Educators
My Time, Our Place

EDUCATORS' GUIDE TO THE FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL AGE CARE IN AUSTRALIA

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

The Framework: *My Time, Our Place—Framework for School Age Care in Australia*

The Guide: *Educators My Time, Our Place—Educators' Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia*

The terms used in the Guide are consistent with the Framework. For explanation, see the definition boxes and glossary in the Framework.

INTRODUCTION: USING THE GUIDE WITH THE FRAMEWORK

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

> *The Framework is designed to inspire conversations, improve communication and provide a common language about children's play, leisure and learning among children themselves, their families, the broader community, school age care educators and other professionals.*
>
> *(The Framework, p.6)*

The Educators' Guide has been developed to support the professional practice of those who are responsible for the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in a school age care environment designed to foster children's wellbeing, development and learning. It focuses on aspects of pedagogy including building and nurturing relationships, program decision-making, teaching and learning.

A NEW VISION FOR SCHOOL AGE CARE IN AUSTRALIA—LEARNING THROUGH PLAY AND LEISURE

In school age care settings, educators encourage children's engagement in a range of play and leisure experiences that allow them to feel happy, safe and relaxed, and to interact with friends, practice social skills, solve problems, try new experiences, and learn life skills. Educators providing education and care to school age children need to have the skills and understandings about the many facets of children's lives and what it means to support their learning and care for them in a school age care setting.

While there has been considerable investigation and research undertaken about the various aspects of schools, there has been limited research which focuses on school age care. Educators should acquire rigorous knowledge about educating and caring for school age children, equipping them to understand the holistic life of a child, rather than just the 'school' or 'care' experiences. School age care is an alternative to home environments as 'places of childhood', where children spend time developing the knowledge and skills for citizenship. It occurs in a range of settings such as before or after school care, school holiday care or vacation care.

The vision for educators is encouraged and supported by the Framework which is written to extend and enrich children's experiences in school age care settings. It is based on the principles laid out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* which states that all children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational experiences. The *Convention* also recognises children's rights to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives and respects their familial, cultural and other identities and languages. It is critical that educators have an understanding of all these matters, together with an understanding of themselves gained through reflective processes. They need to be encouraged to engage in critical reflection about their moral responsibility to children in the care setting to better prepare them for the responsibility that they have to all children and the wider community.

Most significant to Australia's Indigenous peoples is their ancestral relatedness to country. The Framework supports the commitment of The Council of Australian Governments to closing the gap in educational achievements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The Guide is intended to support educators to explore the roles and responsibilities associated with their work in the school age care sector. It builds on the content and themes identified in the Framework. The emphasis in the Framework is on the importance of play in the life of a school age child's life. It encourages educators to consider the planned or intentional opportunities for play as well as spontaneous play.

A NEW VISION FOR EDUCATORS

> 'The term educator is used to refer to practitioners whose primary function in Australian school age care settings is to plan and implement programs that support children's wellbeing, development and learning.'
>
> (The Framework, p. 4)

When educators reflect on their role in children's lives they reflect on their own views and understandings of theory, research and practice. This Guide provides educators with underpinning knowledge about the theories, research and practices that are most relevant to children in the middle childhood phase. All children demonstrate their learning in different ways. Educators, therefore, need to be able to reflect on children's wellbeing and how they have developed, as well as how they have engaged with increasingly complex ideas and participated in increasingly sophisticated experiences from a variety of perspectives. They need to acknowledge approaches that are culturally and linguistically relevant; be responsive to children's social, physical and intellectual capabilities; acknowledge children's abilities and strengths; and allow them to demonstrate competence. Educators collaborate with children and use strategies that support and empower them to see themselves as capable and foster in them independence and initiative.

> 'When an adult cares for and interacts with children in ways that demonstrate positive regard and genuine interest in the health and wellbeing of another human being, then they are an educator. Child Care Workers are educators when they provide wholesome food—they are teaching children the value of healthy lifestyle… Child Care Workers are educators when they are responsive and warm to children's needs and interests—they are teaching children to feel safe, supported and included… Child Care Workers are educators when they plan play and leisure experiences—they are teaching children skills of cooperation, engagement and inventiveness… How can we say that Child Care Workers are not educators?'
>
> (School Principal)

When educators collaborate with families, other educators and professionals to meet children's needs, they can enhance children's wellbeing and development.

USING THE GUIDE

The Guide is designed to be used by individuals and teams in interactive ways to promote conversations and thinking about the concepts which underpin the Framework. It is not intended to be read in one sitting. Rather, individuals and teams of educators may find it helpful to 'dip' into the Guide at different points, to focus on one section at a time, and to begin with the section of most interest to them. Most readers will find it helpful to read the Framework before turning to the Guide. The following concepts of the Framework are explored in the Guide:

- principles, practices and pedagogy, including learning through play, intentionality and collaboration with children to support learning and wellbeing
- reflective practice
- implementing the Framework to foster children's wellbeing and learning through play in areas identified by five broad outcomes for children
- facilitating children's transitions between home, school age care setting and school
- developing cultural competence
- Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence
- exploring your own personal beliefs and using theoretical perspectives.

Both the Framework and the Guide are designed to engage educators in critical thinking and reflection. As such, they are not prescriptive or 'recipe' books, but rather are intended to provoke, inspire and challenge. They recognise that there is not one 'right way' to provide for children's wellbeing and learning. If we think there is just one right way and if we have no doubt about the quality of our provision, we leave little room for reflection, for questioning or for change.

The sections that follow this Introduction all have a similar format. Each major section starts with a quote from the Framework and then is divided into the following segments which help you to explore particular concepts in the Guide:

Think and reflect about—explanatory information about the section, including reflective questions and suggestions for going deeper

Hear about—stories and models of practice

Try out—possible entry points

Find out more about—links to other resources and tools.

The case studies used in the guide are examples of practice and are designed to promote critical reflection rather than identifying any particular approach.

Learning stories, educator reflections, children's voice and photos are included as examples of practice that illustrate the links between the principles, practice and outcomes for children. Each section will also identify additional resources that can assist educators to critically reflect on pedagogy, relationships and the connection with children's wellbeing and involvement in learning.

Additional materials and some tools are available on the accompanying resource CD.

2 ONGOING LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FOR IMPROVEMENT

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

Critical reflection involves closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives. Educators often frame their reflective practice within a set of overarching questions, developing more specific questions for particular areas of enquiry.

(The Framework, p.11)

Ongoing learning and reflective practice is one of the key principles of the Framework. Reflective practice is a form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Educators continually seek ways to build their professional knowledge and develop learning communities. They collaborate with children, families and community, and value the continuity and richness of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, through culturally competent practices. The intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children's wellbeing and development. As professionals, educators examine what happens in their settings and reflect on what they might change.

The Guide and the Framework aim to make reflective practice and inquiry a part of everyday practice. This Guide supports educators to be reflective by providing:

• critical questions to think about and reflect upon

• ideas to promote a culture of inquiry

• a process for inquiry.

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

In school age care settings, educators engage in reflective practice that describe, analyse and synthesise their thoughts and ideas about the program, the principles and practices, and the outcomes for children. Opportunities for reflective practice could include discussions or conversations or perhaps writing in journals. The reflective processes provide educators with the skills to enhance their professional learning, improving practice and knowledge, and help them to think about ways they can support children's development and wellbeing.

When educators participate in reflective processes, they need to have knowledge about children and how they develop and learn. For educators to undertake their role, they need to draw upon a multiplicity of areas, including knowledge of school age children's development and wellbeing, organisation, and community development.

School age care educators have a professional responsibility and it is within the context of this responsibility that educators need to make complex decisions, reflect on action, and collaborate with colleagues. They need to be empowered to make decisions about issues within their programs. They need the confidence to act and the ability to participate actively and creatively, rather than be passive recipients of others' actions. Educators must develop their own beliefs and values in relation to their pedagogy in the light of their understanding of theory and research to provide quality programs. Reflective practice is considered to be an essential technique for promoting such critical inquiry.

The literature about reflective practice is diverse. Reflective practice and thinking are not new practices. They can be linked to the work of Dewey, who suggested that reflective thinking means turning a subject over in the mind to give it serious consideration, enabling one to act in a deliberate and intentional manner. Using reflective practice gives educators confidence in their ability to carry out their complex role. Reflective practice takes for granted the ability of educators to stand back from their practice and look at their actions objectively. This may be difficult for some individuals because of time constraints, or the situation in which they work, or their temperament.

There are different types and levels of reflection. For example, descriptive reflection is considered to be more easily mastered. It describes the events that have occurred with no attempts to provide reasons or justifications for the events, whereas critical reflection requires knowledge and experiences that take time to develop. In school age care settings, more experienced educators will need to help emerging educators to develop the skills, understandings and knowledge base that will enable them to engage in reflective practice and ongoing learning effectively.

For reflective processes to occur, educators need time, compatible colleagues, a conducive climate, and explicit administrative support (Wildman et al, 1990). Sharing one's perceptions and beliefs with others through reflection may lead to self blame for any perceived weakness (Wildman & Niles, cited in Hatton & Smith 1995). On the other hand, the role of dialogue with a 'compatible other' is seen to facilitate reflection by helping the individual to shape and clarify their ideas. A high degree of verbal interaction with a trusted other, such as colleague, other staff or the children, can enhance confidence in the self as a learner. The kinds of questions asked can elicit reflective responses and can contribute to the valuing of personal experience and the confidence in one's capacity to generate knowledge. Educators need to consciously use well-developed active listening skills; identify personal goals; recognise presuppositions in language use; and mediate and clarify questions when they are engaged in the reflective process. Conversational communities are a useful strategy for supporting reflective practice in school age care settings (Griffiths & Tann, 1992, p.79). These communities are a place for engaging in discourse, debate, risk taking, analysis and re-theorising about school age care practices.

It must be noted that journal entries made by educators may underestimate the degree of reflection undertaken: more significant reflection may have taken place during the events or in the discussions at the time of the events that is not evident in the writing. The educator's ability to reflect on their work provides them with the feedback to nurture their self esteem and professional growth. Reflection, particularly critical reflection, can contribute to this, but it can be challenging (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Conversations need to be scaffolded in a way which supports self-reflection. Developing a set of critical questions is a strategy that promotes and models the skills essential for critical reflection.

Groups of educators conversing together can engage in some deeply reflective practice. One such model is termed Circles of Change (COC) (Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2007) in which educators use a reflective model with questions to scaffold the reflective process as described below.

Steps	Action in conversation	Questions to be asked
1. **Deconstruct** Describe and unpack	Pull apart practices and closely examine their makeup, especially practices that have been enshrined as 'normal' and 'proper' practice.	What happened?
2. **Confront** Approach personal, social and systemic issues head on by examining difficult, previously thought of as 'sensitive' topics	This stage is useful for prospective practitioners as they focus on their own practice and confront issues that arise during the course of their day. The democracy and safety that COC provides enables opportunities for more experienced practitioners to point out how important it is to confront issues pertinent to their own practice.	What is working well? What are your challenges?

3. **Theorise** Carefully consider practice at all levels and question what is	This stage is useful for educators to understand the importance of linking theory to practice and the need to apply what is learned theoretically to what is implemented in the programs. Educators can explore how theories and research influence practice and identify what knowledge is privileged over other knowledge. Refer to the resource CD for a summary of relevant theories.	What literature/ research/ experience helps you to understand what is happening?
4. **Think otherwise** Challenge yourself to think outside the dominant ideas and come up with other ways, or better ways of practising	This stage is useful for educators as they recognise there are multiple perspectives and a variety of opinions about professional practices.	What do you need to change about your practice? What are the first steps?

In this case, the COC approach provides educators with useful reflective tools and, as such, improves their capacity to engage in teamwork, collaborative decision-making, and reflective practices, and to finely tune generic skills required for effective lifelong learning and practice in the school age care sector. It is important that participants are accepted for their contribution and that recognition is given to the tacit knowledge (Osmond & O'Connor, 2004) that each person already possesses.

HEAR ABOUT

One team's take on reflective practice

The introduction of the National Quality Framework and My Time Our Place; new words like 'pedagogy'; and the idea that we were now 'educators' sent everyone reeling. So much new information with no list of instructions of 'do it this way'. And then this idea of reflective practice! The idea of talking openly about our professional practices was confronting and challenging. What is reflective practice and how can we find out? How could it be useful?

Together as a team of educators we decided to devote a staff meeting to researching information about reflective practice, what it was, and how we could begin to use it. Our task was to then discuss and share our research with the rest of the team. We began to realise that our review of daily practices and procedures, which had always been a normal part of our staff meetings, was actually reflective practice. We regularly assess how effective our practices and procedures are by reflecting on current experiences, feedback from children and families, and new knowledge or information about children. Do they achieve what they are designed for? Who do they serve? For example, are they designed for the convenience of staff or to meet outcomes for children? Do they reflect our service philosophy or policies? Could we do it better or differently? Is there new information that we should think about or consider?

We realised we had done this before. How else could we start to use reflective practice? As a result of a brainstorming session, we had created quite a list of ideas from which we could start to develop our skills in talking about what we do and why. We hoped that the practice would develop our confidence as professionals —for some of us it has been a difficult process to think of ourselves as either professionals or educators, but our confidence is growing: it is a part of our journey of belonging, being and becoming.

As a team we identified three steps in reflective practice:

STOP—educators needed time to think and record reflections. This is now scheduled into our daily practice

THINK—what happened? What were the outcomes? Who was involved? Celebrate what is working well.

CHANGE—does our current practice need to change to improve outcomes for children? Who do we need to collaborate with? Do we need to access training or professional learning?

Reflective practice is becoming a natural part of our daily practice, we are becoming more comfortable in looking at how we are working and how we can improve, but we are also more aware of the great work that we are already doing and make more of an effort to acknowledge this.

> *[Reflection] is a practice that enables childcare professionals to consider why certain practices or experiences do or do not work, and how to use this information to support change and continuing improvement.*
>
> *(NCAC, 2011, p.1)*

TRY OUT

Reflective practice will help educators learn how to use the Framework as well as learn about their own practices and the principles that underpin them. Use the following questions to help educators begin reflective practice:

Before

What are your thoughts before commencing a reflective practice session?

What are your feelings before commencing a reflective practice session?

Describe some of the plans or intentions you have for undertaking a reflective session?

After

What are your thoughts now?

What did you make of that?

What do you understand about the type of questions asked during the session?

What was influencing your understanding?

Were you having any internal thoughts, feeling or reactions about reflective practice that you did not share with your colleagues? What were they?

What would you have liked to have seen happen?

Once educators become familiar with using these questions in reflective practice sessions with other educators (and children), and convinced of the benefits in their practice, they find it easier to include ongoing reflection and self-evaluation as part of their daily practice. It will reap rewards, particularly in achieving high quality programs in school age care, as it supports the kinds of questions that need to be asked in developing a Quality Improvement Plan as part of the National Quality Framework.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

Cartmel J (2011) 'A considered curriculum for preparing human services practitioners: Structuring circles of learning and change', in Billet, S. (ed) *Promoting Professional Learning*, Springer, New York

Casley M & Cartmel J (2009) *Dialogues of Discovery,* Early Childhood Australia, Queensland Branch

Department of Education and Children's Services (2007) *REFLECT RESPECT RELATE: Assessing for Learning and Development in the Early Years*, DECS Publishing, Adelaide

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2010) Evidence Paper 'Practice Principle 8: Reflective Practice', Victoria: Melbourne Graduate School of Education

Early Childhood Australia, Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program e-Newsletters: http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfplp/#link4

Macfarlane K & Cartmel J (2007) 'Circles of Change revisited', report written for the Professional Skills Coordinator, Queensland Health and Community Services Workforce Council, Brisbane

Osmond J & Darlington Y (2005) 'Reflective analysis: Techniques for facilitating reflection', *Australian Social Work*, 58 (1), 3-14.

Professional Support Coordinator Alliance (2009) *Child care Staff: Learning and Growing through Professional Development*, PSCA, available at
http://www.pscsa.org.au/cms/?q=system/files/FINAL+resource+manual.pdf

Stanfield B (2000) *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 ways to access group wisdom in the workplace*, Institute of Cultural Affairs & New Society Publishers, Canada

On the resource CD

- Reflective practice for improvement
- Conversations matter: Leading teams in reflective conversation
- Pedagogical leadership
- Summary of reflective questions from the Guide

Educator reflections

- Reflecting on links with 'our' community
- Focus on healthy eating
- Reflecting on cultural competence

3 DECISION MAKING: IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

> *Working in collaboration with children and in partnership with families, educators use the Outcomes to guide their planning for children's wellbeing and learning.*
>
> *(The Framework, p.6)*

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

The Framework is not a curriculum. The Framework provides a guide about the roles and responsibilities of school age care educators. It encourages educators to draw on philosophies, values, pedagogical theories and beliefs to create a vibrant school age care culture focused on relationships and inquiry. The broad direction it provides is based on bodies of research around education, brain development, health and wellbeing, and the importance of play. The Framework focuses on best outcomes for children around their development and wellbeing. Implementing the Framework is about implementing an ongoing cycle of reflective practice drawing on information from the context of each particular setting. Therefore, the Framework cannot be implemented simply by reading and following a book.

Children are learning all the time and, as educators, we should work hard to ensure they are learning things that will enable them to be happy, healthy and fulfilled. As Norton Juster stated in The Phantom Tollbooth: *'But it's not just learning things that is important. It's learning what to do with what you learn and learning why you learn things at all that matters'*. Learning in school age care settings assists children to use what they have learnt at school in a real life context.

Developing relationships and partnerships with all families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is integral to ongoing, open and honest communication. Culturally competent educators acknowledge the diversity of communities and are inclusive of all family groups.

Programs that are culturally appropriate and developed in consultation with families and community will ensure that children and families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, are actively participating and contributing their knowledge and ideas as learning evolves. The Framework enables us to incorporate contemporary theory and research; educator skills and knowledge; collaboration with children; and partnerships with families and culture to develop best practice for program planning, as demonstrated in Figure 1. As educators, we must take all these aspects into consideration when undertaking program planning.

Figure 1: The components of program planning

| Contemporary theory and research | Educator skills and knowledge | Collaboration with children | Family and culture | Best practice program planning |
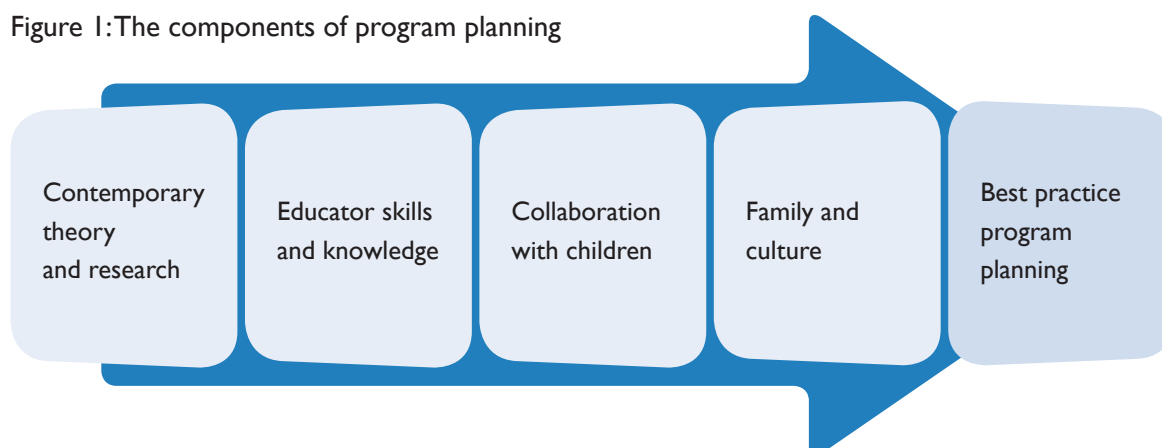
As the Framework suggests, the program encompasses far more than just a list of planned experiences. So when program planning, educators need to consider such things as the environment, the routines, the everyday resources, and even the skills and knowledge of the educators who work with the children.

As children explore relationships, resources and experiences in a thoughtfully planned environment, educators move through a continual cycle of observation and reflection, questioning, planning and acting, as demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Program planning

A school age care program encompass all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, which occur in an environment designed to support wellbeing and foster children's learning and development.

