reflections

GOWRIE AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION • WINTER 2013 • ISSUE 51

INSIDE :

Taking Responsibility for Reconciliation
Developing a 'Learning Community' for Educational Leaders
Provocations for Practice
The Power of Problem Solving
Sharing Educational Leadership
The 'Good Enough' Teacher

© Karen Briggs

reflections
GOWRIE AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION • WINTER 2013 • ISSUE 51

Reflections is a quarterly publication by Gowrie Australia for educators and families in Education and Care Services.

PUBLISHER
TTR Print Management Pty Ltd on behalf of Gowrie Australia

EDITOR
Josephine Musumeci

DESIGN
Angela Reeves

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Centre Staff

PRINTER
TTR Print Management

COMMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS
Feedback, suggestions and contributions are most welcome. Please contact Gowrie Australia to discuss ideas or to submit an article email: **info@gowrie-tas.com.au**

PHOTOCOPYING
Permission to reproduce any articles published in *Reflections* must be obtained from Gowrie Australia.

POSTAL ADDRESS
PO Box 263, North Hobart Tasmania 7002
Telephone: 03 6230 6800
Facsimile: 03 6230 6811
Email: info@gowrie-tas.com.au

DISCLAIMER
The opinions expressed in *Reflections* are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of Gowrie Australia. By publishing diverse opinions we aim to encourage critical reflection and motivate practitioners in Children's Services to respond. Gowrie Australia's privacy policy precludes the use of children's names. Fictitious names are substituted.

ISSN 144-5387. Issue 51, Winter 2013
© 2013 Gowrie Australia

CONTACT DETAILS - Gowrie Australia

Gowrie SA
39a Dew Street
Thebarton SA 5031

Ph: 08 8352 5144 **Fax:** 08 8234 1217
Email: train@gowriesa.org.au
Website: www.gowriesa.org.au
Contact: Christine Burgess

Gowrie NSW
Level 3, 215 Euston Road
Alexandria NSW 2015

Ph: 02 8571 9745 **Fax:** 02 8571 9790
Email: merise.bickley@gowrie-sydney.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-sydney.com.au
Contact: Merise Bickley

The Gowrie (QLD) Inc.
228 St Paul's Terrace
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Ph: 07 3252 2667 **Fax:** 07 3252 2258
Email: sharron@ladygowrie.com.au
Website: www.gowrieqld.com.au
Contact: Sharron Palmer

Lady Gowrie Tasmania
229 Campbell Street
Hobart TAS 7000

Ph: 03 6230 6800 **Fax:** 03 6230 6811
Email: info@gowrie-tas.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-tas.com.au
Contact: Ros Cornish

Gowrie Victoria
Cnr Newry & Canning Streets
Carlton North VIC 3054

Ph: 03 9347 6388 **Fax:** 03 9347 7567
Email: melodied@gowrievictoria.org.au
Website: www.gowrievictoria.org.au
Contact: Melodie Davies

The Gowrie (WA) Inc.
61 Lowan Loop
Karawara WA 6152

Ph: 08 9312 8200 **Fax:** 08 9313 1827
Email: toniaw@gowrie-wa.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-wa.com.au
Contact: Tonia Westmore

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

editorial

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the Winter Edition of *Reflections.* In this edition the lead article shares with readers the journey of an education and care service in the development of a reconciliation action plan. The collaborative approach and partnership with key stakeholders demonstrated not only a strong commitment, but also the respectful responsibility attributed to this important task. It is hoped this article provides the impetus for others to consider their own 'plan for reconciliation'.

Addressing the National Quality Framework requirement of having an educational leader in all education and care services, the article by Green and Bickley outlines the development of a learning program that unpacked the role of the educational leader and the establishment of a learning community for leaders. The considerations within the article are great reflective tools for leaders.

Ongoing professional and personal development is a critical aspect of being an effective education and care practitioner. Professional discussion and robust debate between colleagues supports this notion and can provide a setting for provocations to be raised. The article by Fiona Stary highlights the theoretical aspects of provocation and goes on to provide examples where the theory, becomes practice.

A Queensland Kindergarten shares an approach to problem solving which is strongly inclusive of children, and supports their sense of wellbeing through empowerment and ownership. The article makes linkages to the Early Years Learning Framework Outcomes.

Luke Touhill provides a personal reflection on theorists, making linkages to past and present. He himself raises some provocations for readers around the expectations of the educator to meet the outcomes of the education and care reform initiatives. The idea of 'perfection' is questioned, as opposed to the importance of continual improvement and reflection, which is a key aspect of the reforms.

This edition also features a new section: *'The Voice of the Educator'.* This aims to share with readers the views of practitioners on a diverse array of education and care topics. The first contribution is by Fiona Black from Mount Gambier in South Australia, who writes about the experience within her service in establishing the education leader role through a shared model of leadership. Like Fiona, I encourage others to share their voice by submitting articles for consideration through any of the state contacts listed on page 2.

In closing, Gowrie Australia acknowledges the Early Childhood Quality Funding announcement by the Federal Government. This commitment was clearly influenced by the Big Steps Campaign. While the initiative has raised a range of challenges, it is a significant milestone for the education and care sector. It demonstrates that government has acknowledged the need for improved wages and conditions for the sector. For the Reform Agenda for Education and Care to be achieved, and for children in Australia to have the best possible start, an essential ingredient is a highly qualified, well trained and supported, and appropriately remunerated professional workforce. This funding announcement is a first step! The challenge confronting the sector is to gain support for this to be ongoing, and available, to all educators who undertake the important role of enhancing the education and care of children in our country.

Until next time,

Ros Cornish
on behalf of Gowrie Australia

Access an e-copy of *Reflections* at:

www.gowrie-brisbane.com.au
www.gowriesa.org.au
www.gowrie-sydney.com.au
www.gowrie-tas.com.au
www.gowrievictoria.org.au
www.gowrie-wa.com.au

BE PART OF THE "REFLECTIONS" SURVEY

As part of our Quality Improvement Process we would like to hear your thoughts about *Reflections* and how we can continue to make it a valuable resource.

You are invited to take a moment and share your thoughts through an online survey
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Z9NPRVT

We will let you know the results in the next edition and how we will be using your feedback going forward.

