gathering, planning and action that were aimed at producing changes and improving practice. Educators worked in a range of services and settings (long day care; family day care; school age care; inclusion support facilitators) and engaged in a wide variety of projects related to play.



As facilitators and mentors, our role was to visit participants in their services to provide research support, and to share in their learning. We also facilitated an action research project day every 4-6 weeks in which all participants came together to develop thinking and skills around critical reflection, the use of theories in our work, documentation, working with the *Early Years Learning Framework*, and writing for publication.

The Projects

A wide variety of projects explored aspects of play. Here we describe some of the projects that were undertaken by providing the title and brief details about each to give an idea of what we investigated and how we collected data.

Reconnecting children with nature in school age care.

We gathered information through surveys, drawings, photographs and narratives to establish what our stakeholders saw as natural play and whether it was deemed important to them. As educators we were passionate about the benefits of outdoor natural play, and early on identified the role we played in perpetuating limited access to the outdoors. This was the catalyst for a philosophy and routine review, to acknowledge and protect the unique opportunity that natural outdoor play delivers.

From a social work model to an educational model: An Inclusion Support Facilitator (ISF) perspective.

As an Inclusion Support Facilitator (ISF), I was interested in looking at ways to promote a shift from a social work model to group learning in my work with services. Under the social work model, support was usually requested with a specific child as the focus. The expectation was for additional staff that would “fix” the challenges. In an educational model, educators recognise their own strengths and knowledge, and use this to support all children. They develop strategies to recognise each individual child’s uniqueness and abilities. I reviewed how I approached and worked with services to find better ways of supporting a shift in the model of practice employed to support children and families.

Take outdoor play off the endangered list.

We collected data from parents and families about their outdoor childhood memories and their suggestions about how to improve our outdoor play area. Children provided information about how they liked to play at the centre, at home or at the park, and we gathered information about children and adult learning styles. Using this information, we made changes to the outdoor environment, took photos of before and after backyard revamps, had children conduct a safety risk assessment, created learning stories with the children about special projects being undertaken in the yard, and sought feedback from children about the changes.



Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in play.

The impetus for this project was the lack of emphasis in the Child Care Regulations about understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. We wanted children’s play to be respectful of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our centre and community. We made a connection with a member of the local Aboriginal community to assist in gathering resources and building a positive relationship with the local Indigenous community. We thought this would help us to have a better understanding of the importance of including perspectives about Indigenous cultures for ourselves, staff, children, families and the greater community. These experiences have helped us to be more confident in acknowledging and embracing Indigenous cultures and to begin to break down our own stereotyped understandings of Indigenous Australians.

Have we regulated the fun out of play?

This project started by looking at the impact the Queensland regulations have on children’s play and the opportunity for risk in play by posing the question: Does avoiding the risks reduce the benefits? We believe that challenge and risk allow children to test limits; we feel that if educators provide encouragement and proper supervision, regulations could be relaxed, thus allowing more challenging opportunities for children to learn through play and exploration.

Family day care educators and professional learning.

Within Family Day Care services, there is a wide range of experience and preparedness to embrace changes that have come with the *Early Years Learning Framework*. Educators initially completed written surveys to indicate how they felt about the Framework and what their needs were. We used this feedback to make changes to the way we delivered training and the workshops we provided. Feedback from newly devised workshops and discussion groups was used to provide further individual support and assistance and to guide future ideas about ways to support our educators’ professional learning.



Changes to play space and the impact on children's play.

Our motivation began from identifying that as a new centre and a new team, our environment was highly commercialised (plastic) and not naturally aesthetic. We wanted our play spaces to provoke curiosity, investigation and enquiries that were meaningful, had purpose and were connected to children's play. Surveys were offered to staff and parents. The parent survey gave us an idea of the types of environments and materials that children enjoy in their homes. Children's participation was sought through group discussions, with children's voices highlighted through documentation and photos of how they see their environment (from their level).

Benefits of uninterrupted play.

At our service, educators had often asked, 'Why do we have to pack up just because it is morning tea time?' It would seem that we would just get involved in play and activities and then it was time to prepare for group time and then morning tea. Educators and children found this frustrating. We posed the question: How do children benefit from uninterrupted play? Educators were asked to be aware of times they were interrupting children's play and to put themselves in the children's position when they were being interrupted for nappy changes and meal times. We focused on how children could benefit through opportunities to explore all areas of play and make decisions that affect the running of their day. We took observations at morning tea time/group time to support our reasons for change. Following a trial, we introduced a flowing morning tea and an indoor/outdoor program.

