

reflections

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Whilst the previous edition celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Gowrie Centres, this 40th edition heralds another milestone – ten years of continuous publication of *Reflections*.

Featured in this 40th edition is an account of how some of the Gowrie early childhood education and care services have embraced the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Each article shares the different approach undertaken by services to support the understanding and implementation of the EYLF.

The first article shares the journey of a service in becoming familiar with the Framework and introducing it to educators and families. The service reports of the significant changes already evident in the program, with the educator comments at the end of the article clearly validating the introduction of the EYLF.

The introduction of the National Agenda, of which the EYLF is one initiative, is a defining time for early childhood education and care, drawing attention to the early years and the complexities of providing services which contribute significantly to young children's growth and development. Another article reminds educators of the need to become familiar with the document and to engage in conversations with colleagues and families. Highlighted in the article is the importance of taking time to critically reflect on current practice and gain a deeper level of understanding of Belonging, Being and Becoming.

Yet another approach undertaken by a service is the establishment of a Pedagogical Reference Group. One of the aims of this is to consider ways of supporting educators in the implementation of the EYLF.

An ongoing challenge to early childhood education and care services is engagement with families. The article relating to encouraging families to become familiar with the EYLF and the challenges which have emerged through this process is a timely reminder of the importance of raising awareness and understanding of the vital role early childhood education and care plays in the lives of young children.

There are many valuable resources emerging to support educators in the implementation of the EYLF. Gowrie Australia have collaborated to develop the publication, *Assessment in the Early Years*. To compliment this practical resource a professional development series is now available to encourage and assist educators to undertake meaningful and ethical assessment of teaching and learning. An overview of this professional learning series is featured in this edition.

Readers are welcome to share their EYLF journey by submitting articles for consideration to any of the Gowrie organisations listed inside the *Reflections* cover.

Whilst early childhood education and care has been the focus of recent government initiatives, it is pleasing to read Robyn Monro Miller's article on the development of a framework for middle childhood ie school age care. Often a forgotten sector, the government commitment to develop this framework demonstrates the respect and value of the work in the outside school hours care community.

The final article moves away from what has been a 'Framework' focused edition to share the enriching experience of a collaboration with a dance artist, as part of the Australia Council funded Fellowship, which explored the cultural lives of young children.

As this edition goes to print, the outcome of the Federal Government election is unknown. Regardless of the result, those who are committed to improved outcomes for Australia's most valuable asset – young children, can only implore the elected Government to progress the initiatives of the National Reform Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care, which contribute to these outcomes.

Ros Cornish

CEO, Lady Gowrie Tasmania

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Lady Gowrie Tasmania - University North Reflect on their Early Years Learning Framework Journey

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The centre's journey with the Early Years Learning Framework commenced at the end of 2009. Over the following months educators started the journey of familiarisation with the elements of the EYLF. The process of familiarisation supported educators to reflect on their own practices and how they related to the vision, principles, practice and outcomes outlined in the document. There was much professional discussion and debate about what this new document meant for us as educators working with children and families and also what this meant for children. In November 2009 a new Curriculum Planning model was introduced within the organisation that aimed to support improved quality outcomes for children. The model recognised the need for improving outcomes for children in early childhood and outlined ways in which this could be achieved. It was recognised that highly qualified and experienced educators were imperative to children's successful learning and development in their early years.

Becoming familiar with the EYLF document

A Curriculum Planning Facilitator (CPF) was appointed to each room with a significant increase of planning time allocated. The responsibility of the CPF included ensuring all team members, including regular relief members, undertook observations and recorded information for individuals and groups of children to be referred to during planning time. A team approach was seen as being paramount to the development of the curriculum. The model also included time for all members of each team to meet on a monthly basis to reflect on the curriculum and discuss the future directions. The CPFs attended an introductory session in March 2010 in which they were involved in reviewing the current curriculum planning model and offering suggestions and improvements which have since been incorporated into a new model.

New planning formats included:

- Individual Plans
- Group Plans and Assessments
- Curriculum Planning Policy and Protocols
- Planning Partnership Formats.

These documents closely reflect the vision, principles, practice and outcomes of the EYLF. Educators engaged in professional discussions and reflective practice strategies before implementing the new documentation. During this time the Centre Manager attended an information session facilitated by PSCTas (Professional Support Coordinator - Tasmania) in order to become familiar with a Team Meeting Professional Learning Package which could be utilised within the centre to further develop educator's skills and knowledge regarding the EYLF. A professional development session for educators followed.

Educators were involved in discussions and brainstorming activities during this session with a focus on:

- **Belonging** – understanding that children learn in social contexts and that their identities are defined by their interdependence and relationships with others.
- **Being** – understanding that children are capable learners from birth and live very much in the present. They actively contribute to their family and society.
- **Becoming** – understanding that childhood is the beginning of life with many possibilities. It is about ongoing learning and reflecting and emphasising the importance of participating fully and actively in society.

