THE EDUCATIONAL LEADER RESOURCE

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Introduction

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is an independent national authority committed to promoting and fostering continuous quality improvement in approved education and care services, and publishing resources that support the clildren's education and care sector in understanding the National Quality Framework.

ACECQA's vision is for children in Australia to have the best start in life, and nearly 16,000 services across Australia are assessed and rated under the National Quality Standard, delivering quality education and care to over a million children.

Educational leaders are highly valued and instrumental in establishing, maintaining and continually improving quality education and care for Australia's children.

This resource has been developed to help clarify what is expected of this important role (Part One), show how it supports continuous improvement (Part Two), and provide other ideas for personal development and reflection (Part Three).

At the end, there is information about the many authors who generously contributed to the development of this resource for ACECQA.

This resource will continue to grow. Further information and more resources are freely available to all educational leaders and educators at **www.acecqa.gov.au**.

> *Sharing valuable insights into the quality outcomes the educational leadership role is delivering for children, and inspiring the educational leaders of tomorrow reinforces the value of quality education and care.*
>
> **— Gabrielle Sinclair,**
> Chief Executive Officer, ACECQA

Inspiring people working in children's education and care to become educational leaders is in our national interest. Building their confidence, skills and knowledge, and continuing to grow creativity and innovation across the sector will embed a culture of continuous quality improvement.

This commitment to developing and supporting teams to achieve the best outcomes for children is the very heart of educational leadership.

> *The role's focus is on outcomes and relationships, and the National Quality Standard provides flexibility for educational leaders to be creative and innovative, to best support quality outcomes for the children, families and educators at the service.*
>
> **— Rhonda Livingstone,**
> National Educational Leader, ACECQA

PART ONE

The role of an educational leader: Expectations and requirements

THE ROLE OF AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER: EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Since its inception in the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012, the role of the educational leader in children's education and care services across Australia has revolved around guiding educators in maximising learning, development and wellbeing outcomes for children.

Embedding the role in the NQF reflects what is already well understood in other educational sectors—paying particular attention to pedagogy and assigning the responsibility of educational practice to a position of leadership ensures the learning and wellbeing of children is upheld as the key purpose at all times.

A vision for the role of the educational leader

The vision for educational leadership, as a mechanism for improvement, recognises that the role is much more than the sum of its parts. More than a requirement—although these are critical tools to ensure a consistent approach across the country—educational leadership is about driving change for the better.

> *Leadership is about motivating others to follow ship—that is, effective leaders motivate, inspire and aspire others to realise shared goals* (Rodd, 2013, p. 36).

Not only are educational leaders agents of change on the journey to exemplary education and care provision, they also promote a sense of professionalism for the sector now and in the future.

> *Pedagogical leaders can make learning visible to others and challenge assumptions that working with young children is not babysitting* (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley & Shepherd, 2017, p. 118).

It is recognised that the educational leader is not the only driver of change, but change for the better needs champions who lead practice and have the courage to imagine what is possible.

Research and the role of educational leadership

> *Studies show that leadership can positively impact on the quality of the centre as a workplace, the quality of education provided and the developmental outcomes achieved by children over time* (Waniganayake et al., 2017).

Educational leadership, its role in outcomes for learners, and how it is best undertaken, has long been the subject of research. While much of this research has been generated in the primary and secondary school space, increasing numbers of researchers and policy-makers are examining this role in the early childhood and outside school hours care contexts. The findings of this collective research point to the role's significant capacity to support improvements in teaching, learning and children's wellbeing, and therefore how outcomes for children are realised.

An examination of some of the emergent literature highlights the following key points:

- Strong leadership is a key characteristic of effective early childhood settings, with trained 'curriculum leader' teachers having the greatest impact on setting quality and children's educational outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004).

- Analysis of the most effective of these settings identified key characteristics of effective early years leadership practice (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

- Educational leaders require an understanding of children's learning and how to promote that learning. They also benefit from understanding how adults learn and develop in the workplace (Ord et al., 2013).

- Educational leadership is best understood as a practice 'concerned with the actions and the processes of constructing or deconstructing knowledge according to the context of the learning groups and individuals (ecology of the community), and recognising the set of social axes' (Male & Palaiologou, 2015). These 'social axes' include values, beliefs, culture and external influences such as mass media and technologies.

These findings echo a growing understanding of the leadership styles and approaches that support effective practice.

Jillian Rodd's formative work in the 1990s described a distributed model that enabled whole teams to take up leadership tasks in collaborative ways (Rodd, 1998). More recent publications build on this model to imagine leadership as a transformational process that engages hearts and minds to orientate teams towards a deep commitment to change for the better (Waniganayake et al., 2017).

ACECQA: Leadership and management in education and care services: An analysis of Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standard

This occasional paper offers insights into children's education and care services quality ratings for Quality Area 7 (Leadership and service management).

www.acecqa.gov.au/media/25871

While Quality Area 7 focuses on leadership and administrative systems, it has a direct influence on all other quality areas of the NQS. How a service addresses different aspects of the NQS—for example, how it embeds and promotes children's health and safety in relation to Quality Area 2—will be shaped by its leadership team and service management. Similarly, how a service fosters and commits to continuous improvement will influence the way it implements quality improvement in all aspects of its operations and management (ACECQA, 2017, p. 6).

The role of the educational leader in continuous improvement

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea (Antoine de Saint-Exupery).

At its most aspirational, the role of an educational leader is a key enabling factor in the delivery of quality teaching and learning experiences for children in education and care services around the country. As the above quote suggests, asserting the role as that of an advocate for work with children—an opportunity to harness the extraordinary joy and enormous privilege that comes from being connected with children's learning and wellbeing—will help drive the commitment to continuous improvement.

For example, in a service where educators might be feeling overwhelmed by everyday practice, or seem disconnected from each other and the idea of quality, the educational leader can act as an enthusiastic reminder that we, like the children we work with, are always seeking to reach our full potential and realise the enormity of our capability.

Educational leaders play a central role in supporting a culture of continuous improvement, empowering their staff to strive towards practice that consistently delivers the best outcomes in terms of children's learning and wellbeing, and communication with families and the community. As a champion for quality, the leader pursues excellence in all aspects of the educational program and practice, and inspires others to do the same. A shared commitment to continuous improvement by all educators is a mark of exemplary practice.

The educational leader must become a highly valued part of any children's education and care service that aims to uphold the rights and wellbeing of children. The role of the educational leader, as described by the National Regulations (New South Wales Government, 2018) and the National Quality Standard (NQS) (ACECQA, 2017), is of an effective leader, rather than a monitor or compliance officer. The aim of the educational leader is to support educators with technical practice, compliance and procedure; and lift their gaze to refocus their energy on understanding the limitless potential, and upholding the rights and wellbeing of children.

The following case study and online material offer insight into the potential of an educational leader to build service-wide support for continuous improvement and lead processes that effect change.

Case study

Focus on continuous improvement

In 2017, Manuka Occasional Childcare Centre Association (MOCCA) reflected on the role of educational leadership and how it could best suit our context. As Pedagogical Leader, I worked with the centre's Director and Nominated Supervisor, Robby McGarvey, to create a position statement that reflected our philosophy and would help us realise our vision. This position statement aimed to have the person in the role lead the development of the curriculum through the establishment of clear goals and expectations for teaching and learning, and promote a positive organisational culture by building a professional learning community with a strong commitment to continuous improvement.

One aspect of my role was to guide our self-assessment process, which included a legislative compliance assessment, practice audits, policy and procedure review. I also conducted a situational analysis in relation to Australian Early Development Census community profile data, ACECQA NQF Snapshots, our previous assessment and rating report, and Australian Bureau of Statistics data as a few examples. Strategic planning was also an important part of self-review and planning for quality, and this included bringing together information from our business plan, Reconciliation Action Plan and our Strategic Inclusion Plan. Critical reflection strongly informed our approach to continuous improvement throughout all aspects of our work.

Relationships were our starting point for everything. To create change, inspire others, challenge ourselves and continue enriching each aspect of our work with children, families, educators and the community, relationships are critical. This focus on relationships enabled us to create a collaborative approach to self-assessment and planning for quality improvement, and included a deep and genuine partnership with our children, families, educators and community.

Seeing children as capable, competent, active citizens and rights-holders, we wanted to find a way to ensure their voices would be heard and used in an ethical way to influence policy and continuous improvement within our organisation. Using the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2015) we consulted with children in relation to our strengths and opportunities for improvement. When it came time to document our Quality Improvement Plan, we included this information through images, work samples and quotes from children.

Our educator team was also actively involved in ongoing reflection and planning for quality. We vigorously protected planning and reflection time, not only through non-contact time but also through regular opportunities to come together as a whole team and room teams to reflect and plan together. Our meetings were always pedagogically focused and included static agenda items such as quality improvement and reconciliation. Our approach to professional learning was influenced by our self-assessment, vision and philosophy.

As the pedagogical leader, my role had included a focus on professional reading, research and networking with sector colleagues. Through these strategies and networks, I was able to access a range of resources and tools produced by various agencies and organisations, which helped me lead our professional inquiry projects.

By taking these steps, we have created a culture of inquiry that has filtered not only throughout our educator team, but also to our families and management committee. The MOCCA leadership team and parent management committee value the role of educational leadership, and meetings and discussions at this level also include a pedagogical focus in addition to operational needs.

— Rowena Muir
Pedagogical Leader (Australian Capital Territory)

Resources

ACECQA: Quality Improvement Plan

ACECQA's website provides further guidance and direction on the quality improvement process and on completing a Quality Improvement Plan.

www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment/quality-improvement-plans

ECA Learning Hub video: Quality improvement process

In this 'Talking About Practice' video, Early Childhood Australia (ECA) talks to two services about their approaches to quality improvement and how these have developed and changed since the completion of their first Quality Improvement Plan.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1L__MYbYdA

Australian Early Development Census resources

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a nation-wide data collection of early childhood development at the time children commence their first year of full-time school. The AEDC user guide leads the early childhood sector through the steps they might take while responding to AEDC data for their community.

https://www.aedc.gov.au/resources/detail/aedc_userguide-early-childhood-sector

The educational leader: National Regulations and the National Quality Standard

As a starting point in the process of understanding the role of an educational leader, it is important to clarify the expectations and responsibilities as prescribed by the National Regulations (New South Wales Government, 2018).