Thank you for your time
The Gowrie Australia team

GOWRIE CEOs

(Acting) Natalie Grenfell – *Gowrie NSW*
Sue Hart – *Gowrie Victoria*
Jane Bourne – *The Gowrie (QLD) Inc*
Kaye Colmer – *Gowrie SA*
Tonia Westmore – *The Gowrie (WA) Inc*
Ros Cornish – *Lady Gowrie Tasmania*

contents

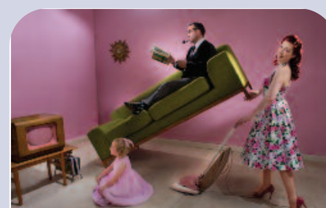
4 Taking Responsibility for Reconciliation

6 Developing a "Learning Community" for Educational Leaders

8 Provocations for Practice

12 The Power of Problem Solving

16 Sharing Educational Leadership


18 The "Good Enough" Teacher

20 Back Cover - National & International Conference Updates

Taking Responsibility for Reconciliation

Author:
Gloria Lalor-Mundine
Aboriginal Community Co-ordinator
Mary Scales
Community Program Leader
Gowrie SA

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge that the land where Gowrie SA is situated is the land of the Kaurna people, and we acknowledge and recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Nation Peoples of Australia, and that they are the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waterways throughout our country. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and future.

At Gowrie SA we had been attempting, over many years, to make our service a culturally safe, relevant and welcoming place for Aboriginal children, families and staff, but we had not done this in a planned or connected way. There was a great deal of uncertainty about how to do this authentically and we were also very mindful of 'getting it wrong'. On February 13th 2008, our staff heard the apology read by Kevin Rudd and, for us, this was a turning point. We knew we had a responsibility to further the spirit of the Australian Government's apology, and this apology ignited our passion and commitment to taking action. We knew we needed to take responsibility for our part.

We also knew we had much to learn. We had an Aboriginal family who was using our service. The child's attendance was sporadic and the educators were not following up on 'why'. When we did call and touch base with the family, we learned that the mother was concerned that her child was getting paint on his/her clothes. Initially, this was dismissed, as it seemed unimportant when compared to our philosophy of learning through play and experience, with the expectation that during the course of play and exploration children will, at times, get dirty. However on reflection, our group of educators realised that this was not a satisfactory response, and we took time to 'walk in the shoes' of this mother, and consider why this was a problem. What would it be like for this mother to be walking in the community with her child looking dirty? What did it feel like for this mother to be unheard? What history did this mum carry with her that influenced the way she felt? We knew we had to make the experience of our service better, for this and other Aboriginal families, and that we needed to learn more about the history and experiences of our First Nation Peoples.

With strong leadership from our CEO Kaye Colmer, the staff embarked on a journey. We began by watching Professor Michael McDaniel speaking at the Reconciliation Action Plan launch of a Sydney Law Firm. We committed staff meetings, where our focus is on professional learning, to understanding more about Aboriginal history and culture. We decided early on that we wanted to create our own Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) which would provide us with a way of working together in a cohesive, thoughtful and connected way. We gathered a passionate group of people which included some families (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), staff and the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community, and together we used the Reconciliation Australia format to guide our direction. In this planning we wanted to make sure we included changes across our entire organisation and, in order to do this, we needed to be specific and our goals achievable. During this two year development the belief that good intentions need to be turned into real actions was a strong motivation for all.

The RAP format guided our thinking and helped us create action in the areas of relationships, respect, opportunities and how we would track and report on our progress. It also ensured we articulated our vision for, and commitment to, reconciliation. This provided a rich opportunity for discussions, decisions and thinking together about how best we could make a difference in our work.

Within our RAP we committed to providing cultural awareness training for staff. We organised a two day training that was comprehensive, thought provoking and, at times, highly confronting. The process was pivotal to staff having an understanding of white privilege, different forms of racism, Aboriginal history, the weaving between cultures that Aboriginal people are required to do, and understanding our own beliefs, attitudes and our view of history. We also used the cultural audit tool from the *Toolkit for Indigenous Service Provision* (FaHCSIA, 2010) as a self assessment and reflection tool for all staff to reflect on their own knowledge of Aboriginal culture, history, Indigenous organisations and the way they work with Indigenous families. These audits then guided our RAP committee in the planning of professional learning opportunities for all staff.

After we drafted our RAP, we submitted it to Reconciliation Australia for feedback and guidance, made some minor changes and then circulated it within our organisation and to families. We engaged the services of graphic designer Karen Briggs, an Aboriginal woman from Yorta Yorta country, to do a design that encapsulated our organisation and beliefs. Karen provided a design that the children could relate to, and were interested in, and that also represented Gowrie SA and the different aspects of our work within the sector. It also reflected the significant Kaurna totems and connection to country. We were able to do some consultation with our local Elders about the design and also with the preschool children in our service. The children were immediately drawn to different aspects of the design, some to the animals and some to the symbols and patterns.

On October 21st 2012 Gowrie SA officially launched our Reconciliation Action Plan. The launch was held at the beautiful Tainmundilla Park (Botanic Park) in Adelaide with about 70 families from the children's program attending, along with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families from across Adelaide and interstate. This launch was a real celebration of the work that had already started and a commitment to future work. We had Aboriginal performers and businesses represented. We were fortunate to have our Elders, Auntie Josie Agius and Uncle Lewis O'Brien, attend our launch and provide a Welcome to Country.

Over the last two years we have worked on creating welcoming and culturally safe environments for our Aboriginal families and staff. We have signed the Australian Employment Covenant where we have committed to employing 4 Aboriginal staff members (which we have achieved), with the staff employed across different parts of our organisation. We have started developing relationships with many other Aboriginal organisations and networks so that we can work together to support our Aboriginal families. We have focused on ensuring we are aware of, and observe, cultural protocols, and we have developed relationships with our local Elders and engaged them in consultation opportunities. We are excited that we can see changes in every level of our organisation from how educators purchase resources, to policy development, to hosting Indigenous students and ensuring that issues of equity are woven into our training programs.

In enacting our RAP we believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are supported through our education and learning programs in our service, and that the lives of our staff and families are enriched by developing a deeper understanding, knowledge and connection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Over the last two years we have been committed to our current RAP and we are in the process now of evaluating our progress and deciding on our strategic directions for the next two years. We know we have learnt a great deal, but still have much to learn and contribute to Reconciliation. We hold this responsibility as a real priority, not just for the current children, families and staff of our organisation, but also for the future. We know that small steps can make a big difference, and it just requires passionate people to drive the change. It's the journey that counts, and we are proud to be part of it.