During the professional development session, educators also had the opportunity to delve further into their understanding of the principles, practice and outcomes of the EYLF and discuss the importance of reflective practice. Reflective practice was seen as an empowering learning tool which would enable educators to learn from and reflect on their own and others' practical experiences. As a group, educators described the benefits of reflective practice as allowing them to:

- grow and adapt
- improve current practices
- initiate and adapt to change
- focus on the positives
- weigh up the pros and cons
- see things in a different way/perspective
- involve children in the reflective process.

Changing curriculum planning

By May 2010, CPFs started to phase out previous program planning documents and began to implement the new ways of noticing, recognising and responding. Observations began to change from focussing on specific skills or areas of development to a more holistic approach, taking into account the environment, social interactions, language, adult involvement and really 'noticing' what children were doing and saying. Educators were given examples of documentation to use as a guide and families were invited to share information about their children, both verbally and in written formats, using the Planning Partnership Proforma, which asked for information on children's passions and interests, significant other people in children's lives and their hopes and expectations for their children. These proved to be a valuable tool as they gave educators extra insight into children's lives outside of the centre and tapped into families' goals for their children.

Linking EYLF to other learnings

During this time the centre was also working on Component 1 – Creating a Sense of Community, of the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative (KMEC). Educators attended two professional development sessions as an introduction to the component. We found that the target areas of Component 1 - Belonging and Connectedness, Inclusion, Positive Relationships and Collaboration, linked very closely with the elements of the EYLF. To further extend educators' knowledge of both of these vital documents and to gain input from all stakeholders, we distributed surveys to educators and families asking for their feedback regarding the target areas. Results were then collated and culminated in our being able to recognise areas of strengths and areas which we could work on to further enhance a sense of belonging, being and becoming for all children and to build strong partnerships with families. This information helped the centre to develop a plan of action including goals and strategies which included key elements from both KMEC and EYLF.

Our strategies and associated goals included:

- Providing a daily visual record for families of the experiences their children had been involved in by photographing children and displaying them using a digital photo frame. *This assisted in developing children's sense of identity and sense of belonging, developing strong partnerships with families and creating opportunities for educators to engage in reflective practice.*
- Involving children in making decisions about their outdoor environment and practice as well as inviting family participation in several organised events. *This strategy was aimed at helping children to become confident, involved learners, connected with their environment and with a deeper understanding of their relationship with other living things.*
- Inviting families to a Morning Tea and later a BBQ lunch, as well as seeking their assistance with an outdoor project. *Our aim was to develop a sense of collaboration between educators, children, families and the community and to help families and children feel a sense of belonging at the centre and within their community.*



During May and June practices were influenced again by an inspirational conference attended by all educators at the centre. One of the workshops focussed on using a strengths based approach to curriculum planning, which we had come to understand through our reflection with the EYLF. Learnings were consolidated and improvements to educators' approaches to curriculum planning became evident. Educators began to think further about what they noticed children doing and saying and ensured observations followed a strengths based model rather than a deficit model. Through conversations and reading, educators began to become more intentional in their teaching and the EYLF provided and supported the language and framework. The EYLF supported educators with ideas about what to observe and to see how looking at children as confident and capable learners opened up many doors and opportunities. The focus shifted from what was arbitrarily chosen as important for children to know, to finding out more about what children and their families see as important.

Other workshops at the conference focussed on sustainability and our understanding of the EYLF outcomes was further enhanced as educators engaged and networked with others to learn more about how important it is for children to be connected to and contribute to their world. Through professional discussions at the centre we realised the importance of embedding sustainability into the centre's daily routines and practices.

Where are we now?

From the journey to date there have been many significant benefits for educators, children and families. Through the centre's work with the EYLF change has been evident as:

- Families have become more involved and seem more willing to participate in the curriculum. Several families donated items and time to help make the outdoor environment more aesthetically pleasing and were keen to become involved in projects that encouraged them to spend time with their children. The centre asked for donations from local businesses of concrete, pebbles and plants and built a dry creek bed in one of the children's play areas. In another play area, a fernery was created, complete with log seating, ferns and large rocks under a big tree.
- Children seem happier and much more engaged with experiences. They need less intervention from educators and have been given more opportunities to enhance their curiosity, cooperation with others, creativity and confidence.

- Educators have become much more enthusiastic about their work as they see the results of their efforts. Educators are co-learners with the children and have an increased awareness of what is important. The EYLF has also reinforced educators' current practices and has helped them to realise that lots of things they do are documented in the EYLF.
- Educators have also had more opportunities to develop their reflective skills. Surveys and questions have asked them to reflect on their own understanding of the EYLF and what changes they have made to their everyday practices, as well as reflecting on their understandings of pedagogy, how they encourage family partnerships, valuing children's diversity and developing cultural competence.
- Educators have become more aware of what they are teaching and role modelling to children, incorporating learnings about the natural world, for example, recycling, reusing and being water wise, introducing natural/found objects into play and ensuring families are receiving regular updates about children's learning.