The National Regulations expect that the approved provider of a children's education and care service 'must designate, in writing, a suitably qualified and experienced educator, co-ordinator or other individual as educational leader at the service to lead the development and implementation of educational programs in the service' (Regulation 118).

In addition, Regulation 148 requires that the staff record must include the name of the person designated as the educational leader, in accordance with Regulation 118.

The specifics of this requirement can also be found on the ACECQA website: **www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-law-regulations/national-regulations**.

The *Guide to the National Quality Framework* (ACECQA, 2018, p. 303) outlines that the primary requirements of the educational leader role are '*to:*

- *collaborate with educators and provide curriculum direction and guidance*

- *support educators to effectively implement the cycle of planning to enhance programs and practices*

- *lead the development and implementation of an effective educational program in the service*

- *ensure that children's learning and development are guided by the learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and/or the Framework for School Age Care or other approved learning frameworks'.*

In addition to the National Regulations, the NQS (ACECQA, 2018, p. 303) specifies the expectations of the educational leader within a service as follows:

> **Standard 7.2:** Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community.

> **Element 7.2.2:** The educational leader is supported and leads the development and implementation of the educational program and assessment and planning cycle.

Although the role of educational leader is specifically articulated in Quality Area 7, it is important to recognise the interrelationship between Quality Area 7 and Quality Area 1. Analysis of the assessment and rating process to date has confirmed a fundamental link between the effectiveness of leadership and service management and the effectiveness of the educational program and practice, especially in support of the development and implementation of the education program, and assessment and planning cycle.

With this in mind, educational leaders and approved providers should ensure that decision-making supports a connection between these two quality areas. For example, an approved provider might hold regular leadership meetings to reinforce the connection between how a service is managed and approaches to teaching and learning that respect children and their families. Or an approved provider might invite the educational leader to attend governance meetings to promote the learning program and ensure decisions are made with quality outcomes in mind. The educational leader's role should also be evident in educators' practice for Quality Area 1: standards 1.1 (Program), 1.2 (Practice) and 1.3 (Assessment and planning), as well as all the elements of these standards.

Resources

Defining the leadership role

The following resources define and describe the role of the educational leader in detail. They will be relevant to professionals who are beginning their journey in the role, or during a review of how the role is developing.

ACECQA: National Quality Standard

This webpage provides further guidance and understanding of the NQS and each of the seven quality areas.

www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard

ACECQA: Educational leadership

This webpage provides information on the role of educational leadership, the National Educational Leader and additional educational leader resources.

www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/educational-leadership

ACECQA: We Hear You: The role of the educational leader series

The final instalment of the series focuses on the way educational leaders work with teams to set goals—for both teaching and learning—that help bring the program to life.

https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/2016/10/06/the-role-of-the-educational-leader-part-1/

ACECQA information sheet: The role of the educational leader

This factsheet provides an overview of the role of the educational leader, tips for selecting and supporting an educational leader, and strategies for those already in the role.

www.acecqa.gov.au/media/26531

ACECQA video: The role of the educational leader

In this video, leaders from family day care, outside school hours care as well as long day care discuss the role of the educational leader.

https://youtu.be/fRog7esEEKw

ACECQA video: Leadership in education and care

Dr Joce Nuttal discusses leadership in children's education and care services, and how it impacts the quality areas of the NQS.

https://youtu.be/m3REgglzvpA

Undertaking the role: The educational leader's perspective

The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers (Ralph Nader).

The role of an educational leader is simultaneously exciting and challenging, yet full of possibilities. The work includes supporting educators in their everyday work and on their continual quality improvement journey—inspiring them to see the possibilities, try new approaches and take professional, calculated risks.

Some leaders may find the task of encouraging staff to maintain a deep commitment to this endeavour challenging, particularly if existing programs need significant change. But a lot can be achieved when the learning, health and wellbeing of children are given prominence, and leaders support a culture that expects high-quality educational programs and practice.

In practice, the role of educational leadership combines supporting exciting shifts in thinking, and overseeing often complex processes that explore the need for change. Applying skill, sensitivity and a strength-based approach can help the educational leader recognise and build on each educator's strengths and interests.

Note: When considering undertaking the role of educational leader, ask the approved provider for a clear and contextual role description that specifies the expectations and parameters of the role, as described in the National Regulations and the NQS (see p. 12). Also enquire about how the role will be supported.

Being a leader

Great leaders are also leading learners. If leaders don't learn, then the learning in the organizations that they lead is not likely to flourish (Sahlberg, 2018, p. xi).

This section offers a series of ideas that seek to understand the expectations and possibilities of the role from the perspective of the educational leader.

The Guide to the NQF (ACECQA, 2018, pp. 304–305) provides a helpful starting point when considering the expectations and possibilities of the role.

The educational leader provides guidance on educators' pedagogy and professional practice, by supporting educators to build and nurture secure respectful relationships with children and families, and assisting educators to articulate how and why they make decisions about the curriculum/program.

Key aspects of the educational leader's role in leading, developing and implementing the program include:

- *mentoring and supporting educators' understanding of educational program and practice, such as:*
  - » *how theory supports best practice in all parts of the program*
  - » *building relationships and interactions with children to assist their learning through play and leisure-based programs*
  - » *intentional teaching strategies and thoughtful, deliberate educator practices that support children's wellbeing, learning and development*
  - » *routines and transitions*
  - » *providing for continuity of learning when children transition to, from or within the service*
  - » *developing documentation that is meaningful, relevant and promotes reflection on educators' pedagogy and practice*
- *drawing on a range of understandings about learning theories and styles, as well as educators' strengths, to develop educators' professional skills and confidence*
- *encouraging and empowering educators to draw on their creativity, intuition, knowledge of child development, as well as children's knowledge, identity and culture in their teaching and planning for learning*
- *liaising with other early childhood education and care professionals (such as therapists, maternal and child health nurses, and early childhood intervention specialists)*
- *assisting educators to make connections in the community, including with diverse cultures and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Elders or their representatives.*

Note: A key strength of the NQF is that it recognises the importance of context, including the articulation of leadership. Each setting, educational leader, educator and community is different and requires specifically local responses. While the legislation and NQS are not prescriptive about the role, the guidance in this Resource and others is meant to suggest a range of strategies that educational leaders might find helpful.

Thinking of yourself as a leader

The importance of leadership within education and care services is now well recognised as a major contributing factor in the delivery of quality outcomes for children and families (Waniganayake et al., 2017). So, becoming an educational leader is a significant step up into a position of responsibility. Being selected for the role (and agreeing to undertake it) is an important recognition of personal skills, knowledge and attributes.

In recent times, research has helped clarify the dimensions of the role and the way in which organisations and individuals can use transformational approaches to maximise outcomes. Despite the growing strength of this narrative, stepping into a leadership role can be a challenging undertaking: relationships with colleagues change, expectations are redefined, and capabilities stretched.

There are many resources designed to assist leaders in successfully navigating the transition into a leadership role. In *Effective leadership in the early years sector*, Siraj-Blatchford & Manni (2007, p. 12) highlight the following key strategies:

- *'Identifying and articulating a collective vision*
- *Ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals*
- *Effective communication*
- *Encouraging reflection*
- *Commitment to ongoing professional development*
- *Monitoring and assessing practice*
- *Distributed leadership*
- *Building a learning community and team culture*
- *Encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships*
- *Leading and managing: striking the balance'.*

Educational leaders will benefit from wider reading about the place of leadership in the sector and from consideration of what leadership means to them, personally and in the context of their workplace. The references at the end of this section (p. 74) are a good starting point.

Reflective questions

- Who are the leaders that have inspired you? Why? What do they do? What don't they do?
- When did you first think of yourself as a leader?
- What sort of a leader would you like to be? How do you want others to think of you?
- Which of your current skills would help you lead others?

Being a role model

> *Leadership begins with you … It is unlikely that you will be able to inspire, arouse, excite and motivate others unless you can show who you are, what you stand for, and what you can and cannot do* (Goffee & Jones, 2006).

Becoming an educational leader is about assuming a clear and public identity as a leader and role model to others. Educational leaders are expected to 'talk the talk and walk the walk', as the saying goes. This doesn't mean that they must be practice-perfect in all matters relating to the program, but they will need to show a willingness to be reflective, explore new ideas, value feedback and shift practices where required.

It is also helpful to regularly reflect on how quality practice is understood and how it evolves. Ongoing reflective discussions with the approved provider will also help to build a shared understanding of and support for the educational leader responsibilities, particularly as a role model.

As a starting point for reflection, educational leaders might ask themselves how they demonstrate or role-model the guiding principles of the NQF. For instance, as leaders and educators, they might want to consider how they:

- uphold the rights and best interests of the child
- view children as successful, competent and capable learners
- ensure equity, inclusion and diversity underpins their work
- value Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- ensure the role of families is respected and supported
- demonstrate best practice in the provision of education and care services.

Organising the role

One of the challenges that educational leaders might face is in organising the role. The demands of the role and the required commitment for continuous improvement may make the scope of the work seem overwhelming. Deciding on a range of approaches (Figure 1.1 on p. 19) can optimise time management and ensure that the purpose of the role is maintained. Each educational leader will organise time differently, depending on the context, but implementing a combination of actions may help map out the workload. These include:

- **observing** educators' practice
- **collaborating** with colleagues—individuals, teams, children, families, external organisations or agencies
- **reporting** to the leadership and governance teams on quality improvement as well as preparing documentation for the NQS, such as the Quality Improvement Plan
- **mentoring/supporting** individuals and groups
- **planning** for improvement actions
- **researching** practice and new ideas.

Figure 1.1: Organisational tasks

Reflective questions

- What are your challenges in undertaking these actions?
- How is your time organised?
- Looking at Figure 1.1, where do you think you are spending most of your time?
- Is it an effective use of your time? Does it support the team?
- What changes might you make? Why?