References:

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2010), *Toolkit for Indigenous Service Provision.* <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibiities/indigenous-australians/prorgams-services/recognition-respect/toolkit-for-in-digenous-service provision>

For more information on developing a RAP plan or to view Gowrie SA's plan:

Reconciliation Australia
<http:// www.reconciliation.org.au>

Developing a “Learning Community” for EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Authors:
Jenny Green & Merise Bickley
Gowrie NSW

The National Quality Framework (NQF), launched in 2012, mandated the appointment of an ‘educational leader’ in all education and care services. When developing the Gowrie NSW 2012 Professional Learning Calendar, this new role was seen as a great opportunity to facilitate learning for educators where they could engage in professional discussion, thinking and reflection about the concept of educational leadership and its impact on a service’s operations. Gowrie NSW subsequently launched an eight part series titled “Educational Leader: A Learning Community”. In the article below Merise and Jenny share their story of the development of this learning series.

With the overwhelming amount of information that services were receiving about the NQF, in 2012, we realised that unpacking the role of the educational leader was not likely to be a number one priority for many services at this time. However, communicating to the sector a commitment to supporting directors, coordinators and the soon to be appointed educational leaders, was a priority for us. We envisioned an adult learning opportunity where professional discussions with peers enabled reflection, analysis, change and the practical consolidation of newly acquired skills and knowledge. We believed that we could use the Communities of Practice model for learning to support individuals – facilitators and participants – to consider, understand, explore, discern, reflect and unpack how this responsibility could be achieved practically in early childhood education and care settings.

As Lave & Wenger (1991) describe, a ‘community of practice’ or ‘learning community’ can be created specifically with a goal of gaining knowledge related to the learners’ field. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally (Wikipedia, 2013). Perhaps the most noticeable difference of this style of professional learning, to other adult learning models, is the level of participant involvement in the group. The participants become active members or ‘active learners’ of the group, in contrast to the one-off style of professional learning, which is often seen as information being imposed or transferred to recipients.

Our learning community was established with participants registering and so our learning journey commenced. The session content was inspired and gathered from a range of sources and through endless discussion and reflection over many meetings. Although we had a framework and overview of content for the duration of the series, it was apparent, as the sessions progressed, that our discussions would be influenced by the experiences, perspectives, questions and the manifestations of the educational leaders' role at the participants' services.

During 2012 we co-facilitated two learning communities consisting of eight two-hour sessions. Numbers increased in the second round, and there was a very different learning dynamic to those participants who attended the first series. It seemed that the increased interest reflected educators' growing familiarity and level of comfort with the role of educational leader within the sector as NQF settled. The content of both workshop series was changeable, resulting in a structure of discussions and provocations that unfolded according to the evolving needs of each group. As co-presenters, we would meet every other week to identify the focus for the following learning community session.

To support the fortnightly meetings, participants maintained a reflective journal, readings were distributed and questions posed between sessions. The intention of sharing information and documenting a reflective journal was to underpin participants' knowledge regarding leadership and to better support and assist them in their educational leadership role. Enacting the role of an educational leader in different contexts, active discussions about one's identity as a leader, coaching versus mentoring, and respect for adult learning styles helped participants to articulate an understanding of what an educational leader would look like in individual workplaces.

Following on from their experience of developing and co-presenting the "Educational Leader: A Learning Community" series, Jenny and Merise offer the following considerations for educational leaders who are facilitating their own learning communities in individual services:

- **Explore and continually reflect on your individual leadership skills.**
  Are you an 'enabler' or an 'egotist'? Do you facilitate or dictate other educators' development regarding the programme and children's learning? Have you articulated your own 'vision' on how to lead other educators' learning and development?

- **Question and challenge your own understanding of the National Quality Framework (NQF) and Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).**
  How confident are you in your knowledge and understanding of the NQF and EYLF? As an early childhood education and care service, what is your commitment to children's learning? Can all of the educators in your service articulate what they know and believe about children's learning?

- **Be confident about your service's philosophy.**
  Take the time to consider whether it authentically reflects your beliefs and understandings about how children learn.

- **Acknowledge and work with different learning styles, backgrounds and experiences of the educators in your team.**
  What is the impact of the current situation on each learner? How does each individual respond to challenge about children's learning considering their background and experience – in the long term and for each session? What is the impact of the current situation on each learner's contributions?

- **Consider your team's knowledge regarding pedagogy and early childhood practice in general, and their understanding about how it occurs in your service.**
  Do your team members have sufficient sound underpinning knowledge to be comfortable with their decisions about facilitating children's learning?

- **Maintain and model a constant state of critical reflection.**
  Have you considered and made decisions about children's learning in light of the most current theories and research? Do you reflect critically? What provocations can you pose to foster a culture of critical thought and reflection in others? How can you inform your own and your team of educators' knowledge about pedagogy and children's learning?

- **Reflect upon your 'identity' as a leader.**
  Are you building the capabilities of other educators or assuming responsibility for them? How are you maintaining and building your vision as it relates to the program and children's learning? What strategies have you been using to guide and develop the educators' or learners' knowledge to support their practices to guide children's learning and development? Have you been transparent in your dealings and interactions with the learners whilst engaged in professional discussions?

- **Ensure you consider, discuss and model with your learners the consideration of 'context' when evaluating and examining certain practices, processes, ideas and systems.**
  Will this work with your children and families? How will the ideas assimilate into your current provision of education and care? Is it a strategy, idea or practice that will synergise with your service's philosophy about children's learning?

References:

Community of Practice retrieved 23 Jan 2013 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_practice>

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Provocations for Practice

Author:
Fiona Stary
Early Childhood Teacher
Gowrie Victoria

Uncertainty is a quality that you can offer, not only a limitation. You have to recognise your limits as a resource, as a place of encounter. You accept that you are unfinished, in a state of permanent change, and your identity is in the dialogue.

Carlina Rinaldi
(paraphrased from Rinaldi, 2005: 183)

What is provocation in an Early Childhood Education and Care setting?

As an educator, a provocation often starts with an uncomfortable feeling that something is amiss somehow:

- Perhaps a parent has made a request about the care of their child that doesn't sit quite right with you, or the centre's philosophy, but isn't completely outrageous either – is it reasonable to accommodate the request?
- Perhaps you are going along with some inherited practices, but without conviction or clarity.
- Maybe your team has become aware that an area of the children's program is lacking in some way, and you need to seek out additional knowledge and perspectives.
- Maybe you've just realised that you use the same old words and phrases with the children, over and over again.

These are just some of the myriad dilemmas that we, as early childhood educators, may find ourselves contending with.

"Provocation" is a demanding and somewhat startling word, isn't it? In a general sense, to be provoked is to start from an awareness of a need to respond to a situation, whether from unease, inspiration or curiosity. In early childhood education and care (ECEC), the term "provocation" can also refer to the deliberate introduction of provocative stimuli, relevant to previous observations, to expand upon existing knowledge, attitudes and practices. This is undertaken as part of a reflective, continual cycle of learning.