Educator's comments about the journey so far

Educators were asked to finish the following sentence, "The introduction of the EYLF has..." Their responses are shown below:

- "It has encouraged me to think more about what I do and made me more aware of how to enrich children's experiences".
- "The EYLF has helped me to focus on what is important in children's learning and to see children as confident, capable beings".
- "It has deepened my understanding of what is required to create an effective curriculum for children that celebrates their strengths and achievements".
- "The EYLF has inspired me to notice children in a more positive way and to look at their strengths and what they can do, rather than what they can't do".
- "We have begun to build closer partnerships with families and spend more time finding out about children's home life and parents' hopes for their child".
- "The EYLF has helped us to look at children as a whole, looking at their strengths and the influences of their family. It has encouraged us to have a more personal relationship with families and ask for their input more regularly".

In conclusion

As a centre we feel we have achieved a great deal in a short time but understand that we are on a journey that will progress well into the future. We are still unpacking the EYLF document and learning new things everyday which will help us to become better educators who are more 'in tune' with children and families.





Around our Kitchen Table

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The introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) has created an exciting context for professional learning and development for all educators working in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. Alongside this opportunity to further our learning is the expectation that as we reflect critically on our current practice we will plan ways to build on our strengths and implement needed changes. Our aim in making change is to make EYLF come alive in our day to day work, bit by bit.

Implementing sustainable change, so that EYLF does become embedded in this way, is much more likely to be achieved in settings where staff teams work collaboratively together to develop a shared understanding and 'EYLF' informed vision for their work together.

Professional dialogue is a central part of this collaborative work and a key learning strategy to adopt. The aim of professional dialogue is to dig deeply into the meaning of something so that we can move beyond 'first thoughts' and superficial understandings to fully appreciate the complexity and possibilities of new ideas. Seeing possibilities means asking questions, challenging ourselves to question our taken for granted ideas and ways of doing things. EYLF offers us many new ideas to explore in this way.

Getting started on this way of working, if it is unfamiliar, might mean planning for dialogue around one specific idea in EYLF and then carrying the opportunities to keep thinking together going informally. Using dialogue to learn and create change is a very different approach to the often more familiar 'transmission' models of learning or

managerial approaches to leadership. Through dialogue, staff teams build an understanding together so that they have deep understanding and commitment to new ways of doing things. If we spend time coming to understand the implications for change in practice embedded in EYLF deeply, we can approach making the changes we want with confidence and conviction. Rather than working with someone else's answers, formats or systems we'll be creating our own and therefore living the principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice that EYLF requires of us.

Below we share some of our own reflective journey as we tackle new ways of thinking and doing:

*In learning organisations, important and thought provoking conversations happen at unplanned times and in lots of different places - even in the kitchen! In her book, *The World Café: A Resource Guide for Hosting Conversations that Matter*, Juanita Brown comments:*

"Since our earliest ancestors gathered in circles around the warmth of a fire, conversation has been a core process for discovering what we care about. It's how we've always shared our knowledge, imagined our future and created communities of commitment." (Brown 2002)

This article describes the main themes in one such conversation amongst staff at Gowrie SA, who happened to meet unexpectedly around the kitchen table in the staff room for a 'conversation that mattered'. In this conversation, we realised how important slowing down and taking time to reflect purposefully on our practice has been for us in the

process of coming to deeper levels of understanding of the EYLF, Belonging, Being and Becoming. Much like the message from the tortoise and the hare, slowing down may not have seemed a “winning” place to start, but the destination we have reached is the richer for it.

Why might slowing down be the best starting point?

If we rush, there’s a high probability that we will simply relabel current practice using new words.

In our busy world, it is tempting to take something new and make it fit with what we already know and do. We seem to respond to change as if it is an added burden and we turn ourselves inside out trying to avoid as much disruption as possible. In these efforts to minimise disruption however, we often miss the opportunity to explore and learn new ways. To fully embrace the meaning and intention of EYLF, we need to rise to the challenge and acknowledge our own professional capacity to create something new and exciting. The framework is designed to inspire conversations – so let’s start talking!!

- Can someone who doesn’t know your staff team or your service really design a curriculum for you?
- Does one size really fit all (have you been clothes shopping lately)?
- Would you want to order from the same fixed menu every day?

Kay Albrecht and Bev Engel (2007, cited in Carter 2010) suggest that our profession needs to move away from the quick-fix mentality. If we genuinely want to understand and improve on our programs and practices, don’t we need to invest our time? It is important to remember that not everything will change, but it is just as important to realise that if things can change for the better, now is a good time to begin. A useful starting point may be to talk about what you are currently doing in your service which supports high quality. Where do you, and your service, ‘fit’ in EYLF?

There is a rich source of information in the EYLF outcomes about planning and practices – do you know what it says? Can you see yourself there? Time spent discussing the examples of practice in the educator’s column will be time well spent. Keeping a record of these conversations is a valid and authentic way to support your service in achieving Accreditation standards and ultimately improving on what we are able to offer in the way of quality education and care practices.

In our rush, we might miss the boat.

This is an unprecedented time for early childhood. The National Agenda has created an opportunity for us to move forward on so many levels. It has drawn attention nationally to the early years and the genuine complexity of educator’s work and has called into question simplistic or mechanistic approaches to program development and assessment.

