

reflections

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EDITOR

Josephine Musumeci

DESIGN

Angela Reeves

PHOTOGRAPHER

Centre staff

PRINTER

TTR Print Management



COMMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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

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POSTAL ADDRESS

229 Campbell Street
Hobart TAS 7000

Telephone: 03 6230 6800

Facsimile: 03 6230 6811

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CONTACT DETAILS - Gowrie Australia

Gowrie SA

39a Dew Street
Thebarton SA 5031

Ph: 08 8352 5144 Fax: 08 8234 1217

Email: train@gowriesa.org.au

Website: www.gowriesa.org.au

Contact: Christine Burgess

Gowrie NSW

Level 3, 215 Euston Road
Alexandria NSW 2015

Ph: 02 8571 9741 Fax: 02 8571 9710

Email: inservice@gowrie-sydney.com.au

Website: www.gowrie-sydney.com.au

Contact: Helen Lane

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: amandah@gowrie-wa.com.au

Website: www.gowrie-wa.com.au

Contact: Amanda Hunt

Dear Colleagues

As this edition of *Reflections* was being developed, Australia was experiencing some of the worst natural disasters in its history. Extensive flooding in Queensland and Victoria, bushfires in Western Australian, severe storms and cyclones in Queensland and the Northern Territory, and high temperatures in New South Wales, causing great financial hardship for individuals and communities and, sadly, in some cases resulting in the loss of life.

In the face of such adversity, Australians' resilience is often most apparent. According to Grant Devilly, a trauma specialist at the University of Melbourne's psychology department, the typically Australian 'she'll be right' mentality is invaluable in time of crisis and Australians are 'pretty bloody resilient'. The resilience of many was certainly tested over the past month or so, and whilst many victims of disasters tend to adopt the attitude that 'the main thing is we're alive – it's only bricks and mortar', the long term impact on both adults and children is unknown. The impact on the economy is already beginning to emerge.

To our many colleagues and friends who have been exposed to the recent disasters, suffered hardship and significant loss of property and belongings, and more importantly to those who lost loved ones, on behalf of the Gowrie Australia team, please accept our sincerest and deep regret. Despite all that happens, we are certainly a 'lucky country', as demonstrated by the outpouring of support and the generosity of many around Australia to assist our fellow country persons at this time of distress and need.

Despite the events around the country, this autumn edition has been published on time! No mean feat given our Queensland based Editor and Publisher were both impacted by the floods. In this edition there is a strong focus on professional support and leadership to support the implementation of the National Quality Agenda initiatives. The lead article articulates the generational opportunity presented by the National Quality Framework for early childhood services in Australia. This article also highlights the importance of leadership, professional learning and support for educators to understand and embed the Early Years Learning Framework and Quality Framework into their practice. The five elements of the Early Childhood Australia EYLF Professional Learning Program is outlined in the article by Jenni Connor, providing a range of options for educators to engage in professional conversation and reflective practice. A subsequent article also focuses on the critical importance of leadership in respect of the EYLF.

This edition also includes the first of a series of three articles reporting on a research project focusing on the impact of playground design in terms of quantity and quality of children's physical activity. With reports of an increase in early childhood obesity and children engaging in more sedentary activities, this research is timely and has direct synergy with the following article by 2008 Churchill Fellowship recipient Sarah Scott. In the final article, *Reflections* acknowledges the journey of the quality assurance system in Australia through an interview with the NCAC Chief Executive Officer, Denise Taylor.

Until next time,

Ros Cornish

CEO, Lady Gowrie Tasmania

OTHER GOWRIE CEO'S

- Ruth Callaghan – Gowrie NSW
- Gilda Howard – Gowrie Victoria
- Jane Bourne – The Gowrie (QLD) Inc
- Kaye Colmer – Gowrie SA
- Amanda Hunt – The Gowrie (WA) Inc



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Professional Learning for the National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework

Authors:
Kaye Colmer
Executive Director
Lynne Rutherford
Children's Program Manager
Gowrie SA

While this article has been written from an early childhood perspective, the ideas and principles for engaging educators in working on the EYLF and the NQF are likely to be transferable to outside school hours care services. In particular, working on supporting the team to engage with the draft Framework for school age care – 'My Time, Our Place', as the first step in being prepared for the NQF is important. The need for educators and out of school hours care staff to be able to talk about their practice will be a critical step in meeting quality frameworks.

The imminent arrival of the National Quality Framework (NQF) should be viewed as a generational opportunity for early childhood services in Australia. What we know from reading the emerging documentation is that the new quality framework is embedded within the National Quality Agenda (NQA) with the aim of improving outcomes for *all children* – surely this is at the heart of our work? In addition it seems that the new quality framework takes a pathway that recognises the knowledge and professionalism of early childhood educators in a radical departure away from the current quality system of checklists and ticked boxes. It recognises that decisions educators make in their day to day work are complex and need to be understood in terms of the context of the situation, the child, the family and the community in which the centre is located. Such decisions cannot be evaluated through simply ticking an indicator.