This concept of provocation leading to research and reflection can be applied to the process of planning, implementing, evaluating and documenting children's programs, but can also be applied by ECEC practitioners to a process of continual professional and personal development.

Provocation for educators can initially come in the form of a gradual realisation, a dilemma, a flash of inspiration and possibility, or a grasping for words when asked a question. Or, it may come in the form of a robust debate among colleagues leading the individuals to question an aspect of their practice.

How can ECEC colleagues work to establish or maintain a culture of provocation, collaboration and inquiry?

Critical reflection, information sharing and a robust culture of professional inquiry are heavily emphasised in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as important attributes for early childhood practitioners to cultivate. The increasing professionalisation of the ECEC workforce brings an expectation that practitioners are deliberately provocative and reflective.

Educators are called upon to consider and examine their own attitudes and practices, including what their influences and prejudices are, what theories they draw upon, what they find challenging or confronting and why, and post-structuralist considerations of privilege, power, subjectivity and equity (AGDEEWR, 2009: 11-13).

The nature of working in ECEC sees staff members working together closely and collaboratively, continually exposed to each other's ideas and practices. This collaborative energy can be harnessed in a focused way to promote innovation, reflection and evaluation of practices.

At one of the Gowrie Victoria services, there are nine rooms staffed by over 40 educators, servicing the families of approximately 150 children per day. Working at such a large centre, especially as part of a wider organisation with a clearly articulated philosophy and track record of innovation, provides fertile ground for provoking and implementing ideas and grappling with issues, both on an informal and formal basis.

Staff meetings and fortnightly pedagogical leaders' meetings provide a formal setting for provocation and discussion to occur, and each room is also expected to maintain a documented system of collegial reflection. Being a large centre, email is used as a method to communicate across the entire staff cohort.

Many staff have taken up the opportunity to do a course with The Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership involving several days of lectures and a workplace-based research project.

A relatively recent innovation that has occurred is that each permanent staff member is responsible for implementing a project during the year to benefit the service as a whole. Some of these projects have included new ways to collaboratively plan for the shared outdoor area, the introduction of a whole-centre puppet as a tool for discussing issues with children, and a shared meal where staff are encouraged to bring a dish relating to their culture (thus increasing awareness of the fantastic resource we have in terms of staff members' varied cultural backgrounds).

The projects are a way for individual staff to identify areas they would like to explore, and also help to foster a sense of collaboration and information sharing at the centre.

How does it work in Practice?

Staff share two of their investigations:

Going barefoot – a shoe story

Every day in room 9, staff would set about scooping up all the sad, grotty little abandoned socks that worked their way under cushions and on top of lockers. We were forever finding sparkly sneakers wedged underneath blocks and sensible sandals slipped under bookshelves – a clear testament to the covert determination of several members of our preschool group to have their feet remain footloose and fancy-free.

After a while, as educators, we considered our reasons for reflexively requesting that shoes remain on feet. It was a liberating and provocative question – *are shoes really always necessary?*

Having observed that many children preferred not to wear shoes much of the time, we set about discovering if our current practices *("Pop your shoes back on, please!")* were supported by evidence.

We discussed the reasons shoes may be considered necessary, including protection for the feet against injury and the dreaded 'Lego foot', hygiene, cultural considerations, preventing shoes from getting lost by keeping them on feet, and temperature regulation.

We also set about investigating what the merits of being shoeless might be, drawing upon information from a range of fields outside early childhood, including sport and neuroscience.

If you are a runner you will, no doubt, have noted with interest the barefoot trend that has emerged over the past few years. Proponents of barefoot (or minimally clad) running note that over-cushioning and protecting the feet leads to different patterns of movement - a greater tendency to heel-strike, for example - with possible implications for development of the muscles and structures of the feet and legs. There is some evidence that children who usually wear shoes have an increased incidence of flat-footedness compared to children who routinely go barefoot.

The feet also receive much less sensory stimulation when in shoes than when barefoot. This limitation of sensory feedback between the feet and the brain may potentially, over time, have implications for things like balance, sensitivity and responsiveness to terrain. What might be the effects, if any, of having young children in protective shoes for the majority of the time? Would it be a fair analogy to question how children's fine motor and sensory abilities might be affected if they spent their whole lives in mittens? While not qualified to answer these questions, it was interesting food for thought.

We also consulted the children and asked them for their ideas. Why didn't they want to wear shoes? Why might they need to? What could we do instead?

We sought guidance from our centre's policy book, which specified that children should wear shoes unless there was an activity where being barefoot was appropriate. We consulted our centre's managerial staff to discuss if we could interpret this policy in a more lenient way. We also considered what we would do if we needed to quickly evacuate a group of shoeless children.

We asked parents about their attitude to shoes, and we considered the specific risks of our environment (bearing in mind that the children drink from glasses and use ceramic crockery as part of our philosophy of respect for materials and for children's capabilities).

With the information gathered, we formed an opinion that it was reasonable for the children to remove their shoes while inside (where it is warm and there are not too many risks to feet) provided they continued to wear their socks (for hygiene and protection). They would be responsible for putting their shoes on a dedicated shoe shelf so that if there was an evacuation, we could collect all the shoes rapidly. Our evacuation bag also contained spare shoes.

We then continued to reflect upon and fine-tune this system, and dedicated several group times to educating the children on responsibilities that come with being barefoot. There were teething issues and a few misplaced shoes, but the feedback from families was largely positive. Stepping on Lego can be a valuable lesson!

Bolte the puppet

As a beginning teacher several years ago, I realised that an aspect of my practice that I wanted to improve was how to discuss serious or abstract and frankly, sometimes rather boring issues with the children, without sounding like I was giving them a lecture. How was I to engage a group of young children on issues such as messy toileting, respecting others, natural disasters in the news, and keeping track of their own hats?

The answer, of course, lay largely in not telling them, but asking them. A question is a far more powerful learning tool than a fact! Thus, Monty the Monster was born. Monty is a friendly monster puppet who lives in a cave in the storeroom and speaks in a squeaky voice (the only "character" voice my vocal register can accommodate!), and has a habit of falling asleep if the humans around him get too noisy. He is a bit forgetful and, being a nocturnal monster, doesn't know a whole lot about how the human world works. The children, naturally, are keen to fill him in on why we wear hats, ways of responding when someone makes

us angry, and what happens to textas without lids *("Mmm, I've been told that this thing is a 'lid'. It looks yummy. Can I eat it? No? What am I supposed to do with it then?")*

After several other educators expressed an interest in using puppetry as a tool for exploring issues with children, I ran a workshop as my Professional Development and Reflection Program project, where I shared some basic puppetry skills and techniques. As a result of this session, it was decided to get a whole-centre puppet, which could be used by any room as a tool for discussion with the children.

