

InSights

WINTER 2015



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It's about you. Always!

Communities@Work

CENTRE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING & EDUCATION

InSights is published by Communities@Work.

Contributions: This edition's contributors include Hayley Burke, Adam Duncan, Liam McNicholas, Christine Mayberry, Rhonda Livingstone and Victoria Petriella.

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Welcome

to the very first edition of the InSights magazine

We love what we do and enjoy nothing more than sharing stories of best (better) practice, quality improvement and contemporary education and care InSights. The ACT and surrounding Greater Capital Region has many education and care programs providing innovative programs, demonstrating excellence in practice in their work with children and families.

The intent of the InSights magazine is to provide the education and care sector in the ACT and sounding region with a valuable resource. The magazine is designed to showcase some of the amazing programs and practices that are happening in our region, as well as providing articles of interest that inspire progressive pedagogy, while supporting a community of thinkers. In addition, the InSights magazine is an extension of the professional development and support that Communities@Work's Centre of Professional Learning and Education (CPL) offers the sector.

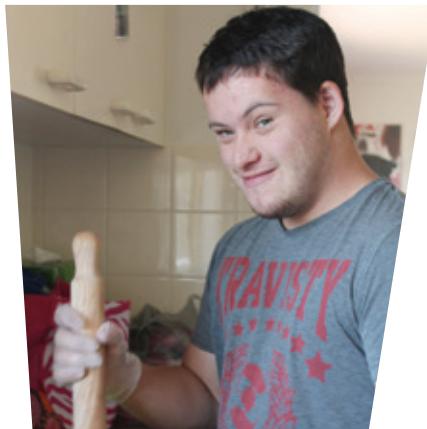
Our first edition contains an array of articles and news stories written by both local and national education authors;

- From within the CPL team, Hayley Burke explores the possibilities of Science in Education and Care and dares educators to experiment, make mess and sense of the world through play
- Adam Duncan from New Saltwater Dreaming Consultancy and Performance comments on 'the New Dreaming' and encourages educators to find the balance between traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture
- Liam McNicholas, a local advocate for education and care, explores professional identity and the intent behind the questions we ask supporting the notion of being reflective practitioners
- The role of the Educational Leader is one that is often reflected upon within the sector and the CPL enlisted the help of National Educational Leader, Rhonda Livingstone from the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), to bust some myths about the role and provide some insight into the intention of the role
- MedicareLocals supplied a contribution to InSights with an article about vaccinations.

InSights is a magazine publication we hope to grow with the support of the community and we welcome proposals for consideration from contributors across the education and care sector.

We are sure you will find something of interest and come away feeling empowered, enlightened and educated.

Communities@Work's Centre of Professional Learning and Education



About

Communities@Work

Communities@Work provides a broad suite of quality community programs of social value and practical benefit. Our vision is for a resilient and socially inclusive community that cares for the well-being of all.

Established and developed in Canberra, we are a local organisation that understands local needs. Our innovative and progressive culture seeks to

respond to changing community needs in a thoughtful and constructive manner.

We deliver services to more than 20,000 people annually, including children's and seniors' services, disability and mental health services, social programs and other special programs. We contribute positively to the health and vitality of our community in

many valuable and engaging ways.

Communities@Work is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, governed by a volunteer Board of Directors.

More information on Communities@Work can be found at www.commsatwork.org

Centre of Professional Learning and Education

Communities@Work's Centre of Professional Learning and Education encompasses the ACT Professional Support Coordinator (ACT PSC) and an accomplished and respected Registered Training Organisation (RTO 88148).

The ACT Professional Support Coordinator (ACT PSC) is part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP), an integrated and nationally consistent approach to meeting the professional development and inclusion support needs of eligible children's services, funded by the Australian Government. The PSC provides subsidised professional development, support and resources to the education

and care sector in the ACT. We aim to support, promote and develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that underpin quality care and education within the education and care sector. The ACT PSC offers assistance to education and care services that is designed to enhance the capacity of the whole service, in providing quality care and education, which aligns with the National Quality Framework (NQF), for the benefit of all children and their families.

Our RTO specialises in education and care, providing quality study options that are designed by education and care specialists with extensive and contemporary experience in the sector.

The team pride themselves on delivering exceptional training opportunities. Our quality, evidence based approach to delivering qualifications and professional learning consists of a combination of face-to-face classroom education, in-service professional development and online learning. All our learning and support programs are developed to meet the current needs of progressive education and care services and individuals. If you value quality, contemporary thinking and best practice approaches then we are the RTO for you!