This is an exciting development and opportunity for Australian early childhood services and their educators. Central to the success of this new system is professional learning – deep level learning that engages the whole team and goes beyond simple training notions.

According to Margy Whalley (2006:13),
...we are responding to a complex, changing and often chaotic world...if we are to build a sustainable workforce we need proud professionals – confident, competent and reflective practitioners who are capable of developing leadership learning within their own centres and capable of building learning communities across centres.

It seems that the new system will also nurture community understanding of the complexity of early childhood education (assume care is inherent in education and vice versa) and bring the professional recognition so desperately needed to sustain our educators in their important community work. Furthermore, for the first time in our history, early education and child care services will be subject to the same requirements and aspirations for children and families.

This brings opportunities for preschools (kindergartens) and child care services to work collaboratively – imagine the possibilities as services share their expertise and work together to build new understandings.

From the NQF pilot it seems that one of the significant changes that the new system will bring, is the opportunity and need for educators to explain their practice – to be able to talk about their rationale for particular decisions, (why have they planned a particular learning experience?) and to be able to discuss articulately the basis for their programs. How well are your educators prepared to engage in these kinds of discussions with an external assessor? This suggests that the best foundation for preparation for the NQF is to be well versed in the new Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and to be progressing down the path of unlocking the potential of the EYLF for better practice.

Instead of getting bogged down in the detail and worrying about possible future ratings under the NQF the best investment would seem to be building your team's capacity to engage with the EYLF. Of course innovation and change need to be handled carefully and the director's role is to find ways to engage all staff, so they can contribute to their full extent. This means nurturing commitment and finding ways to build challenges into staff's daily work. Whitaker's quote (1993) *"Leadership is concerned with creating the conditions in which all members of the organisation can give of their best in a climate of commitment and challenge. Leadership helps an organisation to work well....."* provides an insight to building a dynamic team culture to get involvement and excitement about EYLF and NQF.

Hierarchical models and rigid models of leadership are not helpful to this work. Many services find that rigid hierarchical models lead to educators not taking risks and not being innovative in their thinking. What can be most frustrating is that old ways of working and developing programs continue, despite professional development. Educators also find it difficult to be deeply reflective in an environment that is rigidly controlled, which then has a significant impact on the processes of change and innovation.

'Distributed', 'participative', 'facilitative' or 'collaborative' models of leadership call for a shift away from the traditional vision of the leader as one key individual towards a more collective vision, one where the responsibility for leadership rests within various formal and informal leaders (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2006:20).

An effective approach to creating a dynamic learning environment is to appreciate that professional learning progresses in a community or team of learners. These approaches are frequently referred to as professional learning communities. Without becoming caught up in specific approaches, what will be of immediate interest to early childhood directors approaching implementation of EYLF and NQF is that creating a team approach is highly effective.





The challenges of learning and change are supported in a collaborative approach that provides educators with opportunities for:

- focused social connections as they work together on a shared goal
- shared intellectual stimulation and collegial support
- dialogue and debate
- examining current practice and existing theories and beliefs
- critical reflection.

Another key consideration is that through the opportunity to work together on complex projects, professional relationships are strengthened. Think about how you can create forums where educators come together to work jointly on professional learning and where professional learning is understood as a complex and deliberate process. You need to develop a plan together, as a team, as to what and how you will be learning, making deliberate and wise choices as to what professional development training you will attend and then how you will work on the new information at the centre. Be very aware that educators make decisions as to what new practice they will implement and what they will ignore! It is vital to engage the team in opportunities to consider new learning, while also examining their current practice – all within the context of improving learning and wellbeing for all children. This keeps a team very focused and motivated. It's far better to have a robust argument as to what may or may not happen and develop a negotiated understanding of what is possible, than to attempt to force new practice on unwilling educators who are unconvinced or don't understand the reason for change.

A team learning approach ensures that educators are informed and their perspectives and ideas are

included. For instance, when looking at the implementation of EYLF, our staff have worked together in room teams, then come together in a larger forum. We try to build opportunities for professional dialogue and collaboration as well as to ensure educators are able to be accountable for their actions. This ensures that all educators understand their personal and professional responsibilities within the organisation in relation to implementing EYLF. A key finding from our work has been that collaboration cannot be increased without ensuring the appropriate structures to support it are in place. This means that the director needs to respect educators' work, participating as a learner, being a collaborator in guiding and planning the professional development work and ensuring meeting times are provided with resources so that educators have time, space and access to information (i.e. internet, email). This may sound like a lot of work and expense – it doesn't have to be but it is a much more effective use of resources and time than professional development that does not lead to improved practice.

As a result of this work early childhood educators have a strong sense of professionalism and purpose. This creates a climate where it is safer for all educators to be critically reflective, but this is also something we must continue to work hard at. A key component is also to involve the team in reflection and analysis of the success (and failures) of our professional learning.