(The Framework, p.6)

Planning is therefore an ongoing cycle underpinned by reflective practice. Effective forward planning will enable the success of any service. It operates as a continuous 'cycle of inquiry' which includes stopping to think about how and why we're doing things the way we are, examining our answers to these questions from different perspectives, and using the deeper understandings we develop as a reference point for deciding what actions or changes we want to make. This current method of ongoing and cyclic planning is demonstrated in Figure 3 and elaborated on further in this chapter. It may effectively be linked to developing a Quality Improvement Plan as part of the National Quality Framework.
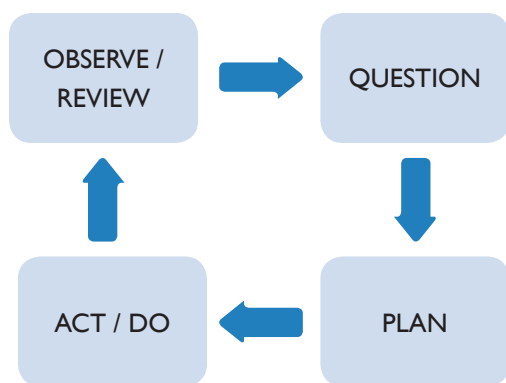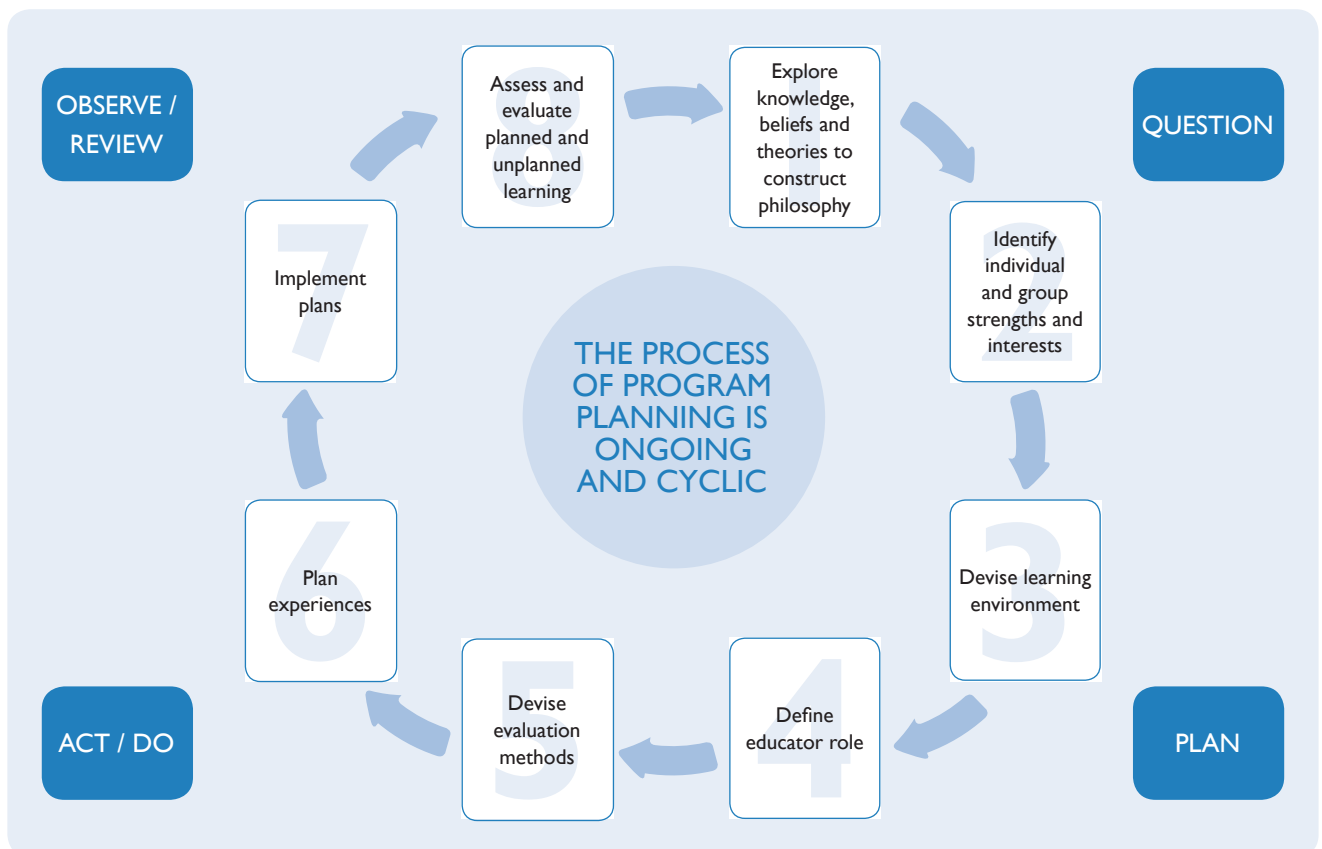
Figure 3: Ongoing and cyclic program planning

DE-CONSTRUCTING THE CYCLE

Question

1 **Knowledge and beliefs**: At the core of program planning is investigating our knowledge and beliefs and the practices that are linked to these. Educators constantly update their knowledge and associated practices by immersing themselves in contemporary research and theory. As everyone has different values and beliefs, educators in school age care settings must regularly come together to share their knowledge and beliefs to develop their philosophy or enable a team approach. This philosophy or team approach should be based on theory and research, not just personal beliefs. Chapter 4 expands on linking beliefs and theory with practice.

▶ How much knowledge do the educators in the setting have regarding the families and wider community?

▶ What knowledge do the educators in your setting have regarding each child's strengths and interests?

▶ How might they find this out?

▶ How has this knowledge contributed to the development of your service's philosophy?

2 **Strengths and interests**: Educators, like the children they care for, are diverse in their education, backgrounds and talents. This diversity means that educators can be responsive to a wide range of children's needs and interests. Different educators will bring different things to the program and there is no one prescribed role. This also models an important concept in school age care services— that of inclusion: it is a place where everyone belongs.

When educators plan by combining their strengths and interests with their knowledge and beliefs they can formulate both short term and long term goals for the service. This planning process can be rich with opportunities for professional growth and development because it requires educators to reflect critically on the nature and purpose of their work. This process helps to build a picture of the strengths within the staff profile, as well as areas in which skills and knowledge need to be built, so that the vision can be achieved. This may include establishing individual professional development plans with particular staff or learning goals for the whole staff team.

▶ How do you uncover your team's strengths and interests?

▶ How do you learn about the strengths and interests of the children in your setting?

▶ How much do you know about the learning that is valued and expected for children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within their family and local community cultural context?

Plan

3 **Devise learning environment**: Educators should spend time planning their indoor and outdoor environments to achieve the outcomes of their vision, which is aligned with their philosophy and beliefs. School age care settings should provide choice and flexibility and a range of engaging experiences which will meet the needs of a range of different children in different age ranges. There should be opportunities for creativity, experimentation and play. The environment should allow children to feel a sense of belonging, coupled with a sense of autonomy. Environments are explored further in Chapter 9.

▶ How does your understanding of cultural competence impact on your personal and service philosophy and the environment?

4 **Define the role of the educator**: Effective educators have a clear vision of their role when working with children. In the Framework, educators are defined as practitioners whose primary function in school age care settings is to plan and implement programs that support children's wellbeing, development and learning.

> 'We often lose potentially great members of staff, not only because of inadequate wages, but because we throw them into a deep, Olympic-sized swimming pool without giving them carefully fitted goggles and a clear life support system. How can they become long distance swimmers if our orientation and staff development is focused only on treading water?'
>
> *(Margie Carter cited in Albrecht 2002, p84)*

In their day-to-day duties, the educator has to undertake many varied roles and the qualities and skills necessary for these roles don't always come naturally with all individuals' personalities. Some educators may need some training or development to acquire some of these strengths. Training and practice can help educators develop these qualities,

just as skilled educators can help children develop these qualities. To be able to develop these qualities, however, educators need guided self-reflection and the support of an educational leader or mentor.

Some of the roles educators must undertake in their day-to-day roles:

- facilitator—providing the right amount of stimulus to scaffold children's learning is a skill. Educators must, at times, also facilitate professional learning at meetings and engage with families to organise their involvement.

- communicator—school age care is a social setting. Effective communication is critical with a range of stakeholders, including children, families, other educators, schools and communities.

- coach—educators assist children to develop a range of skills and provide opportunities for children to practice and perfect these. Educators are both intentional about this role, but also recognise and use teachable moments.

- mediator—school age care settings are play-based with many choices, which invariably leads to disputes and differences.

- director—although educators are primarily facilitators, there are times when clear direction is more appropriate. This includes situations which involve safety issues and other situations where there may be non-negotiable issues (such as bullying).

- model—an educator is always modelling. Children notice everything: learning is their job and they learn from everything you do and everything you don't do, everything you say and everything you don't say. Educators model skills from conflict resolution to hand washing and sun safety measures.

- planner—educators must plan programs, budgets, professional development and communication systems.

- nurturer/supporter—educators celebrate or acknowledge each child's participation, efforts, gifts and talents, affirm children's sense of belonging, and provide physical and emotional support.

- advocate—educators support children's right to play and advocate for appropriate space, facilities and resources.

- observer—educators combine what is seen and heard with what they know about the children. They observe the program, as a whole, identifying what is working and what needs improvement or adaptation.

(Adapted from Bisback and Kopf-Johnson, 2010)

These roles and the associated skills are varied and do not come naturally to everyone. Educators may need assistance to develop the necessary skills to work effectively with children, families and other educators.

▸ Ask the children, educators and families: 'What skills and qualities do educators need to work in school age care programs?'

▸ How do you assess if any of the educators in your setting may want/need development in their role of educator?

▸ What methods of training or development may be effective in your setting?

▸ How do less skilled educators learn to liaise in a professional manner with families?

▸ If you work alone, what opportunities could you develop to assess and reflect upon your own practice? How might you use existing networks or create new networks to further discuss or analyse the role of the educator?

5 **Devise evaluation methods**: Devising evaluation methods up front enables educators to have clear direction on what they are doing and why. While having fun is an important philosophical base for school age care settings in Australia, the Framework enables educators to collaborate with children and evaluate programs with the outcomes in mind. This allows us to go deeper to discover how the programs are contributing to children's wellbeing, learning and development. Evaluation for wellbeing and learning is explored further in Chapter 12 and the questions below are explored in greater depth.

▸ What do you want to evaluate? How will you evaluate?

▸ How often will you evaluate?

- How will you use these evaluations for future planning?

- What knowledge and beliefs have you accessed to plan evaluation methods?

- How will you strive for equity in ensuring each child has opportunities to achieve the outcomes?

- How do we involve children in evaluation methods?

6 **Plan experiences**: When planning experiences for children in school age care settings, it is important to consider the outcomes in the Framework. These outcomes are focused on children's wellbeing, identity, capacity for learning, communication skills, and their ability to contribute to their world. There is no set curriculum or content, as such. This allows school age care settings to be creative and responsive in their planning of experiences.

Settings may use a variety of approaches or theories (such as Multiple Intelligences, Emergent Curriculum, Reggio Emilia, theme-based planning) to plan their experiences. What is important, however, is that educators recognise that best practice program planning is underpinned by the components of contemporary theory and research, educator skills and knowledge, collaboration with children and partnerships with family and culture, as outlined in Figure 1.

At all times, the child must be central to program planning, so devising experiences around children's needs and their interests is a good starting place. However, children need stimulation and scaffolding in their learning and interests and this is where effective educators can work closely with children to notice their emerging interests and further this interest through responsive planning. Noticing the cultures and issues in the community are also stimuli for planning experiences.

- How can you determine what children's needs are?

- How can you determine children's interests?

- When considering children's current interests, how do you decide which interests to follow and which to ignore? Do some 'fit' better with your knowledge and resources?

- How do you know you are being equitable in following children's interests and needs? Have you covered every child? How do you make these decisions?

George and Dimitri's nine years plus bike ride

I asked Dimitri and George: 'What is something exciting we can do next holidays?' I know that George can get bored with some activities and loves to choose physical activities. George, sounding very excited, said 'let's go on another bike ride again like we did last time'.

I agreed that they are always fun and asked him, 'Where do you think we should ride to this time?' George answered:

'It would be good if we could go to the tower for lunch again or have a picnic on the lawn area'. I asked George and Dimitri if they would like to draw up a map and the route that we could take on our bike ride. George and Dimitri agreed happily.

They sat down with a large piece of paper, textas and a pen and discussed the route together. They started drawing the roads of their local town. I prompted them to think about using the safest roads, where there was not a lot of traffic, and asked them to think about how long the roads are, and how far could we ride before needing a break. They were thinking a lot about the questions I asked them. After twenty minutes George and Dimitri finished their map and route. They then wrote out a list of items needed for the excursion, what time we were going to leave and return, and we used this as part of our planning.

Act and do

7 **Implement plans**: Time to put the plan into action. Educators actively engage with and support all children to fully participate in a range of experiences. Educators should listen carefully and respond to children's voices and accommodate for spontaneity, natural curiosity, individual needs and interests.

Observe and review

8 Assess and evaluate planned and unplanned learning experiences:

When reviewing and evaluating the program, it is important to assess both the planned experiences and unplanned experiences. After all, by definition, the program constitutes all of the interactions, experiences, routines and events.

Evaluation methods should have been established in step 5, so it is a matter of gathering the information and undertaking critical analysis and reflection to understand what this means and implement change as needed.

Evaluation should not simply consist of individual written work. Group reflection and discussion is a critical component of evaluation which then leads onto the next step in the cyclic process. Children should also play a critical role in evaluating aspects of the program including routines, experiences and resources.

▸ How did the planned learning occur? What learning occurred?

▸ What unplanned learning occurred? Is this unplanned learning desirable? What does this mean?

▸ In what ways are you listening to your culturally diverse families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families? How are you demonstrating cultural competence?

▸ Consider time, space, resources:

– Do we need more resources, either human resources or material ones?

– Did we allow enough time? Was it the right time of the day?

– Was there enough space? Was it the right space?

▸ What would have made it a better learning experience?

▸ How can we build on this?

▸ Does this experience tie in with any other experiences which were planned or unplanned?

▸ How do we/can we gather feedback from children, families and other educators to help evaluate the learning experiences?

Figure 4: School age care planning cycle

Both the Framework and the Guide use the school age care planning cycle, Figure 4, to support children's wellbeing, development and learning in school age care settings.
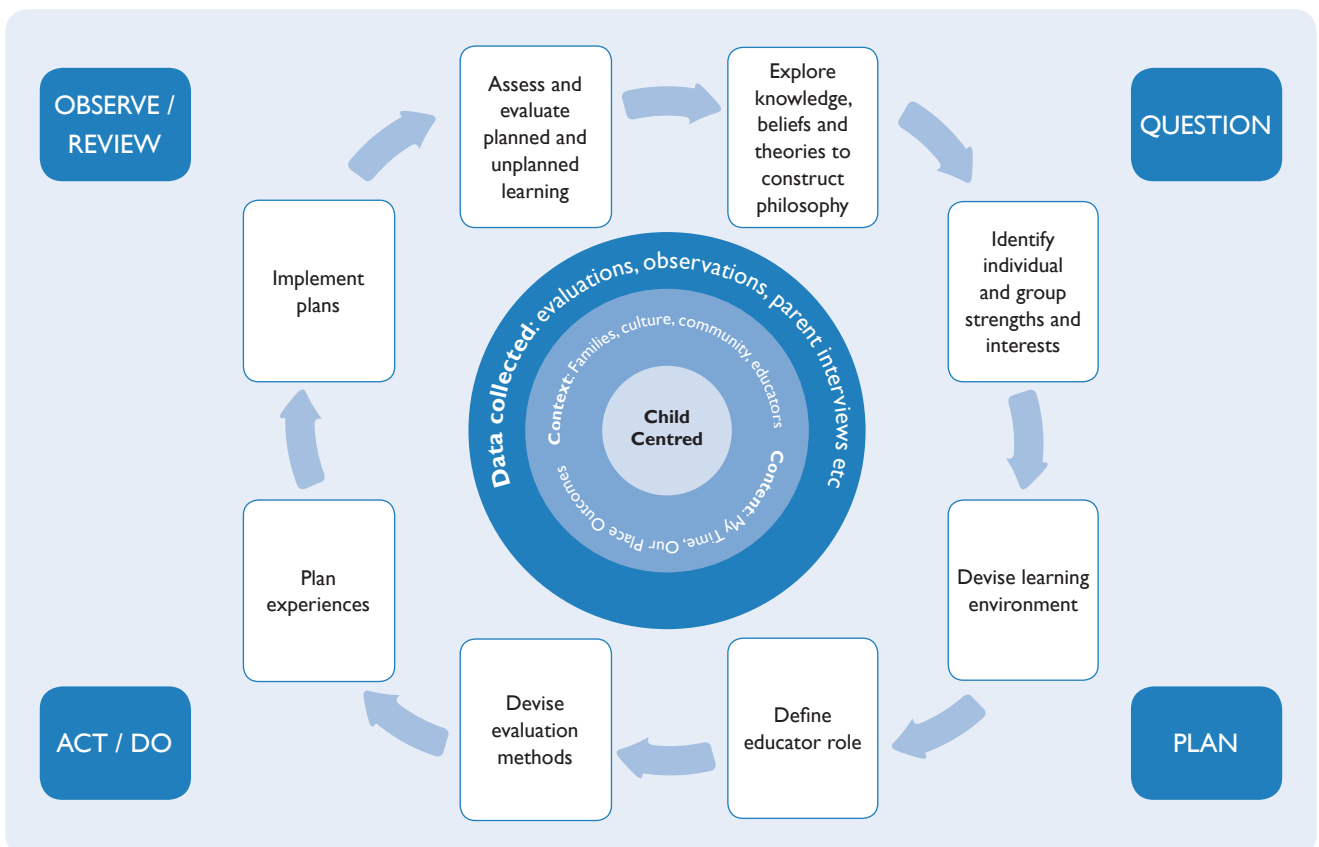
Signing in

Recently our team participated in a familiarisation session on the My Time, Our Place Framework where we discussed reflective practice. What is it? What does it mean to us? How can we be more reflective in our work practices at our service? The educators were asked to consider what it meant to them.

We brainstormed and reflected on our current 'signing in' practice, which was as follows:

- educator sits at the staff desk and signs children in as they walk through the door
- other educators are greeting children at the door and asking children to put bags away in the bag area, with one educator waiting in the kitchen ready to serve food and remind children to wash their hands
- children walk in and greet the educator; normally the educator is busy signing
- some children come in all at once
- educators try to sign in as fast as they can: it can feel rushed, as there is often a line up
- some children say hello, some don't
- educators feel rude sometimes when they don't get to say 'hi' to all children initially
- late bus children arrive at 3:50pm: educators feel like these children aren't getting a nice greeting
- bags get left on the floor
- children sometimes hang around the sign-in desk wanting to talk to the educator
- signing in gets put on hold when the phone rings, or a parent wants to pay fees, then children get missed.

After analysing our thoughts and reflections, we were concerned that this routine was not promoting a positive atmosphere where children felt welcomed, unhurried and valued.

We discussed the fact that some children are asked to move away from the sign-in desk because it is crowded. We are aware some children may not be getting sufficient attention. We want to make each child feel that they are welcomed when they arrive, so they feel a sense of belonging when they walk in the door. We also talked about how to get away from the 'line up' as it reminded us of being at school. We want the children to feel that the after school care setting is different from school.

We wanted to get some ideas from the children about signing in and how we could improve the transition from school to care.

An educator then held a meeting with the children to ask whether they had any ideas on how to make signing in fun and easier for them. The children came up with:

- signing ourselves in
- one sign-on for under-nines and one sign in for over-nines
- if you don't say 'hi' to the educator and get signed in, you go back out and try again
- sign your name on the white board
- stick your own piece of paper on your name to say you are there
- tick your own name off.

Once we had gathered this information, we decided to involve the children by signing their name in on the white board, as the white board is quite far away from the staff desk. It allows the children to walk in, say 'hi' to all the educators, put bags away, then make their way to the white board and write their own name on it.

We trialled the new system for a week. An educator wrote on the white board before any of the children arrived: 'New sign in. Write your own name'. The educators voiced some concerns: 'What if it doesn't work? How will the shorter children reach? What if there is a line up?'

On the first day the first child arrived and the educator explained the new system. He raised his eyebrows and said 'OK', then wrote his name and also the time he arrived. The other children seemed happy to copy what the children in front of them were doing. They seemed to enjoy having the responsibility of signing themselves in. The educator in the quiet area would then check the board and sign off the children on the daily booking sheet.

When the children got picked up, they would go to the white board and wipe their names off to say they have left or they would write 'left' next to their names. Overall the children enjoyed this system and the signing-in process was less crowded. It allowed educators to talk to each child as they came into the service and it promoted continuous flow.

As the week went on the children were walking into after school care with a smile, saying 'hello, I know what to do' and they would go to the white board and sign their name. The sign-in educator supervised while taking the time to have a conversation with all children, asking them about their day and following up on conversations from previous interactions. The children reported that they liked the new system better.

As a result of this change of practice, we have decided to continue the process this way. It has improved and relaxed the process, the room is quieter, and runs smoother. The children seem to co-operate more with the process because it is up to them to complete the task.

We have identified that this new way of transitioning reflects the following principles of the Framework: Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships, and high expectations and equity practices; and the following practices of the Framework: collaboration with children, environment, and continuity and transition.

Outcomes for children:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children feel safe, secure and supported by using effective routines to make predicted transitions during times of change from school to care.
- Children develop knowledge and confident self identities by feeling recognised and respected for who they are because educators have more time to listen to them and engage in authentic conversations.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing by increasingly co-operating with others and educators, as there is more time for them to initiate conversations with educators, develop stronger relationships with them and work with educators collaboratively to plan routines and transitions.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children are interacting verbally with the educators when arriving at school age care because the change in signing-in practices allow more time for conversations.

> **Reflections on practice**
>
> Educators in this story recognise that transitions and routines are important aspects of the program. Educators have used reflective practice to observe, reflect, plan and act. They have worked collaboratively with children and listen to children's voice to make changes to an everyday transition and routine. The change in practice has meant that educators are better able to support children in their transition from school to care, demonstrating that they value relationships as fundamental to their work with children. Educators build strong relationships with children through one-to-one exchanges and conversations, welcoming children individually each day and encouraging them to share stories and events.

TRY OUT

- Choose some photos of children engaged in a variety of experiences. As a team ask the following questions:
  - What is significant about the experience in this photo?
  - What learning may be occurring?
  - How does the learning or experience evidenced in the photo link to the outcomes in the Framework?
- Go to the CD Rom and print off Daniel's show bags; Our radiator springs play set; or Cupcakes and caring citizens. Discuss:
  - What is significant about the experience in this learning story?
  - What learning may be occurring?
  - How does the learning or experience evidenced in the learning story link to the principles, practices and outcomes in the Framework?
- Choose an area of your program, a practice or an experience. Individually consider the following and then share your reflections:
  - What did you observe?
  - What were your reflections? How did you feel? What did you think?
  - What was working well? What were the challenges?
  - How was it contributing to children's wellbeing and learning?
  - Could there be changes to practice? How would this improve outcomes for children's wellbeing and learning?
  - Who could be involved in the planning?
  - What are the first steps?
  - How will you evaluate the success of the changes?

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On the resource CD

- Reflective practice for improvement
- Conversations matter: Leading teams in reflective conversation
- Pedagogical leadership
- Documenting children's learning
- Summary of reflective questions from the Guide
- Learning stories in school age care

Educator reflections

- Reflecting on links with 'our' community and building citizenship.
- Focus on healthy eating
- Reflecting on cultural competence

Learning stories

- Office play
- Wyatt's flying object
- Full of surprises
- Learning story template

4 LINKING BELIEFS AND THEORY WITH PRACTICE

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

Drawing on a range of perspectives and theories can challenge traditional ways of seeing children, facilitating learning, and encourage educators, as individuals and with colleagues, to:

- *investigate why they act in the ways that they do*
- *discuss and debate theories to identify strengths and limitations*
- *recognise how the theories and beliefs that they use to make sense of their work enable but also limit their actions and thoughts*
- *consider the consequences of their actions for children's experiences*
- *find new ways of working fairly and justly.*

(The Framework, p.8)

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

Reflective practice is central to sustaining high quality programs. It offers a way of bringing theory and practice together to enable learning from experiences and to adapt and develop practices in light of new understandings.