Linking with networks

Professional networks are a powerful way to connect with others in similar roles, to exchange ideas, share challenges and celebrate successes. Being the only educational leader in an education and care service can be isolating, and this may sometimes make it difficult to see the work in perspective. Comparing strategies and perspectives with other educational leaders can help clarify expectations, extend knowledge and strengthen educational leaders' ability to advocate for changes or further action.

There are many networks around the country, including those established by associations, peak bodies and organisations, local government, agencies and like-minded individuals. Find out if there are any relevant professional networks operating in your local area. If there are none, you may like to consider advocating for or starting one. Ways to build and run an effective network include:

- meeting regularly by deciding on a schedule that suits all members of the network
- meeting at a service initially—and if the group grows too big, asking a local government, school or community service to allow the use of their meeting rooms
- appointing a small group to organise the meetings, and rotating the responsibility
- collating an email list or using an online social media networking space
- making sure there is adequate time for talking and sharing ideas during meetings
- ensuring time is managed well if there are guest speakers, i.e. limiting their time to make sure members get to share their ideas and challenges.

Case study

Connecting with colleagues to broaden horizons

We work in separate long day care services in suburban Brisbane. We studied together a while ago and have remained connected ever since. When we got appointed to educational leadership positions, we decided to try and make a regular time to catch up and share ideas. We managed to stick to the plan and, in passing, let others know we met to network. We soon received a couple of emails asking if colleagues could join us. Realising that this was becoming more than just a catch-up over coffee, we agreed to evolve our informal meetings into a local educational leader network hosted by Amelia's service. We set up a closed Facebook group and exchanged emails. The group now meets four times a year.

— Amelia and Tash
Educational Leaders (Queensland)

Case study

Sharing ideas to build confidence

I work for a large outside school hours care provider. The provider has 41 programs (before and after school care, as well as vacation care) with 19 educational leaders. As part of the continuous improvement strategy for the whole organisation, I bring together the educational leader team once a term to share ideas and challenges. So far, it has been a great way to build confidence and capacity.

— Rod
Area manager (Western Australia)

Leading others

Building relationships with colleagues

An essential part of becoming and being an educational leader is building respectful and supportive relationships with the team. This includes getting to know the team members personally and monitoring their progress in relation to the expectations of the education and care program, and assessment and planning cycle.

Educational leaders who presume they know what educators want or need, or who make decisions without consulting staff, will find it difficult to make improvements. Similarly, if educational leaders place too much emphasis on everyone being on the 'same page', they may find themselves spending too much time on interpersonal relationships instead of the educational programs.

Cultivating relationships is about establishing an effective working dynamic. The process of building and nurturing relationships is discussed further in Part Two of this Resource. But to summarise, an educational leader could implement the following strategies to build respectful and trusting relationships, which have a clear purpose and direction:

- When first starting in the role, organise a meeting and take some time to clarify the role. Invite the team/s to indicate what support they would like from the educational leader; clarify what is within the job description, and your aspirations for the role. Clearly articulate the matters that could be difficult to deliver, or those that fall outside the expectations of the role.

- Make time to meet with every team member individually (educators and other staff such as cooks and administrators) to discuss the vision for supporting children's learning and wellbeing in the service and how they can be supported in being a part of that work.

- Schedule regular catch-up meetings with individuals and teams to talk through the everyday practice that supports teaching, learning, wellbeing and, in particular, the expectations of the planning process outlined in Quality Area 1.

- Communicate your availability for unscheduled meetings or for offering support in the program to address specific challenges or difficulties (this may have implications for staffing and will need to be clarified with the approved provider).

- Adopt a listening stance. Listen more than telling or reminding. Avoid becoming the 'pedagogical police'. Educators need support, suggestions and a listening ear rather than a monitoring eye.

- Ask for feedback from the team about the support being offered. This might be informal, through catch-ups with teams and individuals, or more formally in a survey or review process.

- If issues arise in relation to educators' wellbeing, and these are impacting the educational program, encourage them to talk to the approved provider (or a representative) to seek further assistance.

Communicating with staff

> ***Successful leadership in early childhood is a matter of communication more than anything else*** (Rodd, 2013, p. 63).

Communicating in effective and compelling ways is an essential skill for educational leaders. It is crucial to ensure that all educators and staff members understand expectations and are informed about any changes in direction, as this helps build a shared understanding of educational program and practice.

Strategies for better communication include:

- using a variety of tools to suit the context and the strengths and needs of educators—there is no one-size-fits-all approach
- ensuring there are regular opportunities for flow of information between educators and the educational leader
- considering the importance of non-verbal communication
- sending regular updates to staff, especially in larger teams or in teams where educators are separately located, such as in family day care settings
- using social media or app-based products to provide regular and timely updates and ideas to staff, and to generate conversations and feedback
- allocating a standing agenda item to the educational leader update in staff meetings
- using informal communications, such as incidental conversation with educators or families, to reinforce key messages.

Resources

International Leadership Research Forum resources:

- Thinking and learning about leadership—early childhood research from Australia, Finland and Norway

  This link brings together the work of 20 educational leadership researchers from Australia, Finland and Norway.

  http://ilrfec.org/publication/thinking-and-learning-about-leadership-early-childhood-research-from-australia-finland-and-norway/

- Researching leadership in early childhood education

  This resource focuses on leadership research in early childhood education and care settings in seven countries from different parts of the world, including Australia, Azerbaijan, England, Finland, Norway, Taiwan, and Trinidad and Tobago.

  http://ilrfec.org/publication/researching-leadership-in-early-childhood-education/

Early Childhood Resource Hub

www.ecrh.edu.au

The Early Childhood Resource Hub (ECRH) website features many resources developed by sector experts that explore aspects of the approved learning frameworks and support quality standards for children's education and care services.

- Quality Area 7 (Governance and Leadership)

    ECRH provides access to a range of resources as well as an overview of Quality Area 7.

    www.ecrh.edu.au/national-quality-standard/quality-area-7-leadership-and-service-management#/

Every Child **magazine: 'What does leadership look like in early childhood settings?'**

In this *Every Child* article, Jenny Lewis and Jenny Hill provide an overview of the Early Childhood Australia *Leadership Capability Framework*.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/every-child-magazine/every-child-index/every-child-vol-18-4-2012/leadership-look-like-early-childhood-settings/

ACECQA: Educational leadership and team building

This factsheet looks at how educational leaders can collaborate with staff and establish clear goals for teaching and learning.

https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-04/QA7_EducationalLeadershipAndTeamBuilding_0.pdf

New Zealand Ministry of Education: Leadership in early childhood education

These leader resources aim to inspire leadership conversations and actions to ensure that children benefit fully from early childhood education.

www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/specific-initiatives/health-and-safety/leadership/

TED Talks

TED Talks videos cover a wide range of topics, including many on the concept of leading and leading others in engaging ways. You can search for talks or podcasts that relate to a specific area of leadership, such as motivating people. Follow the below link and start searching.

www.ted.com/talks

Meeting with the team

Engaging with educators and other service staff to discuss matters related to teaching, learning and child wellbeing is an essential function of educational leader practice. Meetings provide the opportunity to determine shared understandings, identify issues and challenges, and agree on practice strategies that enhance quality and support outcomes for children and their families. To make a meeting effective, purposeful and more likely to lead to action and change, consider:

- scheduling the time in advance, if possible—spontaneous meetings might be needed from time to time, but pre-planning assists in staff management

- having a clear purpose to make sure the meeting has direction

- having an agenda, a clear set of items to talk about—distribute the agenda in advance and provide an opportunity for adding agenda items, if appropriate

- appointing a lead—the educational leader may be best placed to lead these meetings, however, as the team becomes more confident, this role may be shared

- setting a timeframe for the meeting and sticking to it

- taking notes/minutes and circulating these, so agreed actions are transparent

- sharing the notes/minutes with others who are unable to attend

- holding a walking, standing or café meeting to invigorate educators and staff.

While there are no set or required meetings that an educational leader needs to hold, the following types of meetings may help better support educator practice. The number, timing and structure of each meeting should respond to the setting and the needs of the team. Examples include meetings with:

- the whole team (educators and other staff such as cooks and administrators)—to discuss the approach to teaching, learning and children's wellbeing

- individual educators—held in a mentoring capacity to support practice changes or the implementation of new ideas

- small groups of educators, for example, those who work with particular age groups or with responsibility for one aspect such as the before-school program

- external support agencies, pre-service training providers or other local organisations—to progress partnerships and develop new practices or approaches to the program

- the approved provider—to discuss issues that affect quality improvement or that have operational implications, for example, educators may have identified a difficulty using an app-based planning tool that needs further training; or educators may have requested a review of excursion procedures.

Reflective questions

- How would you assess the effectiveness of your meetings? Why?
- Are there systems in place to support the meetings?
- How collaborative are the meetings? How do you ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute?
- What other ideas might suit your setting?

Resources

Edutopia Video: 60 second strategy—stand-up meetings

Faculty members from a school in Philadelphia, US, show how they hold their stand-up meetings.

https://youtu.be/bNe5Xx42meQ

ECRH: Conducting staff meetings—agendas and outcomes (designed for OSHC)

This resource guides educators and staff from outside school hours care (OSHC) settings in planning and running staff meetings. It is also relevant to other service types within the children's education and care sector.

www.ecrh.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/ipsp/conducting-staff-meetings-agendas-and-outcomes.pdf?sfvrsn=6

Leading learning circles for educators engaged in study

This resource aims to help educational leaders supporting in-service educators who are undertaking study and further learning.

https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/leading-learning-circles-educators-engaged-study-0

Responding to challenging people

In any role, professionals will often have to face people who challenge, protest or agitate. Sometimes, looking at opposing points of view may help make changes that are more inclusive and better serve a team's shared purpose. At other times, conflicting assertions may only serve to derail and upset the good work undertaken by a team. In both these circumstances, educational leaders are encouraged to adopt a listening approach rather than a defensive approach. Showing a willingness to listen may help take the 'sting' out of the situation and create an environment where resolutions and solutions can be found.