The Role of the Educational Leader in Australia

An Interview with **Rhonda Livingstone**,
National Educational Leader, ACECQA

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your career.

In previous roles I worked in preschool and long day care centres, and as an assessor of programs and services for both the Queensland Government and a non-government agency in Queensland.

I have many years' experience in delivering early childhood services and also developing and implementing policies for this sector. I have been fortunate to have significant involvement in the National Quality Framework reforms, contributing to the development of the National Quality Standard and its Guide, assessment and rating tools and processes, and the training and testing program for authorised officers.

Prior to commencing my role as National Education Leader, I was the Senior Advisor for Excellent Ratings with ACECQA and also worked as a sessional education academic with the Queensland University of Technology.

2. What is your role as the National Educational Leader?

In my current role as National Education Leader I work in collaboration with government and non-government agencies and peak organisations to assist in promoting best practice and continuous improvement in early childhood education and care.

The current topics prioritised for my role have been informed by:

- discussions with educators, approved providers, academics, peak organisations and governments, based on recommendations from recent reports such as:
 - *2014 National Quality Framework Review undertaken by Woolcott Research*
 - *Consultation Process-ACECQA's Report on the National Quality Framework and Regulatory Burden*
 - *Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care report – A Place for Culture? Exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Competence in the National Quality Standard*

- data drawn from the NQA ITS identifying standards and elements that services are least likely to meet.

From this information, my current priorities include:

- Dispelling myths about documentation and Quality Improvement Plan requirements
- Supporting services to meet:
 - Quality Area 1 (Educational Program and Practice) and
 - Quality Area 3 (Physical Environment)
- Dispelling myths about the role of the Educational Leader
- Working to build cultural competence
- Supporting services to meet standards.

3. Can you describe the role of the Educational Leader?

I have been fortunate enough to be involved in the development of the National Quality Standard (NQS) and I vividly recall the discussions and deliberations we had as part of the process. There was much discussion about the opportunities the Educational Leader role presented.

A strong focus of the NQS is on outcomes for children. The NQS seeks to recognise the

uniqueness of services, educators and communities and empower approved providers and educators to meet the standards in a way that is meaningful, relevant and achievable for each service.

It is for these reasons that the NQS, related regulatory standards and approved learning frameworks are not prescriptive about the role of the Educational Leader. Rather, the focus is on how a suitably qualified and experienced Educational Leader:

- leads the development of the curriculum
- promotes a positive culture
- builds a professional learning community, and
- establishes clear goals and expectations.

4. What are some of the common myths you have heard about the Educational Leader role?

I have heard educators suggest that the Educational Leader has to do all the programming for all educators in the service. This is a very narrow prescriptive way of viewing this important role. There are many more possibilities and opportunities that the role presents.

The reality is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to what the Educational Leader might look like. That is because each educator, each service and each community is different.



5. Your role is the National Educational Leader, what advice would you give to current Educational Leaders?

It is important to remember that there is no one way to lead but there are many ways that we can practice effective leadership.

I spoke to Laurie Kelly who works in the leadership area, and he shared some interesting insights into the key characteristics of effective leadership. Laurie identifies four key characteristics:

1. having a vision
2. enabling others to act
3. modelling the way and
4. encouraging the heart.

When I consider leadership and the role of the Educational Leader, I think back to my own experience as an educator and the influential role a leader took in inspiring, motivating, affirming but also challenging my practice and pedagogy. This had a significant impact that had on my work with children and families.

My advice to Educational Leaders is to acknowledge and build on the strengths of the team, be open to new thinking, doing things differently, be open to the variety of theories that can inform our practice.

Also, reflect on practice, build respectful relationships and, most importantly, take the time to celebrate educator and team achievements.

6. The National Quality Standard, in element 7.1.4, discusses Educational Leaders establishing clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning. Can you elaborate on what that requirement looks like in practice?

Educational Leaders should think about what incremental goals will need to be achieved to work towards the vision for the service. These goals will be different for each service. A good place to start in determining curriculum priorities is by reviewing the service philosophy and the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Once you have identified areas which require improvement, you are able to co-construct goals with educators on specific areas as a focus, rather than trying to achieve everything at once. This builds a shared understanding and clear expectations for teaching and learning for educators.