As educators, it is a responsibility to monitor beliefs against contemporary theory and research. Are practices based on the latest thinking and research? Are they based on personal beliefs, or do you just do what has always been done?

Educators make hundreds of decisions every day based on their beliefs. In fact, educators have been found to make 936 decisions around curriculum in a six hour day (Podmore & Carr, 1999). So where do these beliefs come from? What do we know? Would other beliefs and knowledge lead us to different decisions? How do we know we are making reasonable decisions? How do our decisions impact on children?

Skilful educators are aware of their beliefs and knowledge and the theories behind these. Implementing practices without theory or knowledge is not professional. Neither a doctor nor a pilot would implement practice without theory and knowledge. As educators, we don't either. If you have never explored this, now is the time to do it.

▸ What beliefs, values, theories or approaches underpin your school age care setting? How do you learn about latest theories or approaches?

▸ How do you establish mutual beliefs and values in your setting? Should families and children be involved in this, or just the educators?

▸ Why might it be important to establish what beliefs, values and theories you are aligned with? How often should you be discussing this or reviewing it? How do you reconcile differences in beliefs, values and attitudes?

▸ What understandings are you building from your partnerships with children and families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?

A core element of the Framework is to challenge educators' thinking and beliefs, and enable critical and reflective discussion. Discussing and debating various theories and approaches enables educators to question their current practices and identify strengths and limitations. Such critical and reflective discussion also allows various educators within the one setting to establish common beliefs (aligned with their community setting) and use this as a powerful path forward in planning and decision-making.

Once educators have a common understanding regarding philosophical beliefs and the theories which underpin these beliefs, it enhances decision-making around such things as:

- program content
- setting up the environment
- resource selection and use
- behaviour guidance approaches
- role of the educator

- relationships with others
- methods for evaluation and planning
- responding to children and their play choices.

Reflecting on your values and beliefs about childhood and school age care:

▶ Where do you think your beliefs about childhood come from?

▶ Do you find yourself drawing on beliefs from your own childhood?

▶ How do you demonstrate that you value childhood?

▶ What do you believe and value about school age care?

▶ Where do your beliefs and values for school age care come from?

▶ How do your responses to these questions relate to the decisions you make about children?

▶ What values or beliefs may be influencing your response to certain situations?

▶ What theoretical perspectives and child development principles could inform your understanding and actions?

▶ Are your theories and perspectives inclusive of other cultures, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture?

Reflecting on the beliefs and values of childhood and school age care in your community:

▶ Where do you think families get their beliefs and values for school age care from?

▶ What happens when you find families have different beliefs and values to the educators?

▶ What do you think children might experience and feel if they notice their families and educators hold different beliefs and values? How might you manage this?

▶ Have you ever asked families on enrolment what they want for their children? If so, what did they want?

THEORIES AND APPROACHES

Educators should consider a range of theories and approaches to inform and guide their practice. This knowledge assists educators to develop a professional approach to working with children and helps to develop a deeper understanding of the children they work with and their needs and interests. With this knowledge they are able to effectively plan for children's recreation and leisure time.

A range of theories and approaches relevant to school age care is summarised on the accompanying resource CD. This summary is not an exhaustive list and educators are encouraged to expand on the list of theories and approaches. Because all theories have strengths and limitations, it is preferable for educators to use a range of theories rather than relying only on one. The summary is not meant to convey rigid divisions: some theories have common features and interpretations, and some theories and theorists change over time. For example, Vygotsky contributed to developmental theory, but is now commonly seen as a socio-culturalist theorist. Developmentally appropriate practice should be used with caution as development is not always predictable and linear. Take the time to read and use the reflective questions below to promote discussion.

Reflective questions for each theory/approach:

▶ What is the most important thing you take out of this?

▶ Did you make any connections today?

▶ What makes more sense for you?

▶ Is there something which doesn't sit well with your current beliefs or with which you disagree?

▶ Thinking of your setting and your children, can you think of examples to back up this theory/approach?

▶ When you look around your room, can you see evidence of this theory or approach anywhere?

▶ What current decisions or choices might you consider reviewing in light of this theory/approach?

▶ What else would you like to know more about?

HEAR ABOUT

At one of our team meetings educators shared their frustrations with older children regularly wandering off from the outside play area and hiding in the trees and bushes along the boundary of the play space or around the corner of buildings. It did not seem to matter how often educators spoke with the children to reinforce the rules and boundaries they always seemed to wander off.

When approached, the older children would moan and say that they were not babies, were responsible enough and did not need to be baby sat. When educators required them to return to the designated play space this often led to challenging behaviours and conflict between educators and children.

As a team we reflected on the following questions:

What is the issue?

Older children are wandering off outside the designated outdoor play space. Some educators felt that this was inappropriate as they were not following the service rules and felt uncomfortable not knowing what the children were doing, were worried about children's safety and about fulfilling their duty of care responsibilities. It was acknowledged that when approached the older children seemed to be behaving appropriately when they were using these 'private' areas but that educators were concerned that the space was out of a direct line of sight and often did not know where they were.

Think back to your childhood? When you were twelve what kinds if things did you like to do after school?

Whilst this question generated lots of laughter and a long list of activities we also identified that many of the pastimes had a common thread—adults did not play a big role in our play and were not supervising many of our activities closely.

What are the older children telling us?

The older children want a space to hang out. This space needs to be a different or separate to the other children in care. They want more control about how they spend their recreation and leisure time. They want privacy and spaces to chill out and relax. Many of the children have been coming to after school care for a long time and fully understand the rules and are comfortable within the environment.

What do child development theories tell us about older children?

Peers are very important to older children as they work towards building more mature relationships. They are seeking personal and emotional independence from adults. They continue to hone their social competence through practice. Peer groups provide opportunities for children to consider another peoples' points of view, develop skills to maintain friendships, understand the concepts of fairness and equity, develop effective communication strategies and understand social norms.

As older children look to others to better understand themselves, friendship groups assist them to further develop their sense of belonging and connectedness with a larger social group.

What will we do to meet the older children's need for space and privacy whilst addressing the needs of educators to feel that children are safe and appropriately supervised?

Educators agreed that older children need to be supervised but that they did not need to be supervised in the same way as younger children? It is all about the balance of supervision and educators need to be clear on what appropriate supervision looks like for this age group.

We agreed that it was important to provide space, time and privacy for older children to undertake project work, relax and converse with each other. In this way we will allow time and space for friendships to develop.

Educators and older children will work together to plan indoor and outdoor play spaces that meet their need for privacy but also enable educators to fulfil their duty of care requirements and ensure children are safe:

- identify appropriate play spaces within the indoor and outdoor environments that are safe to be used independently and can meet both the older children's need for privacy and address the needs of educators
- brainstorm rules around the use of these areas
- discuss what happens if these areas are not used appropriately
- identify resources and equipment that will support or encourage appropriate use of these spaces e.g. indoor/outdoor beanbags or cushions, portable CD players, room dividers, couches, tents, cards, bead machines etc
- identify appropriate supervision strategies e.g. planned and regular checking or touching base with groups of children rather than being present at all times
- outline strategies that children can use to get adult support when required

Educators will plan a range of formal and informal opportunities for older children to interact with others in ways that enable them to practice and further develop social skills.

Educators to consider the viability and practicality of establishing an over tens club and work with children to consider what this may look like.

TRY OUT

How can educators in school age care settings increase their understanding of child development theories and approaches? Some examples include:

- Print a summary of each theory/approach and glue them onto the back of old cards or postcards. Shuffle them and turn one over at a time to read and discuss at regular staff meetings. Use the reflective questions in this chapter for each of the different theoretical ideas or approaches. Bring the cards out at other times when reflecting on your philosophical basis or day-to-day practices.
- Set aside a planning day and, as part of this, distribute the various theories (or ask staff to pick one each) to present back to the group. Motivating staff can often be challenging, but try to find ways to spur them on to make it meaningful for the group. Consider offering a reward, such as a movie voucher, to the person who presents the most innovative or meaningful presentation. Try to relate each approach or theory back to your own setting. Use the reflective questions in this chapter to stimulate discussion following each presentation.
- Engage any of the educators on site who may be studying at the same time to present some sessions on the theories or approaches they may have been learning about.
- Use the educators' stories from the resource CD. Can you see any elements of the child development theories or approaches evident in the stories? Use the reflective questions in this chapter with the educators' stories.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), available at: http://www2.ohchr.org/English/law/crc.htm

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On the resource CD

- Summary of theories and approaches relevant to school age care

5 HOLISTIC APPROACHES

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

School age care educators take a holistic approach to their roles and responsibilities recognising the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. They focus attention on children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning as it pertains to lifelong learning.

(The Framework, p.13)

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

A holistic approach means we don't look at things in isolation. Many principles, practices and outcomes are interwoven throughout the Framework and all of them need to be taken into account when planning for children in school age care settings. 'Holistic' is like a gold thread which is woven throughout the various pages of the Framework. It is evident in the planning cycle process, our views of the child, and our views of our settings: it incorporates culture, community attitudes and the child's voice.

To increase our knowledge and understanding of the Framework, we may unpack it or pull it apart to analyse it, but we must be conscious of always putting it back together again. Our image of the whole child influences every interaction and experience. This image encompasses physical, personal, social, emotional, cultural, spiritual and cognitive aspects of the child.

A holistic approach does not prioritise one aspect of development or learning over another: it is the connectedness of body, mind and spirit, all of which are equally important. Nurturing the whole child is an important role for school age care educators. Taking a holistic approach also means considering and incorporating into the program Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander terms of reference about time, space, talking together, safety, relationships, family, and learning.

When planning activities we are looking at the whole package. For example planning an organised sports day involves nurturing children's physical skills, social skills through team work and competition, their spirit through the thrill of playing for a team, and their mental strength and emotional stamina to both win and lose.

Being holistic in our approach also means drawing on a range of relevant factors which result in responsive and stimulating program planning. This includes collaboration with children, families and communities, while drawing on our own values, beliefs, strengths and interests, as well as a range of theoretical approaches.

The stories interwoven throughout the Guide demonstrate the holistic nature of children's development and wellbeing, and the way educators have integrated principles, practices and the outcomes of the Framework. The stories do not just sit with one example of practice or outcome: they serve to illustrate many varied practices, principles and outcomes all at the same time. One story of practice may, in fact, cover all five outcomes. We should not, therefore, look at the outcomes in isolation or try to 'pigeon hole' examples into specific areas. It is recommended that programs are planned holistically around the child rather than outcome by outcome.

The Framework draws on conclusive international evidence to present the big picture and identify long term outcomes. These outcomes provide broad direction for school age care educators so that all children can experience meaningful play, which builds success for life.

Fundamental to the Framework (and also *Belonging, Being, Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*) is a view of children's lives as characterised by belonging, being and becoming:

Belonging: *Knowing where and with whom you belong is integral to human existence. Children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community. Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become.*

Being: *Childhood is a time to be, to seek and make meaning of the world. Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children's lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life.*

Becoming: *Children's identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. They are shaped by many different events and circumstances. Becoming reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs … as … children learn and grow. It emphasises learning to participate fully and actively in society.*

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009) p.7

▸ What does 'belonging' look like, sound like and feel like in your setting?

▸ What does 'being' look like, sound like and feel like in your setting?

▸ What does 'becoming' look like, sound like and feel like in your setting?

▸ Is the program holistic in its approach, or focused on one or more particular areas?

▸ How can the program be more holistic?

▸ What is important for you and your team in regard to children?

▸ Do children have time to just 'be' during their time with you? How would you describe these experiences? Are they valuable? If so, in what ways? How can this value be shared with families and the community?

▸ What do the terms 'physical', 'emotional' and 'spiritual' mean to you?

▸ How do you try to ensure that children feel safe, secure and strong physically, emotionally and spiritually? Do you know what these terms mean for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

Figure 5: Elements of the Framework for School Age Care
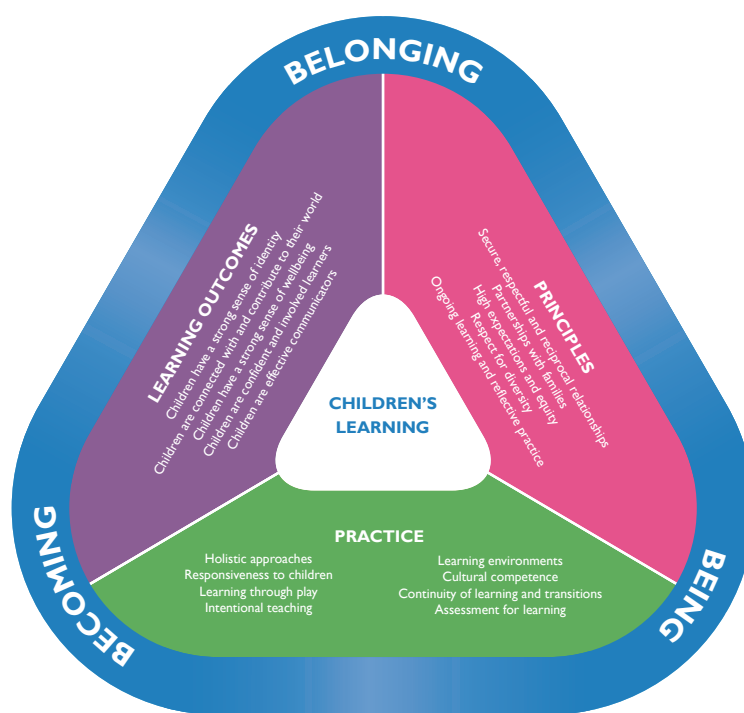
HEAR ABOUT

The great bird rescue

Once upon a Thursday afternoon, the children of after school care noticed a poor little bird stuck in a tree. 'We won't leave until the bird is free!' the children cried but were finally convinced by the staff to go inside. Fortunately, Lockwood's mum was very tall and decided to help. So after a lot of trying, they got the legendary PVC pipe from the wondrous land of the Green Room and finally got the bird unstuck. So they lived happily ever after. . .The End.

By Jacinta, Year 7

The bird rescue contributed greatly to children's learning and development, with the outcome contributing to their wellbeing. The children were able to have discussions on who we could contact to rescue the bird. They wanted to phone the RSPCA or a local Animal Rescue centre to help us. The Director phoned a previous educator who now works at the zoo. She suggested that we break the branch to try to free the bird as it was more than likely that no-one would come to assist. Upon discussing that the bird was not an endangered bird and the chances of someone or an organisation coming to help would be remote, the children then started problem-solving on how they could free the bird.

The children were so passionate about freeing the bird that some pleaded with their parents to come and have a look to help free it. They also ventured inside the school age care building to inform the children that were inside playing to come and have a look for themselves. One of the children suggested connecting the pieces of PVC piping together that were in the drama storage to reach the bird, hoping to snap the branch so the bird could be freed.

After one hour of trying, the thin branch was finally snapped and the bird flew away uninjured. After some celebratory cheers, the children, parents and educators were able to go home knowing they had done a good deed!

Belonging: Children experienced a sense of belonging by using relationships with peers, educators and family members to work collaboratively to achieve a common goal.

Being: Children experienced a sense of being by being consumed by the moment, demonstrating deep concentration and complete focus, recognising that they were an active part of the natural world, respecting others' point of view, and meeting an everyday challenge.

Becoming: Children experienced a sense of becoming by further shaping their identities as problem-solvers, contributing to the natural world, and being active partners within their community who could affect change.

This experience led to the following activities:

- The after school care service recently held a cupcake fundraising stall and some of the money will be going towards sponsoring an Australian animal at the Animal Rescue Centre.
- We researched other organisations that rescue animals, such as the RSPCA.
- Jacinta identified the bird as a 'Noisy Miner'. The children researched this breed on the internet.
- The children used binoculars to go 'bird watching' at after school care. They keep a record of the type of birds found in our school grounds.

Outcomes for children:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children felt safe, secure and supported to openly express their feelings and ideas in their interactions with others as their distress at the bird being trapped was acknowledged, ideas listened to and taken seriously, and they were supported in taking action to free the bird.

- Children developed their autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency when they were encouraged to collaborate and problem solve with their peers, families and wider community to save the bird.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children became socially responsible and showed respect, appreciation and care for the environment in their concern for the welfare of the bird and made connections with the local community to find a solution.

- Children developed a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation by collaborating and cooperating with others, negotiating and joint problem-solving.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Children became strong in their social and emotional wellbeing as they were supported to cope with frustrations and attend to the challenge through problem-solving.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children use a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating, applying a wide variety of thinking strategies to solve problems when they investigated and explored different ideas to rescue the bird.

- Children developed dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity, remaining persistent when challenged, and gained independence and autonomy as educators judged when to provide appropriate support and when to step back to allow children to take the lead.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children interacted verbally with others to explore ideas and problem-solve in freeing the bird.

- Children collaborate with others, express ideas and make meaning using a range of media and communication technologies and were encouraged by educators to use technology to record and share the experience with others.

Reflections on practice

Educators recognised the importance of this experience to children and acknowledged their sense of agency. This example shows how unplanned experiences can contribute to each of the outcomes for learning and wellbeing. This experience can be carefully scaffolded by the educator, providing support and encouragement where appropriate and stepping back for children to take the lead. Children's belonging, being and becoming were supported by educators recognising the significance of this experience in children's lives, trusting children's competence, agency and ability to collaborate and make decisions and choices, and allowed time for the children to engage in the experience and link them to relevant community resources.

TRY OUT

- Collect some photos and study them, individually or as a team. How many different principles, practices and outcomes can you see evident in each photo? Try this also with examples of video footage or documented stories of the children or practice.

- Print off Daniel's show bags; Our radiator springs play set; or Cupcakes and caring citizens from the resource CD. Discuss: How many different principles, practices and outcomes can you see evident in each photo? What evidence can you see of a holistic approach?

- Print out 'Linking Belonging, Being and Becoming to the five outcomes'. As a group, use the questions in this chapter and in the handout to brainstorm what these terms mean for your group and how you convey these overarching principles in your setting. Consider using this information and any artistic talent you have in your setting to display the results.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

Kennedy A & Stonehouse A (2004) *Shared visions for outside school hours care*, Department of Human Services, Melbourne, Vic, available at http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/childrensservices/sharedvisions_outsideschoolhours.pdf

On the resource CD

- Linking belonging, being and becoming to the five outcomes

Educator reflections

- Reflecting on links with 'our' community and building citizenship
- Focus on healthy eating
- Reflecting on cultural competence

Learning stories

- Daniel's show bags
- Our radiator springs playset
- Cupcakes and caring citizens
- Office play

6 COLLABORATING WITH CHILDREN

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

School age care educators are responsive to all children's strengths, abilities and interests. They value and build on children's strengths, skills and knowledge to ensure their wellbeing and motivation and engagement in experiences.

(The Framework, p.13)

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

School age care settings are in a unique position— they cater for children who are able to engage in more complex thinking than preschool children and are clearly able to articulate their needs and interests. School age care settings are ideally set up to enable extensive collaboration with children, not only because they are full of competent communicators, but also because of the play-based environment they operate from. Children can engage in hours of uninterrupted play, based around their strengths, needs and interests. Latest research in neuroscience has identified this low-stress learning in a stimulating environment is the ideal setting for the brain's neural pathways to grow.

The level at which educators collaborate with children may largely depend on their view of children. Educators who view children as competent, resourceful, curious, imaginative and desiring interaction with others will produce a strong child-directed program. Educators notice and follow the children's interests and model the passion for learning and curiosity alongside the children. Educators are committed to reflection about their own learning. Communication and interaction can deepen children's inquiry and increase their knowledge about the world around them.

The Reggio Emilia approach and socio-cultural theories, such as Vygtosky's and Brofenbrenner's, are grounded in beliefs that children learn through interaction with others, including families, educators and peers, in a friendly learning environment. Reggio founder Loris Malaguzzi's vision of an 'education based on relationships' focuses on each child in relation to others and seeks to activate and support children's reciprocal relationships with other children, their family, teachers, society and the environment.

Meaningful collaboration with children takes a number of different forms. While this age group is clearly able to articulate their interests and views, educators can still scaffold their level of engagement and learning by carefully observing them in play and planning ways to extend this.

School age children's insights can also be gathered formally and informally through a range of means such as:

- authentic and meaningful conversations
- communication books/journals
- organised children's meetings
- children's representatives, like Student Representative Council (SRC)
- suggestion boxes
- graffiti walls
- questionnaires
- vox polls
- children interviewing others
- observations, photographs and video.

However, respectful and responsive relationships are at the core of successful collaboration with children. Reciprocal trust and respect allow for in-depth knowledge and understandings to be built and extended upon. Interacting on a daily basis and questioning, stimulating and scaffolding children's thinking allows educators to deepen their understanding of each child, children in general, and themselves on their own learning journey.

In trusting, respectful relationships, educators participate in authentic discussions and collaborative decision-making with both groups of children and individuals. Educators can set up an environment

which encourages informal discussions, initiated by both educators and children. Consider decisions you might not normally involve the children in: if a planned excursion has suddenly become unavailable at short notice, do you ask children for suggestions on how to fix it? This approach does not mean the children will choose something unacceptable, because the educators facilitate the discussion and illustrate the limitations of the available choices. This is an ideal shared decision-making process from which children (and educators) can learn.

One of the benefits of working closely with children when planning programs is their unique ability to dream. Ask them what they want for a snack and they will tell you ice cream. Ask where they want to go on an excursion and you might hear 'Disneyland', or they may want to ride an elephant. This may put some educators off, but in fact it can open up valuable discussion and understanding between the educator and the children and achieve something better than if nobody had dreamed at all! Educators can respond, mindful of the limitations of the setting, but adapt some of the children's ideas. Ice cream may not be an everyday snack food, but it can certainly be served on the Disneyland theme day held at the setting, which all children can be involved in organising. It is not possible to organise elephant rides in Australia, but if you mention trying to get camel or pony rides, you might see the children's faces light up! When working with children, it is vital to maximise on their imaginative ideas, aspirations and ability to dream.

