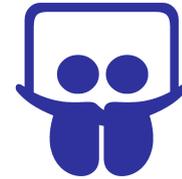


# TALKING QUALITY: REFLECTING ON PRACTICE IN EDUCATION AND CARE



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## Welcome

Welcome to the last edition of Talking Quality for 2020. What a year this has been for the Education and Care Sector and for our community in general. We hope that everyone will be able to have some down time in the months ahead to relax and renew.

### *Guiding Principles of the NQF*

- *The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.*
- *Children are successful, competent and capable learners.*
- *Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the framework.*
- *Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.*
- *The role of parents and families is respected and supported.*
- *Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.*

The Quality Assurance team recently invited services who received a final assessment and rating report since the introduction of the Revised National Quality Standard in February 2018 to participate in a survey about their experiences. The survey was sent out mid-September to 185 services.

The return rate on the survey was 28%, significantly lower than the 2017 survey which resulted in a return rate of 60%. As such this survey can only be considered as a representative sample of the sector, rather than a definitive representation of the sector. We recognise the low response rate may be a result of consultation fatigue as many surveys have been sent out during 2020. This, along with changes in staffing at services since their report was received, may have contributed to this outcome. Regardless of the low response rate, the survey does provide some indicative findings on services experiences during the assessment and rating process.

The Quality Assurance team would like to thank those who were able to provide feedback. This feedback will provide us with an opportunity to reflect and inform improvements as we move into 2021.



If you would like to contribute to future publications or provide a question, please email [CECA.EducateandInform@act.gov.au](mailto:CECA.EducateandInform@act.gov.au) for further information.

## Committing to Continuous Improvement Incorporating Community Voices in Quality Improvement Plans

Education and care services are required to review their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) at least every 12 months. It is also important for the service team to revisit the QIP at regular intervals to reflect on progress and add progress notes.

The questions below are designed to support services to reflect on the continuous improvement process and identify new ways of including input from children, families, educators, and the service community.



### Questions For Reflective Discussions

- ⇒ Who is included when you are reviewing your QIP? (The provider, educators, families, children, community members?)
- ⇒ Have you considered conducting a survey of families to encourage them to contribute to the design of QIP goals or share strategies to support the achievement of goals?
- ⇒ Is your QIP available to families in a way that supports them to understand the goals and offer suggestions and ideas? How could you change the way your QIP is displayed to encourage more community feedback?
- ⇒ When including voices of children, families and community members in the QIP it is important to consider confidentiality, rights and privacy. This may involve asking permission to use quotes from families, children or community members, identifying people by their first name only or de-identifying information. It is important not to identify individual children, families or staff members within examples of practice in the QIP.



### Suggested Links

[Practical Ideas to Support Continuous Quality Improvement](#)

[ACECQA-Quality Improvement Plan](#)

[Developing and Reviewing your Quality Improvement Plan](#)

[Using Complaints to Support Continuous Improvement](#)

[Update Your Quality Improvement Plan](#)



## Critical Conversations

### Reflection on Digital vs Hard Copy Documentation

For the education and care sector, and life in general, 2020 has posed challenges, changes and a new “normal”. This has led to some services embracing new ways of connecting, communicating, and sharing documentation and pedagogical practices with families and educators. These changes in practice may have led you to think of new ways, embrace old ways or reflect on finding somewhere in between. Earlier in the year we shared some ideas on digital documentation and the Early Childhood Australia statement on young children and digital technologies. With this in mind we would like to get you thinking of how you as educators have changed, embraced or explored new digital ways of being. Reflecting on what has worked, what was productive, what was challenging, and what you think could have been done differently to increase engagement and outcomes for families? Perhaps there is a new consideration of digital documentation tools being able to create connection rather than just to share practice?



It is often during these challenging times that creativity and new ways of doing things can be enhanced, refined and new opportunities explored. It is important as a service to look at practice as a team, invest time into the QIP and critically reflect on what has been a time of change.

Dr Deborah Price, a Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education and Wellbeing at the University of South Australia's Education Futures academic unit shared this thought:



*'The rapid emergence of the unprecedented pandemic calls on the well-evidenced expertise, responsiveness and creativity of early years teachers in scaffolding learning experiences that integrate the individual contexts that young children are inhabiting during social isolation and COVID-19 requirements'.*

As a sector the creativity part has always been a normal part of everyday practice, but the pandemic also let us explore new ways of service delivery.