Now is the time to embrace and support these changes by prioritising professional learning and engagement with these initiatives. If we believe we are capable and tap into our vigour and passion, not only will our own personal and professional identity be enhanced, so too will the quality of our programs for children and families, as well as the standing of early childhood services within the community.

Owning our own future will require us to own these changes and weave them into the context of our services in ways that reflect our differing communities, staff teams and families. EYLF calls on us to make sound professional judgments through the weaving together of knowledge, skills, and understandings. In each community, different children, families and staff provide us with different threads for our weaving. EYLF offers a framework to support the ‘weaving work’ that we do, so that each setting will weave a cloth that fits them, within their own unique context.

Where to now?

At every decision point in using EYLF, it is important to reflect on our professional judgments in collaboration with our team to make sure that the work we do with our children and families contributes to the uniqueness and richness of the cloth we are weaving. This will take time and a commitment to a creative process where we play with possibilities to see where they lead. Some ideas will be useful, some less so, but at least these will be our ideas, developed by our teams and communities. This ownership deepens the understanding of what we are doing and why we are doing it – also a key requirement for Accreditation.

There are no easy answers – we have to find them ourselves – and we are up to the challenge!

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Transforming Practice, Supporting Change: Establishing a pedagogical think tank for Gowrie Victoria

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“Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skilful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.” William A. Foster

Investing in Pedagogical Leadership

Pedagogical leaders set the tone of professionalism. Through their leadership both within and outside the setting, they communicate ...the importance of high quality early learning experiences for all children. They are advocates for early childhood ...[and they] shape and frame the professionalism of an early childhood setting. (Educators Guide DRAFT FOR TRIAL ONLY— April 2009:6)

With the introduction of both the national and state Early Years Learning Frameworks, Gowrie Victoria made a clear decision to support their educators through this exciting period of change, through an investment in pedagogical leadership. Central to this commitment was the establishment of a Pedagogical Reference Group (PRG). This approach was innovative in that it formalised for the whole organisation the importance of early childhood pedagogical deliberation work, that to date had been undertaken within distinct projects or units and, incidentally within teams of educators.

Establishing the Pedagogical Reference Group

The PRG, comprised of staff from all business units, was formally established in 2010 to provide pedagogical leadership to the organisation and its membership. The PRG is a vital component in helping us to achieve our aim of fully supporting the team to provide high quality programs for children and families and to further develop our pedagogical understandings.

The PRG responds to questions from all staff regarding practice issues and dilemmas and serves as a point of reference in supporting the team to articulate our pedagogical understandings and to assist in informing our decisions around programming and practice.

A focus for this year has been to continue to look at ways to support educators in the implementation of both the National and Victorian Early Years Learning Frameworks. At the beginning of the year all educators were provided with a new resource tool – “The Pedagogical Practice Guide”.



This tool, developed by the PRG, provides all children's program educators with practical information, practice examples and resources to support them in their programming, documentation and delivery of quality programs for children. It is a living document that is continually added to by individual staff themselves, or by the group, distributing information and articles that support educators' daily work with children and families.

As well as this work, the group has developed a plan for a range of projects that are being undertaken during the year. This includes exploring the use of Art Studios; clarifying expectations around documentation, planning and reporting; exploring new ways to make children and children's learning visible in our community; looking at ways to recognise educators' achievements, as well as ways to advocate excellent practice to families.

A vision for the future

"Strong, skilled and well supported educators who work together in a reflective environment to make a difference in the lives of young children."

This vision and the goal of developing an early childhood setting that is a learning community for all involved, is what we are working towards. As the PRG continues to develop its pedagogical leadership role within the organisation we envisage this strong group of leaders will mentor, encourage, support and offer advice to fellow educators that will have a direct impact on the implementation of programs of excellence for young children and their families.

We will be presenting a paper at the upcoming ECA Conference in Adelaide on the exciting pedagogical leadership work that this group is involved in.

A Call to Action – Sharing the EYLF with Parents

Author:
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As Educators we began the immersion into the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) in July last year. Since then the opportunities for our professional development have expanded every day. Early Childhood professionals see the benefits of the ethos and philosophy of intentional teaching and secure attachments but the question is – do families share this vision? Do they feel a connection to the message that quality education programs in their child's early childhood setting is crucial for early learning and development? What meaning does the Early Years Framework have for parents?

A parent who uses a child care service commented:

"I like to think I'm pretty day care savvy, but to be honest the Early Years Framework isn't something I've heard a lot about. There was a small article in a recent newsletter which just gave us heads up and there is a poster on the door as you go into day care, but I don't recall being given any real information on it."

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) assures parents that educators are encouraged to "use the Framework in partnership with families, children's first and most influential educators, to develop learning programs responsive to children's ideas, interests, strengths and abilities". But are we?



The Gowrie WA recognises that providing information for parents is a shared responsibility of Government and the service. We have shared information through our newsletters and discussed the EYLF at Parent Reference Group meetings. From these conversations with several families, from a variety of backgrounds, it has become evident that while parents are interested, the EYLF is not yet seen to be relevant to them and their children.