7. Could you describe some ways that Educational Leaders could lead the development of the curriculum?

There are many practical strategies Educational Leaders can use to support educators to improve the educational curriculum. The Guide to the National Law and Regulations (Page 84) suggests:

- leading and being part of reflective discussions about practice and implementing the learning framework
- mentoring other educators by leading quality practice
- discussing routines and how to make them more effective learning experiences
- observing children and educator interactions, and making suggestions on how to improve interactions and intentional teaching
- talking to parents about the educational program
- working with other early childhood professionals such as maternal and child health nurses and early childhood intervention specialists
- considering how the program can be linked to the community by working with other community services such as Aboriginal Elders



My advice to educational leaders is to acknowledge and build on the strengths of the team.

- establishing systems across the service to ensure continuity of learning when children attend other services, and in their transition to school
- assisting with documenting children's learning and how these assessments can inform curriculum decision making.

In recent visits to services, Educational Leaders have shared their strategies to find meaningful ways to support the development of curriculum. These included

- co-constructing goals with educators
- facilitating professional conversations around the approved learning frameworks
- encouraging reflection
- providing guidance around programming and documentation
- sharing knowledge about theories and pedagogy
- identifying areas for professional development
- sharing resources and celebrating achievements.

8. What considerations should a service leader give when appointing an Educational Leader?

When choosing the right Educational Leader for your service, consideration needs to be given to whether they are:

- suitably qualified
- suitably experienced
- able to make time for the role
- approachable and well respected
- knowledgeable about theories and pedagogy and eager to learn more
- skilled at supporting educators of varying abilities and learning styles
- passionate about improving practice
- knowledgeable about the relevant learning frameworks, the National Quality Standard and related regulatory standards
- willingness to take on the role.

Adding to this, in an article entitled "Being and Becoming Leaders", Dr Manjula Waniganayake and Anthony Semann theorised that managers or

directors of early childhood settings are mentoring colleagues occupying subordinate positions but often do not have mentors for themselves.

Effective leaders have a strong commitment to life-long learning for themselves as well as others.

9. What kind of professional learning opportunities would you recommend for Educational Leaders?

There is such an array of learning opportunities available to support the development of leadership skills. Networking opportunities, accessing journal articles and research, participating in workshops and professional development programs, undertaking action research projects are just a few examples of the variety of options available. It is important to make informed choices about professional development, as the time and resources available are often limited.

Effective leaders have a strong commitment to life-long learning for themselves as well as others.

It is essential to identify areas where support or development is most needed and to identify the most effective ways of addressing that need. The Professional Support Coordinators (PSC) Alliance Self-Assessment Professional Learning Plan, which is available on the Inclusion Professional Support Program (IPSP) online library is a useful planning tool.

10. Do you have any suggestions of freely available resources that Educational Leaders and educators can access?

There are many government funded resources to help you embrace the role of Educational Leader:

- Early Childhood Australia's Professional Learning Program has many resources such as e-learning videos which may be helpful in prompting learning and reflection on areas identified as requiring improvement as well as newsletters clarifying the role of the Educational Leader
- The IPSP Online Library is a collection of valuable research and resources relevant to the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. It has a keyword search function and is wonderful for researching areas of interest. A good resource found in the online library to clarify understanding about leadership is 'The distributive leadership model' by Ros Cornish and the article 'Pedagogical Leadership: Exploring New Terrain and Provocations' by Anthony Semann and Rod Soper in Reflections magazine (issue 47)

- ACECQA website - the newly introduced National Educational Leader webpage is updated monthly with topics of interest and relevant resources
- Peak organisations such as the PSCs offer many valuable resources. One which I have found particularly useful is the PSC 'How to Series'.

11. Could you list your top 'must have' resources?

There are a number of resources available on the IPSP online library to assist early childhood educators understand and implement the approved learning frameworks.

One of my 'must have' resources for early childhood services available free of charge, are the prompt cards entitled: *Thinking about the EYLF - Thoughts to Inspire*.

The prompt cards explain concepts such as *scaffolding* and *shared sustained thinking*. In one service I recently visited, educators had attached the cards by a ring which facilitated easy access when working directly with children. You may also choose to display them as a reminder to educators in their work with children.

The "Living the Early Years Learning Team Meeting Package" is another helpful resource which can be accessed from the IPSP online library (<http://www.ipsplibrary.net.au/>).

These resources are part of the Early Years Learning Framework Practice Based Resources project funded by the Australian Government.

It is inspiring to see the progress so far of the National Quality Framework and the great work being done by Educational Leaders nationally. For me, the words of Ralph Nader resonate; that is "*The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.*"



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority

Reference:

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2014) Guide to the National Law and Regulations 2011. Sydney, NSW: ACECQA.