▸ What is your view of children?

▸ How has your background and values influenced your view of children?

▸ How might issues of culture influence your view of children?

▸ How does this view impact on the level of collaboration with children in your setting?

▸ In what situations have you tried to see the children's point of view?

▸ In what situations have you not attempted to see the children's point of view? Why? Why not?

▸ As an adult, how do you like to be consulted? What methods do you prefer?

▸ How are children involved in program decision-making and contributing to the environment? How do they assist in everyday routines and transitions? How are they involved in menu planning and food preparation?

▸ What responsibilities do children have? How does this contribute to children's sense of agency?

▸ What strategies do you employ to capture the voices of children in planning and feedback?

▸ How do children know they have been heard?

▸ How are children's interests pursued and celebrated?

▸ Does the physical environment and culture of your setting allow for educators and children to just chat about ideas?

HEAR ABOUT

Over the years, as the service has grown, we have changed our routines, particularly during the afternoon tea time to make it more efficient for staff, never considering what this has meant for children's engagement or involvement in the program. Upon reflection we realised that current practices were excluding children from actively participating in this part of the program. In reading My Time Our Place, educators were reminded of the importance of enabling children to become connected with and contribute to their world.

As a team we discussed ways in which we could make this part of our program richer and involve children more. We reflected on why we were undertaking afternoon tea in this way and who was benefitting from it. We discussed ways that we could design this time differently to develop a greater sense of belonging by providing more opportunities for children to participate, express ideas, negotiate roles, contribute to group experiences, and collaborate to achieve goals.

During the planning of a student-free day at the school, I asked the group of children what they would like for lunch. They brainstormed ideas and one of the children suggested we use the fresh produce they had been growing at the school for environmental studies. One of the children

emailed the teacher to ask if this was okay, to which the teacher agreed. During school time in the class they had the opportunity to pick the produce from the garden.

The children had come up with a 'top three' list which they agreed upon by voting. Home-made hamburgers won the vote. As a group, we ordered the groceries online from the shopping list children developed (with the educator's help).

On the day, Peter and David worked on making the hamburgers, while Stacey, Paul and Andrew cut up all the fresh produce. Dylan was the 'hamburger king' as he cooked the burgers. He said that he had never helped in the kitchen before. Katie then prepared the plates and assisted Dylan to serve the other children.

We discovered that collaborative planning and implementation of the afternoon tea routine helped children to connect more and contribute to their world. What we have changed now is that children and educators work together to plan our menu, complete our online grocery shopping, use fresh produce from the school community, and children are part of preparing, serving and facilitating afternoon teas. As a team, we are also looking at other routines we can change to include and involve children more effectively.

TRY OUT

- Aligning daily routines with your philosophy and values is an ongoing process. To assess how much you are collaborating with children, spend some time analysing your daily schedule. Write down the daily schedule from the time the children arrive until they leave and give approximate time frames. Then assign a different colour for each of the following categories:
  - educator chooses and directs what happens
  - children and educator negotiate the focus of what happens
  - children choose and engage in self-directed experiences.

  Look at the colour-coded schedule and add up the minutes devoted to each colour. Is the schedule balanced or dominated by one kind of time far more than the others? Count the minutes children spend in transitions. What portion of time do transitions take? What responsibilities in your setting could the children take more ownership of? What ideas do you have that would make routines more compatible with your values?

This activity may also be interesting if undertaken with individual educators to provide them with some feedback on how adult-driven their approach may be.

- Ask the children probing questions about the setting's environment to get more insight about their thoughts. Even though school age children are able to talk, they are not always able to offer insight unless probed.
  - What things are the same at school age care as they are at home?
  - What things are different?
  - What things are the same at school and school age care?
  - What things are different?
  - If you were in charge, what would your school age care setting look like?

- Give the children permission to dream. In groups, get them to plan their ideal school age care setting. Give them a few (only a few) non-negotiables, such as the necessity to record which children are here each day, and let them go for it! See what they come up with. It may give you some insight into how they are thinking and what changes you may be able to implement.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

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Scheinfeld D, Haigh K & Scheinfeld S (2008) *We Are All Explorers: Learning and Teaching With Reggio Principles in Urban Settings,* Teachers College Press, New York.

Stacey S (2008) *Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings,* Redleaf Press, St Paul, MN

On the resource CD

- Summary of theories and approaches relevant to school age care
- Children's voice questions

Learning stories

- Chef Brianna
- Connor and the volcano
- Exploring aerodynamics

7 LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

Play and leisure activities provide opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine.

(The Framework, p.14)

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

Play is a valued process, not only for enjoyment and leisure, but also for learning. Through play, children develop a sense of identity and an understanding of their social and cultural worlds. Children use play to explore and understand cultures, communities and friendships. We gain a lot through playing, not just as children, but also as adults.

▶ How do we play as adults? What would happen if we, as adults, were denied play time?

Recent brain research has heralded the benefits of a stimulating play-based environment in encouraging the brain to grow and develop (Diamond 1988). Low stress levels and high engagement combine to nourish neural development. Research by Vandell and others (2005) demonstrates how school-aged care environments achieve this through the combination of high intrinsic motivation and challenge, effort and enjoyment. Lester and Russell (2009) identified the flexibility and plasticity of the brain, which develops through play and increases potential for learning later in life.

The intellectual and cognitive benefits of playing have been well documented. Children who engage in quality play experiences are more likely to have well developed memory skills, language development, and are able to regulate their behavior, leading to enhanced adjustment to school and academic learning. Play also provides children with an opportunity to just 'be'. Being is one of the overarching messages of the Framework and allows children to experience the joys and complexities of childhood.

Educators facilitate children's play by providing them with space, time and materials. They also offer guidance in problem-solving, and they present challenges, pay attention to their interests, and value their curiosity about the world we live in together.

In school age care settings, there is a myriad of leisure and play experiences that fosters children's development and encourages valuable learning. Play in school age care settings will often differ from that of pre-school children. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, most school age children will have moved, or be moving, into the concrete operational stage of development. As they get older, school age children place more importance on peer interactions. 'Peers become partners who must learn to negotiate, compromise, share and defend themselves as equals' (Nixon & Gould 2005, p.173).

Play also provides children with opportunities to practise skills taught at school or learned at home, and to reinforce the learning that has occurred. The following outline of the different types of play has been adapted from Bisback and Kopf-Johnson, 2010.

DRAMATIC PLAY

School age children have the capacity to indulge in complex play. Rich role-playing fosters their creativity and imagination, as well as the skills of improvisation. Blocks may be used as phones, chairs become trains, and curtains become capes. As educators plan experiences and play spaces, they need to review resources to ensure children can move from simple to more complex play and that enough time is allowed for this movement to take place.

Social and dramatic play provides a space in which friendship groups are formed, relationships are negotiated, and decisions are made. Children learn to take turns, share, resolve conflict, and become resilient when things don't go their way.

Role-playing enables children to enact or 'test out' different perspectives. Just as children initially use their fingers as physical props when learning to count, they also need physical props when learning to take

perspectives: they cannot do it in their heads in the way that adults can. Children also participate in play to help them work through difficult emotions and confronting situations so that they can understand them better and process their feelings. Playing the role of the 'super hero' may enable a child to feel a sense of empowerment which that child might be struggling with in the real world.

▶ If children are role playing scary situations, what is the role of the educator? How can we help children to process their feelings and understandings of what is happening? What might be a better way to deal with it?

While younger school age children will engage in a range of traditional fantasy play, older school age children might engage in more complex, pre-planned dramatic productions. These productions might by influenced by their peers, pop culture and the media. Children engaged in such experiences may assign roles to various members of the group and spend long hours preparing for a production. Educators may have differing levels of involvement in these productions, but should be nearby to help facilitate any difficulties children experience while they are negotiating, co-operating and compromising.

▶ Do the children in your school age care setting engage in dramatic productions? Who initiates them? What sorts of things inspire these productions?

▶ How do educators maintain children's enthusiasm and extend their learning?

▶ What things may limit children's experiences with dramatic productions?

GAMES WITH RULES

School age children have more refined gross motor skills and the cognitive skills to follow the logic of games with rules. This enables them to participate in more physical games, team games and sport. Sportsmanship and teamwork are explored through active play. As children learn to play team games, educators play a role in mentoring, role-playing and intentionally teaching the concept of sportsmanship, team play, and how to deal with the difficulty of losing. Educators in school age care settings should provide a balance of competitive games with cooperative team games, where the whole team works towards a common goal rather than identifying winners and losers. This way, children have opportunities to develop the skills involved in playing group games without always having to deal with the concept of

losing. It also instils a sense of fun and belonging without fracturing the group. For example, have you tried playing musical chairs where nobody gets out, but each chair is still removed? There is lots of hilarity as all participants try to sit on the one last chair. An educator's role is very clear in this activity: they must model problem-solving skills, cooperation, respect, consideration for the safety and wellbeing of others, encouragement, and participation to achieve a team result.

Board and card games are also important tools, not only to promote team play and fun, but also to practise the skills of turn-taking, how to enter and exit play, as well as how to control impulses and manage feelings around winning and losing that are acceptable to the group. If this game playing is a positive experience, children will feel a sense of belonging and build strong relationships with peers and educators. If the game playing is not a positive experience, the opposite may occur, so there is a clear role for educators to become involved in game playing.

▶ How do children become 'good sports'?

▶ How do children learn how to lose?

▶ Do you have children who don't like to lose? How might you teach them how to win and lose gracefully?

▶ What cooperative games can you play which don't identify winners and losers?

PLAY RITUALS

Play rituals are games or experiences that have been handed down by one generation of school age children to the next. School age care settings, with their mix of different ages, are ideal spaces for passing down these play rituals. Play rituals include games like hopscotch, four square, skipping, clapping games, and hide and seek. These games support hand-eye coordination, dexterity, problem-solving, balance and planning. Chants are rituals that foster coordination, rhythm, memory and sequencing.

▶ Do the children in your school age care setting participate in any play rituals? Which ones? If children don't participate in play rituals, how might you foster them?

ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY

'Rough and tumble play is what children do naturally with each other and with cooperative adults. It is viewed by many as play wrestling and is often referred to as horsing around. Boys are much more likely than girls to engage in this type of play, and men are more much more likely to engage children in rough and tumble play than women are. Men are also more likely to view it as appropriate play as women are.'

(Bisback & Kopf-Johnson, 2010, p.147)

Rough and tumble play is non-competitive, builds self esteem and helps children learn to control their bodies and set limits. Although there is research to indicate the value of this type of play (Pellegrini and Perlmutter, 1988; Hughes, 1999), many schools and school age care settings tend to ban or discourage rough and tumble play as educators fear it leads to aggression or people getting hurt. Children involved in this type of play may need support and guidance to develop problem-solving skills, as they need to know when to stop the play if it becomes hurtful or aggressive. Problems could occur when one person becomes too rough and cannot read the signs that the other child is in distress. These experiences should be monitored by educators at all times.

Rather than ban all rough and tumble play, school age care settings should perhaps provide opportunities where children may participate with educator guidance and supervision. There is a number of creative ways to introduce more structured rough and tumble play experiences, such as pillow fighting, Chinese wrestling, hiring sumo suits for wrestling, and using pool noodles as swords or Star Wars-like light sabres. The key to this is establishing a specific area, such as an area of mats, creating specific rules for the experience and ensuring close supervision. In the role of 'umpire', educators can support children to learn the skills of self-control and reading others' expressions.

Due to the varied age groups in school age care settings, educators need to consider the differing developmental and skill level of the children involved.

▸ If children don't have opportunities to participate in rough and tumble play, what other ways can they learn the skill of self-control?

▸ What benefits do you see in rough and tumble play?

▸ What things do you need to consider in your setting regarding rough and tumble play?

▸ How do you recognise when the experience is becoming unsafe?

▸ What are educators' confidence and skill levels in facilitating rough and tumble play? How might these be developed?

▸ How often should children be able to engage in rough and tumble play?

COLLECTING

School age children are avid collectors! These collections may range from everyday found objects, such as rocks, to bought objects, such as collector cards. Unlike adult collectors, children incorporate their collections into game playing. Collections allow school children opportunities to develop their analysis and classification skills. Children can also develop social skills, such as negotiation through trading. Trading may be a challenging issue in school age care settings, as children from differing ages may present with a wide range of negotiation skills. 'Trades' may not always seem fair. One-sided trades may also see involvement from families and are sometimes challenging to handle. Many school age care settings and schools will ban collections to avoid this. If you operate from a school setting, liaise with other educators on site, as well as children and families, to develop a policy and some procedures to guide the issues associated with collecting and trading.

▸ Do the children in your school age care setting bring along collections? How do you deal with them? Do you establish rules?

▸ What is the consequence if you ban certain collections? Does it stop trading? Is there a better/different way of dealing with trading?

▸ How might you help children to acquire better negotiation skills?

▸ If you are in a school based setting, what is your school's policy on bringing collections to school? Is this policy appropriate in a recreation and leisure setting?

EXCURSIONS

School age children generally love going on excursions. In school age care settings, this occurs most frequently during the school holidays when children have longer periods of playtime. Excursions allow children to feel more connected with their community, build a sense of belonging within their group, provide the children with stimulating and different experiences, and may break up long unstructured periods of playtime. Excursions may allow children to test out their skills in a different context, such as skating on ice or playing football on an official ground.

▶ What are the benefits of excursions? What may be the drawbacks of excursions?

▶ How often do you think children in your setting should go on excursions?

▶ What types of locations are suitable for excursions? Is it okay to keep going on the same excursions regularly, or do you think they should be varied?

▶ What role do the children play in choosing what excursions to go on and when?

HEAR ABOUT

What do you think children can learn while on excursions? Do you have some examples?

Rocket straws

Gabriela came to after school care on Tuesday wanting to make a kazoo and rocket with straws. She had been on an excursion that day to another school's science lab, where the class had the opportunity to try some science experiments. While Gabriela had undertaken many experiments during the day, she didn't get the chance to try the kazoo and rocket experiment. Her strong sense of agency compelled her to ask an educator at after school care if she could try the experiment there. The educator recognised Gabriela's interest and, noticing the group of friends following Gabriela, asked if she wanted to teach all her friends too. They were all excited then. Gabriela went to retrieve her notes from school and the educator got out a box of straws. The group spent the afternoon experimenting with different length straw kazoos which made different sounds and also different length rockets.

The educator originally had a different activity planned for that day, but she recognised the interest the girls had in the experiments and changed it on the spot to seize the moment. Gabriela consolidated and extended her learning from earlier in the day, and her positive, self-chosen experience stimulated her love of learning and enhanced her self-concept as she explored role-playing a 'teacher' for the day. She was also guided by the educator to use empathy and respect in her leadership. 'Gabriela you need to wait for everyone to get to this step before you show what to do next.' The positive experience also stimulated the other girls' interest in the science experiments and the group collaboratively decided to do some more of the experiments outlined in Gabriela's work book on future dates in after school care.

Outcomes for children

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children developed their autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency when they collaborated with peers and educators to plan programs and lead experiences.
- Children developed knowledgeable and confident self identities when they felt recognised and respected for who they are by being provided with time, space and resources for them to engage in self-directed pursuits.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children developed dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination, and reflexivity by being encouraged to extend their own interests through the science experiments.

- Children used a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, enquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating by experimenting in making kazoos and rockets.

- Children transferred and adapted what they had learned from one context to another by recreating school science experiments in the care setting.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children interacted verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes, such as when Gabriela, with the guidance of the educator, explored role-playing a teacher.

- Children engaged with a range of texts and gained meaning from these texts, drawing on written notes from school.

Creativity, imagination and make believe in family day care

After school, the children arrived at Thi Nguyet's family day care house tired and lacking enthusiasm. Thi asked them what they did at school today. No one volunteered to say anything. Then, Sophie looked at Edward. They both said at the same time 'the usual stuff'. Charli responded 'I saw your class in the library. You don't go to the library everyday you know.' 'Yeah, I borrowed a library book about the moon and space. The book is interesting', Edward said. 'My class had an art lesson and I painted a pink and purple flower pot', Taylor stated with a big smile on her face. The children now started enthusiastically telling one another what they did at school.

The discussion led to the children writing a list of what they would like to do. After their animated discussion, they voted to make things with pop-sticks .Thi helped the children to set up the experience on the table.

'I am making a girl and I will dress her up in a skirt and t-shirt just like my sister', Taylor called out. She continued: 'My sister is picking me up tonight.' 'Mine is an alien. It has two antennas to communicate with alien-friends', Edward said. 'Jacob, your thing looks like an animal. Is it your dog Lumpy?' Charli asked.

The children spent a long time designing, making and playing with their creations. The older children helped the younger ones to solve problems during the making process. Edward made up a show with his alien speaking both Vietnamese and English. He was very entertaining. Everyone cheered him up. There were giggles, laughs, many questions and answers and stories to share between the children.

We thought of extending this in the following ways:

- consider Edward's interest in space, planets and aliens

- maximise opportunities for peer support and encourage conversations that enable children to share about themselves and their family

- promote the use of children's home language in the program.

Outcomes for children

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children develop their autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency when they participate in a range of freely chosen play and leisure opportunities which encourage them to design and experiment.

- Children develop knowledgeable and confident self identities when they develop strong foundations in both the culture and language/s of their family and of the broader community without compromising their cultural identities and their home languages are promoted.

School age educators have a powerful role in children's lives by setting up time and space for children to play in. Educators can use the Framework as a guide to help establish rich and meaningful play spaces for children. This includes:

- a variety of spaces in which to play

- choices

- uninterrupted and prolonged time to play

- access to a range of resources which can be used to enrich and extend play

- opportunities to pursue their own interests, strengths and ideas

- a place which instils a sense of belonging.

As educators it is always good to reflect on your own childhood:

- What were your favourite play spaces as a child?

- What did you enjoy doing?

- How might you incorporate some of your childhood play ideas into your setting?

- What role did the adults play when you were a child?

- What are your beliefs about play?

- How do you think play might have changed over the past forty years?

- What impact do you think this might have on children and the adults of the future?

- Reflect on the play space in your school age care setting. Consider:

    - variety of spaces

    - access to natural environments and resources

    - variety and number and appropriateness of resources

    - access to resources that can be used creatively for more than one purpose,

    - for example, blocks, material, box construction?

    - the role of the television and other electronic items in your setting: do they discourage creative or physical play?

- How does your play space instil a sense of ownership in children?

- How do you know if the children feel like they belong?

- What do you know about the play of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

- How do children and families see themselves reflected in the play space?

- In what ways do you use the cultural tools of the community to inspire children's thinking and play?

Observe the children at play:

- What different types of play do you see the children undertaking in your service?

- What things seem to limit their play?

- Challenging behaviour can sometimes be through lack of engagement. Do the children seem to be engaged in the play setting? Are any disruptive children having their play needs met?

TRY OUT

Take video footage of the educators in your setting interacting with the children in play. View the footage and discuss the roles the educators took on, using the following roles identified by Jones and Reynolds (1992):

- stage manager
- mediator
- player
- scribe
- assessor and communicator
- planner

Consider how you currently market and promote the importance of play and its role in learning. Consider making some resources, such as posters or brochures, or make a collection of powerful stories which could go on display or in newsletters. How might your setting benefit from this promotion?

Undertake a reflective discussion based on the following quote from Plato: 'You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation'. What do you think about this quote? Why do you think this may or may not be true?

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

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On the resource CD

- Reflective practice for improvement
- Conversations matter: Leading teams in reflective conversation
- Pedagogical leadership
- Documenting children's learning
- Summary of reflective questions from the Guide

Learning stories

- Learning stories in school age care
- Chef Brianna
- Connor and the volcano
- Exploring aerodynamics
- Elijah's jetpack
- Learning story template

8 INTENTIONALITY

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

> *Intentionality refers to actions that are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful.*
>
> The Framework, p.14

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

To be 'intentional' is to act purposefully, with a goal in mind and a plan for accomplishing it. Intentional acts arise from careful thought and in consideration of the potential effects. For example, when offering dress-ups, educators provide a wide selection. This is intentional in the following ways:

- Not having enough may be challenging to children who find sharing and waiting difficult and could lead to unnecessary conflict over the limited resources.
- If only one or two children could dress up, it would limit opportunities to stimulate rich group play.
- If the dress-ups were all the same, respect for diversity and choice are not promoted.
- Providing variety allows children to mix and match and experiment through varied role play.
- Providing variety encourages children to share, collaborate and negotiate.
- Providing educators who are able to interact with the children fosters skill development in this area (through scaffolding).

Intentionality is about educators being able to explain what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Many school age care educators might argue that their programming is child-centred and child-directed and they can't 'pre-plan' what the children are going to choose to participate in on a given day. While it is true that much of the learning and play which occurs in school age care settings is spontaneous and in response to the actual children on the day, there is

still a lot of intentional planning which occurs before the children even arrive. Educators purposefully (and perhaps in collaboration with children) establish routines, set up the environment, select resources, and appoint educators to work with the children. This approach reflects the educator's understanding of the context, individual personalities and group dynamics.

Educators who are deliberate and purposeful in what they do:

- promote children's learning through worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions which foster high-level thinking
- seize opportunities during experiences and conversations to extend children's thinking and learning
- model and demonstrate active listening skills
- utilise varied communication strategies, such as open questions, explanations, speculation and problem-solving
- move flexibly in and out of various roles and draw on different strategies as the context changes
- draw on contemporary theories and research for their knowledge and practices
- monitor children's wellbeing, life skills and citizenship, and use the information to guide program planning
- monitor children's needs and interests and incorporate them into program planning
- identify 'teachable moments' as they arise and use them to scaffold children's learning and development.

So, if educators are to be intentional, how does this fit with following the child's lead? To be truly responsive to children's interests and needs, a school age care setting must be deliberate and purposeful in how they identify children's interests and needs. If it is not deliberate and intentional how will you know:

- exactly which children's interests and needs you have identified?

- which children you may not be meeting the needs and interests of?
- how to plan around each child's needs and interests (particularly when there is more than one educator on site)?
- what has been achieved?