Change begins at home.

The Inclusion Support Facilitator (ISF) role has in the past positioned us as "experts" or "keepers of knowledge", which has limited our ability to learn new ways and new ideas. After many years as an educator, I had developed "truths" and unspoken understandings around familiar practices that kept me in my comfort zone. Action research for me was an invitation to dig deeply into the understandings of multiple truths and

critical thinking, challenging my taken for granted truths about my role, about early childhood educators and about children.

Pushing the boundaries: When we stop saying 'No'.

We used a question we have asked so many times, but reflected on and thought about only a little: Is children's play affected by our "cotton wool" or preventative approach to play — that is, removing or stopping anything that could be seen as a "hazard" to prevent injury to children? We started by surveying families and educators about their memories of childhood play and, given no boundaries, the experiences they would love to provide or see the children participating in. This began with a few small changes in the environment, including allowing children access to real shovels and hoes with which to dig in the open garden area. Once the idea was planted that we didn't necessarily have to hold children back so much, the philosophy of children's play within the centre changed.

Achievements

Achievements in action research can occur on multiple levels. We observed positive change in participants' practices, their professional relationships, and their experiences with research. Here, we share some examples of outcomes, reflections and comments documented throughout the project.

Changes in practice

Changes were seen in participants' work with children, as well as their approaches to reflective practice. Examples documented for the final sharing day on June 10, 2011 include:

- Educators reflecting before saying 'No' to children, and investigating ways of encouraging children's choice of play in a safe way, sometimes by adapting slightly, and sometimes through discussions with children to assist them in learning to manage risk.



- 'Now, I persistently look at what I do and why I do it (in which theoretical framework I am working), considering who benefits and who is disadvantaged by my actions, and other choices I have available.'
- 'Our daily curriculum is built around children's preferences and interests in a much richer sense, with increased participation from parents.'
- 'Our observations and documentation of children's play scenarios is richer, with added links to relevant literature and theory.'

Changes in professional relationships

Participants' reflections about changes to professional relationships were also documented for the final sharing day. Relevant comments include:

- 'Our staff have become much more confident in their own abilities and can advocate for their environment, centre and the profession. Building community partnerships with other centres has also occurred.'
- 'The project has brought our team together collaboratively in our focus – what to change and incorporate, taking in others' feedback, research, and thinking outside the square.'
- 'As director, I have learnt how to inspire others and involve their ideas to gain more ownership and utilise their own strengths.'
- 'As an educator I am now seeking peer support and mentoring



Experiences with research

Many of the emails we received from participants mentioned their positive experiences with processes of action research, which was so very different from the apprehension expressed at the beginning of the process:

- 'It is so inspiring to see the great steps we as a group are making in the changes to our services! I know for myself and [my colleague] we love hearing what everyone else is doing and to use each other's successes and failures as guidance to make similar changes in our setting! I'm so glad we joined this action research group...'
- '... this has been a great journey for me, I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to attend the AR project... this experience has inspired my practice and expanded my thinking.'
- 'I have really enjoyed working with you all. It has been great, and also fun!'
- 'Thank you so much for your visit yesterday, it has truly inspired [us]. We had our staff meeting last night and introduced to our team the concept and question regarding our Action Research Project. Most of the staff were intrigued by the information you provided us with... it opened a whole new line of thinking...'

Conclusion

As facilitators and mentors we have been inspired by the ability of educators to reflect on aspects of their program and to enact change. Through the processes of gathering data, deep critique and reflection, consultation and collaboration, educators have enacted changes that have made a difference to the children, families and their peers. These stories of changing and changed practice show the dynamism of the field and the ways in which educators are creative and innovative in their individual settings and circumstances.

Sue Grieshaber and Melinda Miller
Queensland University of Technology

An Educator's Journey

Central West Fitzroy Professional Support Network

The purpose of the Central West Fitzroy Professional Support Network (PSN) is to enable access to Professional Development opportunities that respond to the identified needs of all educators in the region. The Peer Support Networking Group is one such initiative that seeks to achieve this vision.