It is our fervent hope that educators nationally embrace the opportunities presented by the national quality agenda. An agenda which has been the focus of advocacy by many early childhood leaders for decades. It is a point in time for Australian early childhood education and care. Make the most of this opportunity that so many have waited for all of their early childhood career.

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On page 8 readers will find information about the upcoming Early Childhood Australia EYLF professional learning program and the workshops that will be provided around the country. How will your service make the most of this information to implement the EYLF?

If you would like additional information and support to create and nurture learning within your teams contact your local Gowrie. We will be happy to support you to develop team learning plans utilising EYLF professional development available in your local area.



The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is part of the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG) reform agenda for the early years and is a key component of the Australian Government’s National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. The Framework will be underpinned by universal access to early childhood education and will be incorporated in the National Quality Standard in order to ensure delivery of high quality nationally consistent early childhood education across sectors and jurisdictions.

The EYLF is Australia’s first national curriculum statement for educators working in early education and care settings with children from birth to age five. The EYLF will enable a national conversation about what matters in early childhood education and what high quality early childhood practice looks like in the 21st century.

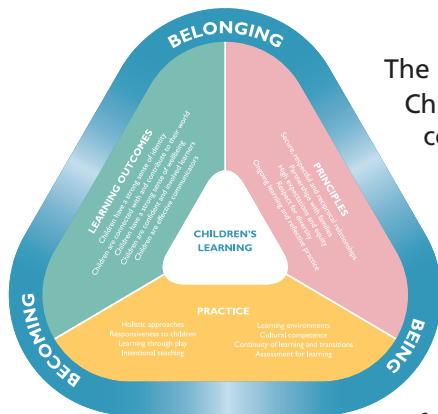


Figure 1: Elements of the Early Years Learning Framework

The EYLF makes clear that: Childhood is about Belonging (feeling connected to family, culture, community, place); Being (being valued as the person you are right now, seeking to make meaning of the world); Becoming (shaping new understanding, identities, capacities and relationships).

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) was distributed to early childhood education and care services in 2009.

Since then, early childhood practitioners in vastly different contexts have been grappling with what the EYLF means for them and their work with children and families.

The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program

Because the EYLF will be so important in framing the work of early childhood education and care settings, Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been funded by DEEWR to design and deliver an integrated suite of professional learning strategies to support the implementation of the EYLF.





The focus of the PLP is on:

- professional conversation and reflective practice - recognising that effective professional learning is collaborative and involves reflection and feedback
- professional practice at the service level
- the provision of expert input and advice
- the delivery of ongoing support to educators
- broad coverage of the sector.

Each element of EYLF PLP stands on its own and also contributes to the effectiveness of each of the other elements. Every element contributes to a professional learning strategy which has both wide coverage of the sector and provides ongoing professional support to early childhood educators as they engage in the EYLF implementation process. This Professional Learning Program has five elements:

1. 65 EYLF Professional Learning **Workshops** across urban and regional Australia, which will be delivered by early childhood educators with high levels of knowledge and practical experience - scheduled for 2011. The workshops will assist educators in ECEC settings to increase their understanding and knowledge of the EYLF and build their capacity to implement it in their setting through beginning work on the development of an EYLF implementation plan.
2. An EYLF PLP online **Forum**, where issues arising in practice can be raised in supported professional conversation. The EYLF PLP online Forum is underwritten by the ECA Code of Ethics and is envisaged as a safe professional community where

the challenges and potentials of the EYLF can be discussed, advice sought and ideas tested. Contribute now:
www.forums.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

3. A regular EYLF PLP **e-Newsletter** will give momentum to the work of implementing the EYLF by providing case studies and other information about how educators are engaging with the EYLF across a range of settings. Researched and written by an ECEC expert with the support of leaders in early education and care, it will respond to content in the online forums; questions and issues raised at the workshops; information from case studies of services; and requests from services for information about particular issues they are facing. Please subscribe by filling in the form on:
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfplp
4. The EYLF PLP **Talking about practice series** of e-Learning videos will provide an opportunity for leaders in ECEC settings to engage deeply in significant issues related to the EYLF. The initial EYLF PLP Talking about practice series of e-Learning videos were delivered at the Early Childhood Australia National Conference '*Garla Bauondi*': *Fuelling the Fire*. Online professional learning materials including the presentations, their transcripts, videos and links to the other elements of the Program will be developed and made available to support participants.
5. A series of short 30-second video **Vignettes**, which capture effective practice in relation to the EYLF and provide stimulus for staff discussion. The clips will provide educators who work alone or in small settings with a professional learning conversation where a range of perspectives on the EYLF are put forward. The Vignettes may also be used as a professional learning tool in staff meetings or training institutions.

Other free resources will be periodically uploaded to the EYLF PLP website. For example, EYLF related articles will be made available for free download.

