

reflections

GOWRIE AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION • AUTUMN 2010 • ISSUE 38



INSIDE:

The EYLF

The National quality framework for ECEC

Investigating the Possibilities of the EYLF

What pushes your buttons?

Responding to an emergency in child care: Reflections on a professional practice

A Gowrie Australia Resource to Support Educators Implement EYLF



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

PUBLISHER

TTR Print Management Pty Ltd on behalf of Gowrie Australia

EDITOR

Josephine Musumeci

DESIGN

Angela Reeves

PHOTOGRAPHER

Naomi Mawson & 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: susan.irvine@ladygowrie.com.au

PHOTOCOPYING

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please contact your local Gowrie for *Reflections* subscriptions.

POSTAL ADDRESS

228 St Paul's Terrace
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Telephone: 07 3252 2667

Facsimile: 07 3252 2258

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 38, Autumn 2010

© 2010 Gowrie Australia

CONTACT DETAILS - Gowrie Australia

Lady Gowrie Child Centre South Australia

39a Dew Street
Thebarton SA 5031

Ph: 08 8352 5144 **Fax:** 08 8234 1217
Email: train@gowrie-adelaide.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-adelaide.com.au
Contact: Christine Burgess

Lady Gowrie Child Centre NSW

3 Joynton Avenue
Zetland NSW 2017

Ph: 02 8345 7603 **Fax:** 02 9313 7022
Email: inservice2@gowrie-sydney.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-sydney.com.au
Contact: Diane Duvall

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.gowrie-brisbane.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: caroli@gowrievictoria.org.au
Website: www.gowrievictoria.org.au
Contact: Carol I'Anson

The Gowrie (WA) Inc.

275 Abernethy Road
Cloverdale WA 6105

Ph: 08 9478 7500 **Fax:** 08 9478 2930
Email: info@gowrie-wa.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-wa.com.au
Contact: Virginia Aden

Welcome to the first edition of *Reflections* for 2010. We are starting the new year on a celebratory note. The Gowries nationally are celebrating 70 years of providing quality services for young children and their families. We are also celebrating the national commitment to a new strengthened and integrated Quality Standards Framework for early childhood education and care in Australia.

On 7 December 2009, the Council of Australian Government's endorsed a new National Quality Standards Framework, comprising of seven quality elements, licensing and high quality standards and a five point rating scale. We join Early Childhood Australia national president, Margaret Young, in commending government's resolve to progress the new National Quality Standards Framework. As *Reflections* readers will know, there has been a great deal of debate about some of the new standards, and some compromises. However, the Framework has maintained its aspirational focus and will challenge us all to raise the quality bar. As Margaret points out, this is a very good thing for children, families, the community and our profession.

Building our knowledge and understanding, government colleagues respond to a number of frequently asked questions about the Early Years Learning Framework and the new National Quality Standards Framework. We encourage you to share this information with colleagues and families, and to share with us any further questions that you may have about any aspect of the national early childhood reform agenda. Let's build our understanding together!

Looking for tangible support to "get started"? Read about Gowrie Australia's new resource designed to support meaningful and ethical assessment in early childhood education and care.

Jennifer Sumsion and Linda Harrison reflect on an exciting new research program, funded by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young People (ARACY), to investigate and determine the impact of the Early Years Learning Framework. The initial project meeting heralds the strength and possibilities of collaborative research that engages a range of stakeholders (ie. government, universities, educators and other child and family professionals).

In the spirit of shared reflective practice, we consider educator responses to children's behavior and ask "what pushes your buttons?" We also reflect on a real emergency in child care and share thoughts on what worked and what might be done in future to strengthen protective factors and reduce the risk of similar situations arising – in child care, at home and in the community. This article certainly demonstrates the role of ECEC in promoting positive child outcomes and preventing adverse outcomes, in the immediate and longer-term.

Another jam-packed edition to bring you up to date with national policy developments, home-grown research and practice tips to support the provision of quality services for children and families across Australia.

Read and enjoy!

Dr Susan Irvine
CEO, The Gowrie (QLD) Inc

OTHER GOWRIE CEO'S

- Ruth Callaghan – Lady Gowrie Child Centre NSW
- Gilda Howard – Gowrie Victoria
- Ros Cornish – Lady Gowrie Tasmania
- Kaye Colmer – Lady Gowrie Child Centre South Australia
- Amanda Hunt – The Gowrie (WA) Inc

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- 5 The EYLF
- 9 The National quality framework for ECEC



- 7 Investigating the Possibilities of the EYLF



- 12 What pushes your buttons?



- 15 Responding to an emergency in child care: Reflections on a professional practice



- 18 A Gowrie Australia Resource to Support Educators Implement EYLF

- 14 Book Review

- 20 Back Cover - National & International Conference Updates



Celebrating COAG

Author:
Margaret Young
National President
Early Childhood Australia

The outcome of the December 2009 Meeting of the Council of Australian Governments is indeed a cause for celebration, but, as with many celebrated causes, we need to proceed with care to protect its integrity and achieve its promise.

