

reflektions

GOWRIE AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION • SPRING 2011 • ISSUE 44



The Flood

Physical Activity of Preschoolers at Lady Gowrie Centres Tasmania (Part 3)

Building EC Leadership Capacity

Development of the National Quality Framework

Reflections at the EYLF Professional Learning Program Workshop



Reflections is a quarterly publication by Gowrie Australia for educators and families in Children's Services.

PUBLISHER

TTR Print Management Pty Ltd on behalf of Gowrie Australia

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ISSN 144-5387. Issue 44, Spring 2011

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This publication is supported by the Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations through the Child Care Conference and Publication Support Scheme

Dear Colleagues

The catastrophic floods experienced on the eastern seaboard earlier this year caused much heartache and pain for so many. In this edition of *Reflections* it is uplifting to read of the 'rebirth' of the St Thomas's Riverview Kindergarten in Brisbane. After being decimated by the floods, the article takes readers on the journey to reconstruct the outdoor play space into a wonderland to support children's learning and development. All this achieved through the generosity of a committed community.

While on the topic of outdoor play spaces, this edition includes the final article of a three part series reporting on the key results related to the physical activity patterns of preschoolers from the joint research project between the University of Tasmania Faculty of Education and Lady Gowrie Tasmania. The key recommendations from the research are pertinent for early childhood education and care professionals as well as parents and guardians of preschoolers. The articles have generated a great deal of interest from readers, with the researcher, Dr Janet Dymont, being contacted for further details and information of the project. One such reader has kindly permitted her email to be published in this edition.

Readers are encouraged to provide comment or feedback on any article published and articles can be submitted for consideration by contacting your local Gowrie centre – contact details are available on p2 of each edition of *Reflections*.

With the introduction of the National Quality Framework from January 2012, the article from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations reports on the journey to date and the key milestones from transition to implementation.

The government funded *Early Years Learning Framework* Professional Learning Program included 65 workshops across Australia. These workshops have had a major focus on critical reflection, which is one of the five Principles of the EYLF. Lennie Barblett's article highlights the importance of focused professional conversations with colleagues as a way of engaging with the EYLF to build a community of practice.

As highlighted in previous articles published in *Reflections*, to ensure the reforms are best implemented in ways that reflect early childhood philosophy and pedagogy, leadership is essential. Dr Elizabeth Stamopoulos provides an insight into research on leadership models. This is an article which provokes readers to consider leadership across the elements of professional knowledge, an interpretive lens, courage and relational trust as the basis on which leadership capacity can be strengthened within early childhood education and care contexts.

In closing, I have much pleasure in announcing that as a consequence of support from the Australian Government, Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, through the Child Care Conference and Publication Support Scheme, the distribution of *Reflections* will be extended to include the broader early childhood education and care sector. From the next edition, a PDF version of the publication will be available from individual Gowrie websites. On behalf of Gowrie Australia, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of the Department in recognising the value of this publication to the early childhood education and care sector.

Until next time.

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CEO, Lady Gowrie Tasmania

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The Flood

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Not-for-profit organisations, like community kindergartens, are usually organised by altruistic people whose only desire is to work with like-minded people, to improve their community. It is the driving force behind every community kindergarten. In our case, in the past 30 years St. Thomas's Riverview Kindergarten Brisbane has twice been in dire straits, and each time it has been parents who have ensured its survival. The latest emergency was the 2011 floods.

During the last major Brisbane flood, 37 years ago, there was no building on this site but the history of this erstwhile sugar cane land is one of inundation. When the predictions were beamed through Brisbane that the river height could be higher than the 1974 flood, parents were emailed with the information that the land had been flooded in the past. Despite the absence of many parents on summer vacation, a group came to the kindergarten and removed all computers, files, books and puzzles, and then stacked furniture on tables and trestles as high as possible – the pile was topped with the rocking horse! Some returned 3 times in the afternoon and night. Strangers walking past joined in the pack-up. It was the pointer of things to come. When the water came, the word was that the kindergarten had gone.

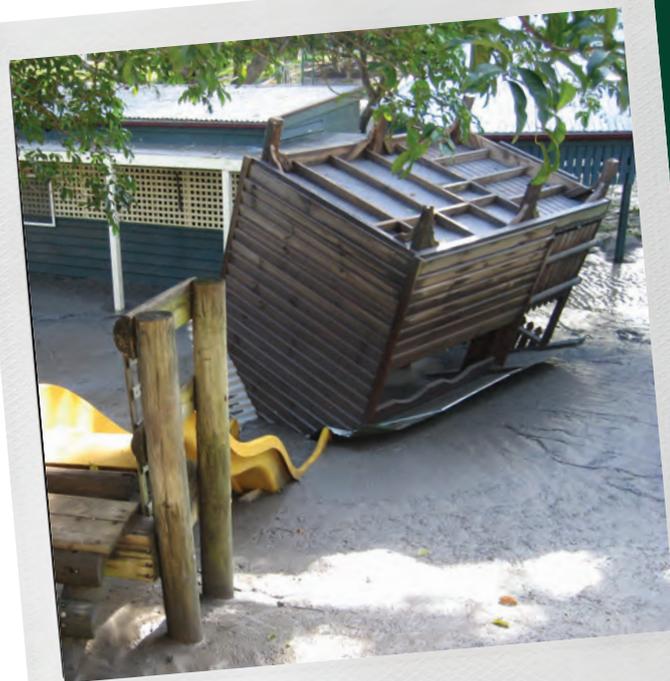
As the water receded the only access was on foot. The biggest shock was the playground. Water had risen over 4 metres and entered the building, covering the skirting boards. There was no way the term could commence on the first day of the school year. In a tremendous show of support families and strangers, past pupils (now young adults and adolescents) and parents whose children had not even started at the kindergarten, arrived to shovel mud, wash floors and equipment and remove mud slicked equipment that couldn't be saved.