Please visit the website regularly or contact ECA EYLF PLP for updates on the program, the dates and locations of the **Workshops**, new videos in the **Talking about practice series**, **Vignettes** and to participate in the discussions on the **Forum**.

The EYLF Professional Learning Program will complement and add value to the work of the Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs).

Contact details:

Website: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfplp

Email: eylfplp@earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Telephone: 02 62421800



Authors:
**Helen Lawrence &
Sue Hart**
Gowrie Victoria

Leadership and The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

In developing programs for leaders in early childhood settings we have found that there are two key things that need to be addressed. Firstly, the critical relationship between personal and professional qualities and secondly, the critical impact leadership has on the outcomes achieved for children.

The early childhood sector in Australia now shares a combined vision for children, the essence of which has been articulated by the national Early Years Learning Framework for Birth to 5 years (EYLF).

To achieve the outcomes described in the EYLF, leaders must develop both the generic and pedagogical skills required to make the vision a reality. They must not only inspire and lead their team of staff but strategically partner with families (the child's first teacher), network with multi-disciplinary teams and be empowered to raise the value of early childhood education within society.

In working with leaders from centres in Victoria we have explored five key leadership issues. Developing and enhancing skills in these areas has allowed each participant to personalise their leadership experience and to then carry that experience and empathy through to their understandings of children's developmental needs.

The five key areas are:

1. Their sense of identity as leaders.
2. Their connection with and personal contribution to their organisation.
3. Their recognition of the importance of building a strong sense of individual well-being.
4. Their understanding of the role of life long learning as a means of improving the early childhood profession.
5. Their use of methods that facilitate effective communication with staff, children, families and the broader community.

In broad terms the achievement of these goals requires early childhood leaders to be involved in the identification of perceived and actual barriers, the implementation of leadership principles, the utilisation of collaborative problem solving techniques, knowledge of current research and a commitment to ongoing reflective practice.

Embedding the framework in practice is an exciting challenge for the sector and within each organisation there will be a number of staff who take on leadership roles. We have found it rewarding and stimulating to work with leaders in developing and enhancing their leadership skills.

Grounds for Action: Preschoolers' Physical Activity on Child Care Centre Playgrounds

Author:
Dr Janet Dymont
University of Tasmania –
Faculty of Education



PREAMBLE: This is the first in a series of articles that will be appearing in “Reflections”. The articles describe the background, methods and results of a joint research project between Lady Gowrie Tasmania and researchers from the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. In this first paper, an overview of the literature that informed the study is reviewed, followed by a brief introduction to the research questions and methods. In the next several editions of “Reflections”, the results of this study will be shared.



Lady Gowrie Tasmania has partnered with researchers from the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. Together, they have embarked on a research project that explores the relationship between playground design and the quantity and quality of children's physical activity. The project aims to enhance knowledge about the impact that playground design can have in relation to the creation of a healthier physical and social environment and the promotion of physical activity on playgrounds. The following questions have guided this study:

1. How does the playground design and 'culture'¹ influence patterns, types, levels and qualities of physical activity;
2. What are preschoolers' perspectives and insights regarding the design and culture of their school ground and how they influence the choices they make about where to play and what activities to engage in?
3. How do educators' perceptions of health and physical activity stand to limit/enable physical activity opportunities for preschool aged children?
4. How do educators perceive the policies and practices of child care centres to limit/enable physical activity opportunities for preschool aged children?

Background

This research partnership has stemmed from the growing awareness that the prevalence of childhood obesity has increased dramatically in recent years. Indeed, it is now seen to be "one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century" (World Health Organization, 2010). It is estimated that 42 million children under the age of five suffer from overweight and obesity worldwide. This is of particular concern to medical professionals, researchers, parents and teachers due to a number of well documented associated health risks, including the development of cardiovascular conditions, hyperlipidemia, high blood pressure, respiratory problems and the onset of type II diabetes.

¹ The 'culture' of playgrounds refers to factors such as the rules that govern play, the social dynamics among preschoolers, and the role of early childhood professionals.



These findings have significant implications for children's health not only now but also into adulthood. Research has found that the physical activity patterns of adults are established during the early childhood years. These findings suggest obesity in childhood will often result in obesity in adulthood (Whitaker, Wright, Pepe, Seidel, & Dietz, 1997).

Furthermore, physical activity has also been found to be integral for children's physical, emotional and cognitive development.

Given that a growing number of young children (birth to five years old) are spending increasing amounts of time in preschool settings, these sites stand to become important settings for tackling childhood obesity. Yet, recent research suggests that children at preschools are physically inactive for a significant amount of time each day (for a systematic review, see Tucker, 2008). The American National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2002) recommends that preschool aged children participate daily in 60 minutes of structured moderate to vigorous physical activity and a further 60 minutes or more of unstructured free play. Recent studies have found that preschool aged children are consistently failing to meet the recommended daily requirements.