## Critical Conversations

### Reflection on Digital vs Hard Copy Documentation continued....

There has been some feedback from services that the use of online platforms has given them more information into life beyond the gate for some families. This window through the digital world was an opportunity to build connection, extend on learning and strengthen relationships. Although the use of digital platforms may not have been a first choice for some or perhaps a welcome change to others, it is important to reflect on what delivered the best outcomes for children and families. Moving forward from remote learning and families in lockdown, think about what part of the practice will be kept or what you will go back to using? This could be floor books, paper journals, digital journals, online programming, or a mixture. Perhaps the families would like to have a say on what worked for them?

If you have any great adventures into the digital world to share with other services, positive or negative, we would love to hear from you.



#### Questions For Reflective Discussions

Use the following questions to support discussions with your colleagues.

- ⇒ Have you engaged families for feedback on how they prefer to receive documentation on their child's progress?
- ⇒ Do you currently get engagement from families in the program?
- ⇒ What strategies are in place to record children's voices in planning and seek their feedback?
- ⇒ How do we recognise and support continuity of learning between home and the service?



#### Suggested Links

[Playing It Safe](#)

[Optimising virtual learning in Covid-19 times](#)

[Fuse Education Early Childhood](#)

[eSafety Early Years Program](#)

[Teachers, parents urged to engage young children with digital technology devices](#)

[What we're beginning to understand about preschool kids and their digital devices](#)

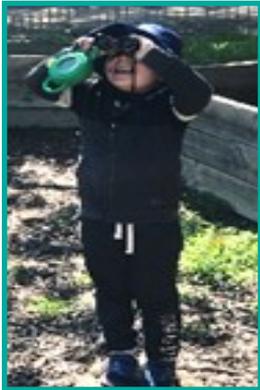


## Embedding Practice

### Promoting Children's Agency, Ainslie School-Reid Preschool Unit

For a recent Early Years forum, my teaching colleague Stacey Nichols and I were asked to share what co-construction, agency and analysis of learning look like in our preschool settings and what led us to our current perspectives of these elements of pedagogy. This drove me to reflect on the *then* and *now* of my 30ish years as an early childhood educator. The biggest evolution for me has been my perception of the role of educators, children and families within early years learning environments.

As a beginning teacher in country Victoria, I put my skills and interests at the center of the program. Planning was done alone and *for* the children. I considered agency to be the ability for children to choose when and how they would participate in my planned experiences and put myself in the position of 'more knowledgeable other' to stretch children's skills and knowledge.



Fast forward thirty years, and through ongoing professional engagement with research and philosophical perspectives, collaboration with other educators, my own action research and the influence of the Early Years Learning Framework, my perception of the role of children, families and educators has significantly shifted. Below are some elements of how I now perceive my role as an educator.



- ⇒ **To notice** – watching and listening to children to notice and understand.
- ⇒ **To support collaboration**– with our whole team learning.
- ⇒ **Targeted support**-supporting children as researchers through responsive routines, considered environments and resources, as well as considering when to step in and out of children's work.
- ⇒ **To function as an enquirer**- engaging as a co-learner with children as we explore big juicy questions together.
- ⇒ **To act as communication support**- making inquiries visible, enabling our whole learning community to engage and contribute to 'the story of an inquiry'.



These days, rather than hearing positive feedback about me as a teacher, I more often and much prefer hearing feedback from families about how amazing the children's work, thinking and ideas are!

*Written By Simone Hobday*

## Embedding Practice

Promoting Children's Agency continued.....



### Questions you may like to ask...

- ⇒ What does agency look like to you as an educator?
- ⇒ Have you thought about having a discussion forum with all educators to explore and discuss what agency looks like?
- ⇒ How do you involve children in decision making about their learning?
- ⇒ What questions could you ask children to give them the opportunity to initiate and lead their learning?
- ⇒ Have you been on a journey of inquiry and co-learning with your group of children?



### Suggested Links

[Engaging with Children's Voices](#)

[Promoting Independence and Agency](#)

[Supporting Agency: Involving Children in Decision Making](#)

[Children's sense of agency fostered through self directed play, inspiring rich learning](#)



## Engaging with Community

### Critically Reflecting & Unpacking Our Practice, Uniting Salem Early Learning Kambah

UnitingCare NSW.ACT, delivers community and advocacy services on behalf of The Uniting Church, Synod of NSW and the ACT. Our not-for-profit services cover all ages and stages of life: aged care, disability, early learning, community services and chaplaincy. We stand up for social justice and speak up on issues that impact the people we serve. We currently have around 10,000 employees and volunteers, serving close to 50,000 people across our services. Uniting celebrates diversity, and we welcome everyone exactly as they are.