Mud in the lower level was calf high on the men, the force of the water had hurled a garden playhouse from the lowest point to almost the highest. It landed on its roof and as the water receded, the shed, outside toilet block, Ally House and sand pit were filled with sticky mud. The sandpit was transformed into a pig's paradise. Shovels wielded by men and women dug out mud, lifted brick paving and reduced the sandpit to an empty mud smeared pit. The little house was righted with the help of brute force and an obliging man with an excavator. It sat in the car park until repaired by an ex-grandfather and his mate who travelled from the north side of Brisbane. Then it was lifted by crane to its original position.

Nothing more was done in the lower playground – it was fenced off. The front yard was transformed with artificial grass and a temporary sandpit. Parents painted the interior, new cabinets and joinery were purchased to replace the particle board cupboards that had disintergrated and core filled doors and skirting boards that were swollen with flood water. Canite noticeboards were removed, also carpeting and anything that had been on the floor. No one could lift the piano. Our Central Governing Body (Gowrie Qld) had found alternative accommodation for us, if needed, but within a fortnight of non-stop work, the kindergarten was transformed and opened its door - just one week late.



The kindergarten from the street



The topsy turvy garden playhouse



From pig's paradise to pristine sand



The newly designed and landscaped lower playground

A member of the committee with a work history in early childhood education undertook to plan the lower playground. It was an opportunity to completely transform the area. After first considering the needs and philosophy of St. Thomas's, a concept map was drawn up to give pointers towards which we could aim. Next, armed with a local publication, *Naturally - The outdoor playspace for children birth to five years*, as well as browsing on the Internet, consulting our yellow pages and many visits to local parks and obliging kindergartens, a plan was formulated. This was produced for parent and children comment. A group discussion using photographic images and a ground plan led to the children's suggestions of what they wanted to have included. Their notions were drawn and painted and pinned with accompanying documentation to a poster board.

It took a long time for things to happen. The kindergarten is blessed with two families who have building companies and, when possible, men from these companies were released to work on the playground. A bulldozer worked for days removing the old climbing platform and the soft fall that had been undermined by the water and later, changing levels, digging paths and preparing the ground for a 'dry creek' bed. The exciting transformation began. Builders extended the undercover area shed, concrete trucks pumped cement into a playground that never had any! The idea was to create textured walkways from the higher to the lower levels, zigzagging in different directions, skirting the building and providing alternative paths for the children to follow. A company that builds climbing equipment installed new equipment and a bridge that links the upper and lower levels over a textured path to a mound that has a variety of approaches, including rubber tyres and staggered vertical logs. Soft fall, pebbles and rocks edge the creek bed that is fed by a

hand pump linked to a water tank. A fun idea to keep cool in the summer days is a large green frog that can spray water into the dry creek bed – again linked to the water tank.

A kindergarten mother who has a landscaping business applied the soft touches with the most amazing array of drought resistant plants, cool ferns (not a fishbone within cooe), herbs and grasses that would be strong enough to resist the pressure of straying feet creating goat tracks (desire lines) through some gardens. One garden has been planted around a camellia that survived the flood with plants that are European but which will add colour to a part of the original embankment. This borders the slide – it has been resurfaced and installed and had been transported from the first site of the kindergarten 24 years ago. Hidden throughout the garden are tree ornaments of butterflies and dragonflies and a small windmill spins with river breezes. In the front yard a bright red car replaces the Fred Flintstone car built by fathers long ago and sadly submerged in the flood.

At last the lower playground was opened to running feet. It is a joy to see the children run across the hardy turf, scramble up on the tyre, climb on the new apparatus, work the pump, dig in the enlarged digging patch and balance around edges. The "pig's paradise", long vacant, has been cleaned and filled with pristine new sand and digging children. Already the children are using equipment in ways unimagined by the planners – the bridge has become not just a means to cross over a textured walkway, but a monkey bar to traverse the area, and the large tyre a cave.

Parents who have worked so hard for this to happen are as delighted as the children in the transformation. It is a magical wonderland for learning, challenging, investigating, role playing, social interchange, problem solving and imagination. As Max said "Let the rumpus begin"!

Physical Activity of Preschoolers at Lady Gowrie Centres Tasmania

(Final of a three part series)

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INTRODUCTION. In the previous two editions of *Reflections*, we presented the foundations and preliminary results of a joint research project between Lady Gowrie Tasmania and researchers from the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. As described in the previous articles, this project aims to increase knowledge about the impact that playground design can have in relation to the creation of a healthier physical and social environment and the promotion of physical activity on playgrounds. In this final article, we present some of the key results related to the physical activity patterns of the preschoolers.

With a view to tackling the growing obesity epidemic in young children, a number of interventions are being trialled at preschools with a view to getting children engaged in more physical activity. In this article, we add to this knowledge base by exploring the physical activity levels of preschoolers during outside playtime as well as the role of early childhood education and care professionals in facilitating physical activity opportunities during outdoor playtime.

The research team recorded the physical activity behaviours of preschoolers at four Lady Gowrie Tasmania Early Childhood Education and Care Centres over a one month period. During this time, a total of 2361 children were observed and, irrespective of gender, the following results emerged: almost half of the children were engaged in Sedentary physical activity (46%), compared with only 36% in Moderate and 18% in Vigorous. These results certainly challenge a commonly held perception that preschool children are active, busy, and “on-the-go” the majority of the time. Moreover, these findings add to a growing body of research that suggests that children at preschools are physically inactive for a significant amount of time each day (for a systematic review, see Tucker, 2008). The American National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2002) recommends that preschool aged children participate daily in 60 minutes of structured Moderate to Vigorous physical activity and a further 60 minutes or more of unstructured free play. Yet a number of recent studies, like this one, have found that preschool aged children are consistently failing to meet the recommended daily requirements.