Anita White was instrumental in setting up the Peer Support Networking Groups, which are designed to provide early childhood educators with informal opportunity to engage in a professional conversation exploring the National Quality Standards. It has also provided a way of supporting educators to build upon existing relationships and partnerships within their local communities.

The Central West Fitzroy PSN agreed to support this initiative through providing small financial contributions for things such as venue hire, catering and administrative costs etc. Attendance continues to grow at these events highlighting the great success of this particular initiative. To hear more about Anita, her journey in and out of children's services and connecting with community please keep reading.

Jan Ungerer, Health and Community Services Workforce Council

I joined the Central West Fitzroy Professional Support network in February this year and have been fortunate within our group to co-host a fantastic conference to support the regional services. We had some brilliant and passionate people sharing their wisdom and in turn I have seen this overflow into some of the services I support. This has been wonderful for the children and also for the staff. There is so much happening with the reforms that although it can be overwhelming we need to keep paddling with the flow of the stream, and I hope that with the many learning opportunities being held educators will embrace the changes and advocate for the importance of our sector and the future of our children.

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a teacher. Some of my fondest memories of my early schooling years are the relationships I had with my teachers — three of whom still very much come to mind. Growing up and living in a small country town provided me with a carefree childhood; everyone knew everyone else.

For high school the decision was made that I would be going off to boarding school in Toowoomba. My

relationships with my teachers there are memorable and all impacted my learning in a variety of ways. Being at boarding school we had longer school holidays and during this time I would return to my old primary school and volunteer in the classrooms. I actually ended up following one group of children through their schooling years from preschool to grade three. I thoroughly enjoyed spending my time with these children and supporting their learning.

On completing high school I journeyed to Brisbane to study; a college trainer had visited my school and from their stories I had come away with visions in my mind of working with a family in some exotic countries far away from my small town life. Well it didn't quite happen like that, but it led me to a world of opportunity. I completed a certificate in nanny training, and over the years I worked in a variety of roles from nanny to director. During this time I continued my studies and travelled overseas twice.

I did leave childcare for a period of time that allowed me to broaden my horizons and provided me with some great learning and skill development that would support my future position when I returned to the sector.

I left because the role I played in educating the children was, in my mind, being dictated too much by risk management, policy and procedure with less focus on what the children wanted to do.

I guess during my time away from the sector I was able to reflect on my beliefs, my culture and how practices were impacting on early learning in other societies. This allowed me to form a very strong belief about how I could impact children's lives but also a very strong understanding of myself, an ability to challenge myself, to drive myself and a passion to do better.

I returned to the sector in 2008 as Area Manager for ABC Learning Centres just prior to the company entering the receivership process. This was a very uncertain time for many, and it was definitely a time to look forward. In this role various conversations with my team led me to undertake further study and I have since completed my Certificate 4 in TAE and have been studying a dual Diploma of Business / Diploma of Management. I believe that continued learning is a very powerful tool not only in providing further information but in supporting the understanding for what we do.

In my current role I have been focusing on "bridging the gaps" — getting out and about and making connections with the community and other services. I have thoroughly enjoyed the enthusiasm and the passion that so many of these wonderful people have in providing high quality care and education services for children.

Recently, with Goodstart's permission, I started some networking groups in my area; Rockhampton, Gladstone & Emerald. These groups have been well supported by many different providers and have enabled some fantastic sharing and learning. I believe that so much of the knowledge we hold and the value that we bring as a group, whether within a service or as colleagues so often goes unnoticed. These groups are exploring the new Quality Areas and discussing how these may look in each service and also challenging the status quo and prompting thoughts and ideas for best practice.

Having an opportunity to "stop, look and listen" is such a necessary tool. We need time out to talk and think and be allowed to "be", whether this is to be the teacher, the learner, the enquirer. For me it certainly represents a time for me to be creative in many ways; the poem used for the conference flyer, the picture to go with the poem — both of these ideas stemmed from conversations with colleagues. Being creative also allows me to think outside of the square when it comes to my approach to service delivery and also in the everyday work I do. The discussions I have with my team of directors often sow a seed in my mind during a conversation.

A key comment that stands out to me is one which a former teacher of mine wrote on my reference after I completed some volunteer work with one of her then classes: 'My only regret is that Anita does not study to be a teacher.' This is something that I have reflected on many times but only in recent years have I truly realised that teaching is what early childhood educators do, but that the common perception from outside is that we just care and play. This has had a huge impact on how I advocate for my colleagues and what we do.