> *'Regardless of whether children are engaged in child-guided or adult-guided experience, however, teachers always play a vital educational role by creating supportive environments and scaffolding learning.'*
>
> *(Epstein, A, 2007, p.viii)*

When children engage in experiences of their own interest, there are many opportunities for educators to extend children's thinking and engagement and enhance their development. Consider a group of children playing Lego. They may happily play for a long time on their own and an adult can sit a distance away and supervise passively. The adult may observe the children having an in-depth discussion about war and people dying. The group may also be putting down the efforts of the five year old in the group. What a lost opportunity this is! An educator could use this opportunity to:

- encourage empathy and respect within the group if they speak disrespectfully to each other
- facilitate an in-depth discussion around war and grief and ways to cope with feelings and thoughts around this
- challenge the children's thinking around their Lego construction and inspire them to work together as a group to solve a problem, or become more engaged in the task.

It is a delicate balance to know when to become involved in children's experiences and when to stand back. Sometimes it is intentional to stand back and observe. At other times educators intentionally become involved with the children. If we want to assess how far a child has come in a particular skill area, such as being able to enter play, we might stand

back and observe. If we want to demonstrate for that child how to enter play, we may actively model with the group how to go about asking a group of children if we can join in.

As children become older they want to spend more time with peers and less time with adults, so an older group of children may not appreciate an educator joining in their play, to 'scaffold their learning'! Do you remember when you were a child? One of the challenges in larger school age care settings is teaching more inexperienced educators when and how to interact with the children. Finding the right balance between child-initiated play versus adult-directed play can be a challenge.

▸ What are some examples where you have been intentional in your practice?

▸ Can you think of a 'teachable moment' which you acted upon?

▸ When might you not be acting intentionally?

▸ Where might your school age care setting benefit from more deliberate and purposeful planning?

▸ Is it important for everyone in the setting to understand what is done intentionally, or with purpose?

▸ In your setting, where does the balance sit in regard to child-initiated activity and adult-directed activity? Are you happy with this balance? If not, how might you change this?

▸ How do you demonstrate that you acknowledge and build on the context and discourse of each child and family, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?

▸ How do all the educators in your setting learn when and how to interact with children?

▸ Do you discuss the needs of the older children? How might they be different?

▸ What is the difference between being intentional and taking over?

▸ In what ways do your interactions build upon the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

HEAR ABOUT

Nathan's snake

Nathan is in Year 6 and attends after school care 1–4 days per week. Being an older child at school age care and in a service that does not have many older boys, the educators identified that Nathan needed a challenge or role of responsibility as he occasionally used the dreaded 'B' word: 'bored'. One afternoon he asked an educator, if he could use the laptop to work on his personal project for school. His topic was snakes. As Nathan's favourite activity at after school care is playing on the kids' computers, the educator thought it would be good for Nathan to use the laptop, especially as he was so enthusiastic on his snake project.

When his PowerPoint presentation was finished the following week, he asked if he could practice his presentation with the children at school age care prior to presenting it in the classroom. The children quietly sat and watched his presentation in awe. Nathan then gave the children the opportunity to ask questions.

A few days later the educator heard from Morgan, who is in Nathan's class at school, that Nathan also took his 'real' snake into the classroom when he did his presentation. Morgan loves snakes and was so excited she got to hold Nathan's python in class. The educator asked Nathan and his family if he would be interested in bringing his snake to after school care for sharing. Nathan was soon going to get a new snake for his birthday so his family decided that Dad could bring the new snake to after school care when we had a warm afternoon.

So, on a warm afternoon, Nathan and his dad walked into school age care ready to do the snake presentation again on the laptop and with a small snake in a bag. After watching the presentation while the snake slithered in Nathan's hands, the children got the opportunity to feel the snake.

The experience contributed to Nathan's wellbeing, learning and development. He displayed confidence and leadership when presenting his PowerPoint presentation to the group. He took pride in his presentation and enjoyed showing his real snake to the children and educators. Nathan developed a sense of belonging at our school age care service and the children enjoyed listening to Nathan.

In the future we plan to:

- seek Nathan's assistance with computers to help both educators and children to further build and consolidate his sense of identity and community
- consider other ways in which Nathan could be a leader at after school care
- allow Nathan to contribute to the school age care community by using his PowerPoint presentation skills to develop presentations for after school care
- encourage other children to share their school work or a special item from home with the children at after school care which will further support family and school engagement with our program.

Outcomes for children:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children develop their autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency when they celebrate and share their contributions and achievements with others, as Nathan did when sharing and presenting his snake project.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment when they demonstrate an increasing knowledge of and respect for the natural environment. When Nathan had the opportunity to participate and contribute to the program, he promoted a respect for snakes in their natural environment and prompted discussions about the interdependence of living things.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children use a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating when they show leadership, as Nathan did in the presentation of his learning to other children.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children collaborate with others, express ideas and make meaning using a range of media and communication technologies, such as Nathan used for everyday life to develop and present information.

Reflections on practice

In this story, the educator's actions are responsive to Nathan's interest, knowledge and sense of agency. The educator is intentional, deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in her approach. This was a spontaneous moment which the educator recognised as a strategy for contributing to a child's belonging, being and becoming. This story demonstrates the bridging of learning between home, school and the school age care setting. In this story Nathan is engaged and sees himself as a confident and involved learner.

Being an intentional educator in school age care—one educator's reflections.

'Intentionality does not happen by chance; it is planful, thoughtful, and purposeful. Intentional educators use their knowledge, judgment, and expertise to organise learning experiences for children; when an unexpected situation arises (as it always does), they can recognise a teaching opportunity and are able to take advantage of it, too.' (Epstein, 2007, p.1)

Under the National Quality Standards, services caring for school age children will be required to use the My Time, Our Place Framework to inform the development of a program that enhances children's experiences and development through planned leisure experiences.

Many school age care professionals believe that school age care is a recreational, unstructured 'free' time for children, and feel uncomfortable with a Framework that uses the words 'educator,' 'teaching' and 'learning,' as typically these words are associated with a more structured school setting.

My Time, Our Place recognises school age care as a recreational, play-based time for children and acknowledges school age care staff as professional people who facilitate learning through play by providing a rich range of experiences. It also recognises that learning is a life-long process that can occur at any time. The term 'educator' is defined as someone whose function is to 'plan and implement programs that support children's wellbeing, development and learning. (My Time Our Place, p.41)

My Time, Our Place is comprised of three inter-related elements: principles, practice and outcomes. The principles underpin practice and combine to demonstrate how children learn in outcomes. One of the aspects of practice is intentionality. My Time, Our Place defines intentionality as:

'… actions that are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful. Educators who engage in intentional actions recognise that learning occurs in social contexts, and that interactions and conversations are vitally important for learning. They actively promote children's learning through worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions that foster high-level thinking skills and they seize opportunities in experiences and conversations to extend or affirm children's learning. They listen with intent to the conversations of children and use strategies such as modelling and demonstrating, open questioning, speculating, explaining, engaging in shared thinking and problem-solving to extend children's thinking and learning.' (The Framework, p.14)

An intentional educator in school age care is one who:

- has an understanding of how children develop
- provides an environment with a variety of accessible resources which can be used in many ways for open-ended play and exploration
- ensures the school age care environment provides all children with opportunities to interact with educators and peers to problem-solve, take risks and to think 'outside the square'
- provides an environment which is safe, supportive and challenging and encourages children to ask questions and investigate new possibilities
- works in partnership with the children's families, schools and communities to create an inclusive environment
- draws on children's past experiences when creating new experiences
- ensures children have input into the decision-making that occurs within the program, however big or small
- is involved in children's play and learning as an active participant.

In order for educators to be intentional, they need to understand that children learn in different ways at different times. Educators should provide an environment that encourages children to learn at their own pace. An intentional educator in school age care thinks about the children attending their program, observes their play, and gets to know their likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses and considers this information when planning experiences or interacting with the children.

In a recent master class session about intentional teaching, Judy Radich said Intentional Educators 'act with specific learning goals in mind, both for children's development and their social, emotional, cognitive, physical and creative domains, as well as learning in the academic domains of literacy, maths and science.' (2010, p.11)

Intentionality in the school age care setting is not a new concept. Ollhoff (2002) said that school age care programs do not occur by accident; rather they are intentionally constructed to provide a quality recreationally-rich program for children. Furthermore he said 'our program design and our adult-child interactions intentionally nurture children's skills and abilities. During out of school time, children must be a part of a program that is developed with them—not at them.' (Ollhoff, 2002 p.5)

For example, during a staff meeting we discussed that the children seem disinterested with the food being offered. The following day two children were sitting outside during afternoon tea time with an educator. Child one moaned and said, 'not carrot sticks again!' Child two: 'yeah, I know we have to eat healthy stuff but there are other things we can eat?' Educator: 'What other things could we eat?' Child two: 'there are heaps of things. What about wraps, they are healthy aren't they?' Child one: 'And sushi. Is sushi healthy?' Educator: 'How could we find out if those foods are healthy? Child two: 'Let's go and look at the healthy eating poster inside and look on the internet for ideas!' Educator: 'Maybe then we can write out a list of the healthy foods you would like to eat at after school care?' Child one: 'And we can ask our friends too!'

In this example we see an everyday routine in which the adult-child interaction is spontaneous. The educator recognises the opportunity to build on the children's prior learning about healthy eating. The educator uses open questioning to build the conversation further and helps the children to work towards solving the problem. This educator is also making the most of an opportunity to build on the children's likes to further the development of the program, which may ultimately resolve the problem discussed at their staff meeting.

TRY OUT

Try videoing a session in your school age care setting and reviewing it with the educators involved. Individually mark down the things which are planned and purposeful as you watch it and compare notes with the group afterwards.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

Epstein A (2007) The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for young children, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC

Radich J (2010) 'Intentional Teaching', transcript, Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program, available at http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfplp/pdf/Intentional-teaching-Judy-Radich.pdf

On the resource CD

Learning stories

- Our musical journey
- Wyatt's flying object

9 ENVIRONMENTS

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

School age care environments are welcoming spaces when they reflect and enrich the lives and identities of children and families participating in the setting in response to their interests and needs.

The Framework, p.15

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

Creating a welcoming and nurturing environment which appeals to all children, families and educators is a critical component in school age care settings. Educators in Reggio Emilia refer to the environment as the' third teacher' (behind families and the teacher). As there are a range of diverse people in school age care, it is important for educators to frequently view and analyse their settings through a range of different lenses. Remember that first impressions count and, as educators who may have worked in the setting for a long time, we may be challenged to see the environment with a fresh perspective.

▸ What does a five year old focus on when they enter the setting?

▸ What do parents focus on when they enter?

▸ What do educators focus on?

▸ What does a twelve year old look at?

▸ How do culturally diverse families view your environment?

▸ What does an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child see?

▸ Consider all senses: what does the environment smell, sound, feel or look like?

When considering the environment, there are a number of different things to take into account:

• the physical environment including the indoor and outdoor areas

• how the environments support positive relationships

• how the environment supports children's play, learning and development

• how the environment supports positive behaviour

• how shared spaces are managed

• the resources and equipment

• how the environment contributes to the service vision or philosophy

• how the environment reflects the cultural diversity that exists within your community.

School age care settings should provide choice and flexibility and a variety of engaging experiences to meet the diverse needs of each and every child. There should be opportunities for creativity, experimentation and play. The environment should allow children to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of autonomy. One of the challenges for educators in school environments is creating a 'home-like' atmosphere, which is also a stimulating, rich play-based learning environment. Just like in a home, a school age care setting should have different areas where children may choose to go.

Children are important sources of inspiration and creativity when planning the environment, so it is an opportunity to learn by being open-minded and to collaborate with the children. It is important to include materials which are inviting and which can be used in a variety of ways.

▸ How does your environment convey a sense of belonging for children, families and educators?

▸ Do children have a sense of autonomy?

▸ What involvement do they have in the planning of the environment?

- ▸ Have you tried to make the environment more home-like?
- ▸ How might you make it more aesthetically pleasing?

PHYSICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Effective indoor and outdoor learning environments:

- are flexible and allow for choice
- promote children's creativity and imagination by providing opportunities to change the environment to suit their needs
- provide space for children to engage in a range of experiences catering for relaxation and rest, small and large group activities, imaginative and creative play, art and craft, and physical play
- are inviting, welcoming and accessible
- reflect the diversity of families within the local and the broader community
- are intentionally designed, planned and organised to allow for easy movement between indoor and outdoor areas
- offer a range of experiences that provide challenge and risk while still being safe
- are enriched by natural resources
- are environmentally sustainable
- support inclusion
- provide sufficient space and resources in ways that minimise conflict between children
- promote children's creativity, imagination, curiosity, learning and development
- meet the needs of all children from a range of age groups, e.g. incorporate sleep or rest areas for younger children.

RELATIONSHIPS

School age children are very social. At this age the focus is on building friendships with peers and the environment should be structured to nurture this relationship-building. Within the Reggio Emilia schools, educators pay significant attention to the environment and how this influences children's learning, development and wellbeing. A great deal of attention is given to the look and feel of the space, with the environment often referred to as the 'third teacher'. The aesthetic beauty within their rooms is seen as an important part of respecting the child and their learning environment. Teachers organise environments rich in possibilities and choice, which

invite children to undertake extended exploration and problem-solving, where cooperation and negotiation can occur under the guidance of a skilled facilitator.

School age care settings should also have quiet, comfortable spaces where children can seek some peace and solitude, and older children can engage in lengthy private conversations. Smaller and larger spaces, with a range of structured and unstructured experiences, will allow children to engage in a range of leisure-time experiences, particularly after a structured day at school.

Consider your indoor and outdoor environments.

- ▸ How many spaces are there for individuals or small groups to find space away from others?
- ▸ How many choices do children have in your setting at any given time? Are the choices flexible? Do the choices suit the older children? Do the choices suit the young children? The boys? The girls?
- ▸ Are there areas in your space where children can rest and relax?
- ▸ Are the educators and children able to interact freely?
- ▸ Does the environment include comfortable furniture to relax in?
- ▸ Is it homey, or does it look like a classroom, set up for work?
- ▸ Do the aesthetics of the room promote respect and pride in the children?

Educators' beliefs and actions also contribute greatly to the school age care environment. Do they see themselves as 'supervisors of children and experiences' or as 'facilitators of play', providing a variety of planned experiences based upon a sound knowledge of children's needs and interests, and allowing freedom, resources and space for children to construct their own leisure time? Do educators greet children by name as they enter the school age care environment? Do educators engage children in meaningful and purposeful conversations? Do educators believe that children should be able to shape their own leisure time or that it should be heavily planned or orchestrated?

> *'Children sense when adults are being sincere in their communication with them. Staff who convey a genuine interest in children by interacting with them responsively and inclusively will encourage children to feel respected and valued.'*
>
> *School age care educator*

RESOURCES

There should be a range of appropriate resources, materials and equipment to meet the needs of a diverse group of children, including children of different ages, abilities and stages of development. Furniture and facilities must be inclusive of all children, enabling access to all aspects of the program and contributing to each child's sense of belonging.

Curtis and Carter (2008) liken collecting resources for children to the pleasure of finding a gift for a good friend.

> *'In child care or teaching, the gift of materials comes from your relationship with the children. The materials represent a bit of you and who you are, as well as the tender way in which you know the children...To enhance children's use of the materials toward more complex learning, you must challenge yourself to become mindful and deliberate with what you provide and how you provide it.'*
>
> *(Curtis & Carter, 2008, p.54)*

To encourage more complex and creative thinking, educators choose resources which are open-ended and have more than one use. Toys and equipment designed for one specific use can be appealing to children immediately, but hold their interest for only a short time because they have only one use and the children can't explore or create with it. Open-ended materials that extend a child's imagination and creative thinking include things like recycled boxes, reels, food packaging, tab top curtains, old floor covering samples, woollen off cuts, etc.

▶ What resources meet the differing needs of the children in your care setting? Are there any gaps ie a lack of resources for a particular age group or child?

▶ Do you have a range of open-ended resources, which may be used in various different ways rather than just for single use?

▶ Do the children access resources?

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Electronic equipment and Information Communication Technologies (ICT), such as computers and the internet, are great technologies for children to access in school age care settings. They can encourage new ideas, different ways of thinking and foster language and social development. However, their inclusion in the environment must also be planned in consultation with children, families and educators. Seek advice from recognised authorities when planning to use ICT in the school age care setting. Educators should ensure that children are supported to use the internet safely, and encouraged to act responsibly and ethically on line.

▶ How do you decide what technological equipment is available in your setting? Who do you consult? Do you limit it? What routines, rules and expectations have you set in place to get best outcomes for all?

ACTIVE PLAY

> *'Children learn best when their whole bodies and minds are stimulated, and being active does just that.'*
>
> *(Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2009)*

The learning and growth gained from being active is important for developing physical, social, language, emotional and intellectual skills. It can also directly impact on children's ability to deal with the situations and challenges they will meet later in life. Active play can occur inside, such as box construction or cubby building, as well as being outdoor physical play.

Outdoor play and the natural environment are very important to school age. Outdoor play offers more chance to move, explore, and discover different environments. Finding objects outside which are thick, thin, light, heavy, smooth, man-made, natural and different from each other can be a fun way for children to learn through using the environment. The outdoors is full of noises, sights, textures and adventures just waiting to be explored.

- What opportunities do children in your setting get to participate in active play outside?

- Are there outside areas where children can read books, set up tents or talk with friends without being disturbed by active play?

- What opportunities do they get to participate in active play inside?

- Are there competing interests, such as technology, which deter some children from active play? If so, how might you alter this?

- How do you promote children to be active? What else might you do?

- Is your outdoor environment interesting for children to explore? If not, is there anything you could do to make it more inviting or more interesting?

- Are there suitable outdoor play areas to which you could regularly walk to promote more active play?

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are literally hundreds of definitions for 'sustainable', but, essentially, if something is sustainable, it can keep going indefinitely. School age care settings are well positioned to emphasise the importance of sustainable lifestyles and environments. Taking responsibility for some simple actions can reduce the anxiety some children may feel about large environmental problems.

Working collaboratively, children and educators may identify environmental issues in their community to focus on. This provides a fantastic opportunity to develop positive attitudes and a responsibility towards nurturing our natural environment. Sustainability can be achieved by focusing on:

- designing the outdoor space to incorporate natural landscape materials
- growing plants and tending organic vegetable gardens
- conserving or capturing water
- plant selection
- mulching
- energy usage
- air quality
- climate change
- recycling and reusing
- reducing unnecessary waste
- reducing your carbon footprint

- reducing the use of chemicals
- food waste
- habitat and biodiversity.

Other ideas to explore are:
- Where is your closest community garden?
- What is your local council doing about biodiversity?
- Find out about community and local projects.
- Invite guest speakers from local environment groups.
- Become involved in Clean Up Australia Day or National Tree Planting Day.
- Develop an Environmental Management Policy.

- How does your school age care setting teach children about responsibility for the environment? What more could you do?

- If you are on a school site, how could you make connections with the school around developing a more sustainable future?

- How could you take this responsibility further into the community? Are you able to adopt and care for a local park? What might be the benefits of this?

ROUTINES

Setting up the environment also includes establishing routines. As you set up your room environment and put routines in place, think in terms of community, more than classroom, as a guiding principle. Children feel more relaxed in a home-like environment than in an institutional school setting. Even though you may be located on a school site, there are still opportunities to create warm cosy environments with routines which nurture a sense of belonging to a community. Lining up is very school-like. Consider other routines you may put in place to avoid lining up. Collaborate with children and have discussions in staff meetings as to other ways you might establish routines.

- Who decides your routines? Must children all do things at the same time? For example, must they all be signed in to the same place at the same time? Must they all eat at the same time? And the same place?

- During vacation care must everyone go and eat lunch at the exact same time, or are children allowed to finish off what they are doing and then go out to eat after that? How do you feel when you are ordered to stop what you are doing

immediately, even though you may be engrossed in something? Would you appreciate five minutes 'finishing off time' in such a circumstance?

▸ How do your routines reflect different children of different developmental ages and needs?

▸ In home-based care environments where children may sleep overnight, how are bedtime routines established? How do they reflect familiar routines from their home setting? Is there a place for children to place their possessions when they sleep over?

CULTURE AND RITUALS

Planning an environment also includes atmosphere, or the culture. Every school age care setting has a culture: a set of expectations, languages, routines and ways of being together which shape the group's identity. The culture you develop sets the tone, reflecting who you are and expressing your values about children. Documented research shows that strong positive relationships between educators, children and families are essential to learning and the development of the brain (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Glasser's Choice Theory (1999) identifies that relationships are the most important thing in people's lives. School age care culture is founded on positive relationships. One of the unique factors of school age care is the ongoing relationships over many years and the culture around good relationships which must be preserved.

Cultures and families thrive on rituals: they nurture a sense of belonging. Rituals are everyday moments which provide fond childhood memories. A ritual could be the way you celebrate birthdays in your setting, or it might be what you do when a child loses a tooth, or it might just be the distinct way you welcome the children each day. You know when these things become rituals, because the children will quickly remind you if you forget to do it—or do it differently!

▸ What is the culture of your environment? Is it developed around logistics and educator convenience?

▸ Children are learning all the time—what are they learning from your setting's culture? If things are left on the floor and not put away, are they learning to disrespect resources?

▸ What does your setting sound like? Are children laughing? Are they yelling? Is it calm?

▸ How do you foster and promote respectful language and attitudes?

▸ How do you honour existing relationships and keep them strong?

▸ Do your behaviour guidance strategies preserve relationships as being the most important thing?

▸ How do you celebrate significant moments in the lives of children and your community?

▸ Do your routines foster a sense of community and belonging, or are they more like an institution, such as school?

▸ What rituals have you established in your setting and are they culturally inclusive?

▸ How do you know the children appreciate them?

SHARED SPACES

One of the biggest challenges for educators in school age care settings is sharing space with other groups. Many services are located in gyms, libraries or even classrooms. Others may share spaces with religious or sporting groups. Sharing a space usually means setting up and packing up the environment every day. While this can be challenging, it is certainly possible to operate from a shared space. The best assets when utilising a shared space are good storage and time for setting up and packing up daily.