Vaccinations

Simple and Effective

By Christine Mayberry,
Medicare Local

Vaccination is one of the most cost-effective health interventions available, saving millions of people from illness, disability and death each year. The National Immunisation Program provides routine childhood immunisations recommended for all children in Australia, free of charge, until a child is 7 years old.

In the first months of life, a baby might have some protection from a disease if the mother has had that infectious disease or has been vaccinated.

This is known as passive immunity and occurs when antibodies are transferred from mother to baby during pregnancy and also through breast milk. This level of protection can be low and is usually short lasting.

Vaccination is a simple and effective way of protecting children and adults against life threatening diseases. It not only protects individuals, but also others in our community by increasing the level of immunity and minimising the spread of disease. Vaccinations use the body's natural defence mechanism; the immune response; to build resistance to infectious diseases.

Since the introduction of childhood routine vaccinations, the rates of deaths and/or disability from vaccine

Vaccination is a simple and effective way of protecting children and adults against life threatening diseases.

preventable diseases are rare. Currently vaccination rates in ACT are over 90% for all age cohorts and are consistently one of the highest rates in Australia. ACT must continue to achieve high vaccination rates to ensure our community has the best possible protection from vaccine preventable diseases. These diseases include, but are not limited to:

- measles
- chicken pox (varicella)
- mumps
- rotavirus and whooping cough (pertussis).

These diseases are highly infectious and the most effective way to be protected from these diseases is to be fully vaccinated.

Most vaccines give a strong immunity to the disease and it is usually long lasting. There are, however, some vaccines that must be given annually. An example of this is the influenza vaccine. Immunity for influenza



wanes over time and the vaccine may include different strains of the influenza virus. It is therefore recommended that childcare workers are offered annual influenza vaccines.

Education and care services can encourage parents to access health services if they are unsure about what vaccinations their child has missed. They can also educate and highlight that although timely vaccination is ideal, it is never too late to vaccinate. Educators should also contact their GP to discuss their own vaccination records and ensure they are up to date with vaccinations. The best way to be protected against vaccine preventable disease is to be fully vaccinated and vaccinated on time.

Education and care services and leaders are in an ideal position to encourage parents to vaccinate on time. Ways in which a child care educator can assist in maintaining the ACT's high vaccination rates are providing evidence based information to parents, reminders about due vaccinations and keeping records on children's vaccination status.

The vaccination schedule for children in the ACT is:

National Immunisation Program Schedule

From 1 July 2013

Child Programs	
Age	Vaccine
Birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hepatitis B (hep B)
2 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hepatitis B, diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough), <i>Haemophilus influenza</i> type b, inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (hepB-DTPa-Hib-IPV) ○ Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV) ○ Rotavirus
4 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hepatitis B, diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough), <i>Haemophilus influenza</i> type b, inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (hepB-DTPa-Hib-IPV) ○ Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV) ○ Rotavirus
6 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hepatitis B, diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough), <i>Haemophilus influenza</i> type b, inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (hepB-DTPa-Hib-IPV) ○ Pneumococcal conjugate (13vPCV) ○ Rotavirus
12 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Haemophilus influenza</i> type b and Meningocoocal C (Hib-Men C) ○ Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)
18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chickenpox) (MMRV)
4 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (whooping cough) and inactivated poliomyelitis (polio) (DTPa-IPV) ○ Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) (to be given only if MMRV vaccine was not given at 18 months)
School Programs	
10-15 Years (contact your State or Territory Health Department for details)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hepatitis B (hepB) ○ Varicella (chickenpox) ○ Human papillomavirus (HPV) ○ Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis (whooping cough) (dTpa)

For more information about vaccinations: <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/> or visit your local GP.

The New Dreaming



**By Adam Duncan,
New Saltwater
Dreaming Education
and Consultancy**

Dreaming is a conceptual term, not only a spiritual one. The exploration of country, community and story pulls the Dreaming out of the prescriptive, closed, and decidedly post-colonial realm of ‘those’ stories that speak of how the world came to be the way we know it.

Exploring contemporary cultural competence and ongoing, meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities begins and ends with Dreaming. It begins with understanding that many Indigenous communities that we are engaging are struggling to build upon a shared history that has seen Indigenous Australians suffering intergenerational trauma, racial vilification and,

more recently, a homogenisation and tokenisation process that has infiltrated many institutions, not least our preschools, childcare services and schools.