Early in the life of the current parliament Prime Minister Kevin Rudd recognised the importance of early childhood education and care (ECEC), including it in his personal vision for the year 2020. Some states were independently committing to a level of quality improvement, and COAG echoed the theme with the December 2007 reform partnership agreement between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments. This was followed by the COAG *National Early Childhood Development Strategy – Investing in the Early Years* in July 2009.

As part of COAG's work we have seen the development and early implementation stages of the *Early Years Learning Framework*, a major achievement in its own right. Beyond this, though, we needed real national improvement in the quality of service delivery. While our hopes were raised with COAG's recognition of the need for change, a strong national step forward in quality standards and the promise of review with an eye to further improvement was never a foregone conclusion. Our Heads of Government are to be congratulated on achieving this for the well being of children in December 2009 in the face of the many obstacles standing in the way.

There are many reasons for celebrating this COAG outcome.

While governments may see quality improvement in ECEC services as underwriting the achievement of long term productivity benefits for individuals and for the nation as a whole, the commitment to quality improvement also speaks to many other important issues – all causes for celebration. These include the rights of babies and young children as citizens; the responsibility of communities, through government, to ensure that these rights are addressed in all aspects of children's lives including ECEC services; and the need to be informed by evidence about outcomes for

children from services that are well staffed and operated to a high standard of quality. We should also celebrate the strength and clarity of the voice that came from our sector and the community in support of quality improvements before the December COAG meeting.

Even as we celebrate the COAG outcome and anticipate what it can bring, we know that implementing the new National Quality Standards, Quality Ratings System and nationally consistent regulatory arrangements for early childhood education and care services will involve challenges – big or not so big, welcome or unwelcome – for service providers, for governments and for stakeholders including universities and vocational trainers.

For example

- there will be pressure to produce many more qualified staff at a time when we need the quality and integrity of qualifications to be stronger, not watered down by large scale fast tracking
- we do need improved wages, conditions and career paths in the sector to support quality and stability
- the quality ratings system must look for structural elements such as staff qualifications and ratios as well as for elements of practice
- the pressure on service providers who need to make major changes will continue, as it should, and
- we will need to be watchful that all parents can access and afford services for their young children, and where necessary, as a community find ways other than compromising quality to achieve this.

If we can protect the integrity of the COAG promise, our ongoing celebration will be that on countless days to come families, staff in services and indeed the whole Australian community will be able to confidently rejoice in the well being, security, rich learning experiences and happy engagement of each baby and young child in every ECEC service.

What an achievement that will be!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Staff from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) were asked to answer some of our questions about the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. Their answers, and some background information about the development and continuing evolution of the EYLF are presented in the following articles. If you have any questions about EYLF or the ECEC National Quality Framework, now is the time to ask. Email your questions to Dr Susan Irvine (susan.irvine@ladygowrie.com.au) and we will endeavour to publish answers in the next issue of *Reflections*.

The Early Years Learning Framework: The Next Steps

Author:
Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations

Q: What is the Early Years Learning Framework?

A: *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework*, is Australia's first national curriculum framework for early childhood education. It will ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education. The aim of the Early Years Learning Framework is to extend and enrich children's learning. It will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs in order to ensure that children in all early childhood education and care settings experience quality teaching and learning. The Framework describes the broad principles, practice and outcomes required to support young children's learning. It has a specific emphasis on play-based learning and supports early childhood educators to work in partnership with families.

Q: What age group does it cover?

A: The Early Years Learning Framework covers from birth to five years and transition to formal schooling.

Q: Will it be mandatory?

A: The Early Years Learning Framework will be incorporated in the new National Quality Standard. Once this is in place, early childhood education and care settings will be expected to provide evidence of their use of the Early Years Learning Framework in the design and delivery of their early learning programs.

Q: What will the assessment element mean in practice?

A: The Early Years Learning Framework and the Educators' Guide acknowledge the important role of assessment in gathering, documenting and analysing evidence to assess learning in early childhood settings.

The Framework and Guide identify that documentation and assessment should be varied and not focus exclusively on the end points of children's learning and educators' teaching. Assessment should be based on

observation of, and engagement with, each child and their family to understand what children know and can do, and how they can be helped to extend their understanding and develop new skills, and not be based on developmental checklists or solely on outcomes. The Educators' Guide contains more detail and examples of assessment in practice.

Q: How can I access the Early Years Learning Framework?

A: The Early Years Learning Framework was sent to early childhood education and care centres in Australia, together with a Families' Guide. Additional copies of the Framework and the Families' Guide, which has been translated into 20 Centrelink recommended languages, is available on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' website at http://www.deewr.gov.au/Early-Childhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx

Copies of the Early Years Learning Framework are also available by emailing: eylf@deewr.gov.au.

Q: What support is available for implementation?

A: There are several elements to the Early Years Learning Framework implementation strategy:

- An Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, which will assist educators to implement the Framework, has been developed with an expected release in 2010.
- Support is being provided by the Australian Government-funded Professional Support Coordinators program and the Indigenous Professional Support Units which provide training and mentoring for child care services.
- The Australian Government is operating an online forum which was reopened on 11 September 2009 for approximately six months to enable early childhood educators and service providers to provide feedback on the draft Educators' Guide, to network with other early childhood educators and to assist in implementing the Early Years Learning Framework.
- A web-based training package and professional development for remote Indigenous settings are under development.