▸ What are the biggest limitations of your shared space?

▸ Do you have enough storage space?

▸ Are there any innovations or pieces of equipment which might make your shared space more effective?

▸ How can you instil a sense of belonging in your shared space?

▸ How does your shared space reflect the children and families in your setting?

▸ How can you establish regular meetings and opportunities to professionally discuss any issues as they arise?

WHAT DO CHILDREN SAY ABOUT THE SCHOOL AGE CARE ENVIRONMENT?

A group of children from a number of school age care settings were asked about their space or environment, what they liked, and what they wished it could look like.

A number of key themes emerged about what children valued. They wanted:

- to be and feel safe
- a place that felt positive and friendly
- a place where you could talk about your feelings if you were sad and seek help if you were having difficulties with other children
- an outdoor space for gross motor physical experiences, such as running on the oval or climbing on the playground and organised sport
- indoor spaces organised and arranged for a purpose, for example art and craft areas, over-tens areas, library areas and places to sit quietly, talk and relax
- equipment, materials, personal belongings and creations which were stored safely
- to be able to decorate the physical environment through the display of their artwork and creations
- some natural environment, including trees, animals, water and gardens.

'School age care makes me feel a positive feeling, like a feeling I get when I go to my grandma's, knowing someone really, really cares for me.'

'The space needs to be bigger or a different shape so I don't have to walk through areas where others are working.'

'The comfy spot is in the bean bags, I like to relax because today we had to walk all the way to the library, I was tired when I came to after school care.'

'It's comfortable and safe, it's warm in winter and you know you have someone there to stay with you.'

HEAR ABOUT

Creating a sensory sensitive environment

School age care can be especially challenging for a child with a sensory processing disorder. Children are expected to process a wide range of sensory input in the environment simultaneously. For some children, inefficiencies in sensory processing impair their ability to do this. Therefore providing a space for children to retreat to and engage in experiences which help them to self-regulate is important for their successful inclusion in the school age care setting.

Our team identified a number of children who would benefit from having access to a sensory room. We shared our ideas with the Principal and Special Education Co-coordinator and discussed how we could collaboratively implement our plan. Ideally, we wanted a shared space which was accessible to school age care throughout the morning and afternoon program and available for the school to access during the day. The school shared our enthusiasm.

Educators went to visit local schools to look at their sensory programs, and talk to staff about resourcing, equipment and suitable training for educators. Our team attended a sensory processing workshop, providing staff with a deeper understanding of all children's unique sensory preferences, the connection between our senses and emotion, and the impact on social interactions and play.

Working collaboratively with the school, we created a sensory sensitive and responsive environment which included beanbags, tents, music, lava lamps, weighted blankets, soft toys and a fish tank. The room has been used by children with autism spectrum disorder and children with developmental trauma. It has also proved a useful resource to engage children who may be reticent to attend school or the school age care program.

Zachary accesses the room every night; he will usually arrive first to avoid the crowds. He seeks comfort using the weighted cushions provided. He will often have a weighted turtle on his lap whilst playing, or a snake draped around his neck as he wanders around the room deciding what to do. The heavy feeling gives his body a sense of feeling calm, which allows him time to regulate his emotions so he is able to join in with an activity being offered.

Ryan enjoys the Bionicles and dinosaurs. A tent provides him a sense of privacy. He can choose when to be alone or socialise with others. This can really assist Ryan if he arrives feeling stressed from the transition from the classroom to care.

Tyler attends school age care with his sister. On arrival he will sometimes need to use the sensory room to avoid the busy transitional stage of the day. He loves construction such as Lego, K'NEX, and train sets. Educators set this equipment up in the main room as well as the sensory room, so he can decide where to play. Making decisions can be difficult for him so two clear options help reduce his anxiety. He is comforted by this predictability and is able to arrive successfully and make a choice with ease.

Working with school age children in a mixed age environment

Working in a care setting with a mix of ages can be challenging, meeting the needs of babies and toddlers, those who have recently transitioned to school, and those older children who have been at school for a number of years.

The older children shared with us that they wanted a space for themselves: a place to call their own. We worked with the children to set up an area separate from the younger children. The children designed it in a way that naturally invited children to participate in a particular pastime or type of play. It included a messy area for art and crafts; a media area, which included a television and electronic games; a lounge area for 'chilling out' and quiet conversations; a games and books area; and a homework space with a laptop. Because this room is shared during the day, we also had to make sure that there were safe places to store items that may be dangerous to younger children and also keep safe prized creations or projects. This space also had access to larger and more private toilets.

Because our outdoor space was designed for use by younger children, we have worked hard at developing a good relationship with our local school so we can access the oval, play equipment and hard court areas: this has been a huge success. It provides opportunities for rough and tumble play and team sport games so children can run off steam without the risk of injuring younger children.

Not all educators thought that we could adequately cater for school age children in our setting. We carefully selected educators with a passion for and skills to work with this age group. They have spent a lot of time working with other educators to share the value of play and leisure for school age children, promote the program and outcomes for children, and advocate for collaboration and consultation with school age children to ensure their voices are heard.

During times when all age groups are mixed we prepare the children ahead of time and work with them to plan and negotiate appropriate activities and use of resources. Children are realistic and understand that there are certain activities or experiences that cannot be done when younger children are present. These times provide excellent opportunities for older children to take on leadership roles, assisting or guiding younger children to participate in activities and play. Some children, particularly those who have just started school, enjoy playing with the younger children and use their toys in imaginative and complex ways or dig in the sandpit.

I believe that mixed age care offers school age children an opportunity to:

• learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect

• develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation.

TRY OUT

- Consider how your view of children influences the materials and resources you offer. Make a list of five resources or materials you regularly provide to children. What values and images of children do these materials suggest? How many natural materials do you provide for children to play with or explore?

- Give children a camera. Ask them to take photos in their environment and make comments on them. Ask them to identify their favourite spaces and places where they feel they really belong.

- Ask the children to take photos of places they don't feel safe.

- Give the children a map of the school and ask them to shade different areas on the map, using different colours according to where they feel safe and happy, as well as where they don't.

- As a staff team, get down on your hands and knees to view the service from a young child's height. What impact does this have on you? What might you change following this activity?

- Divide children and educators into small groups and give them blank pieces of paper. Challenge them to come up with a stimulating and welcoming layout for the setting.

- Observe a group of children using some resources in your setting. As you notice the details of what they say and do, can you see connections to what you know about them, their families and their stage of development? Think of some other resources you might offer to extend an interest. Observe what you do with what you have offered.

- Plan or look for a ritual you could create in your service such as when children graduate to high school, or when they are in the setting on the day of their birthday, lose a tooth or to celebrate the last day of the term/year. Ask yourself what values should guide this experience. How is the ritual inclusive? What symbols might be included to represent this ritual? How do you acknowledge relationships with this ritual? How do you know children appreciate the ritual?

- Collate the information collected and develop an action plan to improve your environment. Include timelines, budget and who is responsible for completing tasks.

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www.treesforlife.org.au Trees for Life

www.sgaonline.org.au Sustainable Gardening Australia

www.savewater.com.au Save Water: celebrating sustainable water use

www.urbanforest.on.net Backyards for wildlife

On the resource CD

• Summary of theories and approaches relevant to school age care

Learning stories

• Full of surprises
• Office play

10 CULTURAL COMPETENCE

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

> Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences.
>
> The Framework, p.15

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

Cultural competence will be a new term for many of us. It is an evolving concept and our engagement with it will contribute to its evolution. It has been defined as *a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enable them to work effectively in cross-cultural settings* (Tong and Cross in VACCA, 2008 p.23).

Underlying cultural competence are the principles of trust, respect for diversity, equity, fairness, and social justice. Cultural competence reinforces and builds on our work of the last two or three decades as we have endeavoured to challenge and address injustice, racism, exclusion and inequity through legislation, awareness raising, rights education and an anti-bias curriculum. At the heart of cultural competence is our aspiration for everyone to be strong and confident in belonging, being and becoming through understanding and empathy, affirmation and opportunity. Cultural competence is about our will and actions to build understanding between people, to be respectful and open to different cultural perspectives, to strengthen cultural security and work towards equality in opportunity. Relationship building is fundamental to cultural competence and is based on the foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes, and subsequently building on the strength of each other's knowledge, using a wide range of community members and resources to build on their understandings.

The five principles and the practice of the Framework are critical to the development of cultural competence.

Cultural competence in school age care settings is important if we are to make a difference in the lives of children and families and ensure that our children are growing up to be proud and confident learners. It is the intent of the Framework that we all strengthen our cultural competence. At the heart of cultural competence is the ability to interact respectfully, constructively and positively with children, families, staff and community. This includes educators recognising and promoting the critical importance culture plays in developing children's sense of belonging, being and becoming.

The Framework provides new possibilities for all school age childhood educators to think about and act so that all children are strong in belonging, being and becoming. It also provides possibilities for all children to experience:

- programs that are engaging
- relationships that are affirming
- resilience with a strong sense of wellbeing
- confidence and strength in personal and cultural identity.

Culture is the fundamental building block of identity and the development of a strong cultural identity is essential to children's healthy sense of who they are and where they belong. Children must have access to services that nurture, celebrate and reinforce their culture and support the development of their cultural identity.

Cultural identity comes from having access to:

- your culture—its institutions, land, language, knowledge, social resources, economic resources
- the institutions of the community (lifestyle)— its codes for living (social and environmental), nutrition, safety, protection of physical, spiritual and emotional integrity of children and families
- cultural expression and cultural endorsement (Durie 2003).

Being culturally competent doesn't mean denying our own culture or having to know everything about all cultures. Rather, it is about being willing to find out more about the cultural identities of the children and families in our community and using this knowledge to develop trusting relationships, respectful interactions, understandings of alternate world views, meaningful learning experiences, appropriate assessments, and firm affirmations of each child and their family.

What is culture? Culture can be defined as 'what we create beyond our biology. Not given to us, but made by us' (Williams, in MacNaughton 2003, p.14). Using this definition, culture incorporates the scope of human diversity and ways of being, such as gender, ethnicity, class, religion, ability, age, and sexuality. As culturally competent educators, we need to think deeply about how our work can support each child's developing identity and self worth.

Respect for diversity requires us to act ethically and professionally. To act ethically, we need to think about our own values, beliefs and attitudes related to diversity and difference and acknowledge and address any bias that we may hold. Recognising and addressing bias is part of becoming a culturally competent educator. The practice of cultural competence requires a whole-of-setting focus that promotes equity and respect for diversity for all as well as a strong approach to countering racism and bias.

Belonging, being and becoming are not new concepts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. They are the essence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities. Access to learning in school age care programs should be maximised, without compromising the development of a strong personal and cultural identity, through a respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, home languages, capabilities and behavioural practices, remembering that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities have high expectations that their children will achieve the same educational outcomes as any other children in the program.

▸ How do you define culture?

▸ What does cultural competence mean for children, family, community, educator, in a school age care setting?

▸ How might your culture, or way you see and understand the world:

– affect the relationships you have with children, families, colleagues and community?

– advantage/disadvantage some children and families?

▸ Are educators encouraged and supported to examine their own cultural competence and identify opportunities for personal and professional growth?

▸ How do you respond to children of varied cultures?

▸ In what ways do you assist children and other educators to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds and share information about their traditions, customs and beliefs?

▸ In what ways do you support children to value other cultures?

▸ How do you engage in conversations with children, families and other educators about cultural differences?

▸ How do you respond to observations of children engaging in behaviours that demonstrate bias, stereotypic or racist behaviour?

▸ Do you have high expectations of all children despite their culture or ethnicity and do you provide additional support as needed for all children to participate to their full potential in the program?

▸ How do educators take responsibility for modelling and promoting professional practice and personal behaviours that affirm respect for diversity and that counter racism?

▸ What opportunities do you provide for families to engage with you in ways that respect and value their culture?

▸ How do you support children to explore the groups to which they belong without reinforcing stereotypes?

▸ How do you help children to gather information, ask questions and consider possibilities about their own lives?

▸ How can we, as culturally competent educators, support each child's developing identity and self worth?

▸ In what ways do you support children's learning and use the cultural tools of the community to inspire all children's thinking?

HEAR ABOUT

Our school age care service caters for a number of schools in the local community and attracts a culturally diverse range of children and families. At our last team meeting we discussed cultural competence and analysed our current practice. We found our discussion focused on practical things like experiences, resources, foods and the physical environment. Our decisions about these things seemed to be based upon our own cultural beliefs about what was culturally appropriate for the children and families at the service and not on what they had shared with us.

We agreed to consider the five principles of the Framework to focus on building stronger relationships with families and the wider community, establishing an open, authentic dialogue to develop a true partnership to share and learn about culture with each other. We posed the question: 'How can we better incorporate the views, ideas and needs of children and families into the program to increase their sense of engagement and wellbeing and build cultural competence?'

What will we do?

- Use reflective practice to increase educator awareness of their own cultural knowledge, awareness, attitudes, values, bias and beliefs about diversity and difference. To understand and appreciate the culture of others, we need to understand and appreciate our own culture.
- Acknowledge and celebrate the diversity that exists within the team of educators and use it as an asset.
- Review the enrolment process to incorporate a discussion with each family about their culture and what they feel is important for us to know, share with others, and incorporate into the program.
- Invite families to share aspects of their culture with educators and children by involving them more deeply in the program, not only by providing ideas to enrich the program or helping to facilitate cultural experiences, but also by providing advice or feedback about our practices including transitions and routines.
- The team made a commitment to undertake ongoing learning about the particular cultures within our community and intentionally use this knowledge to inform culturally competent practice.

TRY OUT

Scan your environment: does it physically reflect the diverse cultures, interests and experiences of children and families in your community? Do the materials and resources provide a diverse, contemporary picture of the world through authentic multicultural resources? Does it reflect the local children, family and community that you provide a service for? How do you know? Identify ways that you can be more respectful of other cultures.

Culturally competent individuals are likely to have, among other things, a strong knowledge of how their own culture shapes their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours and an awareness of the limited value of stereotyping. Explore these ideas in your next professional discussion. Discuss how you are going to use the Framework for more equitable outcomes.

Have educators and children create a journal about themselves and their family including photos, traditions, celebrations, pastimes and family members. What are the barriers for families in accessing and feeling comfortable in your service?

Are the experiences, planned and unplanned, inclusive of the cultural knowledge and understanding of the children, family and communities in your service?

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

Early Childhood Australia (2011) 'Understanding cultural competence', *Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program e-newsletters*, No. 7, available at http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfplp/newsletters/EYLFPLP_E-Newsletter_No7.pdf

On the resource CD

Educator reflections

• Reflecting on cultural competence

THE JOURNEY FOR EDUCATORS:
GROWING COMPETENCE IN WORKING WITH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURES

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

Educators guided by the Framework will reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention). The Convention states that all children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. The Convention also recognises children's rights to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages.

(The Framework, p.3)

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

Cultural competence is much more than awareness of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, respect, communicate with, and effectively interact with, people across cultures (The Framework, p.15). For this document we are defining 'cultural' as shared attitudes, values, goals, beliefs and practices that characterise an institution, organisation or group. Likewise we are defining 'competence' as the ability of all educators to make appropriate decisions and effective actions in their setting, regardless of the absence or presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Cultural competence as it relates to developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures brings together those knowledges, behaviours, attitudes and policies that are required to engage, build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all settings to effect positive change in early childhood education. This involves:

- cultural competence and cultural safety that go far beyond existing notions of cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity
- cultural competence having a legitimate place in the positive experiences of all children in achieving improved educational outcomes
- cultural competence being integrated in all aspects of the delivery of programs in order to *make the difference* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and *close the gap* that exists in current educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners.

Building educators' competence in relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is a process that is underpinned by relationships, evolves over time, and must involve attitudes, skills and knowledge. Cultural competence is a two-way learning process. A culturally competent organisation that values and respects diversity helps everyone feel like they belong. More specifically, being familiar with the rich and long history of Australia, including our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, enriches all of us. In implementing this Framework educators must embed and sustain processes to:

- make decisions that are genuinely inclusive
- negotiate and set goals for children's ongoing learning
- model leadership, respect, responsibility and accountability
- refine, reflect on and apply skills for quality teaching and learning
- share responsibility for teaching and learning
- strengthen policy making, service delivery and practice, and continually monitor, reflect on and refine this process
- implement their professional obligation to embrace the principles of equal access, opportunity, and maintain a journey of learning.

Figure 6: Cultural competence in school age care
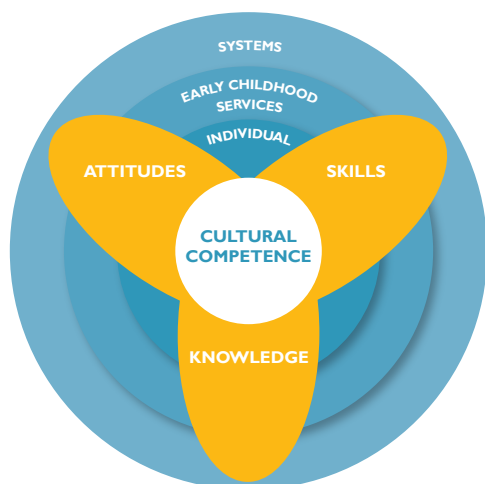
The elements which underpin successful cultural competence include:

Skills:
- for living and working in the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts (socially)
- for working in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts (professionally)

Knowledge:
- understanding and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and contemporary societies
- understanding that the importance of connectedness to land and spirituality is the core of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity

Attitudes:
- exploring individual and societal values and attitudes.

You need all three elements to claim to be culturally competent. If you remove one element then you are operating in an incompetent state (Rose, 2009). High quality educators will use their professional knowledge and skills and the principles, practices and outcomes of the Framework to build their cultural competence and engage all children and families in children's learning and wellbeing. They will learn about each child, family, community and culture and use this to make sure every child has a fair go and the opportunities that are their rights.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE IS ALWAYS ABOUT BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Cultural competence is a learning journey which is underpinned by respectful relationships between the children, families and educators, organisations and communities, which continually evolve. There is not a 'one size fits all' approach as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse.

Cultural competence needs to be applied on three levels:

Individual level: intra-personal
- knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours

Service level: interpersonal and intra-service
- management and operational frameworks and practices, expectations, including policies, procedures, vision statements and the voices of children, families and community

Systems level: interpersonal and inter-services
- how services relate to and respect the rest of the community, agencies, Elders, local community protocols, etc.

An open view is a precursor to enable critical reflection at individual, service and systems levels. In implementing the Framework it is the embedding of skills, knowledge and learning together with an open mind in cultural competence that supports ongoing change for children and educators. Growing cultural competence is driven by showing respect, acknowledging language, strengthening identity, and developing relationships.

Figure 7: Learning journey of cultural competence

WILLING

ATTITUDES SKILLS KNOWLEDGE

ATTITUDES SKILLS KNOWLEDGE

WILLING AND UNABLE

Willing
- Developing an eagerness to learn
- Some things already known

Unable
- Emerging state of awareness but not applying knowledge
- Low expectataions
- Lip service

ongoing reflection

WILLING AND ABLE

Willing
- Aspiration—the target, goal or objective

Able
- Embedded—takes on board
- High expectations

UNABLE

ongoing environmental feedback

ongoing environmental feedback

ABLE

UNWILLING AND UNABLE

Unwilling
- Is not prepared to change

Unable
- Denial—ignorance
- Lack of opportunity
- Fear of acting incorrectly

UNWILLING AND ABLE

Unwilling
- Uncertainty
- Fear
- Not prepared to take risks

Able
- Consolidating—wants to know more about it (already has done some learning)
- In a position to put knowledge into supportive relationships for learning to occur

ongoing reflection

ATTITUDES SKILLS KNOWLEDGE

ATTITUDES SKILLS KNOWLEDGE

UNWILLING

HOW DOES THE LEARNING JOURNEY OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE WORK?

The three elements of cultural competence are attitudes, skills and knowledge. These elements operate at three levels: individual, school age care and systems. A learning journey of cultural competence occurs when ongoing reflection and environmental feedback involves and supports educators to move up and down the journey from unwilling and unable to willing and able. All three elements are critical components of cultural competence. Cultural competence is not static. As we move between and within diverse communities, our level of cultural competence changes in response to new situations, experiences and relationships.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EDUCATORS?

Cultural competence is about your attitudes and how you assemble your social and professional toolkit [of knowledge and skills] in making education inclusive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

(Rose, 2009)

Educators will regularly assess themselves, their attitudes, their interactions and the learning environment for cultural competence as defined by Elders and community members.

In reflecting on their attention to cultural competence, educators consider the extent to which they:

- have nurtured strong family and community partnerships
- know and value the culturally specific knowledge about childhood, children and learning that is embedded within the community in which they are working
- critically reflect on their own views and understandings of early childhood theory, research and practice for the 'degree of fit' with local understandings, experiences and expectations
- use pedagogical practices that reflect knowledge of diverse perspectives and contribute to all children's wellbeing and successful learning.

All children demonstrate their learning in different ways. In growing cultural competence, educators will empower themselves to look for different ways of belonging, being and becoming and alert themselves to the dangers of making assumptions about how children should be learning and demonstrating their learning.

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn from close kin and extended family from an early age through watching, listening and practising their language and culture, rich as it is in environmental and human surroundings, both explicitly and implicitly. Research tells us that families are the child's first educators.

> *A number of significant studies from around the world have found that children must develop linguistic competence and thinking abilities in their first language in order to develop higher order academic skills for later learning in their second language…for example… the more children move towards balanced bilingualism, the greater the likelihood of cognitive advantages*
>
> *(Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, p.6).*

Further to this, on seeing learning differently and recognising this learning, albeit in ways they might not have expected, educators will be responsive to children in ways that are affirming of their cultural identity, contributing to their pride and strength. A culturally competent program uses (involves) the full range of rich and meaningful cultural structures and resources that are available: extended families, Elders, traditional as well as current practices or stories drawn from a wide range of community types to avoid creating stereotypes (Martin, 2007, p.15).

Cultural competence is about assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to build and sustain their strengths and to be strong in their culture.