Dealing with challenging people is not about winning or getting the upper hand; it is about finding useful and shared approaches that enable both parties to move forward. For leaders, this could sometimes require compromising and, at other times, standing firm on agreed ways of practice. A helpful rule of thumb is to share the decision-making as much as possible. A power 'with' rather than a power 'over' approach—in which leaders share the decision-making and come to agreed ways forward—is always preferable and far more inclusive. This approach might help find new, previously unthought-of solutions.

If a matter cannot be resolved in a timely fashion, escalating it to the approved provider or their representative might be required. Typically, educational leaders are not responsible for performance management—although some do undertake dual roles—and should shift the process to the person responsible for that task at the service. Making it clear to the people involved that the matter has been referred to another person will help set boundaries. This will keep the educational leader space free from performance management and operational- or compliance-related conflict.

There are many online resources and short courses that address how to work with challenging people and develop better practices. Generally, the advice offered identifies broad strategies like:

- maintaining a respectful approach; treating behaviour that is difficult or rude with respect and courteousness

- separating the person from the problems or issue—in many cases, the issues may be valid and need addressing

- listening before defending a particular way of doing things; trying to see things from a different perspective

- setting out the facts; jointly looking at observable evidence that might impact decisions

- exploring possibilities together and being open to the idea or a way of doing things differently.

(Adapted from **www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_81.htm**)

Resources

MindTools: Online newsletter

MindTools is a UK-based on-demand career and management learning solutions platform. Its free eNewsletter provides a range of resources to help educational leaders and approved providers understand how teams work. It also has other useful tips to improve practice.

www.mindtools.com

ACECQA video: A critical reflection planning meeting

In this video, Warrawee Care Centre staff members demonstrate how a service can use critical reflection in its planning meetings.

https://youtu.be/UTAMkYmFVAo

Reflective questions

- Think of a time when you have experienced difficulty working with a particular person.
- Looking back, what do you think they were trying to achieve?
- What got in the way of your communication?
- What were the enabling factors?
- What else could you have done?
- What could you have done differently?

Mentoring

Being a mentor to individual members of the educator team can be a key feature of effective educational leadership. It is an extension of building supportive relationships with teams and is based on trust and a shared goal of improving practice.

Besides offering mentoring to the educator team, educational leaders might consider sourcing a mentor for themselves. These formal arrangements ensure that everyone is offered time for critical self-reflection.

The benefits of mentoring in education and care settings are now well understood and there are a growing number of resources that help to describe what the role looks like and how it is supported in children's education and care settings. Mentoring is discussed in more detail in Part Two of this Resource.

Resources

The mentoring role

While many of the resources listed below originate from primary and secondary school settings, they can be easily adapted to suit the early childhood, family day care and outside school hours care contexts.

ACECQA: We Hear You—New educator survival guide

Newly graduated educators can face a daunting experience, navigating the complex 'mini-world' of a new workplace. Sally Burt writes about two key survival strategies for new educators to support this journey into the profession: teamwork and mentoring.

https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/2017/03/30/new-educator-survival-guide/

ACECQA: We Hear You—Leader as mentor

The We Hear You blog post explores how educational leaders drive quality practice by working to lead, coach, mentor and inspire educators towards continuous improvement and delivering quality outcomes for children and families.

https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/2017/02/08/leader-as-mentor/

Queensland Department of Education: DETE mentoring handbook

This resource details the process of being a mentor or mentee, and explains how to work with others to develop important skills, knowledge and understandings.

https://eprints.qut.edu.au/65583/4/65583.pdf

Victorian Education Department: *Mentoring Capability Framework*

The Victorian Education Department's *Mentoring Capability Framework* supports the learning and development of provisionally registered teachers, but the information is also applicable to educational leaders at a broader level. It describes the expectations and behaviours of mentors and mentees in successful professional learning relationships.

www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/profdev/ mentoringcapabilityframework.pdf

AITSL: Resources for coaching

This set of resources from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) introduces coaching and the common themes of successful coaching programs.

www.aitsl.edu.au/lead-develop/develop-others/coach-others/coaching-resources

NSW Department of Education: Quality induction with Strong start, Great teachers

This resource is designed to support teachers through effective induction. Educational leaders and approved providers might find some useful ideas to support the implementation of service- or organisational-specific induction.

https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/ teacher-quality-and-accreditation/strong-start,-great-teachers

Observing practice

Observing each other's practice and learning from one another is a useful practice-improvement strategy. Educational leaders must consider building peer observations into their practice repertoire, where they observe educators' practice and educators observe theirs. This is particularly useful when issues in program delivery arise, or there are complexities in children's participation in the service. Peer observations should be supportive and positive, and kept separate from any performance or management issues.

Constructive feedback is an important part of peer observation and time must be allocated to this process. Feedback involves offering suggestions and recognising great practice as well as constructive criticism. As such, it is recommended that educational leaders discuss the process with their teams before it takes place, to ensure educators are receptive and know what to expect. A helpful reference point for this discussion is the ECA *Code of Ethics* (ECA, 2016), which upholds respectful and collaborative relationships between professionals.

Resources

Early Childhood Australia: *Code of Ethics*

The ECA *Code of Ethics* is a useful starting point for discussions about using a peer-review approach. This will establish the importance of respect and constructive feedback in a collegial environment.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/

The following websites also offer a comprehensive guide to peer observation:

Victorian Department of Education: Peer observation

This comprehensive guide to using observations in an educational setting includes a collection of tools that can be modified for use in children's education and care settings.

https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/practice/improve/Pages/peerobservation.aspx

AITSL: Peer observation

These peer-observation resources from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) are mostly framed within the primary and secondary educational context, but can be applied to children's education and care settings.

www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/peer-observation

Supporting professional learning

Well-planned, well-resourced professional learning is an essential part of quality and continuous improvement. And educational leaders are uniquely placed to support as well as shape the provision of professional learning at their service. This is because they have an ongoing connection with the educators, the challenges their team faces and the new ideas it would like to explore.

Educational leaders can maximise the benefits of professional learning by encouraging and welcoming educators to share ideas and express opinions, and by modelling the skills needed to engage in these conversations. When educators feel comfortable and supported enough to debate and explore their practice, quality improves and outcomes are realised.

When designing professional learning opportunities, the educational leader could also consider and apply the principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1984). These principles are:

- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.

- Experience provides the basis for the learning activities.

- Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their context.

- Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented.

Respecting the unique needs and interests of educators will ensure that these experiences make a real impact.

Ideally, professional learning should be linked to the areas identified in the service's Quality Improvement Plan, and provide opportunities for reflection and collaboration. Professional learning that addresses too many different issues or only explores familiar ideas will not contribute to improvements and will be a waste of time and resources.

In collaboration with the approved provider and the educator team, educational leaders play a key role in determining where and how the available professional learning resources are utilised. So, they might want to consider:

- developing a professional learning plan that identifies needs and areas for development, as well as ideas worth investigating—reviewing this plan annually

- using the individual and team meetings with educators to collect information about specific challenges faced within the program by children or families, and then identifying learning opportunities that directly address these issues

- planning at least one annual opportunity (possibly with the help of external agencies or trainers) to work together as a team and discuss the service's vision for children's learning, development and wellbeing, as well as ways in which these are being maximised in the program

- identifying large-scale professional learning opportunities such as conferences that might be inspiring and energising for educators, and allocating adequate resources to facilitate participation

- planning all required training programs (such as first aid) in a way that they complement the professional learning agenda

- providing educators the opportunity to identify their own professional learning needs, and offering support for this learning.

Communicating with families

Families are another important element to be considered in the work of educational leaders. In the first instance, families should be informed of the educational leader's appointment, though in a manner that extends beyond a name on a wall or in a handbook. Services might even want to consider meaningful ways to engage families in the appointment of the educational leader. It will be reassuring for the families to know who is responsible for guiding and ensuring the quality of their child's learning experiences, developing programs and practice at the service.

The educational leader can implement processes to regularly communicate with families about the scope of their work and the various ways in which they support continuous improvement. They can do this by:

- sharing the service's vision for learning and wellbeing at information events for families—this might include an invitation to provide feedback and ideas for children's learning

- dedicating a section in the newsletter, or another regular communication mechanism, to share the successful strategies being implemented to strengthen the learning and wellbeing of the children.

Resources

ACECQA Information Sheet: Quality Area 1—Developing a culture of learning through reflective practice

This information sheet explores ways of building partnerships with families and will help educational leaders discover the benefits of working in partnership.

www.acecqa.gov.au/media/22976

ACECQA Information Sheet: Quality Area 6—Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

This webpage provides an overview of Quality Area 6, and contains links to a range of resources on supporting partnerships with families and communities.

www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard/quality-area-6-collaborative-partnership-with-families-and-communities

Exchange Press: eNewsletter

ExchangeEveryDay is the official eNewsletter for Exchange Press and contains news, success stories, solutions, trend reports and much more. Recent articles have included: Practices for valuing families, Look at families with new eyes, Engaging families in discussing challenge and risk, among others.

www.childcareexchange.com/eed/

Leading practice

Leading practice is an essential part of being an educational leader. It includes supporting educators in:

- implementing the relevant approved learning framework
- reflecting on their programs, practice and pedagogy
- implementing the assessment and planning cycle
- establishing systems
- participating in Communities of Practice
- understanding how Exceeding NQS themes (ACECQA, 2017) relate to everyday practice.

Using the approved frameworks

National approved learning frameworks:

- *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009).
- *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (DEEWR, 2011).

State-specific approved learning framework:

- Victoria: *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (DET, 2016).