We brainstormed a back-story for the puppet, and considered learning areas and issues that could be enriched by the use of puppetry. We considered issues such as the puppet having been displaced from his home and coming to live at Gowrie Victoria, which could perhaps be used to explore related contemporary issues with the children. We also considered practical issues, such as how to construct a consistent identity for a puppet that would have multiple operators, and how the puppet could potentially be used with babies and toddlers as well as preschool-aged children. The characterisation of "Bolte" the puppet is still a work in progress, but he is already being used to great effect.

Katriye Redif, an educator with one of the kindergarten groups, finds that a puppet elicits a different response from children than a person would. *"There are children who are hesitant to speak up during group times, but when Bolte comes out, they will raise their hand and ask him questions," she says. "We use Bolte to respond to any issues we are having in the room. For example, Bolte was a great tool to discuss hygiene with the children when we needed to remind them of toileting processes."*

Bolte has been a great tool for us, as educators, to consider different ways of discussing issues with the children and guiding behaviour, and to evaluate various aspects of our programs. By thinking about our goals and practices through the lens of the Bolte character, we have been able to gain new insights and see fresh possibilities for our interactions with children and each other.

References:

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (AGDEEWR) (2009). *Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia.* (ISBN 978-0-642-77873-4). Canberra, ACT: Author. Retrieved from <http://deewr.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework>

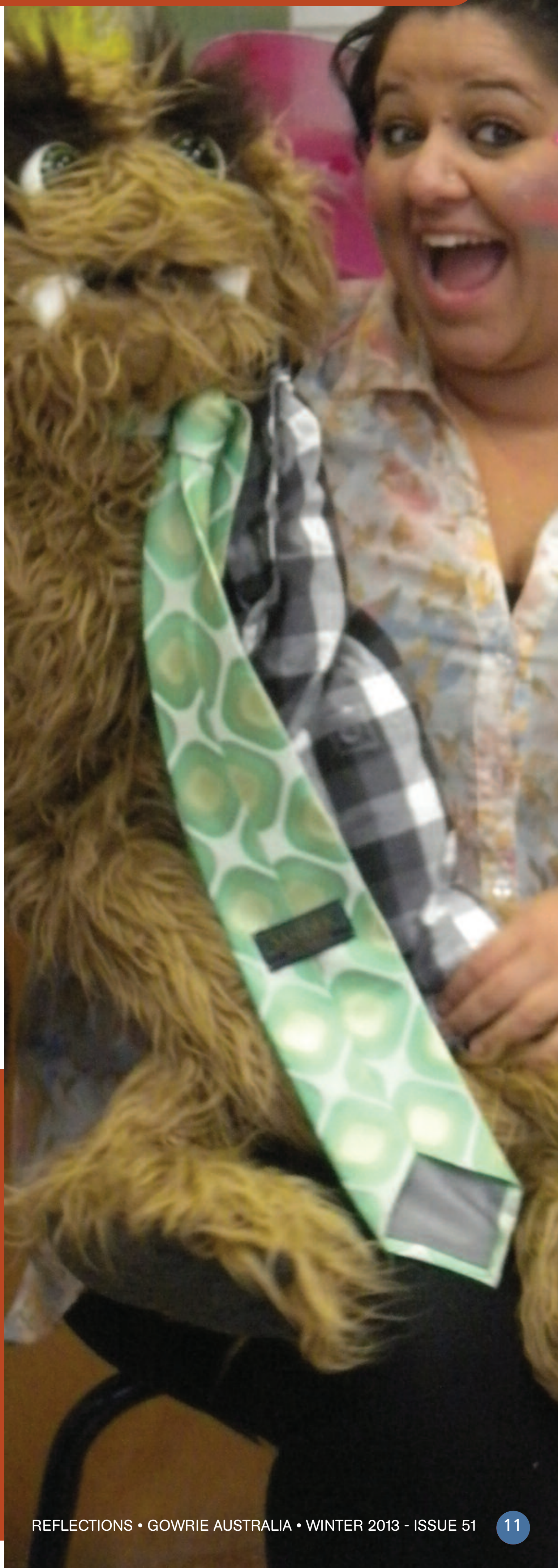
Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (Eds.) (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach – advanced reflections* (2nd ed). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Hewett, V.M. (2001). Examining the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(2), 95-100. <http://cunaeinternationalschool.com/Examiningth-eReggioEmiliaApproach.pdf>

Moss, P. (2006). Structures, understandings and discourses: possibilities for re-envisioning the early childhood worker. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 7(1), 30–41. doi: 10.2304/ciec.2006.7.1.30.

Rinaldi, C. (2005). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Rinaldi, C. & Moss, P. (2004). What is Reggio? *Children in Europe*, 6, 2-3



The Power of Problem Solving

Author:
Desley Jones
Director
Ballymore Kindergarten, Brisbane

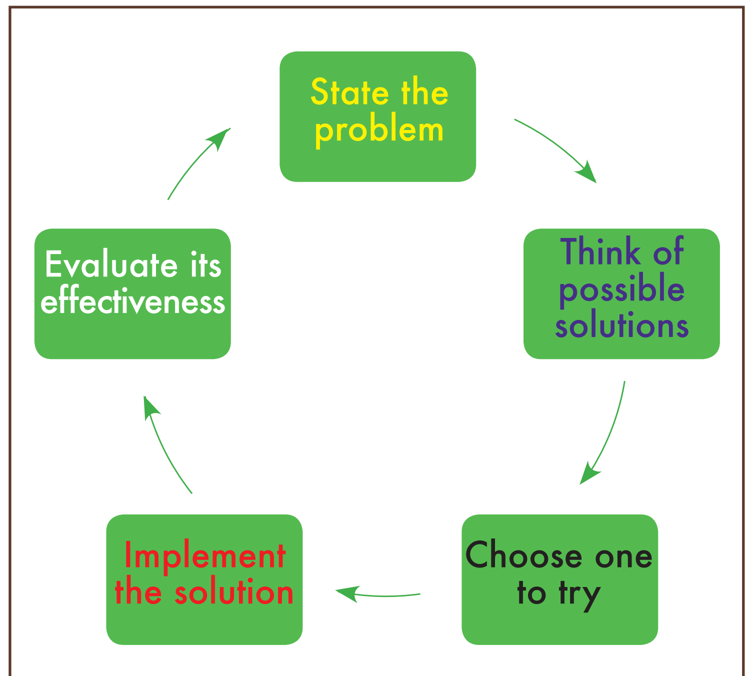
This article arose from speculation about the place of "rules" in enhancing social relationships and managing behaviour. A long-accepted strategy has been to involve children in the establishment of rules within the education or care setting. While this is a strategy that acknowledges the importance of children having a measure of ownership over decisions affecting them, the emphasis on "rules" has some inherent drawbacks. This article presents the argument that an approach which focuses on problem solving with children may be more advantageous than one based on the setting of rules. Problem solving can contribute to a positive group climate, which in turn provides the foundation for a child's sense of wellbeing within the education and care setting, and plays a crucial role in a child's involvement, development and learning (Laevers, 2012).