Uniting Salem Early Learning Kambah's Centre has been on a continuous learning journey over the past two years to critically reflect and unpack our practice, we have been focusing on Aboriginal culture within our service and have partnered with Duncan, a member of the Wiradjuri community which was a vital and integral contribution to our knowledge and practice. This collaboration allowed us to create this special space at Salem for children to learn and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in a practical and authentic way.

Recently we have updated our playground space, the original space was an open play area and has since been completely transformed to include a Yarning circle, seating area and sandy space for children to connect with the land and environment. In Aboriginal culture a yarning circle is a harmonious, creative and collaborative way of communicating.

You will often find children and educators meeting daily in this space to allow connection with each other at the start of our day. Duncan joins us in this space to share story telling, often drawing in the sand as he goes. Stories can be told through song and dance as well, Salem's favourite is the Emu dance.

"We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Ngunnawal people and understand that this is and always will be Aboriginal land". Duncan teaches our children about the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and guides educators in planning our curriculum.

At Salem, we always strived to strengthen our connectivity with the Native Australian Culture, making it an integral part of our routine and practice.



## Engaging With Community

### Critically Reflecting & Unpacking Our Practice Continued....



#### Story Poles

Throughout a six month project we collectively decided to add story poles to our yarning space. We discussed with children and Duncan what would be the most significant drawing on the story poles in our Yarning circle. We looked at the importance of water, sky and land in the cultural sense for the story poles.

Together with Duncan, the children and educators participated in the paintings, the first story pole was painted with

shades of blue which represented the movement of fresh water



rivers. Duncan spoke about the importance of fresh water in the Aboriginal culture and also referred to Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri as “**fresh water people**”. The **water animals** like fish, fresh water crab ‘Yabbi’, turtle and platypus were added to this pole as these animals are of great significance to the culture. The white colour signifies the spiritual connections to their ancestors. Whereas, the various dots represent the bird’s eye view of the people around river.



The second pole represents various elements of the sky such as lightening, wind, thunder and rain. While painting, Duncan narrated a story of the Wiradjuri culture, which was about ‘**Biami**’, a **creative spirit** and how it became the sky.

The third story pole represents **mountain and plains**. The land animals, kangaroo and emu, were added to this pole as they are of high significance to Native Australian culture.



These story poles have become a cultural connectivity feature in the playground at Salem. This space is regularly used to yarn and say acknowledgement to the country. The children draw on the sand, touch and feel the poles, play around and weave in and out of the poles as they sing aboriginal songs.

Educators and children often use the images on the poles to start discussions and storytelling to further their ongoing connectivity to the land.

*Written By Shenny Shabnam*

## Stories from the Sector

### Children have a right to choose their friends and safely connect with others, Forrest Out of School Hours Care

The theme for Children's Week 2020 was that children have a right to choose their friends and safely connect with others. This was inspired by Article 15 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that "Children have the right to meet together and join groups and organisations as long as it does not stop other people from enjoying their rights. In exercising their rights, children have the responsibility to respect the rights, freedom and reputations of others." (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). 2020 has been a year like no other, and it has never been so paramount that children are able to regain some amount of control in their lives and safely connect with others.

FOOSHC adopts a Playwork approach as its guiding pedagogy which supports and ensures that all we do honours the rights of the child, including Articles 12, 31 and of course 15. For us, our approach is about ensuring that the physical and psychological conditions of our play spaces are right for all children to play. Playwork is guided by a set of 8 principles which are used as an ethical framework to shape decision making and practice. Playwork Principle 1 states that "All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2004). Playwork Principle 2 states that "Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2004). It is clear to see how Playwork upholds Article 15 without the need for any further explanation, but where would be the fun in that?



As is the case with all our frameworks - including My Time, Our Place - the Playwork Principles need to be considered holistically and not in isolation from each other. At FOOSHC, children have the opportunity to meet with others and join each other freely within the play spaces. Children can choose how and where they spend their time, and this includes who they spend their time with. They move freely through the play spaces in all weather conditions and engage with a variety of diverse, dynamic experiences. This makes it easier for children to avoid structured peer-based play and the pressures which come with that, cultivating their sense of agency and identity.



Through witnessing the benefits of this approach over the years, we continually return to the decision not to segregate our children based on their ages. A multi-age program encourages and supports families to come together, supports our schools buddy system, and allows for peer scaffolding that would otherwise not occur. For example, within our Loose Parts play space children receive a multitude of play cues from the loose parts items which sees a variety of children pass in and out of the play space as they wish, creating a more inclusive environment.