A core issue for many parents is a belief that formal education is the only setting where real learning occurs – reflecting possibly their own experiences! The importance of the early years and the value of play as a foundation of real and lasting learning is not universally understood or accepted. How often have we heard comments about children “just playing”, that once children start school then they will begin to learn? We find that families are reassured by the focus on the child, and the fact that the Framework creates a tool for ensuring respect for their rights and needs to Being, Becoming and Belonging in today’s society. However, the challenge for some families has been accepting what they see as less structured programs. They see some value in play-based programs, as one parent noted, “*just getting outside and getting dirty and jumping through puddles and running around at the park is important too - there has to be a balance*”, but parents need to be shown how these programs are designed around the holistic needs of children, how they evolve over time and encourage ongoing learning and development.

Families respond to information about the achievements/ learning outcomes of children and most will enjoy sharing the information that only they know about their children. With two-way communication families can be involved in setting goals and aspirations for their own children in their own setting – embracing the diversity of values and experiences that is unique to each group of individuals. Sharing the EYLF is going to be achieved over time. We continue to listen, and to reflect, and to learn as we all - families, children and educators together – explore our own identity, our connections to our environment, our sense of wellness, our ability to communicate and our ongoing joy of learning.



What can I expect from the Gowrie Australia Resource and Professional Development Series?

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The resource details how the assessment process can be understood as a cycle of “noticing, recognising and responding.”

Gowrie Australia has designed the *Assessment in the Early Years* resource and a Professional Development Series to support educators in implementing the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). Our aim is 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), however the term ‘assessment’ is more often linked to the school sector. The EYLF reinforces the importance of reflective practice and describes assessment of teaching and learning to promote the best outcomes for children, and this has prompted some debate in ECEC.

Gowrie Australia hopes that the *Assessment in the Early Years* resource and the supporting Professional Development Series will encourage and assist educators to undertake meaningful and ethical assessment of teaching and learning in ECEC. Educators will have the opportunity to begin to understand the reason for assessment and to have clear priorities as to why and what is being assessed.

The process of coming to understand the complexities and ethical considerations for assessment in the early years can require significant thinking, planning and effort. In fact, one person’s comment was, this “learning makes my head hurt”.¹ The Gowrie Australia *Assessment in the Early Years* Professional Development Series includes opportunity to engage in dialogue with educators that supports this change in thinking and challenges participants that sometimes we need to let go of the old and be open to the new.

Gowrie Australia’s approach to assessment recognises that documentation is about seeking meaning to understand each child as rich and competent, with infinite possibilities. While we can never know for sure, as educators we use our knowledge of how children learn to make informed guesses and assumptions to understand and make meaning of children’s experiences.

The Professional Development full day overview session provides a space for self reflection, to understand, make meaning and see the importance of the things we do in a way the led one participant to plan “to work together with



children and the staff team to achieve change that creates assessment and learning opportunities that are meaningful and achievable" ²

The *GA Assessment in the Early Years* resource includes examples of documentation that show how assessment processes provide a way for educators and families to share their perspectives, information to help educators to reflect on their programs and interactions and guidance for planning for learning. We acknowledge that most of our day to day responses to children and on the spot decision making are not formally recorded or documented. When we document however, learning becomes visible to children, families and others and creates ongoing assessment records of children's experiences and learning. Documentation can be enriched and deepened when we seek multiple perspectives and collaboration with families. Making decisions about what to document involves being attuned to significant moments that reveal something important about the learning of each child and the GA resource supports the notion that there are many different ways early childhood educators keep these records. Different methods can be chosen depending on what aspect of learning the educator wants to capture.

Real examples in the Gowrie Australia resource of assessment and supporting documentation have been sourced from early childhood educators across a range of early childhood settings. The examples have been developed by educators who recognise their responsibility for creating ongoing records of children's learning to make learning visible. Supporting the resource, the Professional Development sessions offer opportunity to engage in dialogue with colleagues in an environment that challenges current understandings and supports new ways of thinking about how and what to document.

The resource details how the assessment process can be understood as a cycle of "*noticing, recognising and responding*." ³ The three hour sessions in the Noticing, Recognising, Responding Professional Development Series explore the concepts of Noticing, Recognising and Responding to children's learning and how this contributes to assessment of, for and as learning. ⁴ Each phase in this process involves making professional judgments. The judgments we make about what is important to notice about a child's experience, as well as what children's responses might mean, fundamentally shape the programs we create.

Our judgments are influenced by our professional knowledge, philosophy and values. The elements of the EYLF all offer other lenses through which we can

view our work to inform professional judgments and assessment of children's learning.

The Gowrie Australia Professional Development Series offers opportunity to further explore and build on the notions of assessment as identified in the *Assessment in the Early Years* resource. It supports educators in the Early Years to further define and develop understanding of the best processes for making children's learning visible and engaging in reflective practice to achieve meaningful and ethical assessment in our settings. In the spirit of shared practice and continuous quality improvement, we encourage you to reflect on these examples, engage in professional development and to continue this conversation within your own ECEC service.