The children's story *Library Lion*, by Michelle Knudsen, provides a telling example of how "rules", by their very nature, tend to be inflexible, with a locked-in view of how the world should be. In dealing with relationships, there are limited black and white scenarios and MANY shades of grey. Being flexible to adapt to different perspectives and experiences is of paramount importance. A reliance on rules, even those made in conjunction with children, may bring with it the disadvantage of "being backed into a corner", from which it can be hard to extricate oneself. An over reliance on rules may also slip easily into being a soft option where the voices of children are rarely heard.

In comparison, introducing a focus on problem solving brings with it opportunities to work with, and listen to children, to encourage children to work and think together, and to contribute significantly to development and learning in many areas. Problem solving can be employed with individuals, as well as with small and large groups of children. It can be used to address issues across the whole program - ranging from making the bus at inside time, to people speaking angrily to each other, to disagreements over who is using the wheelbarrows, to coping with a visitor being delayed in traffic and arriving late, to a broken toilet, to what is the best food for a fairy party – the possibilities are endless!

Problem solving can be approached in a variety of ways. It can be as simple as ***posing questions*** to children - "How do you think you could make the wings for your jet?" or "How will you and Sonja share the fairy crystals?" or by engaging in ***wondering*** with children - "I wonder how you can let the other children know how much your cakes will cost?" or "I wonder what you will do, if all the pipes are being used in the mud patch?"

For problem solving to be a major focus in a program, it is also of benefit to introduce a ***problem solving process*** to children. This process involves the steps of:



As a strategy for enhancing social relationships, problem solving has a very obvious role to play in assisting children with conflict resolution. However, the actual process involved in problem solving, for whatever purpose, also provides authentic opportunities to enhance relationships within a setting. Problem solving with others can facilitate exposure to and acceptance of different perspectives, practice in talking and listening to others, and the scaffolding of deeper level thinking as children consider actions and reactions. It has the potential to contribute significantly to a sense of community as children engage in the process with a wide range of peers beyond their preferred playmates. The conversational approach of the problem solving process involves children in sustained shared thinking, with such interactions being identified as crucial in extending children's thinking and learning (NQS PLP e-Newsletter No.43 2012). Rather than resulting in a "rule" to be followed, problem solving can lead to a decision being made about action to be taken, and it has the potential to become an ongoing conversation within a group.

"Walking inside"

A kindergarten group had been having issues with children forgetting to walk inside. This was brought to everyone's attention at group time. It was a problem because a child had fallen down and two other children had 'collided' with one another when they were running inside. The question was posed to the group, "How can we help people to remember to walk inside?" Solutions offered by children included - tell them to stop, tell them they are naughty, put up a sign, put up a 'stop' sign, put up your hand and say 'stop'. All the suggestions were accepted without judgement (a crucial part of this step) and everybody was thanked for sharing their ideas. After some discussion it was decided to make a sign that said, "please walk inside kindy". We knew that not everybody would be able to read the words so it was also decided that children might help to draw pictures on the sign to help us remember what the words said. This led to further discussion of what the pictures would be about – maybe a smiling face because we would be happy, maybe someone walking, maybe the colours of kindy, maybe two people bumping into each other. The sign was duly made with six children choosing to add drawings. When finished it was placed on the wall at child height. Several times, children have been overheard saying to others "Remember the sign – Walk inside" or "Look at the sign – Walk inside".

Even when the problem to be solved is not related to a social issue, the process itself provides an experience which can build on a child's sense of wellbeing and enhance connections within a group. It facilitates turn taking and consideration of others and can afford children a sense of agency as, by its very nature, the process infers the competency and capability of children, and their ability to impact on their environment.

"Food for dinosaurs"

At group time, Bill announced that he was going to make an island for dinosaurs to live on. The discussion turned to what the dinosaurs would need to eat on their island and trees were an agreed option. And so the problem was stated, "How could Bill make the trees? Does anyone have a suggestion?" Several hands went up and possibilities were voiced. Again suggestions were accepted without judgement. Ideas included drawing on paper and cutting out, building with blocks, using cardboard rolls, using the plastic sticks from the shed. Everyone was thanked for sharing their ideas and it was also stated that now Bill would be able to decide how he would solve his problem. Bill implemented a solution during play and when the group came together again, he was able to tell us what he had done (he had elected to use stickle bricks to build trees), and if the solution had worked.

Utilising a problem solving process requires teachers and educators to employ a range of skills to allow such conversations to take place, and to expand and flourish. These skills include management of situations so that children's voices are heard, modelling acceptance of ideas and contributions, and maintaining sustained shared thinking through clarification, reframing, speculating, questioning and showing **genuine** interest (Siraj-Blatchford, 2005).

The benefits of involving children in problem solving are many, and easily address the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) Outcomes. Through involvement in problem solving, children have opportunities to:

- Develop their sense of confidence, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency, to feel supported and to interact with others with care, empathy and respect as all contributions are accepted and valued (EYLF 1).

- Develop a sense of belonging to groups as they contribute to the problem solving process, respond to diversity with respect as they listen to the ideas of others, and become aware of fairness as they take turns to contribute and engage in the process of choosing and evaluating possible solutions (EYLF 2).

- Become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing as they demonstrate trust and confidence in the problem solving process, working collaboratively with others, self regulating and managing their emotions as issues are addressed (EYLF 3).

- Develop dispositions for learning such as cooperation, creativity, enthusiasm, persistence and imagination, as well as skills and processes related to problem solving, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating, and have practise at transferring and adapting what they learn from one context to another as solutions from one problem are adapted to another situation (EYLF 4).

- Interact verbally with others (as both speakers and listeners) as problems are discussed, and to go on to express ideas in a range of ways as solutions are implemented (EYLF 5).

Problem solving does take time and commitment on the part of adults, but it provides valuable opportunities to make significant impacts on the quality of the group experience.

References:

Dept of Education, Employments and Workplace Relations. (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming; The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* . Commonwealth of Australia.