Q: What is the Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework?

A: *Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework*, has been developed to support early childhood educators' use of the Early Years Learning Framework.

The Educators' Guide is in two parts; the first part focuses on curriculum decision-making, promotes reflective practice and inquiry, and provides best practice examples and case studies. The second part contains educators' stories and models of their plans for the outcomes of children's learning, with questions to provoke thinking and generate discussion in relation to the principles, practices and outcomes of the EYLF. This will be accompanied by a CD of reference materials.

Q: Does it assist early childhood educators working with Indigenous children?

A: While the Indigenous context is embedded throughout the Guide, it also includes chapters on cultural competence and working with Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The Department will also be providing professional development for remote Indigenous settings. States and territories may also develop supporting material with a focus on assisting early childhood educators working with Indigenous children and with Indigenous communities.

Q: How can I get a copy?

A: The Educators' Guide will be mailed to early childhood education and care services in Australia in 2010. The Guide and background information will also be available on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website at http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx

A photograph of two children in a museum or educational setting. One child, wearing a red shirt and a magnifying glass, is looking at a large animal skull. Another child, wearing a white beanie and a red shirt, is holding a small object. There are other animal skeletons and a large rock on the table.

Investigating the Possibilities of the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

Authors:
Jennifer Sumsion
Linda Harrison
Charles Sturt University

In September 2008 a Charles Sturt University-led Consortium of academics, practitioners, peak organisations and early childhood consultants from across Australia won the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace (DEEWR) tender to develop and trial the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)*. For an incredibly intense nine months we worked closely with Council of Australian Government's EYLF Working Party - senior bureaucrats from DEEWR and all state and territory governments - to develop drafts of the EYLF.

Inevitably, many indepth discussions, complex negotiations and unavoidable compromises were required, but for everyone involved it was a period of immense professional learning. One of our greatest hopes for the EYLF was that it's implementation would generate amongst early childhood practitioners the same kinds of thought provoking, challenging and rewarding discussions that we had experienced in developing it.

We were very excited therefore, when we obtained funding from the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth Research Network – Future Generation Program of Support for New Collaborations. This enabled us to establish a national research network to explore ways to investigate the EYLF.

In November 2009 more than fifty people from around Australia travelled to Charles Sturt University, Bathurst for the first meeting of the EYLF collaboration. Participants included representatives from government and non-government organisations, including peak organisations, unions and other interested groups, the CSU-led Consortium – and, most importantly, practitioners from some of the case study settings that had participated in the trial of the EYLF.

The purpose of the meeting was to develop plans for a broad program of research that could:

- assist in evaluating the EYLF;
- identify processes to support early childhood educators' professional development and learning in relation to the EYLF in diverse ECEC settings throughout Australia;
- identify ways to enable ongoing refinement of the EYLF to support it to become a responsive and dynamic framework, not simply a static statement of what was feasible and politically acceptable at a particular point in time;
- develop collaborative research opportunities that would involve government, academics, peak bodies, practitioners and other stakeholders, such as unions, working together on shared interests and pooling their resources, experiences and expertise;
- contribute to the emerging research areas of early childhood curriculum development and evaluation, early childhood educators' curriculum decision-making, and pedagogical practices more broadly.

During the two day meeting, we heard updates from government and non-government organisations, Consortium members and case study trial participants concerning how the EYLF was being used, peoples' responses to it and their organisation's future plans for the implementation of the EYLF. Working together in small groups consisting of a mix of government bureaucrats, representatives from non-government organisations, practitioners and academics, we then identified some major themes and topics for research.



Listed below is a small selection of the many possibilities discussed.

They included:

In relation to implementation

- What do people actually do with curriculum frameworks like the EYLF?
- Who has a voice in the implementation? How?
- How do services give the national framework local relevance and significance?
- What provocations does the EYLF provide?
- What are the possibilities for using visual and digital technologies to support change and implementation?

In relation to structural support and changes

- How can we develop a culture of sharing best practice?
- How can the EYLF break down barriers (e.g. between care and education?)
- How can information be shared across different state jurisdictions?

In relation to leadership

- What do we mean by pedagogical leadership – Who drives it? Who pays for it?
- How do we develop strong leaders? What are the successes, barriers, struggles and stories?

In relation to quality

- How do we ensure that the EYLF produces quality?
- How do we ensure quality systems enhance rather than constrain the EYLF?

In relation to critical friends / mentors / professional learning

- What roles can critical friends / mentors play in sustaining engagement with EYLF? What does that look like in different contexts? To what extent does an 'outsider' help to break insularity?
- What sorts of professional learning actually lead to sustainable change in practice?

In relation to policy

- What baseline data is needed?
- How can cross sectoral collaborations be encouraged and supported?
- What are the silences? Who are silenced?
- How do the EYLF and National School Curriculum articulate?

In relation to EYLF content and practice

- What role does/can the EYLF play in reinvigorating teaching and sustaining productive reciprocal relationships?
- How are services making visible the language of *belonging being and becoming*?

In relation to children

- What scope does the EYLF provide for children's participation in curriculum decision making?
- How do we ensure the voices of very young children are honoured?
- Does the EYLF go far enough (for which children)?