A number of individual, environmental and social factors undoubtedly influence children's physical activity behaviours at preschools. Individual factors, such as gender, parental patterns of play and physical activity, weight as well as ethnicity all have been shown to influence the physical activity behaviours of young children. Environmental factors such as playground design, playground markings, play equipment and weather conditions have been shown to influence children's physical activity in child care centres. Finally, a number of social factors also influence if, where and how children are physically active during their time at preschool. For example, policy directives (national, state, or local) that provide guidance and direction to managers and staff about the purpose of a preschool may or may not recognise the value of physical activity and instead may prioritise literacy or numeracy. Staff perceptions, abilities, experience, knowledge and training also can influence the nature of physical activity opportunities that are provided. Staff with limited interest or training in this area may lack the understanding to properly facilitate physical activity.

Quite recently, some researchers with an interest in physical activity have sought to understand the relative influence of these various individual, social and environmental determinants of preschool children's physical activity. The results are very interesting and quite unexpected. Whereas in adults, the influence of individual and social environmental determinants outweigh the role played by physical environmental determinants of physical activity (Giles-Corti & Donovan, 2002), the situation is very different with preschool children.





These findings paint a hopeful landscape for early childhood education and care professionals who wish to engage students in physical activity opportunities. Given that the social and environmental factors of a preschool are a stronger determinant of a child's movement than the child's individual attributes, the door is wide open for creating innovative environments that can provide safe and challenging physical activity opportunities for children.

Based on this understanding, this joint research project seeks to understand if and how playground design influences preschoolers' physical activity patterns. Profiled in this study are four child care centres operated by Lady Gowrie Tasmania with a diversity of playgrounds - they varied in terms of size, design, exposure, natural elements, amount of hard and soft surfaces, amount of challenge provided, and amount of manufactured equipment.

A number of research methods were used in this research project:

1. Direct observation of physical activity: to ascertain where children are playing on the playground and what activities they are engaged in and what relationship their activities have to the designed landscape.
2. Mapping, guided walks and interviews with child participants: to understand children's perspectives on the playground (e.g., reasons for their play choices, motivating factors, desires and dislikes).
3. Interviews with educators and managers: to gain greater insight into the factors that stand to limit or enable physical activity on playgrounds.

We look forward to sharing the results of this study in the next edition of *Reflections*. If you would like any more information about this project, please contact Dr. Janet Dymont at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania in Hobart (janet.dymont@utas.edu.au).

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Hampshire pre fabricated children centre. The interior of each centre is lavish, the multiple production allowing for the expenditure.

The Power of the Built Environment for Children

Author:
Sarah Scott
Architect

Sarah Scott is an innovative architect with a particular passion for built environments for children. A partner in the Sydney firm, Scott and Ryland Architects, Sarah was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2008. The Fellowship enabled her to travel to 10 countries, visiting about 50 children's facilities. This journey supported Sarah's belief that so much of teaching in the early years revolves around the importance of the child's environment and that the environment has an enormous influence on children's development.

In particular, Sarah observed the move toward holistic education and care, inclusive of children's families, at a range of environments and in different countries. It is with pleasure that we invite you to reflect on this journey with Sarah as we share here an excerpt from her recently published book "Architecture for Children".

Outreach Services

Outreach services acknowledge the need to connect with children's families and work hard at doing just that. In the following excerpt, Sarah reports back on some of the practices that she found in her travels in Scotland, England and Australia.

In the past, outreach services have targeted only those who clearly seem to need them. This is logical and is still a necessary part of an overall outreach program. But services have adopted a more holistic approach in recent years. Anne Cairn, manager of the Victoria Park Centre for children at risk in Edinburgh, Scotland, explained:

I've been doing this for a long time, in the old days we used to get the children only, wash them, clothe them, feed them, play with them, then send them home and do it all over again the next day. Nothing ever changed. Now we focus on the parent first, develop a relationship with them and form a contract, the message being that you can have what you want but you have to give something too. Of course we ultimately have more power in the relationship than they do, but they do have some scope. It is much more successful.

The Victoria Park Centre is set up with playrooms, plus services and additional outreach rooms, interview rooms and most importantly a parent community room which seems very welcoming and quite the focus of the centre.

An even more holistic approach is the idea of 'universal services', which provide families with the support they need before they become 'at risk'. Universal services are aimed at the general population and are accessible to all. In London, the William Bellamy Centre (a government-run centre) provides long day care, preschool, before-school care and vacation care. These are all catered for separately in different parts of the building. It also places a great emphasis on its additional community services which include co-located health services, antenatal midwives, teenage pregnancy midwives, pre-infant mental health therapists (working with attachment theory), speech and language therapists, play language workshops, playing communication workshops for kids, parenting programs, jobs in training focus, job broker, benefits advice and outreach for travellers (ie itinerant families such as gypsies).