There is never a dull moment and I have some many more projects to undertake; before I finish one there is probably another two in the background waiting for some attention.

To summarise this, I guess what I hope people will take from this when they read it is that we have such an important role. This is such an amazing opportunity; don't think of it as a one size fits all, think outside the square and don't be afraid of the responsibility. Take it as an opportunity to learn with them. Weren't we all in that same place so however many years ago? We have the most wonderful job in the world — to "be", "belong" and "become".



Anita White

Bicultural Support Services

I'd like to share with you the experience of one Cultural Support Worker (CSW) who recently attended a child care centre once a week for a four-week period. It is one of the many success stories that our CSWs share with us regularly. Here is Simmi's story. If you would like to contact us to obtain information about how we could support your service please email us on bsa@mdabne.org.au or contact your local Inclusion Support Agency (ISA). It is a free service through PSCQ and is operated by the Multicultural Development Association (MDA).

Aydan Inal, Bicultural Support Coordinator



I would like to share my experience of working as a CSW with the Multicultural Development Association (MDA) in a child care centre in regional Queensland. My involvement with this work began when I was approached by MDA to assist a child from my country of origin, India. Before commencing the position I was required to attend MDA's training sessions to learn about the role of the CSW and how to help the staff at the child care centre build their ability to communicate with and include children from different cultures. Aydan Inal wanted me to support the Indian child and simultaneously share certain aspects of the culture of my home country with other children and the educators.

My days in the child care centre were very exciting and memorable. My first day at the centre started with a general discussion with the centre director who gave me a brief introduction to the centre, the educators and the children. I was then given the opportunity to meet the beautiful little girl from India. She was standing in one corner of the room, her thumb inside her mouth, looking at me. As I approached her slowly, she started moving backward. I then began to speak to her slowly and softly in Hindi and had the pleasure of seeing a smile appear on her little face. She immediately called out, 'Chachi,' (similar to "Auntie"). What a wonderful feeling!

I visited the centre each Wednesday for three hours, for a four-week period, and each week I watched her become more comfortable and develop a greater

sense of belonging in the centre. The educators and I developed a plan of several different activities that I could do with the children in the centre. These activities were based on teaching the children about and involving them in many aspects of Indian culture.

When I began to conduct some of these activities with the other children in the centre, they were quite excited to see my clothes, the bright colours and pictures of things and places that they had never seen before. The children were very curious, asking lots of questions and seemed genuinely eager to learn about a different culture. The little girl from India gradually began to participate, even taking initiative to show the other children her home state on a map of India. It seemed that having knowledge to share with the other children helped her to become much more confident and to reconnect with the parts of her identity that are so strongly rooted in Indian culture. Eventually as her sense of belonging continued to grow, she began talking to everyone with a smile, established comfortable communication with other children and began to play!

When I met with the little girl's mother, she greeted me very warmly saying, 'My daughter always talks about you. She is very happy now and looks forward to coming to child care every day.'

I really enjoyed my experience working with the children and educators. I hope my presence has helped to ignite the children's curiosity about other cultures and they have learnt something that can help everyone to feel comfortable communicating with people from different cultures in the future.

Resources from the Indigenous Professional Support Unit

Look Ere, Look Ere is a deadly book full of activities happening in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services throughout Queensland.

The activities are linked to local culture and show a sense of belonging as their centre is in their back yard, being, as the children make sense of things around them and becoming, as they work with one another, staff and local Elders in the communities, to grow strong.

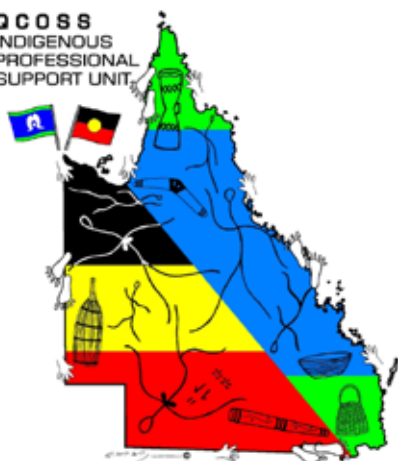
The activities can be implemented in playgroups, long day care and OSHC services. We hope this book encourages non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to celebrate, respect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the way they plan and implement their programs. The services are proud to share this snapshot of their service with you.