How does the inclusion of brown construction paper, cardboard boomerangs and ‘this fellow’, speak to the realities of Aboriginal cultural diversity within Australia? Why is it that we still associate cultural diversity with colour, cultural artifact, and stereotyped, historically-focused and contextually irrelevant representations like this?

Why, when in “... 2006, 31% of Indigenous people in Australia lived in major cities; 22% lived in inner regional Australia; 23%

in outer regional Australia; 8% in remote Australia and 16% in very remote Australia”, do we still want our students to think of Indigenous people as anyone

other than who they are? We are educators, scientists and politicians.

Exploring contemporary cultural competence and ongoing, meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities begins and ends with Dreaming.

There is a mandate for educators to represent the living, breathing Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures, and not only when members of these cultures are present in their classrooms. As an Aboriginal educator, myself, I am often asked about the fact that we are expected to explore the fact that Australia is a multicultural nation. This, of course, I do not dispute, however I



Dear Carer,

As you navigate your way through a continuum of life long learning, I write to help you understand that my son has fundamental human rights, mandating that his well-being and cultural identity is not denied. Along with his family, extended family and language group, I have placed my trust in you to ‘grow him up culture strong’. So let me tell you how I perceive ‘quality care’. Similarly to our Dreaming, I see quality care as an evolving holistic, growth. It teaches us the rules for living, caring and understanding our environment, learning messages from our Ancestors and much more. It helps us to realise our potential. When you truly acknowledge the significance of our Dreaming to the centrality of our very being, you might think more carefully about how and why you read a Dreaming story to all the children in your care. You might appreciate why you must work hard to ensure it doesn’t become a token effort, something you need to ‘demonstrate’.

often ask those same educators about their knowledge and how relevant they feel it is to teach about the Sepoy Rebellions of 1857, as there is evidence that Indian people, and therefore families of Indian-Australians, in Australia since the first days of colonisation. The general response is a raised eyebrow, or a “What is that?”.

My thoughts are not that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures be explored to the exclusion of all others, but that the shared history that we, and all Australians, have on this ancient land should be a vital part of the ways in which we all explore our own sense of being. This, in turn, impacts the way we learn to belong in our space and place on country.

With support, educators and students alike will become far more aware of the land on which they live and learn.

At Wiradjuri Preschool and Child Care (Wiradjuri), where I am currently working* as the preschool teacher, a cohort of students are currently participating in some research with myself and one of the academic staff of the University of Canberra.

Once a week we venture out, beyond the fence, and into a small, planned Casuarina copse. Here we encourage the children to explore the environment, challenge themselves, question things and connect with the ‘more than human’. This comes together as a developing sense of connection to the space, and we have seen the students very quickly gain a sense of belonging, and a sense of environmental stewardship, insofar as they now demand that we travel with bag, so that they might gather (for removal) garbage that we inevitably find during our walks.

This environmental stewardship, and developing sense of relationships, are just two elements of how we engage with some thinking about contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, as we all work to tease out what it means to belong ‘on country’.

This research, my identity, the projects and learning that come from our bushwalks and the ongoing commitment I, and my colleagues at Wiradjuri have to engaging ourselves, and our students, in discussions about contemporary Indigenous cultural perspectives are all a part of our ‘New Dreaming’. It all begins, and ends, with Dreaming.

*current as at December 2014.

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The Importance of in Education and Care Settings

By Hayley Burke,
Communities@Work's
Centre of Professional
Learning and Education

When people think about science they habitually picture white lab coats, eye wear, expensive equipment and demonstrations. Many educators picture all this and more, which is why they often come to the conclusion that science in an early learning setting is too hard, too expensive and not worth the mess. For me, an avid science enthusiast, this is hard to hear... albeit an utterance heard often.

We can all picture that volcano experience and we all remember the joy of seeing the foaming red goo bubbling out of the top of a clay 'volcano' created by our preschool teacher, primary teacher and in some cases, high school science teacher (swap the clay volcano for a glass beaker). The humble volcano experiment has been tried and tested and while it is still an age old favourite and excites the young to wide eyed expressions, screams of delight and calls for an encore perhaps it is time to consider what else might be out there?

Science

So while you may have pulled out the volcano several times this year and hope that this covers the 'science' component of children's learning I ask you to consider what other options you may have?

Think about how children engage with the world around them with a natural inquisitiveness that is only a short hop, skip and a jump into the world of scientific exploration. I urge you to think about the skills children learn when they develop the passion for asking *why*? I prompt you to consider the importance of a child's delight when they discover the answers to those questions.