What does cultural competence mean in your practice, for children, family, community and educators?

▸ What do you know about the language/s that the children bring with them?

▸ How do you acknowledge the oral traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the program?

▸ How do you demonstrate that you acknowledge and build on the context and discourse of each child and family?

▸ How will Elders, family and community members be invited to share culturally valued ways of creating, representing and responding? Are you creating time and opportunities for them to do this?

▸ How do you demonstrate high expectations of the learning capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within the program and what does success look like for the individual child?

▸ In what ways do you support children's learning and use the cultural tools of the community to inspire all children's thinking?

▸ What do you know about what is valued and expected for children within the family and community cultural context?

▸ If there are no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in your setting, how do you raise awareness of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

▸ In what ways will you build your cultural competence to make decisions that inform your practice to strengthen the belonging, being and becoming, opportunities and successes of each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child?

▸ Who will you involve in your journey of learning?

Over the years, a large range of frameworks, research, programs and policies have been developed and implemented to improve educational outcomes for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. While some improvements have been made, significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still educationally disadvantaged. The Council of Australian Governments is committed to closing the gap in educational achievements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade. Educators who are culturally competent have a critical role to play in delivering this outcome.

▶ What is implied by 'gap'? How might this draw attention away from children's strengths?

▶ As an educator, how do you enhance the knowledge and skills of the child built by the family and community to abolish this gap?

▶ How does the burden of the gap rest with the family, community or with you as the educator?

▶ How are you going to use the Framework to enhance the child's right as a learner and therefore close the gap?

HEAR ABOUT

Educators can contribute to reconciliation by ensuring that all children are aware of the rich history of Indigenous Australians and their spiritual link with the land. But where do we begin? We have no families or children at our service who identify themselves as having an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. As a team we discussed the following:

- What is our own level of understanding about Aboriginal culture? How can this be strengthened?
- Who do we contact in the community to share culturally valued information and experiences with children, families and educators?
- Who else can we involve in our learning journey?
- How confident are educators in facilitating Aboriginal cultural experiences?
- How do we check that resources and materials at the service are appropriate and reflect traditional and contemporary images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture?

We contacted the Aboriginal Resource unit who introduced us to an Elder within our community. We invited him into the program to talk about his life, his role within the community, how he grew up, and the traditions of his people. He brought in artefacts and discussed how these are used within his culture. The children were totally engaged and the conversations were rich. We talked about Indigenous values, spiritual beliefs, responsibilities and traditions and related these to our own experiences and culture: what were the similarities or differences and what could we learn from each others' culture?

From here we will continue to work with the Resource Centre to develop relationships with Aboriginal people in our community, extend our individual knowledge and confidence levels, and incorporate culturally appropriate experiences as an integral part of the program.

TRY OUT

Culturally competent educators will continue to reflect on practice through professional learning and side-by-side discussion with communities and families. Walk around your setting. Does it reflect the local children, family and community that you provide a service for? How do you know? Do members of your community come into your setting regularly? What are the barriers for families in accessing and feeling comfortable in your service? Is the learning inclusive of the cultural knowledge and understanding of the children, family and communities in your service?

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

State and Territories Aboriginal Education and Employment Training Development and Regional Aboriginal Education Offices

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), available at: http://www2.ohchr.org/English/law/crc.htm

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), child friendly poster, available at: http://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchilldfriendlylanguage.pdf

On the resource CD

Educator reflections

• Reflecting on cultural competence

12 CONTINUITY AND TRANSITIONS

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

Educators work with children, families, other professionals and the broader community to ensure successful transitions between settings and that children feel secure and confident. They assist children to understand the traditions, routines and practices of the settings to which they are moving and to feel comfortable with the process of change.

(The Framework, p.16)

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

At a time in their lives when children undergo many changes in settings and experience different relationships with various people, the school age care setting may remain a source of continuity, as children can spend up to eight years in a school age care setting. Each year children may change classrooms and teachers, but a stable school age care setting can provide children with that strong sense of belonging to help sustain them through change.

Change can be stressful and some individuals find it more difficult dealing with change than others. Change can occur on a day-to-day basis when children must transition from school age care to the classroom and then back to school age care again, or it may occur on a larger scale when children change school or classrooms or experience a new addition to their family.

In exploring and understanding change and effectively managing change, children need support in:

- learning that change is easier to cope with if it is expected and timely
- using previous experiences of change to help cope with current change
- establishing meaningful routines which help during times of change

- choosing friends to bridge the gap between the familiar and unfamiliar
- recognising that at times of change emotions may be difficult to manage
- learning that new opportunities can come with change
- gaining some control in the changes in their lives
- helping to support others during change
- realising that change is a part of life.

▸ How do each of the educators in your setting deal with change? Who likes it? Who hates it?

▸ What transitions do you make in your everyday life and how do you feel about them? How do you cope with them? Would this be similar or different for children?

▸ Does your setting have a family or community-like culture, or a classroom one? How might this affect transitions?

▸ How often do you take the time to see things from the children's point of view?

▸ Do children have a voice in the planning, implementation and evaluation of routines and transitions?

▸ Do families have a voice in transitions? How are they heard?

▸ How is cultural diversity considered in the development of routines and transitions?

▸ Cultural and family obligations mean some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families will be transient. How do you involve these children and families in a meaningful way?

▸ Transitions can be busy and stressful: do you have enough educators free to 'be with' children and attend to their many needs? If not, what could you implement which would free up more educators?

▸ Do your transitions and routines encourage opportunities for positive communication and the development of strong relationships between educators, families and children?

- How do you arrange your routines and transitions so that they are predictable and consistent, while still being flexible enough to respond to the individual needs of children and families?

- When children are engaged in experiences in your setting and it is time for a transition, such as a snack/meal time or time to go to school, do you give them plenty of notice to finish off their experiences? If not, how do you feel when engrossed in some activity of your choice, perhaps about to come to some conclusion, and you are suddenly forced to stop?

Arrivals and departures

- When children transition from home to your setting in the mornings, what changes could you make which might make it easier for them?

- What differences in the two settings could you reduce or eliminate?

- If children transition to your setting from a school site, how do you liaise with the school regarding

decisions about transitions? How do you communicate with the range of people who may have influence on the child's day?

- One of the biggest transitions for school age children is from school to the school age care in the afternoons. Does your transition process meet their needs around food, shelter, comfort, time, space, choices, and the ability to blow off steam after a relatively confined day at school? Could your transitions be calmer for all?

New enrolments

- Attending school age care for the first time can be emotional and stressful for both children and families. How do the educators address this with empathy?

- How do you support new children in your setting? How do you support new families?

HEAR ABOUT

Signing in

For the past fourteen years, when school finished, our children have lined up outside to be signed in. Up to ninety children are booked in each day and with a small room, this practice is impossible to do inside. As can be imagined, with such a large group of children, this process can take some time and educators were often focused on guiding children's behaviour rather than engaging in meaningful conversations.

Our educators were aware of this situation and that the older children were not happy lining up. The educators were not sure how to change this practice during such a busy period whilst maintaining a smooth transition.

After discussing this practice at a professional development session, I decided to take this question back and discuss it with the children and educators at our afternoon gathering. We encouraged the children to provide strategies and choices that would work for them, the educators, and the service.

Year 4–7 are our largest group of children and the children who become irritated most easily when lining up. With this in mind, we all decided that they would be the groups that could come inside and see me to sign in, without lining up!

It took only two days for this practice to be put into place. The children now arrive happy, respectful, feeling valued and supported.

Although it takes the educator longer to check the attendance sheets now, we have recognised major behavioural changes in both the outside and inside groups. The children are more relaxed, and educators and children are much happier. By acknowledging and supporting this change of practice, our children are gaining a strong sense of identity.

How did the children evaluate the change?

'I feel that I am getting noticed because we now come inside to sign in. I feel safe and I feel like I am at home and with family.'

'I feel really happy and respected at after school care. The educators are kind and helpful and I am so happy we can come inside and sign in after a long day at school. I thank after school care for everything.'

'I am pleased that I don't have to line up to sign on now. It took forever and all I wanted to do was be with my friends. I now feel wild and free.'

'I like not having the big kids lining up. They are noisy and big.'

'I like lining up outside. I like saying hello to Amelia and the line isn't so long now and the big kids don't push me.'

Overnight care in family day care

When children come for their initial visit before starting overnight care, we have a look around the house and at the room they will be sleeping in. We talk about where they can leave their bags and what they would need and like to bring. They each get to choose the sheet set and quilt cover they want for their bed when they stay over. Then, each time they come to stay, their bed is made up and the room always looks the same and feels familiar.

We plan what we will eat at meal times and talk about the foods they like to eat at home. Sometimes we will plan an activity to do or talk about their personal commitments that I will need to take them to, such as a Saturday morning dance lesson or soccer game. Talking about these activities that are part of their normal home routine can make the feeling of staying at someone's house who you don't know feel a little less daunting. Quite often a lot of this important discussion and planning will happen outside in the sandpit. Children seem more comfortable chatting about these things when they are busy working in the sandpit.

When they arrive for their stay they can go and put the things they brought with them in their room. The room is then considered their personal space while they are staying. During their stay we take photos of the different activities they enjoyed doing or things they have created over the weekend so they can print them off and add them to their folders. Each child has their own folder that is added to each time they come. The children like to show their families their folders and often ask to take them home so they can show the other members of their family. This gives parents and children a chance at home to look at all the things they did and aids as a prompt, as children will often forget just what they did. It also gives both the parents and the children the opportunity to add comments or ideas for their next stay.

Outcomes for children:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children feel safe, secure and supported by establishing and maintaining respectful, trusting relationships with educators, such as when collaboratively planning for overnight care.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing by negotiating environments to ensure the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others through actively being involved in shaping their experiences whilst in care and being supported to adjust to new transitions and routines.

Maximising on transitions and routines in family day care

Driving home after school provides an excellent opportunity for school age children to de-brief and share their experiences of the day. If older children have had a challenging day, this is the time they usually let rip—telling on other children, explaining why a particular teacher at school is unfair, or about a fight they had with another child. The younger children in care often stare at them, mouth wide open, as they blurt everything out.

Once home, they are hungry and younger school children are tired after a long day. As a group, we have established a routine where they put their bags away, eat and have a chat, and then get their homework out. The older children usually sit at the kitchen bench to do their homework and can use the iPad if they like. Some children do their readers, reading aloud whilst the younger children listen attentively. They read just like a teacher, pointing to the pictures, asking the younger children questions about the story and feel very clever. Older children may want some time alone and need to have a quiet place to go to relax and wind down after a long day at school without the younger children seeking their attention.

During the school holidays, older children enjoy taking on a leadership role. They like to go through all the resources each morning and plan a group time to do with the smaller children. They choose the stories to read, the songs to sing with the finger puppets, or they create a felt board story to present. These presentations can be very imaginative and well planned out, with different children taking on the responsibility for each of the different character voices or the responsibility of a song to sing.

Many of the children enjoy the mixed-age play and undertake activities together, such as building cubby houses, pretend play in the home corner, working in the garden, or drawing and painting. Older children may ask for time to construct Lego or set up car tracks without the younger children present. Planning our day and using quiet times, such as after lunch, allows the younger children to have a sleep and provides the older children with opportunities to create and construct, using materials not appropriate for small children. We use the higher shelves to display their work so that creations remain safe for further work later or so they can show their parents what they have been working on when they come to pick them up. Sometimes parents will stay for a while at the end of the day to help their child add to their creation while they chat about their day. The children also like to take photos of their work and then print them off so they can add them to their folders.

Lots of conversation happens during meal times and this provides an excellent time to plan, together with the children, a program for the next holidays: who is going to be in care? Which days? What will we do? Where do you want to go? Children make choices about where to go and are guided to carefully consider a range of things, like the age of children in care; appropriateness of the experiences or excursions for the range of children in care, cost, weather conditions, excursion ideas that meet the needs and interests of all children, for example shopping to get items for a recipe or visiting a local park for a picnic lunch. I have a network of three other educators and often the children will suggest going on excursions with those educators. The children reinitiate friendships with children that they met during the last school holidays.

Outcomes for children:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children feel safe, secure, and supported by openly expressing their feelings and ideas in their interactions with others when the educator spends time interacting and conversing with them, listening to and responding sensitively as they express their thoughts, ideas and feelings.
- Children develop their autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency when they participate in a range of freely chosen play and leisure opportunities and are supported to engage in individual and group pursuits.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children develop dispositions such curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, persistence, imagination and reflexivity by initiating and contributing to play and leisure experiences emerging from their own ideas, reflecting their own individual interests and abilities.

TRY OUT

- Interview groups of children in your service and ask them how they felt attending school age care for the first time. What helped? What didn't help? Brainstorm with the children some strategies to alleviate children's fears on their first days.

- Make a list of all the transitions which occur in your setting every day. Discuss whose interests the transitions are designed to meet: educators, children or families? Choose one you would like to improve. Brainstorm ways it might look different from a child's perspective, an educator's perspective, and a family member's perspective. Look at the first outcome in the Framework (Children have a strong sense of identity) and discuss how the transition might support children in developing a strong sense of identity. Are there other ways you could be doing this transition? Choose another transition to work on next.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

On the resource CD

Educator reflections

- Daniel's show bags

13 EVALUATION FOR WELLBEING AND LEARNING

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

> *Educators use a variety of strategies to collect, document, organise, synthesise and interpret the information that they gather about children's wellbeing and enrichment to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs.*
>
> *(The Framework, p.16)*

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

School age care has evolved in the past forty years and there is still a distinct lack of research and data in both Australia and overseas. School age care has many unique factors and it is not easily compared to other sector types and thus the evaluation occurring in school age care settings will differ somewhat from other sector types.

For the first time in Australia, from 2012, school age care settings are required to use a framework for program planning and evaluations. What is still to be determined, through practice, policy or research, is the manner in which this will be catered to *individual* children. There are a number of factors which set school age care apart from the other sector types. They include:

- Children are already spending full days engaged in academic programs. At school they are observed and assessed individually by at least one teacher. Do children then need individualised observation and assessment before and after school and on their breaks as well? One of the contributing factors to this debate would be that the focus in the care setting is around wellbeing, rather than the academic focus of school.

- The school age care sector attracts high numbers of casual and transient children and families. Many settings may attract over 200 different children per week, with unpredictable attendance patterns which makes planned documentation very challenging

- Settings must deal with huge differences in age. They can range from 0–13 years, and sometimes older.

- The focus is on children's leisure time—a break from their everyday academic work.

- Highly casual and transient staff work in these settings. Limited hours make it difficult to retain staff and thus individualised program planning and assessments become more challenging.

- Short, broken shifts mean less time for observations

These differing aspects of school age care make monitoring children against the outcomes on an individual basis more challenging. However, the social nature of the sector makes it ideal for planning and evaluation with groups of children in mind. The age and skill level of the children in care make it ideal for involving them in the process of evaluation

Evaluations against the outcomes in school age care can be achieved in a variety of informal and formal ways which might include the whole group, small groups and individual evaluations. For example, it may be identified that the needs of an older group of boys (or girls) are not be being met very well so more specific evaluations and planning may occur around this group. It may also be decided to increase the level of documentation and evaluation for regular children who attend more frequently. Or there may be a child struggling with an issue such as difficulties making friends, which might attract a different level of documenting and evaluation to the rest of the children in the group.

Evaluation in school age care settings is an ongoing process of using observations and other evidence to make judgements about children's wellbeing and learning and educators' planning and practices. The purpose for regular evaluation is to enable responsive, well thought out long-term and short-term planning to promote the outcomes for children

and to guide educators' practices. Educators can become absorbed in the day-to-day happenings of the setting if there isn't a planned evaluation process. Evaluation is part of the planning cycle as described in Chapter 3.

Educators in school age care settings already gather information about children's wellbeing and learning as they engage in their everyday experiences and interactions with children and families. This includes chatting with families, observing, playing with children, listening to children, and asking questions.

The five outcomes in the Framework are key reference points against which children's experiences can be documented and communicated to children, families and other professionals. In doing so, educators can reflect on children's levels of wellbeing and engagement with learning. Due to the social nature of school age care settings, this evaluation can occur on an individual, as well as a group basis. For example, the whole group may benefit from some experiences planned to foster sportsmanship, plus there may be one or two children who are being more specifically coached and monitored in this area where a lack of skill has been noticed.

Educators make many informal observations and assessments on an ongoing basis. The goal in evaluation is to integrate these into a more planned and formal process to be able to evaluate the overall goals of the setting, as well as individual children's needs and progress around wellbeing and learning.

While more formal and planned methods of evaluation involve increased documentation, the focus should remain on *a planned approach towards particular outcomes*, rather than excessive amounts of recording. The key is to understand what to evaluate and to implement a consistent approach to meet the needs of this approach.

In school age care settings fun and enjoyment is paramount, but it should not be the reference point for undertaking documented evaluations. The Framework now gives educators that much needed direction on what to evaluate.

There is a range of different ways educators may evaluate children's learning against the outcomes in the Framework. Formal observations may suit the needs of educators and children in some settings, while more informal learning stories may be adopted by others. Other settings may adopt voice recorders, journals or weekly documented staff meetings to meet their needs, or combine them all.

WHAT TO DOCUMENT AND WHY?

'Observing and documenting for all the children in your care allows you to gradually build up a comprehensive picture of each child's interests, strengths and relationships, as well as an insight into areas they may be avoiding or skills they need help to develop.

It will give you a clearer picture of the social interactions, creative ideas and the concerns of the children in your program. It will take some time and a concerted team effort to gather documentation on all the children in your care— but there are benefits.

Having this kind of profile of all the children in your service will allow you to plan experiences, projects and events that develop these interests or build up these skills over time.'

(Nixon & Gould, 2005, p. 238)

One of the biggest challenges facing school age care educators is efficient use of time and the need to document what is significant. What do you document? How do you know what is significant? You cannot possibly document everything and it tends to become meaningless if this occurs. Educators need to select the important moments. You can't write in detail about every child, and you can't do it every day! However, in time you can gather pictures and stories about all the children to give a better idea about who they are and their dispositions.

Educators are keen observers. They notice not only what children are doing, but also what and how they are playing and what they are saying during play. This puts them in a strong position to develop a program based on their observations. An emergent curriculum is one which:

- is child initiated, but framed by an educator: collaborative between child and adult
- builds on existing interests
- allows children to create, extend themselves and discover more
- is flexible, constantly developing and not done well in advance
- uses various forms of documentation.

Documentation serves different purposes at different times. The criteria for what counts as quality documentation depends on the context in which you are using it. What seems to remain constant is that quality documentation focuses on some aspect of learning—not just 'what we did.' It prompts questions and promotes conversations among children and adults that deepen and extend learning.

There are three good reasons to document observations in school age care:

1. to inform program planning
2. to deepen our understanding of the children
3. to make learning visible and share it with others.

Observing to inform program planning

Documentation makes children's and educators' thinking visible. It allows children and educators to revisit it, reflect, uncover meaning and plan future directions.

The following describes how one group of early childhood educators formulate a program based on observations of children:

> 'In an emergent approach the sources of curriculum are:
>
> - children's interests such as discovering birds making a nest
> - educators' interests such as artworks
> - developmental tasks—emergent curriculum is responsive to children's development and learning
> - things in the physical environment, including manufactured and natural resources
> - people in the social environment, including staff, families and community members
> - curriculum resource materials that can be adapted'
>
> (Arthur et al, 1993, p.234)

A program direction often comes from a simple moment spent in conversation or play with a child: a moment which makes us pause and reflect.

> 'Ordinary moments are the pages in the child's diary for the day. If we could resist our temptation to record only the grand moments, we might find the authentic child living in the in-between. If we could resist our temptation to put the children on a stage, we might find the real work being done in the wings. If we understood the great value in the ordinary moments, we might be less inclined to have a marvellous finale for a long term project. We appeal to educators everywhere to find the marvel in the mundane, to find the power of the ordinary moment!'
>
> (Forman, Hall & Berglund, 2001, p.52-3)

Before documenting, you should ask: Why am I documenting this? How is this significant? If there is not a worthwhile reason, there may not be good reasons for recording.

There are different ways in which observations can be recorded, such as:

- note pads carried around by individuals
- sticky notes which may be gathered over a period of time and used for reflection
- clipboards
- group journals/communication books
- video recorder
- camera
- voice recorder
- poster/spreadsheet.

The documentation taken for program planning can be recorded in one place by all educators or it can be recorded individually (such as in notebooks) and brought together with the group during discussion. Notes just need to act as a visual reminder to stimulate thought and plans for planning.

2 Reflective thinking and discussion to deepen our understanding of the children

Jotting down observations for later discussion helps educators, particularly new and inexperienced ones, reflect and analyse, which can lead to deeper understandings for the educators in the setting.

These observations may be recorded in a variety of ways, such as scribble form on sticky notes or entered into a group journal. What is important, however, is the fact that the learning has been made

visible and the educators may share knowledge about this and question and extend it further. True collaborative planning can occur when educators share recorded observations. Once again there are a variety of ways to undertake this, but group discussion during meeting time is an ideal way to promote this deeper understanding and shared wisdom.

Encourage all educators in your setting to question why children's play is significant. The thinking is more complex and needs to go beyond just thinking 'they are playing in the home corner again'. Ask yourself why the children are choosing particular role-playing scenarios. What inspired it? Who is involved? Does it reflect an event or experience in a child's life that they are choosing to act out in play? Is someone trying to work through some emotions? Are they undertaking family life lessons at school? What meaning are they getting from it? What misinterpretations are there? How can I assist their learning in this area? How can we build on this learning?

Curtis and Carter (2008) suggest examining children's play from three angles:

- The child's story (Why are they playing this? What fascinates them about this? What is their previous experience? How can I encourage them to show more?)
- The learning story
- The educator's story (What excites you? What are you curious about? How can you find out more?)

During training many educators have been encouraged to look at learning and developmental aspects, however, to engage in deeper thinking, it is important to consider all three perspectives.

3 Making learning visible and sharing it with others

Educators may make some documentation visible to showcase the learning which has occurred and to find ways to connect with others. When you document a child's story you give the child a voice, and have a valuable tool for opening a meaningful discussion with that child's family. It is also a means to engage with other educators, such as teachers in the child's school. Children also love to go back and reflect on documented moments.