With a view to unpacking these results of relatively low physical activity, interviews were then conducted with sixteen early childhood educators across the four Lady Gowrie Tasmania Education and Care Centres. When asked about their perceptions of health and physical activity, the educators all agreed that physical activity was extremely important for preschool aged children. Yet, when the educators were asked if children were sufficiently active during their time at preschools, thirteen expressed a belief that the children in their centres were engaging in sufficient physical activity during their time in the centre. These interviewees seemed unaware that almost half of the preschoolers are actually being sedentary during their time on the playground! Only three educators stated that children were not participating in enough physical activity during their time in care.

The interviews allowed important insight into the educators’ perceptions of their role during outside playtime. When asked to describe their primary role, early childhood educators were adamant that the outdoor environment should not be seen as a break time. Instead, they were emphatic that safety and supervision of children were their main concerns during outdoor time. In regards to safety, all of the interviewees agreed that ensuring children’s safety was their foremost concern when they were outdoors with children. Commenting on how they achieve children’s safety, educators mentioned that completing pre-outdoor time playground safety checks, continuously scanning the playground for safety hazards, keeping children away from unsuitable play equipment and maintaining climbing frame height restrictions were all tasks they completed on a daily basis. The educators noted that the focus on safety could, at times, limit opportunities for physical activity.





In regards to supervision duties, the educators gave differing interpretations of what was required of them during their supervision. Four educators stated that supervision involved standing back and giving children space to play their own games. Another four educators suggested that monitoring and alleviating safety hazards was their primary supervision concern. Two interviewees stated that effective supervision also required educators to help excluded children to find opportunities to enter into the play of others.

The early childhood educators in this study also indicated that a lack of training and overall confidence limited their ability to provide opportunities for physical activity. Other research has identified this as a limiting factor. The provision of training in the facilitation of physical activity for early childhood professionals may greatly increase the types and intensity of physical activity opportunities that children are offered during time spent in child care.

A number of recommendations emerge from these findings. These are pertinent for early childhood education and care professionals as well as parents and guardians of preschoolers.

1. There is a need to undo commonly held notions that the preschoolers are active, busy and “on-the-go” and become aware that the large majority of preschoolers are failing to meet the recommended daily physical activity requirements. This is an important starting point for recognising and then addressing the problem.
2. A key priority is to increase the physical activity opportunities for preschoolers. This can be achieved through implementing a range of interventions that have been identified in the literature as being effective for enhancing the health and well being of preschoolers. For example, interventions such as playground greening, painted playground markings, the provision of play equipment, outside programs and an examination of policies related to weather conditions have all been shown to positively influence preschoolers’ physical activity.
3. During outside playtime, if early childhood education and care professionals’ (and parents’/guardians’) main priorities are supervision and safety, it is understandable that they are unable to facilitate physical activity opportunities for preschoolers. Since this appears to be the case, then perhaps supervision ratios need to be adjusted or additional staff need to be brought in with the sole goal of facilitating programs and activities for preschoolers. This has been shown to be effective in the literature.
4. Given that early childhood education and care professionals indicated that a lack of training and associated confidence might limit their abilities to facilitate physical activities, then opportunities for professional development should be provided. Again, there is evidence from the literature to suggest this can go a long way to facilitating the provision of physical activity opportunities.

These four recommendations need to be considered along with a range of other environmental and social interventions that are currently being used to tackle the obesity epidemic in preschoolers.