In relation to the workforce

- What impact is the EYLF having on the workforce?
- What aspirations, hopes or desires has the EYLF inspired?

Towards the end of the two days, we formed project groups to refine some of these ideas and to identify ways of 'running' with them through collaborative writing and research. We are very pleased to report that an article reporting the experiences of the EYLF case study participants has already been published in a recent issue of ECA's *Voice*, and that several practitioner research projects are underway. We are currently seeking Industry Partners interested in contributing some funding, so that we can jointly apply to the Australian Research Council for funding to explore some of these ideas further. If you think your organisation might be able to help, we would be delighted to hear from you!

Jennifer Sumsion - jsumsion@csu.edu.au

Linda Harrison - lharrison@csu.edu.au

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

Author:

Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations



What was the outcome for early childhood education and care of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) meeting in December 2009?



Late last year all Australian governments agreed to a new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Child Care. This means that all Australian children, regardless of their location, will get the best possible start in life through high quality early childhood education and care services.

The National Quality Framework will put in place a new National Quality Standard to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and care across Australia.

These changes will help providers to improve their services in the areas that impact on a child's development and empower families to make informed choices about which service is best for their child.



What is the National Quality Framework?



The National Quality Framework has three parts:

- a National Quality Standard, that gives families clear information about the quality of early childhood education and care services they can expect their children to receive
- a national quality rating system with five levels, and including a quality rating for seven key areas of childhood development
- an Early Years Learning Framework that guides educators and carers in developing play based learning and development activities for children in early childhood education and care settings.

The new system will be jointly managed by the Australian Government and state and territory governments, with the states and territories taking responsibility for regulating services against the new framework and a new, national body providing oversight of the new system and ensuring consistency of approach.





Q: In what areas will changes be made?

A: The National Quality Framework will set a new National Quality Standard for early childhood education and care providers in Australia.

The National Quality Standard will improve quality through:

- improved staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention
- new staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop
- a new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information relating to the quality of early childhood education and care services
- the establishment of a new National Body to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality.

The new National Quality Framework will cover long day care, family day care, outside school hours care and preschools.

Q: When will the changes come into effect?

A: The framework is being introduced in stages over a number of years, starting from July 2010. This will give early childhood education and care providers across Australia time to get ready and adjust to the new requirements, particularly those relating to staff-to-child ratios and qualifications. Long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services and preschools will be covered by the framework.

The first changes start in July 2010 during a transition phase where services will begin to undergo assessment against the new National Quality Standard.

The national body and the new national legislation will come into effect by January

2012, with gradual implementation of improved ratios and staff qualifications over subsequent years.

Q: What is the new National Body?

A: There will be a new national body to oversee the National Quality Standard. It will oversee how the standard is being applied across the country to ensure that services are meeting the new requirements.

Services will only need to deal with one organisation within each state and territory, with oversight of the assessment process from the national body. This replaces the current situation where many services have to deal with multiple regulators. This will mean less regulatory burden for services, so they have more time to spend providing high quality early childhood education and care.

Q: What is the National Quality Standard?

A: The new National Quality Standard will help services to provide the best possible level of early childhood education and care by being clear about the factors that best support a child's development.

It will also give services and families confidence in understanding what distinguishes high quality or excellent services.

The National Quality Standard includes seven quality areas important in providing quality early childhood education and care services. These are:

1. educational program and practice
2. children's health and safety
3. physical environment
4. staffing arrangements, including improved staff-to-child ratios and qualifications
5. relationships with children
6. collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. leadership and service management.



Q: What are the benefits of introducing an integrated, National Quality Standard?

A: At the moment quality standards across early childhood education and care services vary across Australia.

A legal framework will support the introduction of the National Quality Framework from 1 January 2012. It will replace current licensing and regulation processes in each state and territory.

The new national body will oversee the National Quality Standard. It will oversee how the standard is being applied across the country to ensure that services are meeting the new requirements.

Major changes as a result of the Standard are improved staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications. Research suggests that staff-to-child ratios and higher staff qualifications are important to positive outcomes for children. The framework will assist child care professionals to have more time for quality interactions with children.

Q: What is the new national rating system?

A: The National Quality Standard will be complemented by a national rating system. The rating system will provide clear and accurate information for families and services.

The rating system combines the seven quality areas with a five level rating system. The rating system has the following five levels:

- unsatisfactory
- operating level
- National Quality Standard
- high quality
- excellent.

Each child care service will receive an overall rating following an assessment by a qualified assessor and services will be required to display their approval and rating information.

The frequency of assessment will depend on how well a service is performing. The number and frequency of visits will depend on a service's previous quality record, its current rating and any events associated with a risk or change in practice that indicate a service might not be meeting the National Quality Standard.

Q: How are families being supported?

A: The Australian Government understands the effect of early childhood education and care on the family budget.

That is why the Australian Government provides Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate to help families with the cost of these services.

Because these changes will be put in place over a number of years, and services will have time to adjust, there should not be a sudden increase in the cost of services. Providers will continue to make their own business decisions about the level and cost of service they provide.

The National Quality Framework changes do not impact on families' current eligibility for Commonwealth child care payments.