Knudsen, M. (2006). *Library Lion*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Laevers, F. (2012). ‘Pointing the compass to wellbeing – why and with what kind of result’, *Every Child*, 18 (3),26-27.

NQS PLP e-Newsletter No.43, 2012. <http://www.earlychildhoodaus-tralia.org.au/nqsplp/>

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2005). 'Quality Interactions in the Early Years', *Birth to Eight Matters! Seeking Seamlessness - Continuity?* Integration? Creativity? TACTYC Annual Conference, Cardiff, UK. <http://www.tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/2005conf_siraj.pdf>

LEADERSHIP

Sharing Educational Leadership

Author:
Fiona Black
Director
Community Kids Mount Gambier Early Education Centre, SA

When the National Quality Framework (NQF) was implemented in 2012, there was a great deal of discussion around the role of educational leaders, and what their responsibilities would include. Many of us, as centre Directors, made appointments based on our own best judgement. I asked one of our Group Leaders, who was studying for her Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, if she would be our centre's educational leader. Apart from her current study, she was always bringing in programming examples and was very confident using the NQF. As educational leader she was given non-contact time to support, train and check how the other rooms were going, and this arrangement seemed to work well for a month or so. Then, unexpectedly, she left me a letter saying that she didn't want the responsibility anymore, because she felt that she didn't have enough time to work with educators in the five children's rooms; educators were interrupting her during interactions with the children on a regular basis; and she had limited time outside work due to her studies.

While, as a service, we were holding meetings around the NQF and how to use it, our educators were still feeling lost or anxious every time a change was made. I thought, *"What am I going to do now?"* Whether by luck, good timing, or pure coincidence, I had, at the time, registered to start the Gowrie Leadership Modules, and my first one was around the role of the educational leader in centres.

Working through the leadership module gave me some helpful insights, "....services should choose a model of shared pedagogical leadership that works best for them. Regardless of the model, the team must establish objectives, delineate responsibilities, and articulate these broadly. .....The requirement of the National Quality Framework (NQF), in terms of both philosophy and implementation, entrusts the pedagogical leadership team with an overarching responsibility for ensuring that teaching and learning will be enriched" (ACECQA, 2011: 85-86).

Law and Glover, as cited in Rodd (2006:34), suggest that leadership is about "..motivating others to followship. Through motivation, inspiration and persuasion of them to realise their goals which are based upon an understanding of who the followers are, what their needs are and what resources they can offer the group." The word 'followers' when put in the context of 'inspiring', and with a new grasp of my need to 'understand who the followers are' made my task more achievable. I was also inspired by the notion of

charismatic leadership and the notion of empowering others in order to share and achieve a vision together (Lussier & Achua, 2011).

It was clear to me now that I already had a team of educational leaders who had the knowledge and passion to plan and reflect in collaborative teams. I had one teacher, another staff member studying to become a teacher, and my second-in-charge who has been mentoring and helping other educators understand our curriculum. I decided to share this responsibility with the 'pedagogical leaders' already in each room.

The educators agreed to a new model of leading their teams, coming together for regular 'Educational Leadership' meetings and, from there, bringing new learning and ideas to their own teams. Co-constructing a vision of learning in relationship to our own centre's culture has provided us with outcomes of fairness, equality, purpose and a commitment to continuous improvement. I support the educational leaders by allowing them non-contact time to reflect on their practices as leaders, and to hold professional conversations with each other.

I believe that we are here to guide and facilitate each child's learning journey and that this involves much more than sending home a piece of artwork with the child each night. Our program is now about providing a play based educational curriculum.

We are currently in the process of displaying our curriculum plans and documentation, including individual profiles and floor books in the foyer - creating a quiet place where families can stop and read about what their children are learning, before entering rooms for drop off and pick up. As an organisation we are also looking at how we can better share this information with families, and will begin trialling a web based parent access program this year.

I am hoping that this 'shared leadership' model will create a community of learners who will embrace constant reflection and change, that our respectful community will empower everyone to feel valued and responsible for each other and that this, in turn, will foster positive outcomes for children.

References:

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2012). *Guide to the National Quality Standard.* <www.acecqa.gov.au>

Rodd, Jillian (2006). *Leadership in Early Childhood.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Lussier, R.N. & Achua, C.F. (2001). *Leadership: Theory, application, skill, development*. USA: South-Western Cencage Learning.

THE "Good Enough" TEACHER

Author:
Luke Touhill
Early Childhood Consultant

"I would rather be the child of a mother who has all the inner conflicts of the human being than be mothered by someone for whom all is easy and smooth, who knows all the answers, and is a stranger to doubt."
Donald W. Winnicott, 1955.

In the early 1950s Donald Winnicott, a British psychoanalyst, developed the theory of the 'good enough' mother. He was responding to the popular idea of the 'perfect mother', an ideal that he saw causing guilt and anxiety in otherwise competent mothers who worried that they were somehow failing to measure up to what was, in fact, an unrealistic and unachievable standard.

Winnicott argued that children were resilient – the human race would not have survived if they weren't – and that provided mothers (or, as we would say today, parents) were 'good enough', most of the time, then occasional 'failures' were unlikely to be harmful. In fact, he argued, such failures were actually important for children's development. Without them children would never learn to live in the real world, as opposed to a world of constant adult attention and cosseting.

Like the famous opening lines of Dr Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* (1972), "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do", Winnicott's message was one of reassurance. The 'good enough' mother no longer had to measure up to perfection - she simply had to be good enough. It wasn't an excuse for laziness or poor parenting. 'Good enough' was still a high standard, but by allowing some leeway, it took away the pressure and anxiety of feeling the need to always get it right. It took away the pressure to be perfect.

These days no one seems to remember Winnicott. I recall being taught about him at university but the decision to include him amongst the more well known theorists – such as Piaget and Vygotsky - must have been a personal one on the part of our psychology lecturer, because no one else I know has ever heard of him. His idea of the 'good enough' mother though, has always stuck with me, perhaps because in the midst of so much theory, it seemed so commonsense and down to earth.

Today perfection remains an alluring and enticing goal. Indeed, who wouldn't want to be perfect? And yet perfection, despite its seeming attractions, is in fact a poor motivator. While high expectations are, as the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) reminds us, important, such expectations need to be realistic if they are to be achievable. When we use perfection as the benchmark against which to measure ourselves, we almost always fall short – and usually respond by feeling either resentful, or guilty, or both.