Because they are not targeted at anyone in particular, universal services can avoid stigmatisation, and this means that people are more likely to use them. But it is important to maintain the child-centred focus of universal service centres - if the additional services dominate, there is a danger of creating an 'institutional' feel to the buildings where it then becomes necessary to overcome parents' perceptions that the children's centre is linked to social services and will take their children or their benefits away.



Victoria Park Centre for Children at Risk, Edinburgh. Whilst sadly in need of renovations and a design "make over" the way the space is used is innovative for a children's centre; the focus at Victoria Park is the adult sitting room, with all the rooms around used by the children.



The William Bellamy Centre, Dagenham, London has both children's services and outreach services arranged around two central courtyards. The overall design is unified by the use of colour and a theme of animal motifs. The stairs lead to the more discrete services and even the interiors of the outreach suites co ordinate with the overall design, the emphasis is not clinical.



In Tasmania, Australia, in 2009, the Department of Education commissioned a design brief for 30 new integrated family and children's centres. While local communities will participate in a high degree of consultation over the design of each centre, the working party for the brief was made up of representatives from the various health, education and outreach groups, as well as architects (I was part of the working party). In this brief, there is a strong focus on the centres being welcoming and user-friendly family places, designed specifically for children and run by the community for the community. The brief specifies that the built form reflect these qualities; there are no suites of offices or segregated facilities, rather, communal shared spaces are front and central with tangible links between the various disciplines and scope for customisation and flexibility built into the design to meet the changing needs of each locality. The bulk of the brief is taken up with describing ways of achieving child-friendly design.

Meanwhile, in Hampshire, England, the County Council has built 16 identical prefabricated family and children's centres in the last five years (see Scott, 2010: 118–119). Each one is sited carefully with a unique setout of landscaping, access and outdoor play area. One centre has a large yard with a custom-built timber play ship; another has no yard at all. These centres are about providing outreach facilities within areas of need rather than expecting those in need to seek help out. The maximum number of children catered for is about 10, depending on the outdoor facilities provided. These centres are designed to draw the parents in. The managers love the multipurpose rooms, cosy sitting rooms and the kitchen feel of the foyers. The fit-out feels luxurious, with nice materials and fashionable contemporary detailing.

From a child's point of view, the best thing is the range of wall toys from the popular Rosco play equipment catalogue, and the window alcoves. The compactness allows the centres to slot in almost anywhere and be non-threatening and discreet, while the open reception and sitting rooms are definitely meant to encourage adult encounter while the children play safely in the back.

Also in Hampshire, a modified bus is being trialed as a form of more targeted outreach that can go to those deprived areas where the parents need help, but are suspicious of government services and unlikely to utilise them. The idea is to send the education and resources to them in small, non-threatening sorties. This is an expedient way to get educational services to the difficult to reach, but it requires patient and dedicated staff to go where they are not welcome and try to build relationships. The bus provides a small contained safe zone for a maximum of 5 children to play in one area while around 5 adults can have a meeting in the other. This is an exercise in dressing up an unwelcome concept in appealing packaging, so the bus has been styled to look fresh, luxurious, contemporary and fun. For children, it has window alcoves and the novelty factor, plus colourful, interesting nooks.

For more information and inspiration you can refer to:

Author: Sarah Scott
 Title: *Architecture for Children*
 Publisher: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) 2010
 Sales@acer.com.au



Hampshire Outreach Bus

Interview with NCAC Chief Executive Officer, Denise Taylor

Author:
Ros Cornish

CEO Lady Gowrie Tasmania

As reported in National Childcare Accreditation Council publication *Making a Difference for Children – The Australian journey in assuring quality child care*, the implementation of an accreditation system which assures that children receive quality care was a particularly significant milestone for the early childhood education and care sector in Australia. From the Interim National Accreditation Council (INAC) in 1991 to the commencement of the National Childcare Accreditation Council in 1993, which was chaired by Quentin Bryce AO, and to the current leaders the Chief Executive Officer, Denise Taylor and Chair, June McLoughlin, the journey has been one which is well documented by NCAC in their recent publication.

Denise Taylor has been the Chief Executive Officer of the National Childcare Accreditation Council for fourteen years. During this time Denise has overseen the implementation of the revised quality improvement and accreditation system for long day care, the introduction of systems for family day care (2001) and outside school hours care (2003). She has also been integral in progressing the recommendations from the Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Committee's extensive review of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) in 1998/9 and the revised QIAS in 2002.

With the National Quality Reform Agenda endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in December 2009, which includes the development of a national, consistent, streamlined and integrated licensing and accreditation system for the early childhood education and care sector, the NCAC will be replaced by a new national body, Australian Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Authority (AECECQA) when the new system commences from January 2012.

With this new path in the Australian journey of ensuring quality child care, it is timely and appropriate to seek the view of the NCAC Chief Executive Officer, Denise Taylor, about the NCAC journey and her view of the new quality reform agenda.



Question: Thirteen years is a significant time in the role, what have been the most rewarding aspects of leading such an important organisation?