Q: Which regulator/s will my service need to deal with between now and 2012?

A: Services will continue to operate to the existing licensing and accreditation standards or quality assurance processes. Further guidance will be given to services over the coming months.

Q: Where can I find further information about the changes?

A: While the new system has been developed and endorsed by COAG, some aspects of the assessment system are being finalised and further information will be available to services over the coming months.

For more information on the National Quality Framework visit:

- the COAG website www.coag.gov.au
- the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR):
 - visit the website www.deewr.gov/earlychildhood,
 - call its National Quality Framework hotline on 1800 181 088, or
 - email ECECQualityReformEnquiries@deewr.gov.au
- the Australian Government's MyChild website www.mychild.gov.au
- the National Childcare Accreditation Council's website ncac.gov.au.



What Pushes Your Buttons?

Authors:

Lynne Rutherford

Cecilia Ebert


Project Officers

Primary Caregiving Program

Lady Gowrie Child Centre

South Australia

When children are scared or angry or unsure how to express themselves, they need an adult to be “bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind”.



With this paper we want to invite you, our readers to reflect, to stand back for a moment and think about your work with young children and the situations which have “pushed your buttons” and made you feel uncomfortable. Our capacity for reflection is an indicator of our capacity to create secure attachment relationships with children. So, let’s reflect.....

Is it the child who:

Cries a lot?

Bites others?

Says “NO!”?

Lashes out and hits you when upset?

Just won’t do what you tell her/him?

We all have things that aggravate us or, push our buttons, and often in these situations we find ourselves reacting. Perhaps we frown, or look cross, or sigh, or perhaps our tone of voice changes. It is really important that we recognise our own feelings in response to children’s actions. Our reactions (conscious and unconscious) influence the type of support we give to children (Dolby, 2007). “When your kids ‘push’ your buttons, they’ve actually tapped into your own struggles learning how to assert yourself” (Harris, 2003). These feelings are based on the values and beliefs that we have which are, in turn, influenced by the way we have been brought up (Mackay, 2004). This makes them very, very personal, not universal.

Hoffman (2003) explains State of Mind as “The conscious and unconscious beliefs, attitudes and values regarding past and current attachment experiences”.

Siegel (1999) reinforces this idea by saying that children can activate in us the most intense entanglements that present us with images and ideas from the past. This can lead us to enter an old State of Mind filled with sensations of fear, rejection, disappointment or anger which, in turn, colours our experiences with children.

With this in mind, we should really look at children's 'behaviour' using different lenses. There is still a perception among many adults that problems exist "...within children". This leads to children being labelled as 'attention-seeking' or 'manipulative' and this approach suggests that children need to change in some way (Roffey, 2007:16). The adult's role in the relationship is then about issuing appropriate punishments in order to change negative behaviour (such as biting, tantrums, aggression, defiance). If this is the case, are children supposed to change, behave, or be very careful of not upsetting adults? A key idea of Attachment Theory is that children are always the care seekers and we, as adults, are always the 'care givers'.

If your own beliefs suggest that children are always intentional in their behaviour, and the way they learn how to be with other children and adults is viewed in negative terms, then it is clear how your buttons can be pushed and you react accordingly. Perhaps another way of thinking about children's behaviour is to view it as the way in which they are seeking connections with others. According to Hoffman (2003) there is no such thing as attention seeking but only a desire to make connections.

Dolby (2007) says that we should look beyond the problems/behaviours children show to "discover the genuine relationship needs beneath". This concept supports the idea and invitation to move from, "My child's behaviour is random." to, "My child's behaviour has a meaning." (Hoffman, 2003). What we see is the behaviour of the child - what we don't see are the underlying feelings of the child.

Think back to how you react when you feel upset by a child's actions and ask yourself what your facial expression might look like to a child, or what that child might hear in your voice. When children are scared or angry or unsure how to express themselves, they need an adult to be "bigger, stronger, wiser, and kind" (Cooper, Hoffman & Powell 1998, cited in Dolby, 2007:22). These four words, and their intention, need to be included in our work with children. In order to help children to organise their feelings and to understand that the relationship can always be repaired, children need to be in the context of a secure relationship with a caring and sensitive adult. The Circle of Repair (Cooper et. al., 2003) can be used to illustrate how being a Safe Haven to the child helps the child to learn emotional regulation.

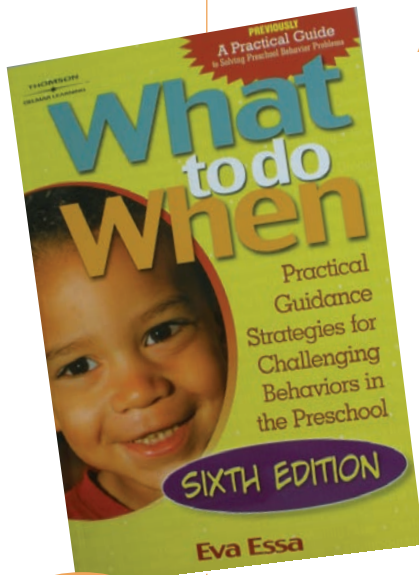
If we think of a child's age in terms of months rather than years it might give us a different perspective on our expectations of what they are capable of. Clearly children of 24, 36 or 48 months (not a long time on this earth) should not have unrealistic expectations placed on the way they act, interact or react. Children are too young to manage intense feelings without adult help and support (Dolby, 2007). Children also think in different ways to adults and don't always understand situations in the same way as we do (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2004).