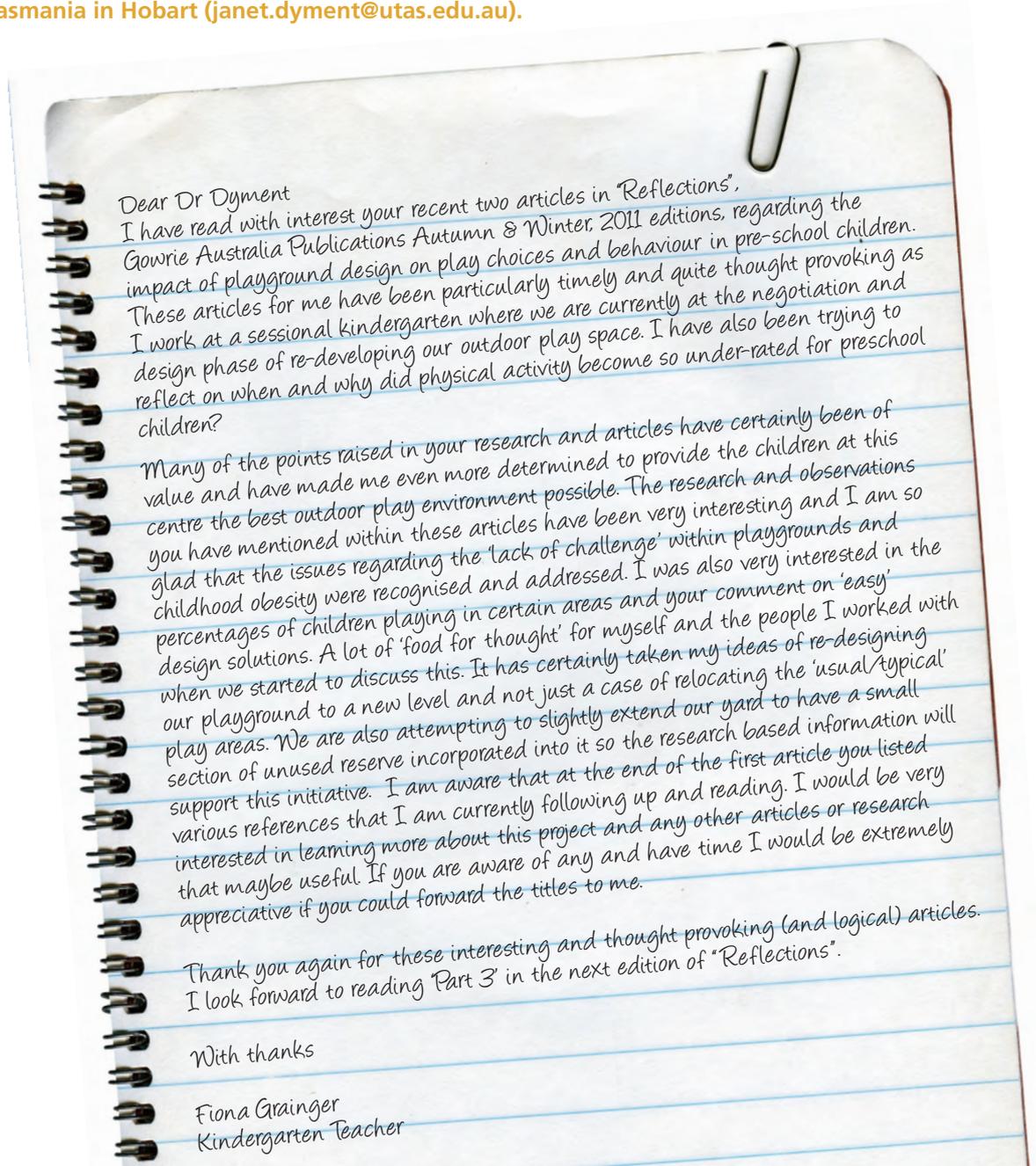
It is pleasing that Lady Gowrie Tasmania has already begun to address the findings of the research across all of their education and care centres. Centre leaders have been involved in professional learning sessions where the research findings were presented with the implications discussed. From this a plan of action has been developed for each centre which includes ongoing professional development for educators, an increased focus on outdoor play by curriculum facilitators planning the program within the centres, and, importantly a rethink about risk management and how this is managed in practice. Furthermore, the “Get Moving” Physical



Activity initiative which has been an integral part of the Lady Gowrie Education and Care children's program for some time has been evaluated to support continuous improvement and to further address the findings of the research.

Whilst not disputing that supervision of children is paramount, the research indicates the strong focus on the safety/supervision of children is to the detriment of increased physical activity in the playground.

If any reader would like any further information about this project, please contact Dr. Janet Dymant at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania in Hobart (janet.dymant@utas.edu.au).



Building Early Childhood Leadership Capacity through Professional Knowledge, an Interpretive Lens, Courage and Relational Trust

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Over the past two decades, my research in early childhood leadership has provided me with insight into the range of leadership models used across early childhood education and care (ECEC) contexts and the different styles, roles and dispositions of leaders. During periods of intense change new reforms emerge, theories evolve and paradigms shift in an attempt to reach pre-determined outcomes. Change is often accompanied with uncertainty and fear that our work with children, families and communities along with our professional identity may be compromised.

Mandated educational reforms such as the Australian Curriculum (AC), National Quality Framework (NQF) for Early Childhood Education & Care and the National Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) challenge us to generate new ways in which to lead curriculum decision making with those working within, across and beyond early childhood settings. Our intent is to embrace a leadership role that we believe will lead to quality outcomes for young children. Our voice as early childhood professionals is important in leading this agenda forward and determining how reforms will best be implemented in ways that reflect our early childhood philosophy and sustain our professional identity.

In this paper I propose a model of early childhood leadership that is shared and reciprocal and embedded in professional knowledge, interpretation, courage and relational trust. Within this model, leadership does not sit alone but is generated within each early childhood professional who works and interacts with children across ECEC contexts. The model is reliant on leadership and support from all professionals, their professional organisations and tertiary educational institutions. This collaborative approach is dependent on trusting relationships with each other; the courage to view our thoughts; articulation of our knowledge of research, curriculum, pedagogy and practice; and showcasing our ability to apply an interpretive lens to our work.

Leadership emerges as each professional confidently and respectfully communicates and influences each other through shared dialogue and reflection that fosters quality curriculum and practice. Within this model, leadership is shared between leaders and followers who are often the same people who take on different responsibilities at different times. For example, an early childhood leader who holds ultimate responsibility for the development and implementation of educational programs may become a follower when engaged in tasks in which he or she has limited knowledge or experience. In this model, early childhood professionals who make decisions about educational practice are empowered and considered leaders in their own right.

I believe this leadership model best matches the nature of early childhood professionals' work and is conducive to integrated early childhood services and their work with professionals from diverse specialisations. The model is consistent with the EYLF which supports a workforce in which nurturing relationships, ongoing learning and reflective practice are important in reviewing outcomes, generating new ways of thinking, building on professional knowledge and developing leadership confidence (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009).

This model has the capacity to provide early childhood professionals with a sense of *Belonging, Being and Becoming*. For example, knowing where and with whom we belong builds our professional identity and gives us a sense of *Belonging*. Knowing our current strengths and capacity to lead change gives us a sense of *Being*. Knowing that the ways in which we lead change will shape our professional identity, build on our professional knowledge, provide us with the capacity to respond to reforms and form relationships built on trust will give us a sense of *Becoming*.