The approved learning frameworks support the work of the educational leader. Referencing the frameworks in meaningful and contextual ways can build confidence and capacity of the educator teams, and help families develop a greater understanding of children's learning and the purpose of children's services. So, educational leaders might want to consider:

- having copies of the relevant frameworks at every meeting, and being deliberate and purposeful about linking ideas and strategies directly to the content
- exploring new ideas or finding solutions to practice issues, drawing on the frameworks as a foundation or starting point for further analysis and research
- promoting and reflecting on the principles and practices of the frameworks as a guide for refining and improving practice
- referencing the frameworks in ongoing communication with families, to reassure them that the service's educational programs and practice are based on strong evidence and contemporary thinking in children's education and care service delivery
- offering induction and training opportunities to all new staff—explaining how the service uses the frameworks and how these inform thinking and reflection
- encouraging educators to read and revisit the frameworks, and use them as a starting point for further reading and research.

Figures 1.2 and 1.3 showcase how the frameworks provide an easy reference for the principles, practices and learning outcomes.
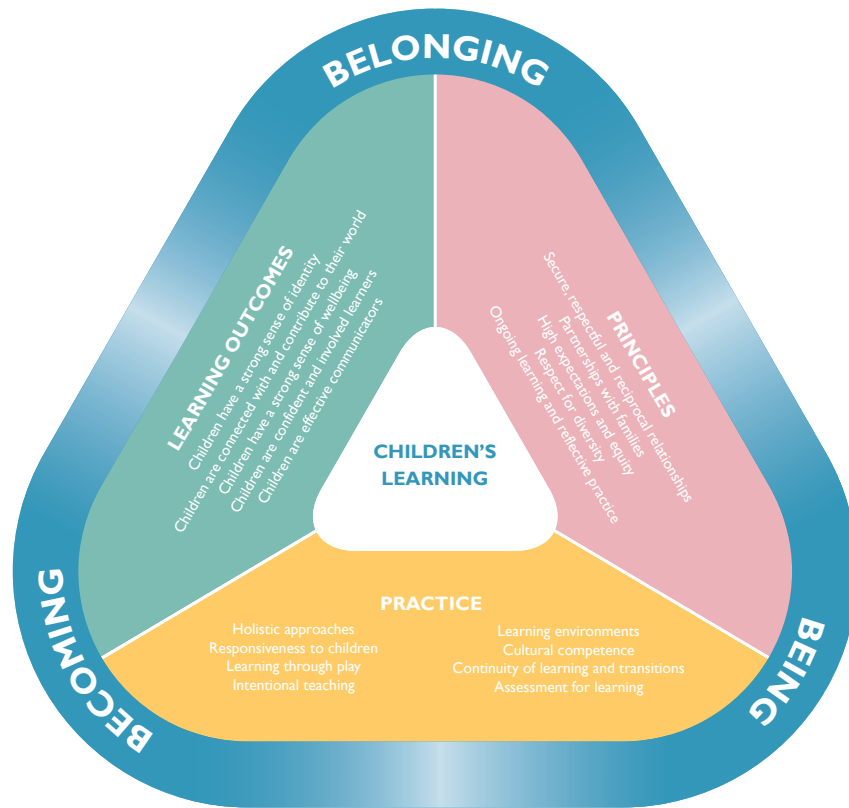
Figure 1.2: Elements of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009)
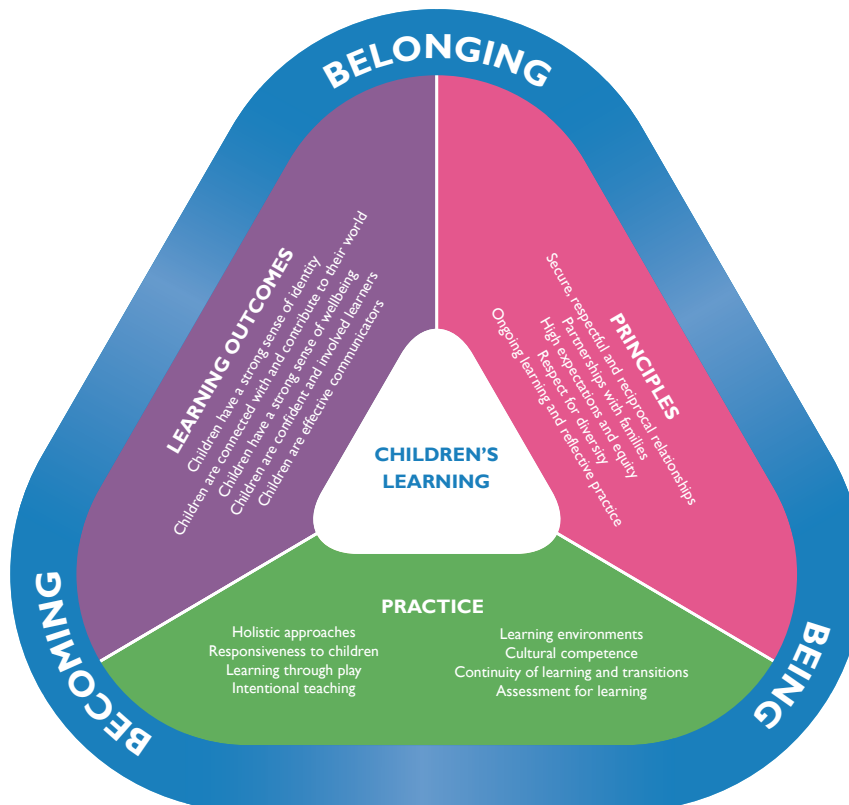
Figure 1.3: Elements of the *Framework for School Age Care* (DEEWR, 2011)

Case study

Exploring new ways to understand frameworks

I work with a family day care (FDC) service. I realised that in my team, only some of the educators knew the approved learning framework(s) well, while a number of others felt less confident with the documents, as they had missed the training sessions that the service had provided when the frameworks were first released. I considered sending reminders to the educators about reading the framework, but decided this approach was more about compliance than engagement. Instead, I developed a reading group, which meets once a month in two locations across the service's catchment area. Just like a book club, the educators come to the meeting having read a section of the relevant framework. Over coffee and cake, we discuss the expectations of the framework and work together to understand what it means in our FDC practice.

— Lakshmi
Educational Leader

Resources

Early Childhood Resource Hub

- **Early Years Learning Framework translated documents**

  www.ecrh.edu.au/resources/detail/index/early-years-learning-framework-(translated-documents)

- **Video: Quality Area 1 (Educational program and practice)**

  This video resource, featuring Anne Stonehouse, focuses on Quality Area 1 and ways to ensure that educational programs and practice in children's education and care settings are stimulating, engaging and enhance learning and development.

  www.ecrh.edu.au/national-quality-standard/quality-area-1-educational-program-and-practice#/

National approved learning frameworks and supporting documents:

- **Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia**

  https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-law-regulations/approved-learning-frameworks

- **Educators Belonging, Being and Becoming: Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia**

  www.acecqa.gov.au/media/22816

- **The Early Years Learning Framework in Action: Educators' stories and models for practice**

  https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/eylf_in_action_-_educators_stories_and_models_for_practice_0.pdf

- **Developmental milestones and the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards**

  www.acecqa.gov.au/media/25681

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

  www.acecqa.gov.au/media/24641

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

  www.acecqa.gov.au/media/24631

- **Belonging, Being and Becoming: Remote Indigenous Professional Development Package for the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia**

  https://www.ecrh.edu.au/resources/detail/index/remote-indigenous-professional-development-package-for-the-early-years-learning-framework-for-australia

State-specific approved framework:

- **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework**

  https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/expired/veyladf.aspx

Reflective questions

- What is the team's understanding of the relevant frameworks?
- What are the barriers to developing this understanding?
- What enabling strategies will help develop further understanding?

Fostering reflection

Another key responsibility of the educational leader is to nurture a culture of critical reflection among the team (Quality Area 1.3.2: Critical reflection [ACECQA, 2018, p. 90]). Critical reflection is also embedded in the Exceeding NQS themes, and it holds the key to practices that respond to the diverse contexts and experiences of children and their families.

While educators may be willing to explore opportunities to think more deeply about their practice, they may be uncertain about how to choose content, what processes to apply and how to make records. Educational leaders can offer tangible and practical support to assist the team in developing the habit of critical reflection, and impart the skills to make the process meaningful.

Strategies include:

- embedding critical reflection as 'usual practice' by providing regular opportunities and an open, collegial professional environment in which educators can raise questions about practice

- setting up a regular time to hold reflective practice meetings or discussions—these should be separate from staff meetings, where operational matters are discussed, and the emphasis should be on regularity of the opportunity to be reflective

- sourcing matters for reflective discussion from observations, family feedback, informal or formal catch-up meetings with team members, and children's interactions with educators

- ensuring that meetings extend to the agreed time and conclude with a plan of action, with staff members being assigned tasks requiring follow-ups by specific due dates

- using a range of tools (see the resource box on p. 39) to assist in the thinking and reflecting process.

The practice of refection is discussed further in Part Two of this Resource.

Constantly challenging current practices and views through critical reflection

My employer, Brunswick East Primary School Out of School Hours Care (OSHC), is a large inner-city service that caters to 106 children a day. Two people share the complex role of educational leader in mentoring and inspiring 14 educators—a necessity in such a large service. Educational leadership is the main agenda item in our weekly educator meetings, enabling us to work closely together as a team and deepen our understanding of working in the best interests of the children and their families.

As part of an ongoing learning cycle of critical reflection, we have been deeply challenging ourselves and our practices via questioning, researching knowledge and demystifying theory sourced from all aspects of the sector. Seven years ago, we started with unpacking the NQF and the approved learning frameworks. Beginning by familiarising ourselves with the language and structure, we moved towards linking the theory with our practices. Many trials, errors and changes later, we now continue the journey towards best informed practice, and find ourselves in profound terrain. We are constantly in a state of questioning why we do what we do, how we can do it better, and how we can include a certain view or all views.

This is a dynamic, organic and inexhaustible process. We are moving with the times.