For copies of the Gowrie Australia *Assessment in the Early Years* resource (hard copy or PDF) OR to enquire about the Professional Development Series:

- *Assessment in the Early Years* - a 7 hour/full day overview with a complimentary copy of the *Assessment in the Early Years* resource
- *Noticing, Recognising, Responding Series* - three X 3 hour sessions

Contact Gowrie in your State:

Gowrie SA: train@gowriesa.org.au
ph : 08 83525144

The Gowrie (Qld) Inc: sharron@ladygowrie.com.au
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ph : 03 62306800

The Gowrie (WA) Inc: info@gowrie-wa.com.au
ph : 08 94787500

References:

- ¹ & ² Participant comments and evaluations from *Assessment in the Early Years* Professional Development 7 hour session, Gowrie SA: 30th July 2010.
- ³ We have drawn on the understanding of assessing for learning, developed through the work of Margaret Carr, Wendy Lee and Carolyn Jones and described in the resource *Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars*, The NZ Ministry of Education: 2004.
- ⁴ *Assessment in the Early Years*, p3, Gowrie Australia: 2010.



“My Time, Our Place”

A Framework for School Age Care

Author:
Robyn Monro Miller

On the 27th May the Minister for Youth and Children's Services, Kate Ellis, announced the decision to support the creation of a national school age care framework. The development of this framework followed successful representations made to the Minister by the National Out of School Hours Services Association (NOSHSA) in October 2009.

A national steering group has been formed to guide the process of developing the framework. The steering group is made up of State, Territory and Federal Government representatives, NCAC and two representatives from NOSHSA, Robyn Monro Miller (NSW) and Kylie Branelly (Qld). The inclusion of peak body representatives on such a high level group has been recognised as a first in recent history and reinforces the respect government has for the OSHC sector.

An academic consultant, Jennifer Cartmel from Griffith University in Queensland, has been appointed to write the framework, and a draft framework will be available soon for consultation with the community. The timeframes for the consultation process are extremely tight to ensure that the framework will be ready for piloting in the new quality framework to be introduced on the 1st January 2012.

The Minister's announcement was welcomed by NOSHSA who view it as government investment into the sector.

The framework to be known as "My Time, Our Place" will complement the Early Years Learning Framework. It will build on the same outcomes for children as those in the EYLF but will be written to meet the unique needs of school age children using all service types - Out of School Hours Care, Family Day Care and Long Day Care.

The development of an Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and a school age care framework will provide a consistent set of outcomes for children 0-12 years that will support and enrich current practice in Australian Children's Services. A framework for school age care will acknowledge and guide best practice and will have the flexibility to be contextualised to meet the needs and interests of the children attending individual services. In addition, the new school age care framework will support and guide service delivery within the new quality framework (formerly quality assurance) to ensure that the distinct needs of school age children are met.

For the first time in Australia the Government will acknowledge, through the existence of this framework, three very important facts:

1. Quality school age care enhances children's development.
2. Play is important for school age children - the time a child spends playing is actually a time of learning.
3. Staff in school age care are educators.

Play spaces, such as those found in Out of School Hours care services are rich learning environments and this new framework will acknowledge that the play opportunities and the range of experiences that happen in school age care are all learning opportunities and fundamentally important to the development of children. The framework will openly acknowledge that play is learning, raising the profile of play in the community.

Whilst play will feature prominently in the framework there is also acknowledgement that not all children want to engage in free play during their leisure time and opportunities for children to try new experiences and activities should be included in any quality program.

The existence of a framework for school age care will provide acknowledgement that a child's right to play and leisure, as supported in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), is equal in importance to Article 28 - the child's right to education.

It is an exciting time for the school age care sector in Australia. Whilst I foresee some challenges I also see many opportunities.

The school age care framework will challenge many of us to think of our work more holistically. As a sector we should embrace this framework whilst at the same time not losing sight of its need to allow for flexibility in application. In capturing the interests and needs of the children using the service, and in ensuring the service is driven by those needs, each of the outcomes in the framework must allow for diversity through innovation and interpretation by individual services.

Most importantly, this framework will articulate our work and the value of that work in the community. Thus by its very nature the framework will raise the status and standing of the profession and emphasise the critical importance of the often forgotten "middle years". Let's celebrate!

Robyn Monro Miller is Chairperson for National Out of School Hours Services Association (NOSHSA) and Executive Officer of Network of Community Activities (NSW peak OSHC Association)

To stay in touch with the latest developments go to: www.noshsa.org.au



Involving a Dance Artist in the Jacaranda Kindergarten

Authors:
Sally Chance &
Mary Scales
Gowrie SA

During the first half of 2008 children from the Jacaranda Kindergarten collaborated each week with a dance artist as part of an Australia Council - funded Fellowship exploring the cultural lives of young children. This article provides an overview of this wonderful and enriching experience from the perspective of the dance artist, Sally Chance and the kindergarten teacher, Mary Scales.

... to be with children is to work with one-third certainty and two-thirds uncertainty...
Loris Malaguzzi

Dance artist, Sally Chance describes the program:

The project evolved in three distinct stages:

1. Skills development – What is dance? How do we invite children into a creative space for dancing? What things make you want to move?
2. Movement as a language to tell a story.
3. A dancing journey - moving in a range of environments.

