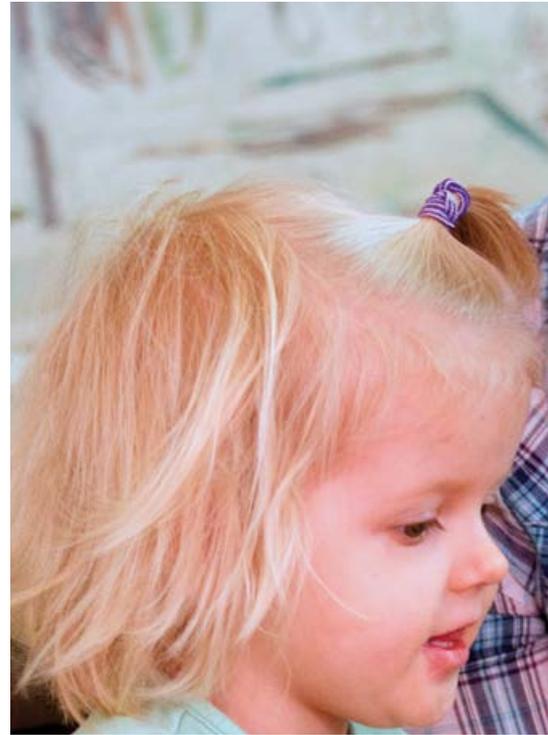




The Changing Role of the Educational Leader

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“The educational leader needs to motivate the team in a number of different ways to think about the pedagogical and curriculum decisions they are making around children and their learning.”

In 2012, along with the introduction of National Regulations and a National Quality Standard (NQS), came the requirement for a new role of ‘Educational Leader’. When looking back over an educator discussion forum from early 2012, it is interesting to note that many people in education and care services were struggling to understand the role. Catharine Hydon in a recent presentation to educational leaders and directors (Hydon 2014), suggested that it has often developed into a position where the educational leader became a ‘program checker’ - the person who ensured clear links between the service program and the approved learning frameworks such as, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) were being made.

Two years on it is interesting to see how far this role has developed and what the current understanding of the role in the sector is. Mel Simpson, Educational Leader at Clarendon Children’s Centre Co-op, now describes her role as building the capacity of other educators in her team through support and conversation.

The Educator’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia and the Guide to the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011, provide clear guidelines around what the role of an educational leader should look like. It is interesting to note that, in light of earlier perceptions of the educational leader role, neither of these documents outline that the educational leader should take on the role of checking everyone’s program. Instead the guidelines use rich, powerful and meaningful language to promote the role. Statements like ‘model professional and ethical practice’ and ‘consider how the program can be linked to the community by working with other community services such as Aboriginal Elders’ underpin the leadership practices our educational leaders should be adopting.

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Visionary Approaches to Educational Leadership

Catharine Hydon advocates the need to move away from an educational leader role being one of compliance and move toward the visionary aspect of promoting a love of learning within our team of early childhood educators and the service community. Moving forward, she suggested that we need to view the educational leader as the person who is going to take the team on a collaborative journey of asking questions and debating issues to ensure the best outcomes for all children’s learning.

The educational leader needs to motivate the team in a number of different ways to think about the pedagogical and curriculum decisions they are making around children and their learning.

This means that in practice the educational leader needs to be asking questions of the team about why they are teaching the way they do; how they make decisions about what they are teaching, and how the answers to these questions support best learning outcomes for children. To engage the team in dialogue, questions may start with:

- I wonder if we ...
- Have you thought about ...
- What do you think about ...
- Why do we ...



These discussions may happen in different ways for each service, as Cheeseman, (2012) discusses, the role of educational leader and how they will involve their team and service community will vary in each setting and reflect the context of the service.

Some practical ideas on how discussions may take place include:

- Addressing families at the AGM about how the service promotes learning through play
- Having a dedicated section/agenda item on curriculum and pedagogy at each staff meeting
- Engaging the team in a yearlong project of inquiry around different practice decisions
- Having one on one discussions with all team members during non-contact time
- Spending time with the educators and children together reflecting on learning and practice.

Practical Approaches to educational Leadership

To promote this role in a visionary sense we must not forget that there are some practicalities that will ensure that the educational leader is supported in their role. Even though the role of educational leader may vary in each education and care setting, outlined here are a few strategies which will work across all settings. These include:

- Have a detailed educational leader position description which clearly outlines what the service expectation of the role is
- Ensure the position is given to someone who has not only a wealth of experience but is also highly qualified
- Ensure that specific time is allocated for the role
- Refer to the NQF Guide to the Regulations, p.84, as a guide to what the role may look like, (Hydon 2014).

Where to from here?

Whilst the role of the educational leader has been a requirement since 2012, for many services there is still a sense of newness to the position and what it looks like for each service is still evolving. While each educational leader reflects on what their job has been and what it will become, we urge them not to lose sight of their passion for learning. When moving forward we hope that all educational leaders take time to ponder on how the role they have helps others love learning; how they will drive the enrichment of children's learning and how will they open the eyes of others to the possibilities we have in education and care. In final, a musing on the changing role of the educational leader, Catharine invites us

“when looking to the future of educational leaders... to imagine what this role is capable of.” ◀

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