So, what can children learn by engaging in science experiences?

The world around us is a big, exciting and engaging learning environment. When using the word 'world' I mean it to be used interchangeably as the immediate world around us that

*I urge you to think
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we can see, taste, touch hear and interact with in a physical sense but I also refer to it as the world that is beyond. Beyond our immediate surrounds such as the community, the country and the other side of the world! This is important to consider when you think about engaging children and *how* they learn, *what* they learn and *why* they are learning about it. As with many learning opportunities, science experiences can be local and worldwide providing endless opportunities for development.

When a child observes something new within their world or notices that something has changed they often ask the nearest person a question and that question inevitably involves the word... *why*? The child may then offer an explanation as to what is happening or why it is happening. When the child is provided with the opportunity to test this theory they are given the chance to extend on their reflections. The importance of this learning is not that they reach a perfect

understanding of what is happening but that they engage in the process of observing, hypothesising and experimenting.

By engaging in science focussed experiences a child develops the ability to consider how or why something occurs and they are given the opportunity to reflect and develop this understanding in an exploratory way. By discovering the answer on their own (rather than having the answer ‘given’ to them by a well-meaning adult) children are able to satisfy their knowledge building and they can learn valuable skills on how to find answers.

So how can educators support and extend on this learning process?

Children learn through play. They learn with the support of others, on their own, in groups and in one-on-one situations. We are to engage them and incorporate interests, strengths and needs. This is the same for science experiences, here using wonderful intentional teaching skills enables us to develop specific science knowledge and skills.

As educators we are in the unique position to influence children’s learning to develop specific skills based on their needs and interests. By nurturing and responding to a child’s inquisitive nature you can support and encourage them in the world of scientific investigation. When you ensure that you are available, that you listen and that you question children you are making a concerted effort to be there



to support them through these scientific processes.

By nurturing and responding to a child's inquisitive nature you can support and encourage them in the world of scientific investigation.

During science experiences children are often guided by adults to question, research and discover. This sharing of the learning process allows children to develop through social interactions and supports them to move from their current developmental state to their potential developmental state. Many group learning opportunities occur for children to develop certain skills and

knowledge which they are then able to enhance in independent learning opportunities.

Science learning aligns beautifully with the Early Years Learning Framework and My Time Our Place as children are able to work towards many of the learning outcomes and make connections with families and within the community. Children are able to learn in a variety of ways through hands-on experiences, visually observing, communicating their learning and recording their learning. By catering for the differing learning styles, children’s varying needs can be met in a range of ways allowing them to have opportunities to succeed and enhance their desire to learn.

If you still believe science learning experiences are too expensive, messy or difficult then consider these experiences:

A 'science discovery table' or a 'touch and feel table':

- Place magnifying glasses, microscopes, specimen jars, tweezers and pipettes on a table
- Alter the 'changeable objects' depending on children's interests for example leaves, dirt, bugs, seed pods, sand, rocks, fossils etc
- Encourage children to bring in objects from the playground or home
- Make sure the table is accessible and children feel comfortable exploring with the different tools. This can be an independent experience, group experiences, educator guided or self-guided experience
- Provide opportunities for children to record their findings (record their voices, take photos and add a caption around their learning, ask them to draw or create a collage about it).



Sink and float:

- Fill a large tub of water (add food colouring or glitter if you or the children would like)
- Find different objects that might sink or float (ask children to sort through the pile to determine which might sink and which might float)
- Children can then experiment to determine which will sink and which will float
- Ask children why they think the floating objects floated and the sinking objects sunk
- Record their findings using pictures, diagrams, tallies (whatever they want).

Observation diary:

- Provide children with a large book (individually or as a single class book) which they can take outside (or use inside) and draw, write, collect and stick things into
- Ask children to think about what they are observing; is it the way the clouds move, the changing colours of the leaves, how a flower starts as a bud and then blooms into a large open flower, a spider-web, a cocoon (the

world can be an endless list of wonder and opportunities)

- Make sure you question children about what they are observing and help them to record their thoughts on the phenomena.

When you are engaging in science experiences it is important to record the processes that have occurred; record the hypothesis, research opportunities, investigation that transpired and document the results of the experiment. This will help to consolidate the skills and knowledge that has been developed and it will allow them to take pride in their learning. Ensure the children take part in the recording process as they will be able to take ownership of it and develop valuable documentation skills.