Answer:

Leading NCAC has been rewarding on many levels. First and foremost it has been an honour and a privilege to lead an organisation that is focused on making a difference for children and whose guiding principle is "putting children first". For me, this has been the pinnacle role in a career devoted to working with and for children.

It has been rewarding meeting and working with so many different people across Australia and internationally – all with a common bond in regards to ensuring that children get the best quality of care and education possible, knowing how important this is for their present and their future.

I have enjoyed the many opportunities to talk to educators and visit services, to see the great programs they are delivering and to hear about their success stories. Having the opportunity to meet and observe so many children actively engaged in their learning has been a great pleasure.

Having the opportunity to build the NCAC team has been especially rewarding. During the time that I have been at NCAC the organisation has grown from 12 to 200 people, all highly professional and dedicated to meeting NCAC's objectives. The personal relationships and the opportunity to contribute to and watch staff develop skills and take on new roles and responsibilities has been personally and professionally rewarding.

Building an organisational culture around commitment to children, equal opportunity and work/life balance principles and striving for excellence through continuing improvement has been a dream realised and an amazing opportunity culminating in being awarded and maintaining AS/NZS ISO 9001 certification as a Quality Endorsed Company and the Employer of Choice for Women award for four consecutive years.

Question: What do you believe have been the key successes of the quality assurance systems?

Answer:

The Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems have put quality care and education on the agenda in the early education and child care field, with families and in the wider community. The systems have assisted services and families to reflect on current service practice against agreed standards and to design and implement quality improvement plans leading to significant improvement in the care and education offered to children across Australia.

As a service recently commented:

There is no doubt that the Quality Assurance process is very important and since its inception our service delivery (which we thought was very good) has improved significantly.

The CCQA systems have engendered and encouraged debate about quality child care, how it can be nurtured, improved and indeed measured. The CCQA systems have also fostered the development of resources to assist services to deliver high quality child care.

A key component of support for services to improve quality has come from government funded Resource and Training Agencies, now known as Professional Support Coordinators. These agencies have been central to the success of the CCQA systems.

In addition NCAC has developed resources in a variety of media to support services through all aspect of the CCQA process with a focus on key aspects of early/middle childhood practice.

I am very proud of our contribution in this area.

Question: What have been the greatest challenges of the quality assurance system?

Answer:

It is always challenging working within the regulatory environment as a large percentage of people are apprehensive of being observed or assessed in the performance of their role. Others oppose being held accountable for the funding they receive. Thus, one of the earliest and continuing challenges is in overcoming opposition to the CCQA systems.

Consistency is also an ongoing issue. NCAC has put in place policies and procedures to ensure that all services are treated consistently and fairly, while also taking into account individual circumstances. Developing consistency in rating services against the standards has been at the forefront of design of both Validation Reports and Validator training and ongoing performance review. However, as we are working with human beings, both as Validators and service staff, the issue of measurement consistency continues to be raised and monitored.

It is a challenge not being able to make changes and improvements to the CCQA systems that services and educators have suggested and NCAC supports. This has particularly been the case during the past 4 years as the systems have been under review.

Question: Reading the current *NCAC Annual Report* and indeed the *Making a Difference for Children* publication there are a number of NCAC employees and friends of NCAC who have contributed significantly to the Council and its functions. Does any particular person or persons immediately come to mind that has made an impact on you as CEO and/or the organisation as a whole?

Answer:

During my time as CEO NCAC has had 3 Board Chairs, each has provided me with significant support and I have learnt a lot from each of them. The NCAC team has been very stable and many staff have made significant contributions, some ensure that we keep children as the centre of our focus, some ensure we have an ethical decision making approach, others have challenged the way we do things which has led to many improvements, others have led us into new realms of communication and awareness of our environmental responsibility, others have simply worked consistently and hard (some travelling long distances) to ensure that we deliver what we need to do consistently and on time.

Question: Validators are one of the key groups and are the face of the system as they are actually in the services undertaking the Validation process. Given the sensitivities of practices perhaps being assessed as not meeting the desired standard of the service, and the potential impact of this in terms of complaints, how do you manage any criticism of Validators?

Answer:

Feedback on the work of Validators is sought from every service that receives a Validation Visit or Spot Check. I am sure that there are few employees in any field or industry in Australia who have their performance assessed 3-5 times per week! All complaints are investigated and feedback is provided to the Validator. Depending on the nature and severity of the complaint the Validator may undertake some professional development or have their performance monitored or their employment terminated. Complaints are also analysed to determine whether there is a pattern that reflects the need to make some changes or additions to Validator initial training or professional development for all Validators. All Validators are qualified early/middle childhood professionals who are committed to making a difference for children. They undertake a complex and at times difficult role, often travelling for long distances and spending considerable time away from their families.

Question: The early childhood education and care sector reports ongoing critical skill shortages. Despite this the trend data reports from NCAC indicate that continuing high number of services receiving accreditation status to the high quality level. What is your view regarding what appears to be a mismatch?