1 The first stage was intensely practical. Dance is a naturally high-energy activity demanding equally high levels of concentration and self-discipline from the children. This is as true for the creative dance approach I took, which invited the children's own responses to my movement offers, as it is for the more formal dance styles that some of the children were already familiar with.

We explored a number of approaches:

- Moving the children from their room to a small meeting room for short sessions in primary care groups.
- Observing what happened when I simply started movement ideas in a designated dance space in the room.
- Inviting dance activities outside.

There were pros and cons for each.



At first, the separate room seemed to put the spotlight on behaviour guidance issues and it was necessary to highlight the need for safety and respecting personal space. However, as we all got to know each other, some beautiful work started to emerge. One particularly successful session invited each primary care group to physicalise a different emotion. This drew on the “When I’m Feeling...” books by Trace Moroney. We looked at ‘sad’, ‘happy’ and ‘angry’, using the leading question: What does your body want to do when you’re feeling sad/happy/angry?

Each group arrived at a very distinct dance, consisting of gestures and actions offered by individual children and combined as a group, as follows:

- When I’m feeling happy I want to jump, spin, hold hands.
- When I’m feeling sad I want to droop, curl up, cry.
- When I’m feeling angry I want to explode, stomp, run on the spot.

Having established my regular presence on Tuesdays, the project began to gain momentum and we took the step of staying in the room (or garden). The huge advantage of this was that other activities and staff were available to the children, allowing them to come and go from the dance as they wanted. This immediately accommodated children’s need for “fast-paced, energetic and fluid activity” with their capacity for “deep and sustained activity,” as Susan Fraser describes in *Authentic Childhood, Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom* (2006:35).

We found that it was still ideal for one staff member to be allocated to the dance space, even if they moved to and from the actual activities.

Having all the children’s primary carers in the room, drawing on their capacity for noticing everything, made the dance much richer.

The in-the-room approach took the emphasis off formality and behaviour guidance and placed it squarely on enjoying the flow of the children’s ideas in response to my offers. It also opened up the possibility for children to view the activities from a short or long distance, without taking part.

- 2 We observed that discussions about what things meant led to the children’s “in” moments and so we began to use the dance session as a space to work things out. We also established some rituals, such as taking our shoes off, having some inviting words of welcome and doing a warm up, for familiarity and mutual respect. Our leading questions were: How can we move to make meaning? What does this movement mean?

We documented some themes in the children’s spontaneous play, drawing on a story offered by one of the children about the sea, a bridge and a storm. We visited this for several weeks, representing the sea with gestures and actions, as well as a huge piece of blue fabric and the bridge with shapes, as well as building blocks and drawings. It was important to start with the children’s physical responses to the images, building in other ways of representing the story later. We extended this into telling another bridge story – *The Three Billy Goat’s Gruff* – using movement and applying the same principles of telling the story, then telling it again as a group in movement, then trying a solo dance.

By this stage several “regulars” had become the project’s core group. Other children were always welcome, even if they took part more intermittently.

The children's capacity to work holistically meant that other elements were introduced which hooked in still other children. For example, one of the children wanted to make a troll mask, which sparked a separate mask-making activity. The dance skills development of the regulars meant that progress was swift. They developed a wider vocabulary of movement and a meaningful language of gestures and their dances began to involve dynamic contrast.

3 The third stage drew on Saltbush – the Children's Cheering Carpet. Most of the Jacaranda children saw the show as part of an excursion to Come Out 2009, South Australia's huge and well-loved arts festival for children and young people. In the work, two dancers visited a range of environments projected visually onto a large floor-level screen. At times, they invited the children to join them, so the experience was already rich and participatory.

We created dances for a busy road, a waterhole, the sea and the night sky, using different rooms and spaces in the centre and travelling between them in a processional way, thinking of the way emus travel in a line. Jacaranda team leader, Mary, enhanced each of these with invitations to the children to work visually with the ideas. They made a beautiful waterhole, a trail of emu symbols and explored star shadows using an overhead projector.

This stage achieved a high level of sophistication, as the need for words gradually dropped away and the children responded to some quite abstract movement invitations, scaffolded by the structure of each environment. They developed skills in reading each other's cues and sharing the space as they moved through the environments, each with its own dance.

Kindergarten teacher, Mary Scales reflects on a wonderful experience:

We have been so fortunate to have the opportunity to spend 6 months with Sally working alongside us. Sally knew us well as she had been a parent in our room with her son recently leaving to begin school before she then approached us about embarking on a dance project together. Our room caters for child care and kindergarten in an integrated approach. We have children aged three to five. Sally attended our Annual General Meeting and was inspired by a presentation on Reggio Emilia to come and share time with us and explore some of the Reggio teaching methods and philosophy. Here began our project. Initially we had more questions than answers as we

found our way. Initially Sally came for most of the day and spent half a day with us and half a day in our infant room Kurrajong. This gave her an opportunity to observe, engage, participate and begin to know the children. As the weeks progressed we realised that 'less is more' and Sally spent closer to an hour or two with us of highly focussed time, her arrival anticipated greatly by both staff and children. In discussing the success and what we had learned through this project we chose some Reggio inspired headings:

The Project (Learning and Understanding)

As with all learning in early childhood we realised the opportunity to repeat, revisit, add on, practice and develop skills was vital. Each time the children had an opportunity to repeat dance movements and sequences they also built their skills and confidence. Sally had a way of inviting children to contribute ideas for movements that were then incorporated into the dance so the children all had contributed to the end result.