A model of early childhood leadership

This model has as its basis four aspects of leadership that early childhood leaders need to know, understand and apply in their work to reach set outcomes. These are: 1) professional knowledge; 2) the application of an interpretive lens; 3) courage and 4) relational trust. The four aspects are inter-related and have the potential to empower all early childhood professionals to take on leadership roles. This paper provides a brief overview of each aspect.

Professional knowledge

Professional knowledge is the basis on which curriculum decisions are made. The AC, NQF and the EYLF call for pedagogical leadership from all professionals who work with young children. This is achieved when we apply our knowledge of how children learn and develop in ways which are appropriate to their individual needs. The flexibility of the EYLF

in promoting interpretation in individual contexts assists us to interpret the framework in our context (Productivity Agenda Working Group – Early Childhood Development Sub Group, 2008).

The diverse educational backgrounds and qualifications of this workforce, including those without qualifications across 0-5 contexts, challenge us to access professional learning in different ways. In the Pen Green study, access to professional knowledge emerged through mentoring and personal reflection. Participants were challenged to apply their own experiences in order to build upon their knowledge and understanding of the nature of leadership (Whalley, Chandler, John, Reid, Thorpe, & Everitt, 2008). They were supported by the expertise of highly skilled facilitators who challenged leaders to engage in deep reflection and analysis. This was seen as a powerful way of generating professional knowledge that is context-based.

A research project I am currently leading focuses on professional knowledge, training, pedagogical leadership and the application of an interpretive lens to aspects of the change process. Pedagogical leaders are provided with infrastructure that promotes networking and the use of ICT both within and beyond work contexts in order to sustain change. Their beliefs and responses to the change process are then analysed in order to inform future learning. Throughout the change process it is important that early childhood professionals are supported in a safe environment and provided with network structures through which ideas and knowledge can be shared, discussed and nurtured.

Interpretive lens

It is important that we build a professional culture that applies ongoing analysis and interpretation in order to meet outcomes and build early childhood leadership capacity. Adopting an interpretive lens requires leaders to problem solve and piece together the factors that impact on change. Their ability to interpret cause and effect in leadership enables them to take on the perspective of others and reflect on ineffective and effective practice (Forrest, 2010). The EYLF calls for pedagogical leaders who are critically reflective (Sumsion, Cheeseman, Harrison, Kennedy, & Stonehouse, 2009). According to Colmer (2008), investment in staff training and the support of strategic networking infrastructure in the development of reflective leaders assisted in the integration of various programs in The Gowrie Adelaide. Deakins (2007) outlines how deeply held beliefs and attitudes amongst individuals in an organisation can be radically transformed through meaningful dialogue and a process of higher order thought. The importance of reflection and self-inquiry is seen as an essential component of leadership (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2005).

Courage

Courage requires independent thinking, openmindedness, acceptance of responsibility, moving beyond our comfort zone, non-conformity and advocating for what we know is best. It can be achieved through shared vision, drawing strength from each other and without fear of failure. Leadership that is courageous reflects bravery, persistence and integrity. It is silenced when leaders are forced to conform to pre-determined expectations (Hard, 2006). This in turn signals a cultural expectation of obedience which impedes early childhood leadership and agency.

Courage needs to be nurtured and supported through relational trust and a sense of attachment amongst individuals, professional organisations and tertiary educational institutions. Leadership programs such as those developed at Pen Green have as their basis a 'pedagogy of participation' and are instigated to support the needs of early childhood professionals through challenging and turbulent times (Whalley et al., 2008). As Nupponen (2006) explains it is important that we develop a culture that recognises early childhood professionals as potential leaders and assists in nurturing within them the courage required to face the challenges of the future.

Relational trust

Relational trust will be critical in reaching shared consensus amongst early childhood professionals and avoiding the resistance to change that emerges when new reforms are implemented without leadership, guidance and support (Stamopoulos, 1995, 2001, 2010). Leaders who evoke a sense of trust and demonstrate sound relationships with others are more likely to build hope in others. Support and understanding is important in instances in which early childhood professionals fear risk of failure when expected to critically reflect upon their thinking (Lee, 2008). Furthermore, we need to acknowledge the perspective of those involved in change so we can lead through shared vision, purpose and identity (Stamopoulos, 2003). Relationships built on trust form a basis on which leadership can be fostered, nurtured and sustained (Drysdale, Goode & Gurr, 2009).

Conclusion

In Australian contexts, research on early childhood leadership remains sparse and inadequately theorised while the voice of the early childhood professional remains marginalised (Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Leadership models should draw on the cumulative strengths of the early childhood profession, tertiary educational institutions and professional organisations to develop a professional culture that is seamless and responsive to the needs of the profession and which reflects our professional identity. The four elements of this model: professional knowledge, an interpretive lens, courage and relational trust form a basis on which leadership capacity can be strengthened within ECEC contexts.

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Development of the National Quality Framework - a shared journey

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In December 2009 the Australian Government and state and territory governments agreed to a new National Quality Framework (NQF).

Implementation of the National Quality Framework is progressing well, as States, Territories and the Australian Government continue to work cooperatively to finalise the key elements, which will support the introduction of the new system from January 2012.

For those that have been involved since the beginning, the journey from announcement to implementation has been a cooperative one and serves as an example of what can be achieved through collaboration.

In many ways the journey has been made easier due to the unwavering commitment from all governments and, most importantly, the early childhood education sector, to quality education and care and the positive impact the reform will have on so many lives in so many ways.

Although there is still work to do, including the finalisation of the National Regulations and assessment and rating process, so much has been achieved.

The Journey So Far

- An approved Learning Framework

Many people may not realise that *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, was the first step of the journey, when it was released on 2 July 2009 following endorsement by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The Early Years Learning Framework describes the principles, practices and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning, recognising that play is the best vehicle for young children's learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development.