Answer:

When analysing the Accreditation results of services it is important to note both the assessment standards and the measurement process used. The current CCQA standards reflect best practice at the time they were developed: Outside School Hours Care (2003), Family Day Care (2004), Long Day Care (2005). All standards are overdue for revision. To achieve Accreditation at a high quality level a service does not have to achieve all of the Good or High Quality indicators. This measurement decision is also overdue for review. Both of these issues will be addressed in the new standards and measurement system developed under the National Quality Framework.

In reflecting on ongoing critical skill shortages I would like to see those who work in child care and early education settings recognised for, and their pay levels reflective of, the value and contribution of their work. University qualified educators who work in child care and early education currently receive far lower pay than those who work in the school sector or other industries. This makes it hard to attract and retain the best educators to work in this sector.

Question: The unannounced Validation Visit caused the sector some angst and now this practice has reverted to the former system of advising of the Validation Visit dates. Was this change a direct result of this feedback? What is your view on announced/unannounced Validation Visits?

Answer:

Unannounced Validation Visits and Spot Checks were introduced at the same time. Service and sector feedback was consistent in support of Spot Checks as an effective mechanism for ensuring services are assessed without notice. Alternatively, service feedback and NCAC administration of unannounced Visits indicated that there were ongoing difficulties with this process and the decision was made to keep unannounced Spot Checks and to move to announced Validation Visits to facilitate a more collaborative and respectful approach.

Question: What are your hopes for new integrated licensing and accreditation system?

Answer:

A streamlined system that incorporates both licensing and quality, building on the work of State/Territory licensing authorities and NCAC holds great promise for the future of early childhood education and child care in Australia. I believe the new system will experience challenges in the early days, as does any new system/organisation. I do hope that everyone will support it, and build on it, to enable it to reach its full potential.

Question: With NCAC winding up and being replaced by a new national body, what does this mean for Denise Taylor and what is she going to miss the most or indeed the least?

Answer:

2011 will be emotionally and professionally difficult for me as I lead NCAC through the closure process and reluctantly oversee the redundancy of all of our wonderful employees. I have decided to take some time out in early 2012 to rest and recover and then to reflect on what I would like to do next before moving on to a new phase in my life and career.

Finally, thank you Denise for your leadership and commitment to children, families and early childhood professionals. Your collegiality and support to the early childhood education and care sector has been highly appreciated and valued. Your legacy is a system which has shaped and supported improved practices and formed the platform for this to continue through the new national quality framework. May the next phase of your journey be fulfilling and rewarding.

References:

National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc. (2009). *Making a Difference for Children – The Australian journey in assuring quality child care*. Surry Hills NSW.

Conference & Speaker UPDATE



Winter 2010



Spring 2010



Summer 2010

CONFERENCES

10th Early Childhood Convention 2011

*he ihu waka – he ihu whenua –
Where the canoe touches the land*
26-29 April 2011
Christchurch, NZ
E: Rachel@conference.co.nz
W: www.econvention2011.org.nz/
**Please check the website for
confirmation of this event**

Children's Services Get it Together Conference

3-7 May 2011
Bond University, Gold Coast, QLD
E: osmith@bond.edu.au
W: [www.bond.edu.au/faculties-
colleges/faculty-of-health-sciences-
and-medicine/events/index.htm](http://www.bond.edu.au/faculties-colleges/faculty-of-health-sciences-and-medicine/events/index.htm)

2011 Early Childhood Education Conference

Together We Grow
3-4 June 2011
Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne, VIC
E: sdoring@kpv.org.au
W: www.togetherwegrow.com.au/

WA 2011 Early Childhood Education and Care Conference

Windows of Opportunity
18-19 June 2011
Perth Convention Exhibition Centre,
Perth, WA
E: info@eecw.com.au
W: www.pcec.com.au

INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS

Dr Margy Whalley

Currently the Director of the Research, Development and Training Base at Pen Green, Margy is involved in research, training and consultancy work in England, Europe, New Zealand and Australia. The research Margy has focused on includes involving parents in their children's learning and developing a leadership learning route for those leading integrated centres.

2 May 2011	Adelaide: Gowrie SA
6 May 2011	Hobart: Gowrie Tas
17 June 2011	Perth: Gowrie WA
22 June 2011	Brisbane: Gowrie Qld
23 & 24 June 2011	Sydney: Gowrie NSW

Contact your local Gowrie for details.

Wendy Lee

Wendy Lee's role in the early childhood education sector has spanned 40 years and has involved teaching, lecturing, researching, advising and consulting. Wendy is the Project Director for the Educational Leadership Project in New Zealand. She is passionate about the impact of political trends on early childhood education and has interest in curriculum, leadership and professional learning issues.

6 May 2011	Hobart: Gowrie Tas
11 May 2011	Adelaide: Gowrie SA

Contact your local Gowrie for details.

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.