Our Place ... Our Dreaming is a resource that goes into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in more detail and describes where they are, how diverse they all are and how they run. It is a great way to share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture with other services, whether they are playgroups, long day care or OSHC.

There are lots of ideas you can include in your own programs creating a deeper sense of belonging, being and becoming for children, families and staff in everyday things. The book also offers relevant information about support relating to services for children and is useful for staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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Mackay Learning Circle: Early Childhood Education

'Community participation may be understood as emerging in a community of place involving collective actions to undertake activities that are at some level perceived to be of benefit to the community.'

(Taylor et al 2006, p. 45)

In the case of PSCQ's Professional Support Networks, the community is that of educators, children and families and, at times, broader community stakeholders in the children's services sector within a geographic region. Professional Support Networks come together to undertake the planning of activities and initiatives to benefit educators (through workforce development and planning), children and families in the region.

These networks strive for effective participation, which is dependent on 'how people take up and make use of what is on offer and supportive processes that can help build capacity, nurture voice and enable people to empower themselves' (Cornwall 2008, p. 275). This includes understanding that different purposes require 'different forms of engagement by different kinds of participants' and that 'being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice' (2008, p. 280). Through participatory processes, networks identify and prioritise professional support needs, plan their implementation and contribute to broader consultations to influence policy and training for the children's services sector.

In addition, it is hoped that bringing together educators and other community organisations and individuals over a period of time will also build 'capacity of community members to address the challenges facing their community and to facilitate increased control by local community members over decisions affecting the community' (Healy, 2006, p. 247). The following article represents an example of how a Mackay PSN member has brought together members of her community to learn, share ideas and build on current practice specifically in relation to the New National Quality Standard and the associated Frameworks.

Melalie Collie, Heath and Community Services Workforce Council

The introduction of National Quality Standards along with the inclusion of *Early Years Learning Framework* in 2012 will change the face of the child care industry forever and for the better. The big question on everyone's mind is: How do we prepare for this shift in child care practice and process?

I am an Area Manager working with ABC Learning Centres in the Mackay Region and have a great working relationship with my Regional Manager and other Area Managers in the Brisbane and Gold Coast

regions, which is based on phone and email contact and a couple of face-to-face visits per year.

As a result of preparing for the introduction of the new standards, ABC Learning (Goodstart) developed a series of session notes covering all of the quality areas and requested that these notes be used as the basis to establish meetings regarding implementation of the standards at a manager level, centre director level and finally at a staff level so that conversations and learnings were relevant to the job role.



Because all of my regional colleagues were based either in Brisbane or the Gold Coast, I decided to see if I could gather a comparable group from my local community and carry out the discussions in Mackay rather than travel south.

Rosemary Shanks from TAFE very graciously offered to send out my invitation via her email network to see who else may be interested in participating.

We had a resounding response from across the region and from a variety of services, all of which were interested in meeting once a month to learn from each other and share ideas about practice and process and how we could build on what we were already doing.

We have met every month since June and many participants have indicated that they would like to continue meetings after the new legislation is put in place in 2012.

We have members from community and not-for-profit based child care, privately owned child care centres, Family Day Care Schemes and other support organisations such as the Department of Education and Training Central Queensland Region, TAFE, and ISA from across the region.

As a direct result of this group coming together, a group member, Melissa Davidson has taken on the role of organising a bus tour to several centres in the Mackay region so that educators can see what others are doing and how they may be able to improve their own practice.

Members of this group who are also members of the Professional Support Network have also come together to organise a children's services conference aimed at assisting educators to build their own personal self to become more successful in their role of an educator.

It is at this event that we will launch the *Mackay Learning Circle – Early Childhood Education Blog* that has been built to provide an ongoing link for all educators who are participating in this network. Membership is free and open to anyone involved in providing education in early childhood.

For more information about how to join, please contact Maria Porter at:

mporter@childcare.com.au

Maria Porter

References

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PSCQ 2012 Membership

As you are aware, the PSCQ project has been delivering a wide variety of innovative and targeted professional development and support for five years.

Our contract to deliver this great program runs out in June 2012, and the Workforce Council are eagerly awaiting the tender process and intend to work towards the continued delivery of PSCQ.

The yearly PSCQ membership for 2012 is now open and you are encouraged to join to ensure you can access all the great benefits this membership offers.