— Ranita Swamy
OSHC Coordinator (Victoria)

Resources

Project Zero: Visible Thinking

Visible Thinking is a flexible and systematic research-based approach to integrating the development of students' thinking with content learning across subject matters. The approach supports the reflection process.

www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/VisibleThinking1.html

ECRH video: Self-assessment, reflective practice and quality improvement processes

In this three-part 'Talking About Practice' video, Anne Kennedy interviews Michelle Gujer, coordinator of a large community-based education and care service, and asks her to share ideas about self-assessment and reflection, as well as how the service supports these processes and outcomes from this professional activity. A supporting document offers questions to guide discussion and prompts deeper thinking about the ideas raised.

www.ecrh.edu.au/resources/detail/index/talking-about-practice-self-assessment-reflective-practice-and-quality-improvement-processes

ACECQA video: Critical reflection—Recording and sharing information

Catherine Lee, Director of The Point Preschool, discusses who is involved in critical reflection at her service, and how the information is recorded and shared.

https://youtu.be/iGvamqfN09Q

ACECQA Information Sheet: Quality Area 1—Developing a culture of learning through reflective practice

This information sheet explores ideas on reflective practice and developing a culture of learning through reflective practice. It looks at how this drives continuous improvement, and focuses attention on quality outcomes for children and families.

www.acecqa.gov.au/media/22931

Campbell Collaboration: The relationship between teacher qualification and the quality of the early childhood education and care environment

This review examines the evidence on the relationship between qualifications and the provision of quality early childhood services.

https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library/teacher-qualification-and-quality-of-early-childhood-care-and-learning.html

Supporting the assessment and planning cycle

A central responsibility of the educational leader is to help educators understand, implement and share the assessment and planning cycle. This process underpins the quality of the decisions made by educators and helps ensure that children's education and care services enrich and enable children's learning and wellbeing. Figure 1.4 (derived from the figure used in the frameworks and the NQS [ACECQA, 2018, p. 125]) describes the planning cycle.

Collect data or information

THE ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING CYCLE

Reflect/review

Analyse learning

Act/do

Plan

Documentation should occur at each stage of the cycle
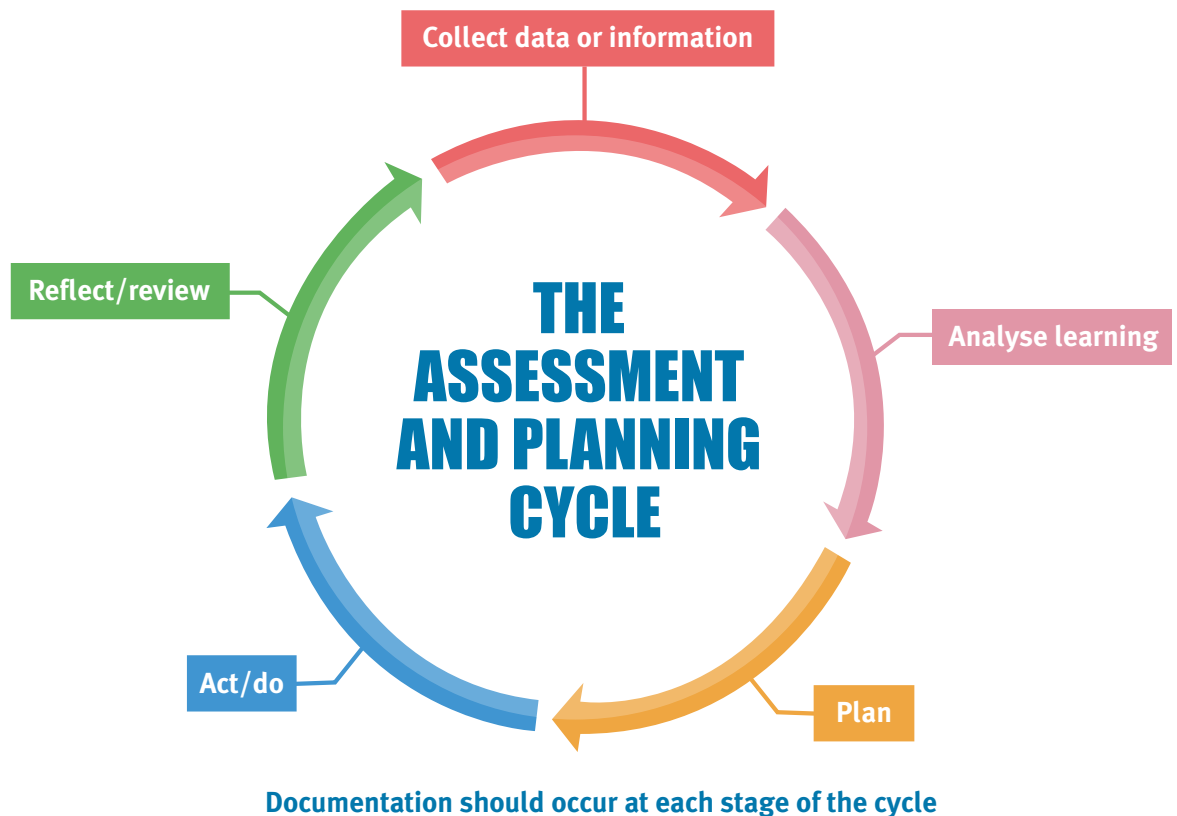
Figure 1.4: The five steps of the planning cycle

The planning cycle is often a source of concern for educators, who misinterpret it as a focus on paperwork and recording data rather than spending time with children. Educational leaders can play a part in reassuring educators that the planning cycle actually supports curriculum decision-making in meaningful ways. Taking time to explore the assessment and planning cycle with educators will help them understand the benefits of the process and help to alleviate undue stress.

For educational leaders, it's important to be mindful that their role in leading the development and implementation of the educational program is primarily to support educators in the implementation of the planning cycle. Educational leaders are not expected to assume the role of compliance officer or monitor educators' work. A more accurate approach would be to guide, mentor and encourage educators to understand the expectations of the planning cycle, and develop their capabilities.

The *Guide to the National Quality Framework* (ACECQA, 2018, p. 96) suggests that *'With guidance from the educational leader, educators:*

- *use an approved learning framework to underpin their everyday practice. The framework guides interactions with children and families and provides the basis for educators' pedagogical decision-making, including the experiences that are planned for children and the teaching and learning that occurs*

- *develop the educational program based on their knowledge of each child so that the interactions, experiences, routines and events that each child engages in are relevant to them, respectful of their background and recognise and build on their current strengths, abilities and interests*

- *ensure that the interactions, experiences, routines and events included in the educational program maximise opportunities for children's learning'.*

In this and many other references in the NQS, the educational leader is identified as a guide or mentor rather than a monitor or compliance officer, with sole responsibility for the planning process. Communicating this to all those involved in the daily operations of a children's service is crucial to avoid misunderstandings.

A useful strategy to promote shared understanding of expectations and the planning process is to lead a regular planning meeting or professional learning conversation about this area of practice.

Case study

A key aspect of the role is to make sure all educators are able to articulate the cycle of planning

My role as Educational Leader at Pitt Town Early Learning Centre (part of Affinity Education Group) is integral to the success of the business. The role incorporates five key focus areas, including:

- *role modelling best practice with educators in all areas across the centre— this involves modelling successful two-way communication with families and educators; demonstrating stimulating and engaging experiences, where children's learning is scaffolded; and consistently modelling best practice in terms of hygiene and children's safety*

- *ensuring all educators are supported in their study and that they are managing their work/study load—this may range from Certificate III to a degree in early childhood*

- *spending time in every room, each week, to ensure programs are up-to-date and to check how the teams are tracking with the planning cycle, including child observations and follow-ups—this involves holding frequent conversations to make sure all educators are able to articulate the cycle of planning*

- *keeping educators up-to-date with current research articles, book summaries and any new ideas that the centre could incorporate—also through sharing new findings, new meal ideas or successful events via our internal website, which incorporates over 150 centres nationally*

- *supporting the wellbeing of all individuals, as a priority, and striving to ensure that all team members are happy in their workplace and have a healthy work/life balance—this includes sharing articles on educator wellbeing and information about local picnic and walking locations, to encourage outdoor activity—a happy and healthy staff creates a happy and healthy workplace.*

In my role, I certainly do not profess to know everything, but I am committed to sourcing and following up on information as required. I am open to change and am constantly reflecting on how things could be performed better, ensuring the centre is always advancing in a positive direction.

— Meg Mathews
Early Childhood Teacher and Educational Leader (New South Wales)

Resources

These resources can help educational leaders understand the expectations and possibilities of the planning cycle.

Child Australia: Effective curriculum planning and documentation methods in education and care services

This 'How To' resource will provide ideas and guidance to educators on developing curriculum and documentation practices.

https://www.ecrh.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/ipsp/effective-curriculum-planning-and-documentation-methods-in-education-and-care-services

ACECQA: Documenting programs for school age services

This information sheet describes documentation requirements for all school age services; continuing documentation requirements for school age care services in the ACT, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia; as well as documentation requirements that apply to school age care services in the Northern Territory, Queensland and NSW.

www.acecqa.gov.au/media/24656

ACECQA video: Educational leaders supporting the cycle of planning

Joce Nuttall, Professor at Australian Catholic University and ACECQA Board member, considers the way educational leaders support the cycle of planning and take the longer view when thinking about and evaluating programs for children.

https://youtu.be/QkfJOjSQ9gI

ACECQA video: Documentation and the cycle of planning in outside school hours care

Dr Jennifer Cartmel and Professor Jennifer Sumsion discuss *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia*, and the intention behind documentation as part of the cycle of planning.

https://youtu.be/wKOI6poCZGw

ECA Learning Hub video: Planning and documentation—Part 1 of 3

This ECA 'Talking About Practice' video is designed to support discussion and reflection on the planning cycle and associated documentation.

https://youtu.be/XRkPaewfMm0

VCAA Resources

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) is an independent statutory body reporting to the Victorian Minister for Education. Its website contains several resources focused on planning effectively for children's learning.

www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/earlyyears/index.aspx#

www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/earlyyears/focus_on_birthtothree.aspx

www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/earlyyears/assesspractice.aspx

QCAA Resources

The Queensland Curriculum Assessment Authority (QCAA) provides a range of educational services to Queensland schools and the wider community. These resources can assist in planning for children's learning.

www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/kindergarten

www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/kindergarten/samples-templates

Reflective questions

- What is your current role in the planning cycle process?