As adults we are able to make choices about our perspectives, expectations and responses (Roffe, 2007). This is particularly important when we feel our buttons are being pushed. The way in which we respond to children's behaviour can have "a lasting effect on how they learn to regulate their emotions" (Linke, 2008:4). Linke also reminds us that young children use behaviour as a form of communication, to express their needs and feelings. Young children need caring adults who can listen, understand and help them learn to cope with situations they have not yet learnt how to manage.

References:

- Australian Childhood Foundation 2004, 'Every child is important: A booklet for parents', Vic, 2004
- Dolby, R 2007, 'The Circle of Security: Roadmap to building supportive relationships', *Research in Practice series*, Early Childhood Australia, Watson, ACT.
- Linke, P 2008, 'Developing a behaviour management policy', *Every Child*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 4-5
- Mackay, H 2004, *Right & wrong: how to decide for yourself*, Hodder Headline Australia Pty Limited, NSW.
- Roffey, S 2007, 'Behaviour, belief and action', *Every Child*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 16-17.
- Flory, V 2005, *Your child's emotional needs, what they are and how to meet them*, Finch Publishing, Sydney.
- Harris, B 2003, *When Your Kids Push Your Buttons*, Warner Books, AOL Time Warner Company, p. 113.
- Hoffman, K 2003, 'Understanding Attachment with the Circle of Security', Conference in Adelaide, Australia.
- Siegel, D 1999, *The Developing Mind. How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, Gilford publications Inc., New York.



\$64.95

Anne Houghton
Gowrie Victoria

What to do When: Practical Guidance Strategies for Challenging Behaviors in the Preschool by Eva Essa.
6th edition, Thomson Delmar Learning, 2008.

"What Pushes **Your** Buttons?" Authors Lynne Rutherford and Cecilia Ebert ask this question in their article in this edition of *Reflections*.

What did you come up with? Without a doubt, I'm betting you will have recalled stressful moments and behaviours in your work with children. I also suspect that the behaviours and situations that you have had to deal with are covered in *What to do When: Practical Guidance Strategies for Challenging Behaviors in the Preschool*.

While there are many books written about positive behaviour guidance, this book examines specific behaviours and addresses them thoroughly, devoting a chapter to each. The book focuses attention on possible underlying causes of specific behaviours and directs the reader to examine the environment, including the people in it, to find factors that may have an impact on the specific behaviour.

Essa, who taught early childhood education, explains in her introduction that students often expressed concern about challenging behaviours responding with "Yes, I understand and appreciate the theory and general principles, but what do I do when.....?" (p ix) This question led to her realisation that specific and helpful information was required addressing just what to do when faced with behaviours presenting specific challenges. You are "urged to examine what might be triggering challenging behaviors and to help children cope more effectively with stressful factors in their lives". (p x)

This book serves as a useful resource tool for early childhood professionals working with children. I suggest it be included as a resource within an early childhood service staff room. It's a book you can delve into at those times when you need immediate support to address or re-examine strategies dealing with behaviours that 'push your particular buttons.' For example, aggressive and anti social behaviours such as hitting, biting, throwing objects and hurting others are well covered. There are also chapters addressing what to do when children use inappropriate language, adopt name calling, tear books, waste paper or break toys. Disruptive behaviours such as upsetting a group time, running aimlessly around the room, shouting in the classroom or dropping objects to create noise are all specifically covered.

A feature of this sixth edition is a CD-Rom which is included in the back of the book. This includes a set of scenarios to help you apply the principles to hypothetical situations. You will feel supported to implement the strategies discussed within the CD-Rom and book.

Early childhood professionals often have time constraints due to their roles working directly with children. Recognising this, *What to do When* lends itself to being used to gain information and strategies about specific behaviours as they occur. Importantly, the book also stresses how readers might consult with a child's family and how to manage and maintain changes with specific strategies.

It's a book worth reading for when those buttons do get pushed!

Available through Gowrie Victoria Resource Centre & Online Bookshop
www.gowrievictoria.org.au



Responding to an emergency in child care: Reflections on professional practice

Imagine... It's 3pm on Friday – the end of another busy week. The temperature has dropped and the children are back outside playing. All seems well....then a staff member discovers a child with some prescription tablets in his pocket. The tablets are in an unopened blister pack – all are there. Then a second blister pack is found and a number are missing. What do you do?

Authors:
Debbie Verstege
Dr Susan Irvine
The Gowrie (Qld) Inc.

One of our centres recently had to deal with this scenario. In the true spirit of *Reflections*, this article recounts this very challenging incident, and shares some important practical lessons.

What happened?

The staff member immediately notified the Director of his discovery. The tablets were easily identified – as the name was on the back of the blister pack. A call to the Poisons Information Hotline provided more information about the drugs, revealing these were used for a variety of purposes including depression, and had potential to cause harm to young children. The centre was advised to call the ambulance, and was given information about the symptoms of ingestion.