- The announcement of the quality agenda

In December 2009, the COAG announced reforms to the early childhood education and care sector that would result in changes to how early childhood education and care in Australia was delivered, reinforcing the importance of skilled and professional educators. On 7 December 2009 the COAG signed the National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care (National Partnership).

The National Partnership demonstrated unified commitment by all governments to deliver nationally consistent educator to child ratios and quality standards and to establish a jointly governed, uniform National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. The National Quality Framework encompassed a number of elements including setting a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care providers in Australia.

- Establishment

For the vision of governments to be realised, a robust regulatory framework that underpinned the National Quality Framework was required. Like all major elements of the reform the development of the Regulatory Framework which consists of the National Law and the, still to be finalised, **draft National Regulations** was a collaborative exercise between all governments with Victoria taking the lead on developing the National Law.

In October 2010, a major milestone was reached with the passing of the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (Victoria) by the Parliament of Victoria.

In November 2010, New South Wales passed its legislation, Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Act 2010.

All other states and territories are on track to introduce legislation this year.

The National Regulations are currently being finalised. An exposure draft of the proposed Regulations was publicly released on 7 March 2011 with schedule 8 of the draft National Regulations, containing transitional provisions, being published on 29 April 2011. These draft regulations are

available on the DEEWR website at www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda

The final National Regulations will be provided to the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) for endorsement in the near future. Following endorsement by MCEECDYA, the National Regulations will be tabled in the Parliament of each State and Territory.

- Engagement

All governments involved in implementing the National Quality Framework are committed to involving the sector and significant effort has gone into ensuring the sector has had the opportunity to be engaged in the development process. This is why there has been extensive consultation on the reforms.

Since May 2010, a range of information sessions, consultations and education programs on key elements of the reform have been provided focussing on the National Quality Standard, the Assessment and Rating process and the National Law. All governments have been pleased with the attendance at these sessions.

In March–April 2011 almost 3,500 participants across the country attended the 58 consultation forums on the National Regulations. At the closing of the submission process over 600 submissions had been received - a clear demonstration of the sector's willingness to engage with the process.

In addition to these consultation mechanisms a Stakeholder Reference Group, which consists of representatives from a number of national peak bodies (including Lady Gowrie), has regularly met to provide views, comment and input on behalf of the members it represents.

Most importantly, feedback is not only sought but acted upon to ensure the new system drives quality, but is clear and unambiguous and can operate in practice.

- Participation

Ongoing participation by the sector has been a feature of this reform journey and, as with the many other elements of this reform, the sector has willingly participated. This is particularly true of the development of the new assessment and rating process.

The Assessment and Rating Process

A key focus in the first half of 2011 was the development of the assessment and rating process to support the National Quality Standard. During October 2010–March 2011, in partnership with the sector, a large-scale trial of the new assessment and rating process was conducted with services from around the country. This trial involved over 190 long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools/kindergarten services and built on the initial field test process that was undertaken in June 2010.

Outcomes from the second phase of testing have been evaluated by expert consultants and include a technical analysis of the Assessment and Rating

Instrument, as well as qualitative and quantitative feedback from assessors and participating services. This evaluation is informing revisions to the assessment and rating process and related documentation.

Draft documentation is currently available for download on the DEEWR website at www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda

The aim is to ensure that the process, when finalised, measures quality, is robust and reliable and takes into account the different settings in which education and care is provided. It recognises that quality can be achieved in different ways and that diversity of practice, when focussed on quality outcomes for children, should be celebrated.

- Ongoing support

All governments understand that when introducing major changes it is not enough to provide information and expect outcomes. Ongoing access to information and sector development and support is a priority for all governments. Jointly all States, Territories and the Australian Government are working to develop a comprehensive sector support package that recognises the different needs of the sector.

It is anticipated that a range of delivery options for training and development will be provided in the final package, including online modules, train the trainer packages and hard copy documentation. This builds on sector support initiatives from the Australian and State and Territory Governments. For example, in February 2011, the Australian Government sent the *Educators' Guide to the EYLF* and the *EYLF in Action* to more than 16,000 services. These documents are also available on the DEEWR website at www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda

The Australian Government is also providing funding for training and mentoring support, including to Indigenous staff in remote Indigenous communities, through the Professional Support Coordinators program and Indigenous Professional Support Units.

- Still to come

We are a long way down the reform path but the journey is not over yet. All governments recognise there is still work to be done, but the commitment to deliver the COAG agenda remains strong. There is also a strong belief that by continuing to work together with the sector the vision to provide Australia's children with one of the best early childhood education and care systems in the world will become a reality.

Further information

For more information on these changes you can:

Visit www.mychild.gov.au
www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood

Email ECECQuality@deewr.gov.au

Call 1800 181 088

"In all my time working for Early Childhood Australia I have never been involved in a process which has been so open and transparent, where the input from the sector has been so rigorously and respectfully considered and taken into account." Pam Cahir, Chief Executive Officer, Early Childhood Australia

Key milestones for transition to implementation

Progress to date:

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Assessment pilot of 21 services commenced and completed | June 2010 |
| Victoria passes legislation | October 2010 |
| Second phase of development of assessment and rating process with over 190 services | October 2010 to end March 2011 |
| New South Wales passes legislation | November 2010 |
| Consultation on National Law and Assessment and Rating Process | November 2010 |
| Information Paper on the Education and Care Services National Law and the proposed National Regulations | December 2010 |
| EYLF Educators Guide sent to over 16,000 services | February 2011 |
| Draft Regulations released | March 2011 |
| National consultation on draft Regulations | March–April 2011 |
| Analysis of submissions on the draft Regulations | May–June 2011 |
| Evaluation of second phase of assessment and rating complete | May 2011 |
| ACECQA established and board appointed | July 2011 |