- What do others expect of your role in terms of planning?

- How can you understand more about what support the team needs in terms of planning?

- How is the role organised to support the planning process? How can this support be enhanced?

Establishing systems

It is essential to establish service-wide systems that will allow the educational leader to know how the education program is being delivered and what strategies are being used to support improvements.

It is a good idea to use standardised processes to keep track of the many conversations and plans being made with individual educators, teams and the approved provider. While there are no formal requirements, it is useful to have records of discussions and decisions that can be referred to during the assessment and rating process, or when asked to reflect on previous work or account for particular strategies.

Suggestions for effective record-keeping systems include:

- establishing an electronic file for each team within the service where notes of meetings and any other important resources about the program can be kept

- establishing a shared electronic folder where colleagues can access information and resources collected by the educational leader and educators, such as journal articles or newsletters

- creating a specific educational leader email address and encouraging educators to email concerns, questions or achievements—this establishes a record of communication between educators and the educational leader

- keeping a journal/notebook to record observations or discussions

- making a meeting template for the educational leader to keep track of designated and set action items.

Reflective questions

- What systems are currently in place?
- Do they support quality educational practice?
- Does everyone in the team understand and follow these procedures?
- When are these systems reviewed? Who participates in this review?

Community of Practice

A Community of Practice is a useful model for an educational leader to consider. This approach is about drawing together:

> *… a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. This definition reflects the fundamentally social nature of human learning. It is very broad. It applies to a street gang, whose members learn how to survive in a hostile world, as well as a group of engineers who learn how to design better devices or a group of civil servants who seek to improve service to citizens* (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2011).

The Bastow Institute (part of the Victorian Education Department) encourages networks and system leaders to adopt a Communities of Practice approach to share knowledge, experience and resources. The approach involves 'educational leaders and professionals working collaboratively with the goal of developing a collective responsibility for driving improvement using the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)' (DET, 2017).

Resources

Bastow Institute: Communities of Practice

This webpage provides further information about the Victorian Education Department's Communities of Practice project.

www.bastow.vic.edu.au/communities-of-practice

Video: Communities of Practice

This video explains what the Communities of Practice approach is about.

https://youtu.be/XS1OhxXhOEM

Identifying and leading practice that exceeds the NQS

Leading practice includes considering how the Exceeding NQS themes (ACECQA, 2018, p. 331) are reflected in the service's programs, practices and policies. These themes were introduced in 2018, in response to requests from the sector to provide additional guidance on practice that exceeds the NQS.

While it is important to recognise that educational leaders are not solely responsible for the demonstration of Exceeding NQS themes, they do play a role in building an understanding of the expectations of the Exceeding NQS benchmark. This includes understanding how the themes relate to everyday practice, supporting educators to identify practice that reflects the themes and planning for continual improvements.

The three Exceeding NQS themes are:

- **Theme 1: Practice is embedded in service operations**
- **Theme 2: Practice is informed by critical reflection**
- **Theme 3: Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with families and/or the community.**

The three Exceeding NQS themes are applied at the NQS rating level for **standards** (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Summary of approach to determining NQS for standards (ACECQA, 2017)

Working Towards NQS	Meeting NQS	Exceeding NQS
One or more elements of the standard are **not met**.	All elements of the standard are met. Service practice **does not reflect** all three Exceeding themes, **for example**: ✘ Practice is **embedded** in service operations ✔ Practice is informed by **critical reflection** ✔ Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with **families and/or community**	All elements of the standard are met. Service practice **reflects** all three Exceeding themes: ✔ Practice is **embedded** in service operations ✔ Practice is informed by **critical reflection** ✔ Practice is shaped by meaningful engagement with **families and/or community**

Using the Exceeding NQS themes for improvement

To ensure continuous improvement, educational leaders could consider developing specific processes that focus on the Exceeding NQS themes. For example, educational leaders might:

- support educators in undertaking a self-reflection process that identifies practice strengths and challenges

- select a specific Quality Area or Standard of the NQS that the team is working on, and use the Exceeding NQS themes to identify further considerations and action

- explore an identified issue or achievement using an Exceeding NQS theme—for example, using:

  » a parent's concern about the nappy-changing process to invite educators to reconsider how to generate a meaningful engagement with families

  » a family's question about how their child's homework will be managed after school as an opportunity to communicate these ideas to the whole-school community

- choose one of the Exceeding NQS themes and invite educators to think of work examples that demonstrate this approach—for instance, family day care educators might work together to identify shared practice approaches for taking children out into the community, or collecting children from school, or preparing for meal times

- discuss and demonstrate how the service's leadership team supports collaboration with educators, to effectively lead the development of the curriculum and set high expectations for teaching and learning

- encourage educators to discuss and demonstrate how they:

  » feel supported to learn and grow in their professional practice

  » work with the educational leader to consistently deliver an educational program that sets high expectations for each child's learning.

Resources

ACECQA: New guidance on determining Exceeding NQS for standards

This factsheet contains guidance on determining the Exceeding NQS rating level for standards. It clarifies the difference between the Meeting NQS and Exceeding NQS rating levels to ensure that quality expectations are clear for approved providers, educators and assessors.

www.acecqa.gov.au/media/23126

ACECQA: We Hear You—Are you exceeding the 2018 National Quality Standard?

This article explores what going 'above and beyond' means when we focus on quality service practice and provision in relation to Reconciliation Action Plans. It also explains the three Exceeding themes that services will need to demonstrate for a service to be rated Exceeding NQS.

https://wehearyou.acecqa.gov.au/tag/exceeding-nqs-themes/

ACECQA video: Exceeding NQS theme guidance

Professor Jennifer Sumsion (previously of Charles Sturt University) and Dr Jennifer Cartmel (from Griffith University) discuss how the Exceeding NQS themes can be used by educators, providers and assessors to understand and articulate practice.

https://youtu.be/Ij9ibYZYd6s

Leading change

If you're any good at all, you know you can be better (Lindsay Buckingham).

A likely part of the educational leader's role is to lead change. This change process is articulated as 'continuous improvement' in the NQS.

Understanding the process of change

There are many resources available to help professionals understand and lead change. One of the most famous and well-used is John Kotter's (2018) eight-step process for leading change.

These steps (Table 1.2) can be implemented by educational leaders to inspire reflective questions about existing practices and to support the process of change where it is required.

Table 1.2: The eight-step process for leading change (adapted from Kotter, 2018) and related questions that may help in its implementation

The process	Reflective questions
Create urgency: Develop a sense of urgency around the need for change.	How has a sense of urgency been communicated? Is the team clear about the expectation of quality?
Form a guiding coalition: Building momentum for change requires strong leadership.	Who in the team is already on board with the change?
Develop a vision and strategy: A drive for change needs a clear vision.	How can the service philosophy be utilised to drive a culture of change?
Communicate the vision: Constantly communicate about the new vision.	How is the vision in the philosophy communicated to others? Does the team understand the vision?
Enable action and remove obstacles: Take practical action to put supportive structures in place and empower and encourage smooth transition.	What strategies will work in the setting? What are the obstacles?
Generate short-term wins: Success breeds success.	How do we celebrate our successes? With children? With families?
Hold the gains and build on change: Continuous improvement and seeing each success [and failure] as an opportunity.	How do we record what we have done and build on it? How is the Quality Improvement Plan used to support improvement?
Anchor changes in the culture: Become embedded in the 'new way we do things around here'.	How do we articulate this new culture to others?

Case study

Continual improvement through better educational programs

Uniting Preschool Grafton is a 25-place service in regional NSW and has been operating for over 50 years. As the educational leader for this service, I wanted to focus on the way we incorporate children's voices into the program and document their learning. In working towards this, I led the team to develop a multi-faceted educational program.

We have a central program book, which is a 'woven-mat' record of the children's learning journey throughout the day. It includes anecdotal/narrative observations, significant learning opportunities and interests, and it is where reflections, comments and considerations are proposed. A 'Children's Voices' book sits alongside the program, as a record of children's thoughts, ideas and questions that are incorporated into the program.

As the educational leader, I support educators in actively drawing upon information from this document to inform small-group learning opportunities. Children of differing backgrounds, cultures, languages, abilities or experiences are all fully supported to have their voices heard, to be acknowledged and to inform the program through collaboration and negotiation with each other and educators.

In our service, children who require additional support are included in all aspects of the educational program, through individualised strategies and individual education plans devised in collaboration with their assigned educator. I work with the educators to ensure these education plans are tailored to suit the child's developmental journey and interests.

Through my work as educational leader, and in collaboration with educators, learning opportunities are now planned and tailored to suit individual children's learning styles, abilities and dispositions.

We make children's learning portfolios available for children and families to read and record comments in, take home and share with their families, and contribute to the documentation of their child's learning. We also seek permission from children before work samples are added to their portfolios.

We conduct children's policy meetings—often at the children's request—that help us address issues as they arise. Children take notes and are encouraged to consider how these issues can be resolved.

The development and implementation of this multifaceted program has been an overwhelmingly positive journey, which our educators embraced. We have achieved our objective of capturing the children's voices within their program, and thus improved outcomes.

— Neil Gorring
Educational Leader (New South Wales)

Undertaking action research

Action research is a deeper form of professional learning that supports educators in thinking deeply about their work with children, and about their understanding of pedagogy. It is a process of local research activity that seeks to identify an issue or question and take action to improve practice. It differs from inquiry processes that are used with children in that it aims to help educators (rather than children) learn more and think differently. This process connects to, and can be understood as, practitioner research or educator research.

> *[Educator] research is important because it repositions the meaning of [educator] from one who simply performs or acts to someone who generates and contributes to the knowledge on which [our] practice is based and how decisions are made. [Educator] research is liberating and empowering inquiry that allows … [educators] to take their lives as teachers seriously, to generate knowledge and understanding that can improve teaching and potentially create a more democratic and equitable learning community* (Stremmel, 2012, p. 114).

Action research can be used to think about what needs to change, come up with plans and try out new ideas. It is practical and should explore new concepts, help solve problems or improve practice. Educational leaders might consider applying action research (as explained in Figure 1.5 on p. 52) to extend and develop the education program and practice.