Several ambulances quickly arrived at the centre. While there was some early discussion around taking the children to hospital (around 40 children!) it was subsequently decided to screen the children at the centre and send any showing symptoms of ingestion to the hospital. Screening commenced and thankfully no children demonstrated any of the noted symptoms. Parents were told of the incident as

they arrived to collect their children, and many were with their children during the screening process. Prior to leaving, all parents were given an information sheet identifying what to look for and do if they were concerned later that night.

As you might imagine, we were very anxious to discover how the tablets had got into the centre. Did we fail to pick up something during our regular morning grounds checks? There were workmen at the centre – had the tablets fallen out of someone's pocket? Had a child brought the tablets to the centre? To prevent such an incident happening again, it was important to determine how the tablets came to the centre. We continued our investigation. On Monday of the following week, a parent called the centre and we determined that a child had brought the tablets to the centre.

Reflecting on our response

Incidents such as this really 'test' our professional capacity and strength of team work. It would be easy to succumb to the sense of dread and panic that goes with any emergency situation.



The fact that we have a very strong organisational team and had established protocols and procedures to deal with emergency situations certainly helped. In terms of our response, in order of priority, we acted to:

1. Ensure the immediate safety and wellbeing of the children.
2. Inform and support parents.
3. Inform others eg. the State licensing agency – as per legislative requirement – our Board of Management; the media – who had picked up the story via police radio and were quickly on our doorstep and ultimately our other centres and families (important because the media didn't clearly identify which of our centres had been involved).

Team work was at the core of each of these responses. The Director had quickly notified management and accessed the support of the Operations Manager and CEO. The presence of extra senior staff enabled the Director and Assistant Director to focus on the needs of parents and staff attending to the children.

What worked well

- Effective team work. All staff stayed throughout the incident – well beyond their shifts. Senior staff and management worked together to manage the incident, taking on different roles and supporting each other.
- Keeping the identity of the child who brought the tablets to the centre confidential. We saw no need nor benefit in sharing this information with staff or families.
- Acting quickly to inform parents of the incident on the day and following up with further information over the next week:

- The Director and Assistant Director greeted parents on arrival to the centre, reassured them their child was well and shared news with them as screening progressed.

- We sought assistance from a telephone interpreter service to ensure clear communication with two families for whom English was their second language.

- Following the incident, two letters were sent to parents – providing information about the incident and actions we were taking to reduce the risk of this happening again.

- Making accurate information available to the media. The CEO quickly prepared a brief media statement to address waiting media outside the centre. It was important to ensure the media had correct information and to avoid any dramatization that could cause additional concern for parents and staff and potentially damage the centre.

- Seeking assistance from parents to reduce the risk of this happening again. Parents were asked to help by being vigilant and aware of what their children were bringing to the centre.

- Promoting prevention through education. As a preventative measure, to strengthen the children's safety, we incorporated the broad issue of safety and medication into the educational program over the next month. Key messages included:

- You only take your **own** medicine and never take someone else's medicine.
- It is your medicine if it has your name on the front or if mummy or daddy gives it to you.
- If someone offers you some of their medicine or tablets, say NO because it can make you sick. Tell an adult straight away.



We pursued this with the older children and encouraged all parents to share these messages with their children.

- Undertaking a full review of current risk management strategies and seeking to strengthen these where possible. Primarily this reinforced the importance of our core strategies:
 - the daily inspection of the grounds for safety hazards – conducted each morning before the centre opens
 - ongoing safety checks and management of play areas (indoors and outdoors) by staff throughout the day
 - vigilant supervision of all children throughout the day.

We also reviewed our playground set up and cut back some plants to strengthen supervision.

- Using the incident to promote learning. Staff at the centre have reflected (several times) on the incident and our combined response. We evaluated our performance against the Critical Incident Policy - and confirmed that all procedures had been followed. We shared the experience and what we learnt with Directors of our other centres.
- Finally, acknowledging and celebrating a job well done! All staff were thanked for a job well done and senior management's appreciation was passed on to staff on Monday morning. We received great feedback from families – with many taking time to write or email their compliments to staff on a job well done. Parents acknowledged the stressfulness of the situation, and commented on the highly professional and competent manner that staff managed the incident. We also received very positive feedback from colleagues at other early childhood services and our licensing agency. All feedback was immediately shared with all staff and our Board of Management.

- Responding to different staff needs in sensitive ways. While all staff rose to the occasion at the time, some found it more difficult to reconcile later and recognizing these different reactions helped everyone to put the incident into perspective over the next week or two.

While no-one would wish for a 'test' such as this, we can now look back and feel proud of the way we managed a very difficult situation. Doing this, we understand and acknowledge that the very successful outcome was the result of a collaborative effort by staff and management, ambulance officers, the Poisons Information Hotline, and the Royal Children's Hospital. Team work really counts in situations such as this!

Email from a parent:

To all the wonderful staff

We can only imagine how traumatic, worrying and stressful Friday's tablet incident must have been for you all.

On collecting our son, my husband was so impressed with how quickly you had all acted, the presence of the medical teams and how thorough your process of examining/screening each child was. You should all be commended for your efforts.