There are numerous ways to document for others to see. Some options include:

Wall displays: Documenting and displaying the children's project work allows them to express, revisit, and construct and reconstruct their feelings, ideas and understandings. Pictures of children engaged in experiences; their words as they discuss what they are doing, feeling and thinking; and the children's interpretation of experience through the visual media are displayed as a graphic presentation of the dynamics of learning. Documented wall displays or 'panels' is a Reggio Emilia concept which aims to place emphasis on the process, not just the end product. Making images of learning visible and being together in a group is a way to foster group identity and learning. This type of documentation promotes conversation or deepens understanding about one or more aspects of a learning experience. It can serve as a memory experience, allowing children and adults to reflect on, evaluate, and build on their previous ideas. Sharing documentation with learners can take many forms: a photocopied sheet of paper, words, scrapbook pages, or a carefully arranged panel.

Learning stories: A learning story is an alternative to other forms of observations. Margaret Carr developed this narrative form of assessment to meet documentation requirements in New Zealand to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of each child. In learning stories, educators capture significant moments throughout the day with photos and then tell the story of the child's learning (Carr, 2001). In school age care settings, children can set the scene by telling their own story, to which educators can make links regarding the learning. Linking learning to the outcomes in *My Time Our Place* is a great way to become familiar with the Framework and making the learning visible. See the resource CD for guidelines on developing learning stories in school age care settings.

Portfolios: A portfolio could document a child's development over time and highlight each child's learning story. The portfolio belongs to the child and contains their work and their stories. Portfolios are as individual as the children and they don't follow a prescribed pattern or format, they can just evolve. School age care is a social setting and children's portfolios should contain photos and stories of their friends, but be mindful of children and families who do not wish their photos to be included in others' folders and find strategies to deal with this. Portfolios and scrapbooks are long-term projects which can be undertaken jointly by the children and educators.

Documentation does not need to be repeated. A narrative story with photos can be shared at a staff

meeting, with input from all educators about links, questions, and where ideas may be built upon. The story can then be displayed in the room (as a work in progress or perhaps with an end product if there is one). The child can show people who are important to them the documentation and it will open up discussion with families, children and educators. Once it has been displayed for a period of time it can be filed away in the child's portfolio, where it can be revisited at any time. It is also available if an assessor wants to look at it during a visit as well. So this one piece of documentation serves many purposes.

Children's voice: The Framework encourages educators to create a culture of listening to and working collaboratively with children. How do you know what the children in your care want from their time in care?

There is a strong synergy between children's being and belonging and children's active involvement by being part of a democratic process, and having an impact on what the environment, programs and partnerships look, sound and feel like. The information you gather from children is integral to the development of a program that meets their needs and interests.

A range of ways can be used to gather and document children's voices in school age care settings including:

- 'All about me' sheets, where children and families document important information about themselves, such as likes, dislikes, hobbies and such
- setting time to have informal and formal discussions with children
- children interviewing other children
- suggestion boxes and surveys
- recording children's comments and thoughts about experiences as part of the evaluation process
- children's portfolios
- creating opportunities for joint planning, including setting up of the care environment
- photographing children and asking them to write about the experience
- children writing their own learning stories
- joint problem-solving opportunities.

Careful consideration needs to be given to children who may be non-verbal or have difficulty expressing themselves to ensure their voices are heard in your care setting.

Throughout the Guide you will hear children's voice expressed through the use of quotes, reflections on experiences and collaboration. The resource CD has a simple tool, developed by educators, which provides possible discussion starters to find out more about what children have to say about transitions, collaboration, learning through play, and the environment—see 'Learning stories in school age care' and the learning story template.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When documenting children's learning, educators must be respectful of the rights of children and families. Permission must be sought from children and families before information is collected and documented. Children and families must have the right to privacy, be informed about how the information will be used and have a choice about participating.

MacNaughton, Smith and Lawrence suggest

'that to protect and enhance children's rights through consultation with them, adults should ensure that children have:

- *safe spaces in which to share their ideas without challenge or critique*
- *privacy: ask children for permission to document/ record what they say*
- *ownership of their ideas: ask children to display and/ or share their ideas and understandings with others*
- *appropriate equipment with which adults can care for children's work in ways that shows that their voice is important and respected.*

(2003, p.17)

‣ What does observing, documenting and evaluating look like in your setting?

‣ How do you involve children in the process?

‣ How do you involve families in the process?

‣ How do you know what is valued or expected for children within the family and cultural context?

‣ Do you assess children at an individual level? Do you think this is important in your setting?

‣ How do you define 'regular' in the context of children who attend 'regularly'?

‣ What methods or tools would you use?

‣ Does the documentation focus on learning, not just something you did?

- Does the documentation promote conversation or deepen understanding about some aspect of learning?

- What documentation do you collect which is appropriate to share/display?

- Does the documentation focus on outcomes for children and not just what the educators are doing?

- Does the documentation focus on the process as well as the product(s)?

- Does the documentation clearly communicate the aspects of learning you consider most important?

- Does your display documentation have a title?

- Is the documentation presented in a way that draws the viewer in?

HEAR ABOUT

Developing child portfolios at school age care

The educators at our school age care decided they wanted to improve the basic child files and develop new and improved individual child portfolios. Some of the educators attended professional development sessions and spoke to other services to get feedback on how others set up portfolios.

We looked at scrap books, display books, worksheets and folders. We liked the idea of a display book into which we could easily slip pages and photos. We also liked the idea of a scrap book where children could paste, draw, collage and write and which they could make quite personal.

We considered developing a 'contents page', but thought not all children would be interested in completing all the experiences in the contents. We also had a huge selection of worksheets including about me, family trees, self portraits, birthdays, special things, coat of arms, pets, friends and when I grow up.

Educators decided that, rather than a standard format, they wanted each child's portfolio to be unique to the individual. We wanted choice and variety: written work, photos, typed stories, collage, art work, scrapbooking.

As space is limited at our service, we wanted something that was easy to store so that the children could easily find their portfolio without flicking through or moving other children's portfolios.

The solution:
- one display book per child
- type each child's name on the labelling machine and stick it on the spine of the display book
- put the display books in alphabetical order in plastic tubs
- provide each child with an A5 exercise book and place this in the front of the display book to be used as a scrap book/journal
- copy all the different sheets we have sourced and place each in a plastic pocket in a folder so that children can 'choose' what they want to include in their portfolio
- set up a folder for each child on the children's laptop so that children's photos and learning stories can be stored and easily accessed.

The result:
- The children were so excited to have their own personal, individual portfolios.
- The children are able to easily access their portfolios.
- The children can browse through the worksheet folder and choose what they would like to do.

- Some children have stuck records of other experiences they have done at school age care in their journals/scrap books.
- Some children have shown their portfolios to their families.
- Educators have gone through all our 'old' photos and placed them in the new child portfolios. Children and families have enjoyed revisiting past experience at school age care by looking at the photos from previous years.
- Some children have sat down with educators to share their portfolios and this has assisted educators to get to know the children.

We decided that in the future we would:

- encourage children to self-initiate what items they want to file in their portfolio
- print a list of all children that attend school age care. Each term, check each child's portfolio and document what they have included.
- encourage those that have not filed anything to complete a sheet or learning story. Educators could place a photo in the child's portfolio and then ask the child to tell the educator about that experience and how they felt.
- ask the children what they want to include in their portfolios. What other resources can educators provide?
- look at child portfolios at a staff meeting and evaluate how effective our new system has been and where we can improve. How can we keep the children motivated once the novelty wears off?

Children's strengths

In our school age care service we wanted to introduce more individualised planning and evaluation for children. We already ask children to complete an 'About me' form when they first start at our service and more recently we introduced a Multiple Intelligences checklist. These two tools give us great information about the children's interests and strengths which we use for program planning on an individual, as well as group, basis. However, we wanted to hear more from the children about what skills they would like to learn and how we could help them achieve this.

We trialled using the Strengths Cards for Kids by Innovative Resources: children could identify areas in which they had strengths and areas which they would like to improve. We asked the children to sort the pack of 'strengths' into three different piles: one for things they were already good at, one for things they weren't so good at, and the third pile was for things they wanted to improve.

After a conversation with each child about their selections (including helping them to have a more balanced view if they were too negative on themselves), we recorded a few examples of each of these onto a pro-forma we created for the purpose. We narrowed the third pile down into one particular skill which the child would like to focus on improving. This is recorded for each child along with some strategies. At regular staff meetings and for program planning we incorporate these ideas and strategies into our reflective process and it enables all educators to become more knowledgeable and aware of the children and their various individual needs.

This proved to be a fantastic process, in which children became very engaged. The children also proved to be generally very accurate at identifying which areas they would like support in. The activity also allowed educators to build more intimate relationships with children and create better shared understandings.

Our staff team has decided to undertake this process on an ongoing basis with the children in regular attendance to help them build on as many skills as possible and build deeper connections.

TRY OUT

- Get a photo or two of some children engaged in play. If you have a question, write it down. Keep observing to see if you can find the answer to the question. If you had to describe why this play was significant, what would you say? How does it link to the learning outcomes in My Time, Our Place? Undertaking this activity regularly will promote a deeper understanding and knowledge of the Framework, as educators have to make links repeatedly.

- Gather and analyse the evidence you collect for evaluation purposes. Does it link directly to the learning outcomes in the Framework? Are the observations and evidence equitable amongst the children? Do some children attract more evidence? Are there children who are overlooked?

- Undertake observations in your setting to determine:

  - who plays with whom

  - who usually plays alone or drifts from group to group

  - the special interests of each child

  - each child's talents and strengths

  - the games and activities that children stay at the longest

  - how children change the games and activities that you provide

  - areas or activities that get little use

  - what may be causing difficult or negative behaviour in some children

  - times of the day or routines when more negative behaviour is seen

  - safety issues

  - who gets more educator attention

(Nixon & Gould, 2005, p.240)

- Get the children in your setting to undertake group challenges, while you assign educators to observe and document. For example, design an outfit for one person in the group and then, using just newspaper, scissors and sticky tape, make it for them. A second or alternative challenge could be to design a bridge which will hold the weight of a brick or large book using just newspaper and sticky tape.

- Instruct documenters/observers to observe with the following question in mind: What do you notice about the individual and group's process of building knowledge and what can you point to that makes you say that? Watch for interesting or important moments or shifts in the ways ideas are being developed. Afterwards, both describe and interpret how those moments advanced the knowledge-building of the group.

- Document your observations in any way you wish as long as you document in some way: jot down bits of conversation; write short descriptive notes; draw pictures or diagrams. Observers share their observations and documentation about the individual's and group's process of building knowledge. Try to identify interesting or important moments or shifts in the ways ideas were being developed and offer an interpretation of how they advanced the learning process.

Not sure when and how to document?

Try asking yourself these four questions:

Why am I recording this—what is meaningful/significant?

What is the learning occurring?

How can we extend on this?

How does it link to the outcomes?

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

Arthur L, Beecher B, Death E, Dockett S & Farmer, S (1993) *Programming and Planning in Early Childhood Settings* (fourth edition), Cengage Learning Australia P/L

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On the resource CD

- Reflective practice for improvement
- Conversations matter: Leading teams in reflective conversation
- Summary of reflective questions from the Guide
- Pedagogical leadership
- Documenting children's learning
- Making sense of children's learning
- Developing portfolios for children
- Learning stories
- Learning stories in school age care
- Full of surprises
- Learning story template

14 OUTCOMES

WHAT THE FRAMEWORK SAYS

> *The five outcomes are designed to capture the integrated and complex wellbeing, development and learning of all children. The outcomes are broad and observable.*
>
> *(The Framework, p.18)*

THINK AND REFLECT ABOUT

The five outcomes for school age children's development and wellbeing provide educators with a clear guide to:

* plan effectively for individual and groups of children in the school age care setting
* identify, document and communicate about children's strengths and areas for further development to other educators and families
* evaluate the effectiveness of the program and practices and identify how they are contributing to children's development and wellbeing
* reflect on pedagogy and consider its appropriateness within the context of the community and individual children you work with.

This is the first time school age educators have been provided with key reference points against which to develop and evaluate programs and educator practices. In some settings, educators may have previously used developmental domains to plan and evaluate so this will require a change in mindset from those educators.

The outcomes have been developed by drawing on conclusive international evidence. The broad and observable outcomes identify key components that contribute to children's development and wellbeing. The outcomes are observable through both the actions of children and the actions of educators. There are examples of this listed under each outcome for each key component.

Whilst the outcomes are described separately within the Framework, all of the outcomes are interconnected and educators are not expected to plan separate experiences to meet or assess children against each of the individual outcomes or key components. When making decisions about the program, practices and children's learning, development and wellbeing, educators should consider the principles, practices and outcomes along with their knowledge of:

* each child's strengths, capabilities, likes, dislikes and dispositions
* the environment
* the context of the community
* the needs and wishes of families
* individual educator's skills and abilities
* the needs of individuals and groups of children.

Each child and group of children will be at different points in their journey towards these outcomes. Children come with a range of interests and understandings, family and community experiences, developmental pathways, and temperaments and dispositions.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring the particular histories, cultures, languages and traditions of their families and community. Culture is central to a child's individuality, identity and sense of belonging.

Educators use their observations of children and feedback from children and families, as well as evaluations of learning and wellbeing to analyse and assess what children are able to do and areas for further development or progression towards the outcomes. Learning stories, educator reflections, journals and child portfolios (referred to in Chapter 13) are strategies to not only document experiences, but also help educators become more familiar with the outcomes as they make frequent links from the learning stories to the Framework.

- Does your current planning provide a balance of experiences which contribute to each of the five outcomes?

- Can you see children engaging in experiences that build competence in each of the five outcomes?

- What is important to you and your team for children to experience and learn in your setting? What would the outcomes of this learning look like? How are they similar or different to the ones in the Framework?

- How do you try to ensure children feel safe, secure, and strong:

  - physically?
  - emotionally?
  - spiritually?

- In what ways do you understand the meaning of the above terms for all children?

- How do you understand the following terms?

  - self identity
  - sense of agency
  - inter-dependence
  - resilience
  - empathy
  - diversity
  - socially responsible
  - wellbeing
  - dispositions
  - inquiry
  - hypothesising
  - context
  - connecting with.

- How might children's desire to 'belong' lead them to adopt the majority culture and way of being? How do you, as educators, influence children's belonging and becoming in their own culture?

HEAR ABOUT

Our wall murals

Each term children and educators work together to create our wall mural. We use the internet to research our ideas and to reserve books from our local library. After receiving a text message from the library, we collect the books and then collate all the ideas with those we found on the internet. We draw several drafts and then a master plan of what we want our mural to look like. We photocopy the design so children are able to help create a colour template for us to duplicate and project up onto the wall with paints. We chose to do a panda mural, as our service had recently been on an excursion to the Adelaide Zoo to see the pandas.

Our murals are created in five stages:
- brainstorming and collating all the ideas
- mapping out and drawing our designs (background scenery, foregrounds and main characters/objects) first on white paper then on separate A4 plastic sleeves
- covering the wall with double-sided masking tape and paper, donated by our local newspaper
- using our very old overhead projector (OHP) to enlarge and project the images up onto the wall so we can trace them
- mixing colours according to the colour template we voted on and painting our design.

Children of all ages work together in creating our murals. This process usually takes three to four weeks. Over the years we have done many different designs so we have a folder full of ideas to reuse on other projects.

We feel that creating the murals contributes to children's wellbeing, learning and development as they:

- are able to demonstrate their competence at seeking and researching information on pandas in their natural and zoo environments through a variety of media and texts, including using their increasing ITC skills to navigate the internet and accessing resources in the extended community and within the school hours care community
- use recycled material (paper) which demonstrates a sense of responsibility for our planet
- confidently and collaboratively plan and implement a group project together with educators using a variety of old and modern media and art supplies
- experiment with bright, dark, and pale shades of colour by mixing a variety of acrylic paints and water colours to apply different textures and brush strokes to the mural.

In the future we plan to:

- take some time to enjoy the mural for a while before we begin the process again
- create a scrapbook of all the murals we have done over the years
- get children to use the overhead projector to make mini murals and projects on large white cardboard
- use the same process with children, educators and families to create large displays for our pageant float at the end of the year.

Outcomes for children

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- The children had opportunities to work collaboratively on a project, articulate their ideas and suggestions and respond to others.
- The children's sense of connectedness and belonging was enhanced through their contributions to improve their physical environment and play space.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation when they participate with others to collaboratively brainstorm, collaboratively solve problems through experimentation, and contribute to group outcomes in creating a wall mural.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing when they are able to co-operate and work collaboratively with others, such as through contributing to a shared project, cooperating and collaborating with others, and when their achievements are valued, recognised and celebrated.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed material when they experiment and use ITC to investigate and explore their ideas, by resourcing their own learning using the internet and other sources to research information and extend their ideas.
- Children develop dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity to develop designs for the mural.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children collaborate with others, express ideas and make meaning using a range of media and communication technologies when they engage with media and technology for fun, such as when using creative arts and ITC tools to communicate and create the mural.

TRY OUT

- Choose some photos of children engaged in a variety of experiences. As a team ask the following questions:
  - What is significant about the experience in this photo?
  - What learning may be occurring?
  - How does the learning or experience evidenced in the photo link to the outcomes in the Framework?

- Go to the resource CD and print off Daniel's show bags; Our radiator springs play set; or Cupcakes and caring citizens. Discuss:
  - What is significant about the experience in this learning story?
  - What learning may be occurring?
  - How does the learning or experience evidenced in the learning story link to the outcomes in the Framework?

- Similarly, ask educators to bring some learning stories (see Chapter 13) to team meetings. Ask them to read just the narrative description of the experience and then ask the same questions about what is significant, what learning was occurring, and how does it link to the outcomes in the Framework?

- Display the outcomes described in the Framework to the community. Ask families, children and other stakeholders what the outcomes mean to them.

- Evaluate your current processes for program planning against the outcomes. Doing this, educators should be able to assess what they are already doing and identify what they need to concentrate more on. This process of cyclic reflection is described in Chapter 3.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2011) *My Time, Our Place Framework for School Age Care in Australia,* Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

On the resource CD

- Reflective practice for improvement
- Conversations matter: Leading teams in reflective conversation
- Pedagogical leadership
- Documenting children's learning
- Making sense of children's learning
- Developing portfolios for children
- Summary of reflective questions from the Guide

Learning stories

- Learning stories in school age care
- Learning story template
- All learning stories

15 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Agency: being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world.

Citizenship: being a member of and supporting one's community, including the school age care community as well as the local and global community. Citizenship involves a range of key components, such as opportunities for belonging and participation, contributing to decision-making, and taking responsibility for actions to others and to the environment.

Collaboration: involves working together cooperatively towards common goals. Collaboration is achieved through information-sharing, joint planning and the development of common understandings and objectives.

Communities: social or cultural groups or networks that share a common purpose, heritage, rights and responsibilities and/or other bonds. 'Communities' is used variously to refer, for example, to the community within school age care settings, extended kinships, the local geographic community, and broader Australian society.

Critical reflection: reflective practices that focus on implications for equity and social justice. It involves examining and analysing events, experiences and practices from a range of perspectives to inform future planning and decision-making.

Dispositions: enduring habits of mind and actions, and tendencies to respond in characteristic ways to situations, for example, maintaining an optimistic outlook, being willing to persevere, approaching new experiences with confidence.

Educators: the term used to refer to practitioners whose primary function in Australian care settings is to plan and implement programs that support children's wellbeing, development and learning. In school age care settings, educators are employed 'before and after' school and during vacation periods.

Framework: a guide which provides general goals or outcomes for children's learning and how they might be attained. It also provides a scaffold to assist school age care settings to develop their own, more detailed program.

Inclusion: involves taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in program decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that all children's experiences are recognised and valued. The intent is also to ensure that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference.

Intentionality: involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions.

Involvement: is a state of intense, whole-hearted mental activity, characterised by sustained concentration and intrinsic motivation. Highly involved children (and adults) operate at the limit of their capacities, leading to changed ways of responding and understanding, leading to deep level learning (adapted from Laevers, 1994). Children's involvement can be recognised by their facial, vocal and emotional expressions, the energy, attention and care they apply, and the creativity and complexity they bring to the situation which Csikszentmihayli conceptualised as '*a state of flow*' (DECS, 2008, p.81).

Learning: a natural process of exploration that children engage in from birth as they expand their intellectual, physical, social, emotional and creative capacities. Life-long learning is acknowledged as a self-motivated process that extends intellectual, vocational and personal horizons which begins in pre-school times, and continues throughout life.

Literacy: in school age care, literacy includes a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, reading and writing.

Outcome: a skill, knowledge or disposition that educators can actively promote in school age care settings, in collaboration with children and families.

Pedagogy: school age care educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, program decision-making, teaching and learning.

Play-based learning: A context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations.

Program: in the school age care setting, includes all the spontaneous and planned experiences for children at the service designed to support wellbeing and facilitate learning. It includes all the interactions, experiences, routines and events.

Relationships: interactions that further children's wellbeing, learning and development. Both the adult and the child have intent to learn from each other.

Scaffold: the educators' decisions and actions that build on children's existing knowledge and skills to enhance their learning.

Spiritual: refers to a range of human experiences, including a sense of awe and wonder, and an exploration of *being* and knowing.

Technologies: includes much more than computers and digital technologies used for information, communication and entertainment. Technologies are the diverse range of products that make up the designed world. These products extend beyond artefacts designed and developed by people and include processes, systems, services and environments.

Texts: things that we read, view and listen to and that we create in order to share meaning. Texts can be print-based, such as books, magazines and posters, or screen-based, for example internet sites and DVDs. Many texts are multimodal, integrating images, written words and/or sound.

Transitions: the process of moving between home and childhood setting, between a range of different school age care settings, or from childhood setting to full-time school.

Wellbeing: Sound wellbeing results from the satisfaction of basic needs: tenderness and affection; security and clarity; social recognition; to feel competent; physical needs and for meaning in life (adapted from Laevers, 1994). It includes happiness and satisfaction, effective social functioning, and the dispositions of optimism, openness, curiosity and resilience.

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