We also realised that rituals were important – and as time progressed Sally began by everyone removing their shoes, and then started with a warm up and then the dancing. This provided predictability to children and a clear signal that it was dance time.

The Environment

We tried working in different ways – in the room, withdrawing children in primary care groups, using the outdoor environment until we then returned to the indoor environment and children being involved voluntarily. It became that a core group of children would always gravitate towards Sally. We felt it was important for some children to have the opportunity to be audience members and had places to watch and observe. Often we found that the children that were in the audience then became involved in the dance itself, especially when primary carers were involved. We did some thinking and work on 'a space' that invites dance and found that by using simple props such as cushions, fabric, lighting and animal tracks we could project a real mood that inspired the children and that they respected and treasured as a precious space to dance.

Communication and collaboration

We invited some other staff to come and observe and take some footage for us on video. This then gave us the opportunity to discuss what we were doing and have some reflective conversations about what we were learning and seeing. Some of our reflection led us to try making links with storytelling so that children had some background experiences in which to 'hook' the dance concepts on rather than just being abstract. Already the children were working on bridges and there was a natural

progression to the Billy Goats Gruff. We also reflected on the value of staff involvement and how this helped children participate and also helped to maintain boundaries for the children. We made links to notation with Lily doing a dance map for us to follow and this opened up opportunities for further notation and for children to guide the dance.

100 Languages

We saw how movement could be an expression of ideas, feelings and place and how children grew in their ability to be expressive and how they each interpreted and expressed themselves uniquely. We spent some time watching dance sequences with the idea of inquiring about dance and how it makes us feel. We also incorporated other areas of learning so that when investigating the Children's Cheering Carpet the children were involved in drawing Emu tracks and making a waterhole all to support our dance sequence.

Listening

We learnt how words scaffolded children's dance movements and directions and then as the children got more practiced and skilful the need for words lessened. We saw how different children used leadership qualities and how other children were happy to follow. As time progressed there was a sense of mutual purpose and the realisation that together our ideas make this dance. The children were able to listen to and interpret each other's contributions to the dance.

Relationships

Sally's initial time in the room was crucial in building relationships and knowledge of the children and our expectations of them. The ability of staff and Sally to be able to question, inspire, challenge and reflect together shaped the project and its direction. Using the video footage gave us a unique opportunity to reflect on each session and to learn from it, to incorporate the thoughts for the next session. Sally's ability to hold an idea, respect it and incorporate it authentically for the children gave them such confidence and investment in the dances.

Documentation

Each week Sally filled a diary entry which was a reflection on the session – what had happened, what had gone well and things she wanted to incorporate or change. These entries provided a real window into her thinking for families and staff alike. Staff also documented with photos, video and through writing stories for the children based on what had occurred and skills being acquired.

On our final day together the children performed our 'Waterhole' dance for the infants in Kurrajong. In that short sequence you could feel how far we had travelled. The children moved with grace and confidence following the sequence of steps with pride as they had created this dance in partnership with Sally. As a final celebration we invited the families in to share the edited video footage which showed the dance sessions from inception to our final dance.

References:

Fraser, S. (2006) *Authentic Childhood : Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom*. Thomson: Toronto.

Sally Chance also created magic in her work with babies and very young children in the centre. This experience will be shared in a future edition of *Reflections*.



National and International CONFERENCE UPDATE



Summer 2009



Autumn 2010



Winter 2010

QEC 6th International Conference

Connecting with Families: Creating Opportunities for Growth

11-12 November 2010

The Sebel Albert Park, Melbourne, VIC

W: www.qec.org.au/conference

Inaugural National Indigenous Policy and Dialogue Conference

18-19 November 2010

University of NSW, Kensington Campus, Sydney, NSW

E: nipde@unsw.edu.au

W: <http://nipdc.arts.unsw.edu.au/>

The Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood's 10th International Conference

Honoring the Child, Honoring Equity 10

18-20 November 2010

The University of Melbourne, Parkville, VIC

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

W: www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/ceiec/conferences/conf10/index.html

Child, Communities, Connections Conference 2010

Developing effective integrated place-based support for children and families

25-26 November 2010

The Hawke Centre, UniSA City West Campus, Adelaide, SA

E: jacquie.dell@aus.salvationarmy.org

W: www.salisburyc4c.org.au/downloads.php

Strengths and Assets Summit

*Combining 6th Australian Family and Community Strengths Conference
and the 2nd ABCD Asia Pacific Conference*

30 Nov – 3 Dec 2010

University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW

W: www.newcastle.edu.au/summit

2011 World Forum on Early Care and Education

3-6 May 2011

Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

W: www.worldforumfoundation.org/wf/wf2011/index.php

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.