

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADER



An interview with Karen Schneider
Educational Leader at Monash Children's
Centre Co-operative.

*This centre is a 100-place community
managed long day care centre on the
grounds of a university in Clayton.*

'I love this role ... I love this job ... I love this industry ... there has been a lot of positive change over the last few years. It's exciting and we just have to keep our foot on the pedal!'

What qualifications and experience has equipped you to take on the role of educational leader?

I have worked in early childhood for 12 years. I started as a kindergarten assistant and studied my diploma while I was doing this. My first contact with this centre was as a student on placement and I loved it straight away. The philosophy of the centre fits well with my personal values and approach to child care. I came to work here soon after I got my diploma and have continued to study ever since. I have worked with our three-year kinder group, our toddler group and am now in my fourth-year job sharing the kindergarten teacher position in the funded kindergarten program. I am now studying a Masters in Education.

How has the Educational Leader role evolved at your service?

I was appointed to work a day per week as the centre's pedagogical leader at the beginning of 2011. We were all becoming familiar with the new terminology and concepts embedded in *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) – and some of us struggled to get our tongues around the term 'pedagogical'. During one attempt the word 'pathological' slipped out instead and since then it has been a centre in-joke that I have the role of 'pathological liar'!

Including regular relief staff, we have around 40 educators and a large proportion of educators have English as an additional language. It was felt that this 'pathological liar' role was needed to ensure that this large staff group were resourced appropriately to explore and understand the EYLF.

At this service we have a leadership team that includes the coordinators as well as educators with leadership responsibilities in areas of curriculum development, sustainability and inclusion. With the introduction of the requirement to have an assigned educational leader, it was agreed that I would take this on as part of my role as pedagogical leader. I work closely with this leadership team in achieving the goals of this role.

What do you do in your role as educational leader/pathological liar?

We have a strong commitment here to supporting every educator to be the best they can be and to ensuring that everyone has a voice.

I support educators here to continue their professional education through study. I help them locate appropriate courses and am available to help them with their studies as they progress through. I am able to spend time talking with educators and helping them link academic language or new terminology from the EYLF to their everyday practice. Through professional conversations and discussions at team meetings we help educators recognise the knowledge and skills that they all have and use this as a base to build on.

Sometimes, if educators are dealing with a tricky situation, I will find some current research for them to read, think about and share with families. Most of our families are linked to the university and many have academic roles and are used to academic language. Consequently, with this community of families, using current research articles is an effective way of building a common understanding of issues and working in partnership to support their children.

Along with others in the leadership team here, I work to support the development of a culture of reflective practice.

How has the centre encouraged a culture of reflective practice?

Making time at team meetings for professional conversations has been important. This began with unpacking the vision, principles and practices of the EYLF and making it meaningful for us in our setting. We continue on with time for sharing and discussing successes and dilemmas so we can keep learning from each other.

As well as each child having a learning journal, each room has a 'Reflections Book' and everyone is encouraged to contribute.

An important shift has been to not just describe the good work we have done with the children, but to write our stories with questions that we don't have the answers to. As we 'wonder' about an issue with colleagues and families we are letting people know that we are not the holders of all knowledge and are really interested in others' points of view. Our curriculum development leader has developed a list of reflective questions for educators to refer to as they write up documentation. This tool has been useful as a prompt to help educators write up learning stories in a reflective way.

It is important to acknowledge that there are so many different ways of seeing things and not one right way to do anything.

REFERENCES

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, ACT

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