I am reminded of the dangers of perfectionism, and of Winnicot's response to it, when I talk to educators about the EYLF and the National Quality Framework (NQF) and how educators perceive their own role within both of the frameworks. The introduction of the EYLF and NQF represent two of the most important and positive developments for the Australian early childhood field for a generation. And yet, for some educators, their introduction has produced an unintended sense of disempowerment and anxiety. In some cases, this is simply a natural reaction to change. In others however, there is a feeling that the role of educators is now so complex, and the expectations so high, that it is all increasingly unachievable.

Of course, for some educators – those whose practice is outdated, tired or simply poor – the EYLF and NQF *should* be challenging and demanding, even confronting. However, when experienced and capable educators are just as anxious, then it seems that something may be going awry. I don't think the problem lies with the frameworks. The EYLF and NQF were designed to challenge and provoke our thinking, but the intention was not to overwhelm and demoralise. It seems to be more about our response to the very idea of standards and expectations, and the misconception that they demand perfection from us.

In working with the new frameworks we need to be careful that in applying high expectations to ourselves, we do not inadvertently head down the road to perfectionism. It doesn't have to be that way. Read carefully, the EYLF and the National Quality Standard (NQS), provide ample evidence that perfectionism is not the answer. Such a path however is difficult to avoid, if only because perfectionism is such a pervasive idea. We live in a society that idealises the perfect life, the perfect job, the perfect body, the perfect family. We are bombarded with the message that perfection is both possible and desirable. In the face of this, it is hard not to be sucked in, despite the fact that

measuring ourselves against the unattainable only leads to dissatisfaction.

This is where Winnicot's idea of being 'good enough' offers an alternative way to think about what we do. The truth is that no one is perfect. That doesn't mean we shouldn't set high standards, or aim to improve. This is not an argument for slap-dash or half-baked practice. Nor is it an excuse or apology for laziness. Instead it is an attempt to think about what really matters in quality early childhood education, and our role in it, without idealising the impossible.

As educators we are called upon to make hundreds of decisions every day. Some are small, while others are large, some will be inconsequential, while others will have lasting impacts. Understandably, we want to make good decisions as often as possible. But if we imagine that we can always make the right decision, and always do the right thing, then we are setting ourselves up for failure.

In this regard the principles of reflective practice and ongoing improvement, are vital parts of both the EYLF and NQF. Importantly both recognise that we are not perfect. In a perfect world there would be no need for reflection or improvement. However, the message that there is always room for improvement, can itself be taken in two ways. Either it becomes a comfort (that none of us is perfect) or it can become a thorn in our side, reminding us of exactly the same thing, but with an added twist – we are not perfect but we should be. If we allow ideas about improvement and reflection to become coupled with an expectation of perfection, then they become just another way to beat ourselves up about what we have done 'wrong'. When we look at what we do from the vantage point of perfection, we will always fall short. While it is important to identify areas where we can improve, it is also important to recognise that there are things we do well. Everyone makes mistakes, and there will always be things that, given a second chance, we might do differently. But the value of reflective practice is in seeing such 'failures' in the context of everything we do. There is something in human nature that seems to lead us to focus on the negatives, even when they are outweighed by positives. But we don't have to let our mistakes define us. The key is to see them as learning opportunities, rather than as black marks against our name. 'Good enough' gives us permission to do this.

Good enough allows us to put our mistakes into perspective and, as the EYLF and NQS argue, to use them as the basis for genuine and meaningful reflection and improvement. Of course there are mistakes we don't want to make. The wrong dose of medicine, the gate left open, the child left unattended on the change bench – all are inexcusable and we rightly develop policies and procedures to ensure that they don't happen. But, if we aren't willing to make more minor mistakes, then we are unlikely to learn or to improve. The good enough teacher gets it right often enough that children feel secure and supported, but is also prepared to get it wrong often enough, that there is a chance that something new or interesting will occur. Getting it 'wrong' occasionally is an important learning experience both for ourselves and for the children we work with. As Winnicott argued, the perfect parent actually does little to help a child adjust to life in what is clearly an imperfect world. When we allow ourselves to be human and to make the occasional mistake, we demonstrate a valuable lesson about what it means to be a well-rounded person, warts and all.

Resilience and persistence are key qualities that we aim to encourage in children. We would do well to look at how we build them in ourselves too. Perfectionism, and the fear of failure that often accompanies it, decreases the likelihood that we will take chances. When we have the expectation that everyone will do everything right, all of the time, we place an unrealistic burden on ourselves. Faced with the expectation of perfection we are likely to take the safe option, rather than take a risk. And yet how often does the most interesting learning come from a mistake or unintended circumstance?

As we seek to improve our practice it sounds almost contradictory to say that perfection is not the answer. But, as educators, we would do well to shake off the idea that perfection is what we should be aiming for. While 'good enough' doesn't sound quite as inspiring as 'perfect', it is a lot more achievable. And it is still good, it just isn't perfection. But if that means that we feel better about ourselves, and if it allows us more opportunities to take a chance and try something new or different without fear of failure, then all the better. Perhaps, seen in this light, being 'good enough' really is enough.

References:

Spock, B. (1972). *Baby and child care*. New York: Pocket Books.

Winnicott, D.W. (20th century), British child psychiatrist. A collection of previously unpublished essays and radio broadcasts from 1955. Health Education Through Broadcasting, ch. 2 (1993). cited in Columbia World of Quotations. Retrieved May 02, 2013, from Dictionary.com website: <http://quotes.dictionary.com/I_would_rather_be_the_child_of_a>

National and International CONFERENCE UPDATE

Spring 2012

Summer 2012

Autumn 2013

ACER Research Conference 2013

How the Brain Learns: What lessons are there for teaching?
4 – 6 August 2013
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, VIC
W: http://www.acerinstitute.edu.au/research-conference

National Quality Framework Conference 2013

Quality, Consistency, Excellence
12 - 13 September 2013
Australian Technology Park, Sydney, NSW
W: http://acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework-conference-2013_1

Infant & Early Childhood Social & Emotional Wellbeing Conference 2013

What vision do we want for our future?
Where should we be focusing our attention and effort?
30 October – 2 November 2013
Canberra, ACT
W: http://www.iecsewc2013.net.au

2013 WA Early Childhood Education & Care Conference

Wheels in Motion
26 – 27 October 2013
Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre, WA
W: http://www.waecec.com

LSAC & LSIC Research Conference 2013

Growing Up in Australia and Footprints in Time
13 – 14 November 2013
Rydges Melbourne, VIC
W: http://www.aifs.gov.au

Honoring the Child, Honoring Equity Conference 13

Narratives of Equity
15 – 16 November 2013
University of Melbourne, VIC
W: http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/yrc/

Gowrie Australia

Promoting and supporting quality services for all children.

Our Mission

Nationally committed to optimal outcomes for children and families.