So, the next time you are called upon to go to the cupboard for baking soda, dishwashing liquid, vinegar and food colouring ask yourself these questions:

1. Will you use this as an opportunity to extend on the children's science investigation skills?
2. How will you inspire the children to continue developing their natural inquisitiveness?
3. Could this lead to an opportunity for researching other science related learning opportunities?

Perhaps you will surprise yourself and develop a scientific community of young researchers, discoverers and investigators.



Asking the Right Questions: Professional Identity in Children's Services

By Liam McNicholas
Centre Director and Early Childhood Teacher

Questions are vital in our work with children. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Framework for School Age Care (FSAC) encourage us to view children's learning holistically. Not as a block of knowledge to be "transmitted" to each child, but as a complex creation of relationships, interests and meaning.

Questioning is a valuable strategy to encourage children's natural curiosity. Providing the correct answer to a child is the well-trodden road to knowledge. Responding to children's questions with questions or curiosity of our own takes us off the main road to the wild lands of imagination and discovery. These are the paths that take us to where none have walked before.

We value questions, but how often do we question our own roles and our identity as professionals working with children? If we do, are we asking the right questions?

Here's a question we often hear: **Why did you start working in children's services?**

This is a great icebreaker, and we love to tell those stories. I'm fond of mine. I was in the first year of a Media Production degree, and needed a part-time job to

fund the meagre lifestyle of a university student.

That's my answer to that question, but now I know that it's the wrong question. Our first step doesn't tell us much about the journey that lies ahead. Other answers I've heard include "I always thought children were just cute", or "it was just an easy job to get".

The question we need to start asking ourselves is: **Why are you still working in children's services?**

This is the question that challenges our identity as professionals. Working in children's services is challenging and complex. We know that turnover is a significant issue, as is burnout. People leave our work regularly - but crucially: people stay.

The status of early childhood education has risen significantly in the last decade. Providing children with high-quality, play-based learning experiences before they start school is now seen as critical to reducing inequality and ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed in life.

Australia has acknowledged this with the introduction of the National Quality Agenda. For the first time the entire country came under the same system of regulation and quality support. In particular, the introduction of the

EYLF and the FSAC provided a national curriculum framework to support the learning of every child attending a children's service.

This makes the role of an educator more important than ever before. We know that quality children's services can dramatically improve children's chances in life, particularly for children experiencing disadvantage.

All children can benefit from the work we do, but as professionals we must be particularly mindful of how our work can affect individual children. For a number of children that we work with every day, the children's service they attend may be the most stable, safe and consistent environment available to them. For children of families experiencing poverty, violence, mental health issues, the time they spend with us is critical, not just for their education, but for their overall wellbeing.

The work we do is complex, demanding and incredibly busy. But it is essential that we all regularly take a step back to remind ourselves not why we started, but why we're still here. We have a powerful role to play in the future lives of children, whether it is fully recognised by society or not.

Ask some of your colleagues why they still do the work they do; the answers might surprise and inspire you.

Learning Environments to *Inspire*

By Victoria Petriella

Communities@Work's Centre of Professional Learning and Education

Educators often ponder how to design their spaces to achieve various learning environments that are flexible for teaching and learning. The national approved learning frameworks have assisted in guiding educators' reflective practice by including 'environments' as a key aspect of our planning, curriculum and pedagogy. This suggests that thought and intent needs to be present in our decision making and during the creation of learning spaces.

When educators ask how their environments should look, we encourage them to reflect on the statements of the learning framework practice 'learning environments or environments'. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Framework for School Age Care (FSAC) discuss the importance of learning spaces being welcoming to support learning and respond to the needs of children and families (DEEWR, 2009). This can be interpreted in many ways and a reflective question you could ask is 'what do you wish the space could look, feel, smell and taste like?' Being mindful of the design and layout of the space is important as are the resources used within the space and curriculum.

When reflecting on your spaces, you could give consideration to and question the following things:

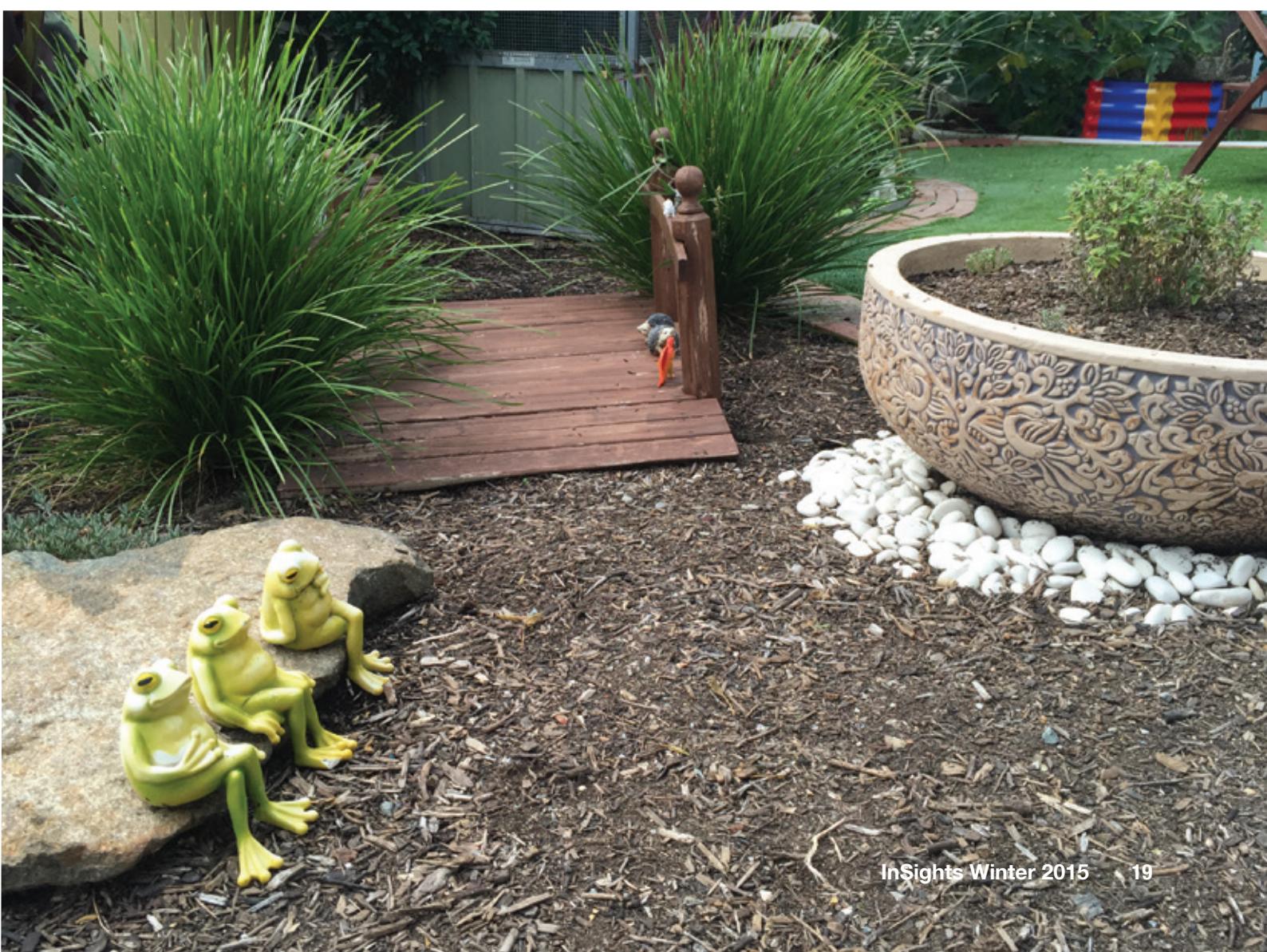
- The flow between spaces
- How do your spaces promote children's active engagement and agency?
- Are you maximising the potential of natural light, corners, passages, etc.?
- Are there clearly defined spaces?
- Are there spaces for individual, small and large group play and learning?
- Are there any conflicts between your spaces, e.g. is your quiet space/areas close to your busy/noisy spaces?
- The use of natural and processed materials
- Is there easy access to resources and play spaces?
- The reflection of children and families in your space
- Reflect on the overall aesthetics and usefulness of the space as a learning environment

Sometimes it's helpful to look to our peers and draw inspiration from their work and creativity. We've included some environments and ideas in the hope it will inspire your design and creation process.

*When looking at the learning spaces of others, consider the needs of your children and the impact of changes and materials.
Perhaps there is something within these images that inspire your thinking and creativity!*

What is your vision for your learning space/s?

Communities@Work Sandra Norris, Family Day Care



Acton Early Childhood Centre



Mocca Manuka Childcare Centre



YMCA Early Learning Centre Holder



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Communities@Work's Centre of Professional Learning and Education encompasses the ACT Professional Support Coordinator (ACT PSC) and an accomplished and respected Registered Training Organisation (RTO 88148).

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