PSCQ 2012 Membership Benefits

PSCQ 2012 Members will receive excellent benefits including:

- FREE access to the extensive collection held at Noah's Ark's General Resource Library. All books, resources, etc. delivered and returned 100% free!
- FREE access to the Remote Area Advisory Service (RAAS)*
- Financial support to participate in the Staff Exchange Program*
- Access to the In Service Contribution Program* which provides Financial support for your service to run your own professional development session/s
- The opportunity to access various events for free including Peer Support Groups*, Professional Luncheons* and *Online Forums*

(*Conditions Apply: all Membership benefits apply ONLY to the Primary Membership holder. Proof of current membership may be requested)

Eligibility

All Queensland based Children's Services and associated support services are eligible to become PSCQ 2012 Members. Membership eligibility is based on both your service type and whether you are part of the target group or non-target group for PSCQ.

Target Group Membership

PSCQ's Target Group consists of Australian Government approved Child Care Services. These are Queensland child care services that receive Child Care Benefit (CCB), Budget-Based Child Care Services and Queensland Inclusion Support Agencies.

Therefore PSCQ Target group includes Long Day Care, Outside School Hours Care, In-home Care, Family Day Care services, Budget Based Services and Inclusion Support Agencies.

Non-Target Group Membership

Services which are not Australian Government approved Child Care Services (i.e. those not receiving Child Care Benefit, and non-Budget-Based Child Care Services) and those services that provide support to child care services are considered to be PSCQ's Non-Target Group.

Therefore the PSCQ non-target group includes Kindergartens, Limited Hours Care Services, Early Years Centres (that don't include a CCB service) HUBs, TAFEs, RTOs and University.

Types of Membership

As well as target and non-target groups there are several different levels of membership, each designed to suit different circumstances. Please read carefully through the following types of membership to determine which best suits you.

Membership Type	Eligibility	This level of membership will suit
Individual Educator/ Staff	Target Group	Individual educators working with a Family Day Scheme, in a Centre or School Age Care Service who want access to information and services for themselves.
	Non-Target Group	Individual educators or teachers in kindergartens, Limited Hours Care services etc. and support personnel who work in RTOs, TAFE or Uni etc.
Services with less than 49 places	Target Group	A Centre or School Age Care service that has less than 49 licensed places or a family day care or In-home care service with less than 49 occupied places.
	Non-Target Group	A Kindergarten, Limited Hours Care service, Early Years Centre etc. that has less than 49 licensed places.
Services with 50 places or more	Target Group	A Centre or School Age Care service that has 50 licensed places or more, or a Family Day Care or In-home care service with more than 50 occupied places.
	Non-Target Group	A Kindergarten, Limited Hours Care service, Early Years Centre etc. that has 50 licensed places or more or an RTOs, TAFE or Uni etc.
Organisations with more than 5 but less than 25 services	Target Group	An organisation that operates more than 5 centres, School Age Care, Family Day Care or In-home care services but not more than 25 of these services and pays for all their services at once, will receive a 10% discount for each service membership. <i>For organisations having services in both licensed places categories, the level of membership will be based on the category in which the majority of services fit.</i>
Organisations with more than 25 but less than 50 services	Target Group	An organisation that operates more than 25 centres, School Age Care, Family Day Care or In-home care services but not more than 50 of these services and pays for all their services at once, will receive a 20% discount for each service membership. <i>For organisations having services in both licensed places categories, the category will be based on the category in which the majority of services fit.</i>
Organisations with more than 50 services	Target Group	An organisation that operates more than 50 School Age Care, Family Day Care or In-home care services and pays for all their services at once, will receive a 30% discount for each service membership. <i>For organisations having services in both licensed places categories, the category will be based on the category in which the majority of services fit.</i>

Please see the Membership Forms on our website at www.pscq.org.au to apply for the level of PSCQ membership that suits your circumstances.



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Health and Community Services Workforce Council Inc
Ground Floor, 303 Adelaide Street Brisbane Q 4000
Unit 1, Level 2 390 Flinders Street Townsville Q 4810
P: (07) 3234 0190 F: (07) 3234 0474
E: info@workforce.org.au W: www.workforce.org.au

The Professional Support Coordinator is an initiative funded by the Australian Government under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. Feedback and queries should initially be directed to the professional Support Coordinator in your state. Further information can be sought by contacting the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.