## Stories from the Sector

### Children have a right to choose their friends continued....

Playwork asks you to leave your adult agendas at the door and to ensure that play takes precedence over almost everything else. Our philosophy and its emphasis on relationships means that as educators we *KNOW* the children and are supportive and respectful of their individual choices; we don't make them play together or share. These can be confronting concepts to navigate in practice, however our experiences and outside evidence attest to the fact that children learn best through play and make it a lot easier to prioritise. It is not uncommon to be approached by a child who is uncomfortable or upset and to hear that someone "... wont let me play". At first, not intervening on this immediately may make an educator uncomfortable. However, given time and a lot of critical reflection it would be strange to see or hear an educator at FOOSHC force anyone to play with another child, especially if that child has vocalised or demonstrated that they do not wish to. A large part of our practice on this stems from an understanding of what happens when children play and being able to identify the Play Cycle in action. This can lead to a misconception that we simply walk away, which could not be further from the truth. We simply use a different method of intervention to most. Perhaps it is the subtle assistance of sending a play cue, helping the child find the currency needed to join an established play frame, sitting beside the child for a while and giving them time to honour and acknowledge the feelings they are currently confronted by, or by turning ourselves into a loose part to offer a possibility of play to the child that has been 'left out'.

Keeping the above concepts in mind it has become more evident than ever across 2020 that a Playwork approach is indeed in the best interest of the child. As a team, we regularly descended upon our local pub after work throughout the fires and storms to debrief and make sense of what was happening around us. Whilst COVID pushed us to become slightly more creative in how we approached this, we came together to work through what the world was facing. Children are not afforded those opportunities, nor is it how they make sense of their world: they do this through *PLAY*. We have seen it unfold in all our spaces across 2020, from the fires to the hail to COVID -19. We have seen fire rescue missions being acted out, artworks created depicting hail and its damage or beauty, hospitals have been formed and patients either be treated or die, and we have seen tips or 44 home replaced with words such as "rona". At a time when it could understandably be diminished, children's wellbeing has flourished for those attending our service. This is because they have been afforded the time, space, and freedom to play through what is worrying or confusing them, in a space they have control of, and with those whom they trust and choose to do so with.

*Written by Rachel Cooper, Lachlan Fittler, Katie Sproule and Kylie Keane*



#### Suggested Links

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), (1989)

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, [The Playwork Principles](#) (2004)

## FAQ

### -Frequently asked questions

The purpose of this section is for us to try and answer questions that you may have. These would need to be broad so that other services can relate and engage. Specific questions should continue to be directed to authorised officers where contextual advice or guidance maybe needed.



#### How should services prepare for the bush fire season?

Many local children and families were affected by the bushfire emergencies last summer. We were all impacted by the smoke from the nearby fires and this may have triggered anxiety, particularly for educators, families and children who experienced the 2003 fires in the ACT. Here are some questions to prompt reflection on how to move forward, plan for summer this year and support children and families to feel safe. Below are some reflective questions to prompt discussion within your team.

- ⇒ Does your service specific risk assessment of potential emergencies include actions relating to bushfires or excessive smoke in the service environment?
- ⇒ Do you need to develop a more detailed bush fire plan for your service?
- ⇒ Do you have resources available at the service to support families and children who have been affected by bushfire?
- ⇒ Are the plans developed for children with medical conditions such as asthma or other respiratory illnesses detailed enough to effectively manage this condition when there is smoke in the environment?
- ⇒ How can you engage families and the community to build children's awareness of fire safety?
- ⇒ How can the perspectives of indigenous Australians in relation to the use of fire in the landscape be included in children's learning?
- ⇒ Are there additional resources that could support children's understanding of bushfires, fire safety and recovery after a bush fire emergency?

Below are some links that may support you to answer some of these questions and engage in critical reflection as a team to determine the best strategies to support families, children and educators in the context of your service.



#### Suggested Links

[Be Emergency Ready](#)

[Resources for Bushfire Affected Communities](#)

[Bushfire Education-Early Years](#)

[Bushfire Education-Resources](#)

[Bushfire Crisis Hints and Tips](#)

[Australia's Bushfire Emergency](#)

[Disasters: Bushfires](#) [Bushfires and Mental Health](#)

[Bushfire Education](#)

[Monitoring and Regulating Air Pollution](#)

[Fire NSW Education](#)

[Bushfire Smoke Information for childcare centres](#)

[Asthma Australia-Air Quality](#)

[Birdies Tree-Growing together through natural disasters](#) [Community Safety-Bushfire](#)

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General enquiries to Children's Education and Care Assurance can be made to [CECA@act.gov.au](mailto:CECA@act.gov.au).

*\*Please note, many of the group photographs contained within this publication were taken prior to the global pandemic and accordingly do not comply with current physical distancing requirements.*