

reflections

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BRINGING LEADERSHIP INTO FOCUS: LOOKING THROUGH MULTIPLE LENSES

The Early Childhood Education and Care Team, Lady Gowrie (Qld)

In 2012, after the introduction of the National Quality Framework, Lady Gowrie (Qld) created a series of Professional Workbooks designed to help individual Educators, Teachers and Service Leaders to engage with Professional Topics central to their everyday roles and responsibilities in early childhood settings. The first topic Leadership in the Early Years was rolled out at Lady Gowrie (Qld) Network meetings across Queensland in 2013.



BRINGING LEADERSHIP INTO FOCUS: LOOKING THROUGH MULTIPLE LENSES (CONTINUED)

Lady Gowrie (Qld) has over 100 affiliated kindergartens. In 2016, as part of our commitment to ongoing professional development, we conducted research to give the organisation a better understanding of where our Educational Leaders see themselves in the context of their environment and what support the organisation can provide for them.

We asked educational leaders how they saw their role when first appointed as educational leader (after the introduction of the role in 2012). The diagram below illustrates the response:



It was clear that when first appointed Educational Leaders saw themselves as leaders, mentors and responsible for guiding team knowledge and experience.

We then asked our Educational Leaders how they would describe their role now? Some respondents described their role as the same or similar and others went on to discuss how their general understanding of the role had been clarified or their concept of the role had expanded.

The following changes to the role and needs were perceived:

- promoting reflection on teaching practices
- people management
- advising on behaviour management
- supporting families and supporting staff to support families
- overseeing programs and policies
- ensuring consistency of philosophy in the centre
- educating families and community about play based curriculum

Along with perceived changes in the role, it was also clear that the role came with its challenges:

- finding time
- promoting quality improvement/professional growth
- personal feelings related to the role
- acknowledgement of the role

Clearly, this is a complex role and as an Early Childhood Education and Care Coordinator team we have spent some time exploring the 'multiple lenses' of this leadership position in order to address the research findings.

We have looked at four main areas:

- meaningful documentation: seeing the child
- making time for educational leadership
- nurturing and building the strengths of the team
- knowing yourself, knowing your team

We brainstormed the topics, drew up webs to illustrate our ideas and developed workshop tools to use as conversation starters and reflective practice exercises with Early Childhood Leaders.

With the introduction of the revised National Quality Standard in February 2018, the role of the Educational Leader continues to be a significant one. Element 7.2.2 of



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the NQS states that ‘The educational leader of a service plays a significant role in guiding and developing educators’ and families’ understandings about play and leisure-based learning, and the significance of the early years in the education continuum for children.’ (Guide to the National Quality Framework 2017, p. 303).

At a team level, we continue our discussions and conversations about the Role of the Educational Leader in our kindergartens. According to The role of the educational leader 3 part series on the ACECQA We Hear You, “Educational leaders play an integral role in mentoring, guiding and supporting educators” and “The most effective educational leaders work collaboratively with educators, children and families to decide ambitious goals for the curriculum as well as the focus and purpose of the educational program” (We hear you, The role of the educational leader Part 1 2016).

Lewis and Hill (2016) have researched leadership, posing the question ‘What does early childhood leadership look like in education and care settings?’

“The completion of extensive research and national consultations has led to a number of understandings about leadership in ECEC settings that include:

- Leadership is about identity—it starts from within.
- Leadership is about influence (both directly and indirectly) and responsibility, and is therefore potentially open to everyone.
- Leadership demonstrates respect as an enactment of ethical commitments.
- Leadership is about qualities and values rather than position.
- There is not just one way to enact leadership—it is complex, dynamic and varies from situation to situation and from culture to culture.
- Leadership is about purpose.
- Leadership capabilities can be professionally developed.”

Moving forward, our team will be working with Educational Leaders as we visit our services and provide support.

ACECQA has produced an Information Sheet Quality Area 7 *Educational leadership and team building*. It is important for our services to create a collaborative leadership culture where leadership draws on each educator’s strengths and expertise.

Some questions for consideration as discussed in the Information Sheet will be a focus of our conversations with the service leadership team:

- When and how do you support a shared leadership model?
- How do you create and nurture a professional learning community?
- How can a collaborative approach ensure documentation is meaningful, relevant and informs your work with children and families?
- How does your shared leadership model connect with your service vision, mission and philosophy?

(National Quality Standard Information Sheet Quality Area 7 Educational Leadership and Team Building 2016)

....“so much to do, however it is a healthy challenge and it’s done with optimism and a desire to get it right, providing the best for our teachers, educators, families and children”.

Jane Bourne, CEO Lady Gowrie (Qld)

References:

- Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority 2017, *Guide to the National Quality Framework*, accessed <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about/guide>
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- Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority 2016, *We hear you, The role of the educational leader Part 1*, accessed <https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/2016/10/06/the-role-of-the-educational-leader-part-1/>
- Lewis, J. and Hill, J., 2016, ‘What does leadership look like in early childhood settings?’ *The Spoke Early Childhood Australia’s Blog*, accessed <http://thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/leadership-look-like-early-childhood-settings/>

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