We are very fortunate to have our little boy in such wonderful care – so thank you!

In our opinion, you all deserve gold medals!

Kindest regards

A

A Gowrie Australia Resource to Support Educators Implement EYLF

Author:
Kaye Colmer
CEO
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
South Australia



With the introduction of the EYLF, staff from Gowrie centres across Australia have been working together in a project to review the range of possibilities for ways of approaching assessment. Our work has led to the development of a resource - “Assessment in the Early Years: A resource from Gowrie Australia drawing on the Early Years Learning Framework”.

Orders for the resource will be available from your state's Gowrie website and it is expected that professional development sessions will be available from your local Gowrie.

The introduction to the resource is published here to provide an insight to Gowrie Australia's position and information about the process of developing the resource. We hope it will be a valued contribution to support educators across all service types to embrace using EYLF.

This resource has been designed to support educators in implementing EYLF and to complement the Educators' Guide. It aims to support educators to develop, review and strengthen their own approaches to assessment.

Documenting children's learning and program evaluation has long been part of quality practice in early childhood education and care (ECEC). While promoting new terminology, the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), reinforces the importance of reflective practice and assessment of teaching and learning to promote the best outcomes for children. Whilst building on established good practice, the term 'assessment' is more often linked to the school sector and has prompted some debate in ECEC. What constitutes meaningful and ethical assessment in ECEC?

Gowrie Australia hopes that our resource will support educators to undertake meaningful and ethical assessment of teaching and learning in ECEC. In developing this resource a ground up approach was used. First the literature on pedagogical documentation was explored, then we invited team leaders and qualified staff from the South Australia Gowrie to workshop over several weeks what they believed were the underpinning philosophical, theoretical and practical issues in documenting children's learning. The team engaged in some very rigorous debate, and their ideas and assumptions were explored in depth and often challenged. This work eventually led to an understanding of how to approach writing this resource.

During this time we came to really appreciate the complexity of the ethical issues that must be considered in the process of making judgments about children's learning. We are committed to an approach to assessment that recognizes each child as rich with infinite possibilities. Our documentation is about seeking meaning to understand each child. We can never know for sure what a child is thinking or learning or really **know** their experience within the early childhood setting. As educators we use our knowledge of how children learn to make informed guesses and assumptions to try to understand and make meaning of their experience. We need to recognise that our own life experience, knowledge and dispositions affect the way we see or interpret a moment. One person's understanding of a moment will be different to another's. Documentation can be enriched and deepened if we are able and committed to gathering and valuing multiple perspectives. In documenting our thinking we provide the forum that allows parents, other staff and the children themselves to have a voice, to contribute in making meaning and to participate in decisions about learning.



Collaboration with families and children is at the heart of this process, creating shared understanding and a sense of working and learning together. Conversations about children's learning are a defining feature of effective partnerships with families.

We have collected examples of assessment and supporting documentation from early childhood educators across a range of early childhood settings including childcare, preschool, kindergarten and family day care.

The examples have been developed by educators who recognise their responsibility for creating ongoing records of children's learning (ie the achievements, experiences, ideas and aspirations of the children in their settings) to make learning visible. Examples in the resource show how assessment processes provide:

- a way for educators and families to share their perspectives and deepen their connections
- information to help educators to reflect on their programs and interactions
- guidance for planning for learning
- information that can promote continuity of learning and support successful transition to school.

We thank all the educators, parents and children in ECEC services around Australia who have been willing to share their views and experiences of assessment. In the spirit of shared practice and continuous quality improvement, we encourage you to reflect on these examples and to continue this conversation within your own ECEC service.

National and International CONFERENCE UPDATE



Winter 2009



Spring 2009



Summer 2009

Kidsafe Playground Conference

The nature of play

19-20 April 2010
Subiaco Arts Centre, Perth, WA
E: kidsafe@kidsafewa.com.au

Community Owned Children's Services ACCOS

3rd National Conference

14-15 May 2010
Novotel Wollongong, Northbeach, NSW
E: excellencecanhappen@ozemail.com.au

Early Childhood Intervention Australia Conference 2010

Every day in every way: Creating learning opportunities for every child

20-22 May 2010
National Convention Centre,
Canberra, ACT
www.ecia2010.com.au/

NAEYC's National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development 2010

Emotional Intelligence: A 21st Century Skill for Children and Adults

6-9 June 2010
Phoenix, Arizona, USA
E: naeyc@naeyc.org

Aboriginal Child and Family Services National Conference

For Our Children: Local Strengths, National Challenges

27-29 July 2010
Alice Springs Convention Centre, NT
E: sharynlow@pacific.net.au

11th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference

9-10 July 2010
Melbourne Convention Centre, Victoria
www.aifs.gov.au

European Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference 2010

Knowledge and voice in early childhood: Who knows, who speaks, who listens?

6-8 September 2010
University of Birmingham,
Birmingham, UK
www.eecera2010.org/

Early Childhood Australia's 2010 Biennial Conference

'Garla Bauondi' (To fuel the fire)

28 September – 2 October 2010
Adelaide Convention Centre, SA
E: conference@earlychildhood.org.au

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.