Still to come:

| | |
|--|------------------|
| National Regulations finalised | Second half 2011 |
| Remaining states and territories pass legislation | Second half 2011 |
| New national standard assessment and ratings system finalised and detailed information provided to all services | Second half 2011 |
| New system starts, ACECQA fully operational | 1 January 2012 |
| New staff-to-child ratio for birth to 24 months: 1 staff member to 4 children for Long Day Care | 1 January 2012 |
| Introduction of new requirements for early childhood education and care services to have more highly qualified staff | 1 January 2014 |
| Remainder of new staff-to-child ratios effective | 1 January 2016 |

Reflection at the *Early Years Learning Framework* Professional Learning Program Workshop

Author:
Dr Lennie Barblett
EYLF PLP Workshop Facilitator



“Reflection is critical in all aspects. We need to continually look at situations because they may not be what you see at first glance. Revisiting and reflecting enables deeper understanding and has the opportunity to plan more effectively for all aspects of curriculum” (EYLF PLP participant, 2011).

The government-funded *Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program (EYLF PLP)* consists of an integrated suite of professional learning strategies to support the implementation of the EYLF.

Part of the EYLF PLP has seen 65 *Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Workshops* run across urban and regional Australia. The workshops have been an amazing opportunity for a national professional conversation about engaging with the EYLF. They have been developed to assist educators in early childhood education and care settings to increase their understanding and knowledge of the EYLF.

A major focus of the workshops has been critical reflection, which is one of the five Principles of the EYLF - ‘ongoing learning and reflective practice’. The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009:13) says, ‘Reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics, and practice. Its intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children’s learning’. The *EYLF Educators’ guide* (DEEWR, 2010) states that reflective practice assists educators to become more thoughtful about their work and look at new possibilities in practice. Finding the time to be critically reflective is a challenge that many educators have identified in engaging with the EYLF. However, reflective practice must become embedded in our daily practice if we are to achieve better outcomes for children.

Schon (cited in Fetherston, 2007) believes that people have mental maps or plans about how to act in certain situations. Many things influence the mental maps that we have and as educators we need to be guided by our professional knowledge about children and the best ways in which to work with them. However, Schon found that there is often a difference between the theories we hold and the actions we take. We are often good at speaking about what we know but this is not always reflected in our practice. It is important therefore, that educators continually reflect on their practices - think and talk with others - as it is through repeated reflective practice that we make sure that our practice mirrors our professional beliefs or new learning, and that it assists in finding new responses to problems.

The EYLF describes a number of overarching questions that educators can use to guide reflection, such as:

- *What are my understandings of each child?*
- *What theories, philosophies and understandings shape and assist my work?*
- *Who is advantaged when I work this way?*
- *Who is disadvantaged?*
- *What questions do I have about my work?*
- *What am I challenged by?*
- *What am I curious about?*
- *What am I confronted by? (DEEWR, 2009:13).*

We can critically reflect on our own, but a more effective way is to engage in professional conversation with colleagues. It is when you entertain the idea of multiple perspectives (how other people see this practice) and question how things could be done differently, that the capabilities for change are produced.

Focused professional conversations are an important part of engaging with the EYLF and they build a community of practice amongst colleagues. Fetherston (2007) believes that educators should build a community of practice to understand their work and that reflective conversation binds colleagues together as shared goals and common understandings are developed.

A way to focus the conversation on reflective practice is to use the EYLF Professional Learning Program reflective template, which guides professional conversation through a number of steps in order to scaffold reflective conversation. For example, at the EYLF PLP Workshops participants were shown a small snippet of practice in a short video and asked to question, think and talk together through the following steps:

Step 1: Reflect

After viewing the snippet of practice, ask yourselves: *What is happening here? What am I comfortable with? What worries me?*

It is important to ask questions from the affective domain (the learning area involving emotions) to encourage the deeper level of thinking required for the reflective process.

Step 2: Reframe

Once everyone has answered the first step, go around the group and ask yourselves:

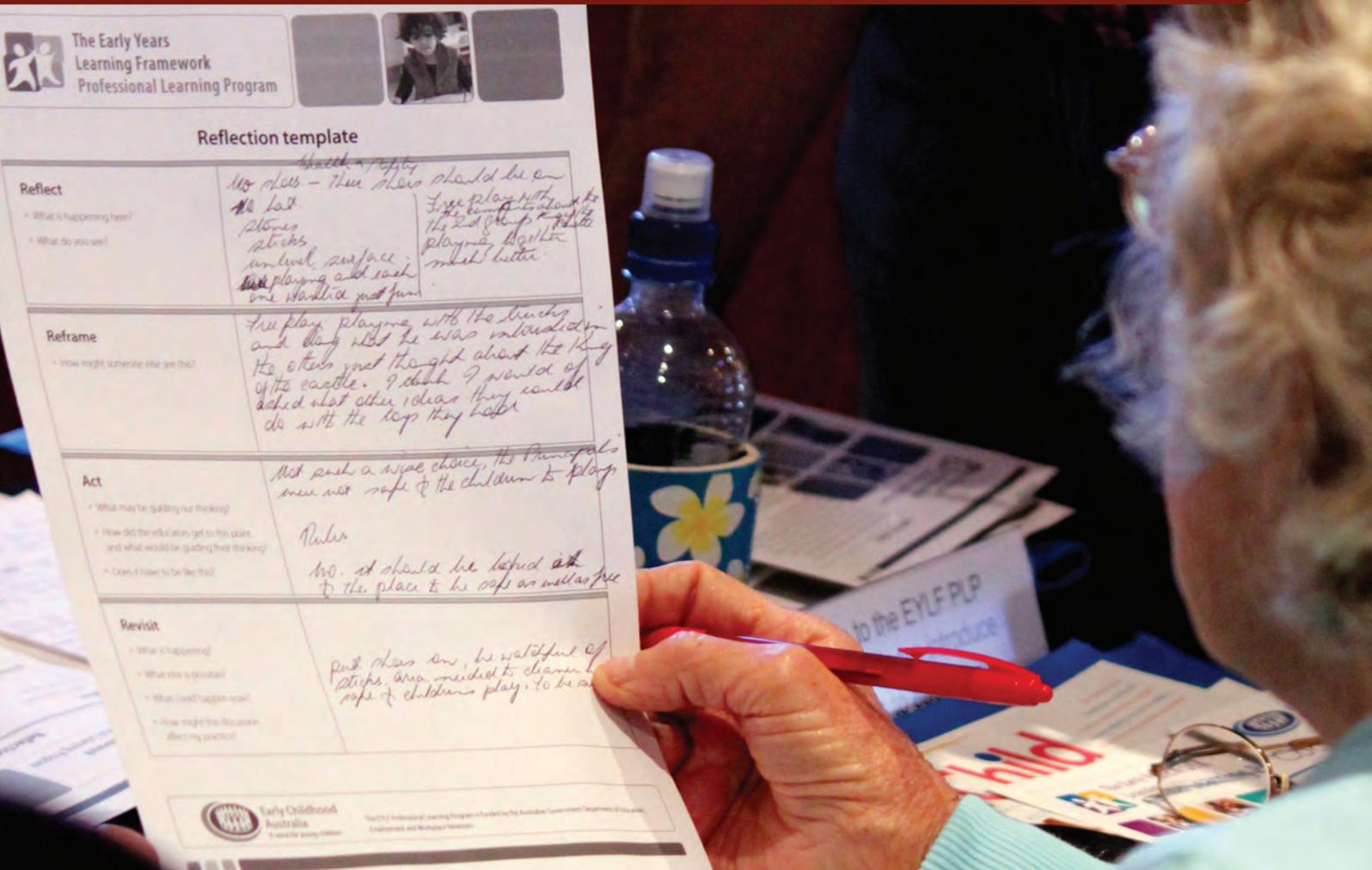
How might someone else see this?

(For example, from a child’s point of view, a parent’s, an assessor’s?)

Step 3: Act/rethink

Then ask:

What may be guiding your thinking? What professional knowledge assists in your thinking? How did the educators get to this point and what might be guiding their thinking? Does it have to be like this—or could the practice be different?



Step 4: Revisit

Then ask:

What learning is happening?

What else is possible with regard to the EYLF?

What could happen now? How might this discussion affect my practice?

Participants in the EYLF PLP Workshops across Australia noted how useful the reflection template was as a professional tool. One participant wrote, 'I will definitely make use of the reflection template - love the language. I am more confident that I am on the right track and doing OK at immersing myself in the EYLF' (EYLF PLP participant, 2011). Another said, 'Reflection and continued discussion is crucial during this transition period' (EYLF PLP participant, 2011). The reflection template being used at the workshops will be made available on the EYLF PLP website in August. Another reflective tool was recently published in EYLF PLP e-Newsletter 16 - *Reviewing practice*, and is available on the EYLF PLP website now.

Building a community of practice around reflective professional practice is a way to strengthen the early childhood sector. The EYLF PLP online Forum has given us a tool for the development of a community of professional conversation on a national scale. The Forum discusses all aspects of the EYLF. The Forum facilitators pose reflective questions in order to get educators to think more deeply about aspects of the EYLF and help respond to questions from

educators about the EYLF. All educators are encouraged to reflect on practices within their work setting and to engage in reflective conversations.

The EYLF PLP also offers support through a series of fortnightly e-Newsletters, which provide case studies and information about how educators are engaging with the EYLF across a range of settings. Recently the EYLF PLP has also grown to include a Facebook community and Twitter network, allowing individuals to build collective professional conversations and take advantage of free EYLF resources, including the 'Talking about practice' series and 'Thinking practice' series.

Access the entire range of free support resources and reflective communities through the EYLF PLP website:

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfpplp

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Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009. *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra, ACT: DEEWR.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2010. *Educators Belonging, Being and Becoming: Educators' guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra, ACT: DEEWR.

Fetherston, T. 2007. *Becoming an effective teacher*. Thomson Learning: South Melbourne, Victoria.

National and International CONFERENCE UPDATE



Summer 2010



Autumn 2011



Winter 2011

The Power of Play National Playgroup Conference 2011

All Together Now

12-14 October 2011

Park Hyatt, Melbourne, VIC

E: info@playgroupaustralia.com.au

Magical Moments 2011 Conference

Opening the doors to get outside

28-29 October 2011

Centre for Sustainable Living, Denmark, WA

W: www.aweandwonder.com.au/awenwonder/Home.htm

Growing Up in Australia and Footprint in Time

Research Conference: Findings from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC)

15-16 November 2011

Rydges on Swanston, Melbourne, VIC

W: www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/index.htm

Honoring the Child, Honoring Equity 11

Inspiring changes: insights, challenges, hopes and actions

18-19 November 2011

University of Melbourne, Parkville, Melbourne, VIC

E: education-ceiec-conference@unimelb.edu.au

13th New Zealand Early Childhood Research Conference

26-28 January 2012

Wellington City, New Zealand

W: www.childforum.com/

Gowrie Australia

Promoting and supporting quality services for all children.

Our Mission

A national collaborative approach to better practices which benefit children, families and the children's services sector.