Note: Action research is best undertaken with others over a period of time. This allows ideas to be tested and refined, as educators learn more about themselves and the impact of their work.

REFLECT
Reflecting on our practice and any ideas for new practices and what they mean.

PLAN
Based on our observations and reflections and the analysis of what they mean, plan key actions—what needs to be done and who needs to do it.

ACT
Implement the plans.

OBSERVE
Record what happened, what we notice and identify further ideas that we want to explore.
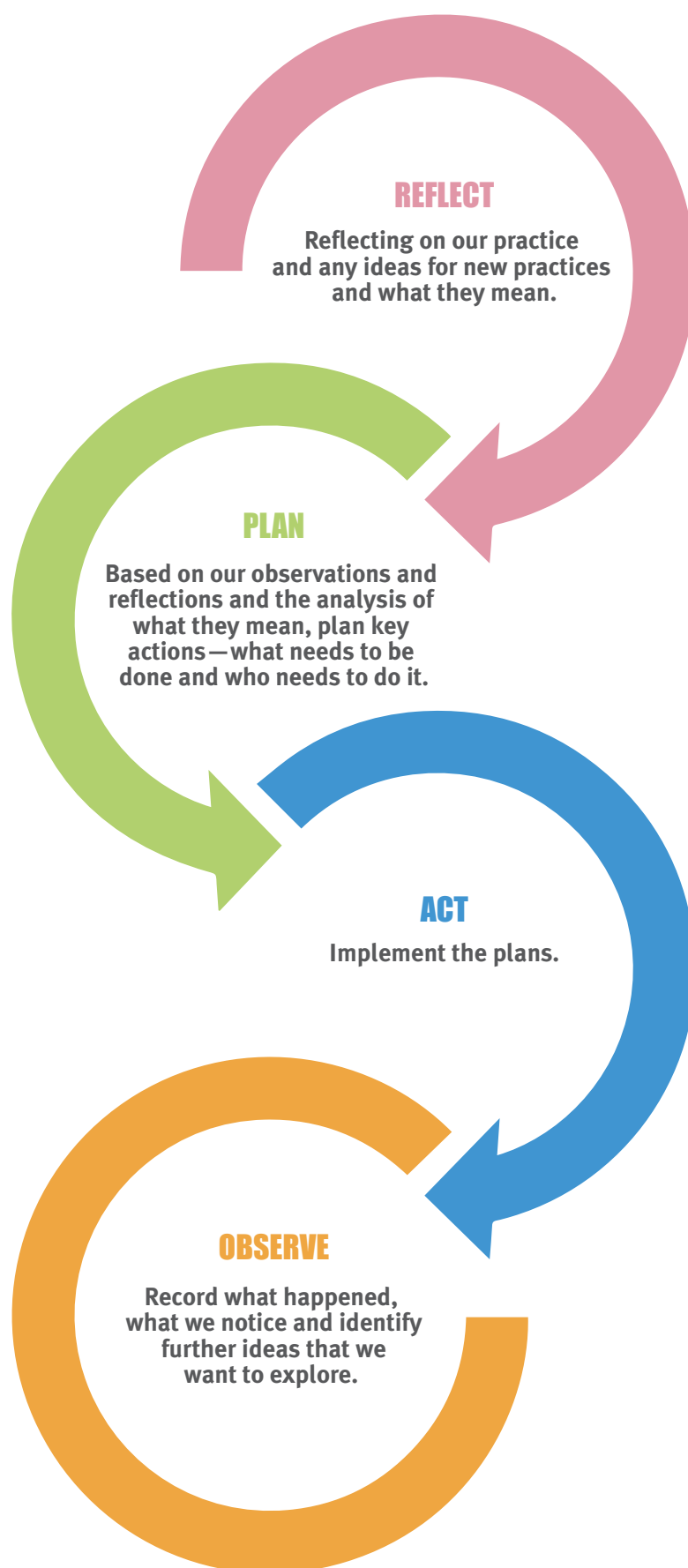
Figure 1.5: The action research process is made up of four key stages (adapted from Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, as cited in Dick, 2000)

Practice what you preach

Inspiring others to improve their practice is no easy feat, inspiring them to **want** *to improve their practice is perhaps even harder. Yet, it is the desire to do so that holds the key to it happening. This is what lies at the heart of being an educational leader.*

So how does one inspire a group of casual employees—most of whom are under 25 and will never turn outside school hours care (OSHC) into a career—to improve their practice? In my experience, you need to learn to lead from within and practice what you preach. You must share your whole self: the good, the bad and the ugly!

Lobbying and advocating to Forrest Out of School Hours Care (FOOSHC) stakeholders to have the educational leader role separated from other management positions and to operate out of ratio was one of the toughest things I have had to do in my career to date, and possibly the most rewarding. It has allowed me to foster a different relationship with my colleagues.

Being out of ratio and on the floor has allowed me to lead by example, to truly be present with the team, mentoring, coaching and discussing practice. I am able to take the time to discuss things in the moment, when it matters, without having to worry about the phone ringing, the stack of paperwork or any first-aid incidents arising. Having this time allows for honest critical reflection to occur and the chance for the educators I am working with to feel part of the solution rather than being part of the problem. Being able to purely focus on the role of the educational leader has allowed me to genuinely get to know the team I work with, and adapt my practice accordingly.

I am constantly reminding myself of the quote: 'If they do not learn the way we teach, then we should teach the way they learn.' Having this time out of ratio allows for the team members to learn at their own pace, in their own way, and for me to recognise and facilitate this accordingly. It taught me that when explaining theory, regulations or the framework, it is best to use practical examples from within our workplace as opposed to examples from textbooks or templates. Most importantly, it has allowed me the time to encourage the team to think about what is possible rather than simply being the pedagogy police.

Over time, this type of relationship and the above-mentioned practice will inevitably build trust, something pivotal for inspiring anyone to want to do anything. This trust also comes from really listening to your team and giving them a platform to have their voices heard. Your team members need to know that you trust them as much as you need them to trust you. Trust is about following through on their ideas as well as your own and actually doing what you say you will do. Anyone can stand up and demand change and improvement. It takes courage, time, patience, persistence, empathy and respect to work within a team as a leader, to enact that change and inspire continuous improvement. Trust is about being able to challenge your team to go beyond their comfort zones, demonstrating that you have faith in their capabilities, and challenging their decisions to ensure you uphold the standards and expectations within your service, and reflecting on this together.

However, this trust will falter if they do not believe in you, the vision of the service, or your own trust and belief in this vision. You need to practice what you preach. If your vision and philosophy speak of sustainability, then the team needs to see you taking an active part in this process. What do you do on a daily basis to promote this? To strive for this? Our vision and philosophy at FOOSHC is cemented in playwork and it is my love of, belief in, engagement with and advocacy for playwork that continue to inspire the team to want to live and breathe it as much as I do.

You cannot expect your team to go above and beyond if you are hiding in the office. I learnt long ago that, to inspire, I needed to be out in the rain, covered in mud, pushing the boundaries, lobbying and advocating to have fires and being able to climb trees. I needed to play and create time and space for the team to play, to remember what it feels like, in order to facilitate the time and space for children to do the same.

*Possibly my greatest success though has come from realising that, in order to inspire others, you need to refuel your own tank. Over the past five years in this role, I have attended countless professional development sessions—some that align with what I stand for and some that do not (where one often ends up learning the most from). I have seized every available opportunity to advocate and lobby for the role and what FOOSHC stands for; using each as a teachable moment for FOOSHC stakeholders and empowering our team to do the same. I have sought out mentors who have challenged and inspired me, and have myself acted as a mentor to other services. I have also embarked on three self-funded study tours to the USA and the UK, to completely immerse myself in playwork, develop my own practice and push myself well out of my comfort zone. All this has ensured, more than I can ever put into words, that I do not drown in the everyday life of the work that we do. And, most importantly, this, above all else, is what has inspired those I work with to **want** to improve their practice.*

— Kylie Keane
Educational leader (Australian Capital Territory)

(With contributions from, and in consultation with, Catherine Penhale, Alyssa Roggero, Patrick Brennan, Jay Calder, Neave O' Dwyer, Nick Graeber-Browne and Ali Sewter)

Resources

Website: A beginner's guide to action research

This webpage provides more detail about action research and how to implement and lead effective action research.

www.aral.com.au/resources/guide.html

AITSL video: Action research for professional learning

This Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) video looks at two teachers who are trialling team teaching in a secondary science and mathematics environment. Although set within the context of secondary schools, the process also applies to children's education and care.

www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/action-research-for-professional-learning-illustration-of-practice

Video: What is action research?

This video provides a short description of action research.

https://youtu.be/Ov3F3pdhNkk

Supporting the role: The approved provider's perspective

In children's education and care services, when appointing an educational leader, consideration needs to be given to Quality Area 7 of the NQS—in particular, Element 7.2.2 which requires the educational leader be supported and lead the development and implementation of the educational program and assessment and planning cycle.

Underpinning this element, Regulation 118 of the National Regulations (New South Wales Government, 2018) requires that the approved provider must 'designate, in writing, a suitably qualified and experienced educator, coordinator or other individual as educational leader at the service to lead the development and implementation of educational programs in the service'. In addition, Regulation 148 requires that 'the staff record must include the name of the person designated as the educational leader in accordance with Regulation 118'.

It is important to note that neither the NQS nor the regulatory requirements are prescriptive of the qualifications, experience, skills or role description of the educational leader. This recognises that every service and every team of educators is different. The flexibility built into these provisions allows approved providers to choose the best person in the service to take on this role. The chosen person also needs to be willing and able to take on this role.

Appointing an educational leader also demonstrates the approved provider's commitment to optimising quality outcomes for children. Cheeseman (2012) identifies that ideally the educational leader has education and care qualifications. Further, when choosing an educational leader, Cheeseman (2012) suggests that *'consideration should be given to an educator's:*

- *knowledge of theories, learning and development—someone who has an interest in reading widely and sharing information with other educators in bite-sized chunks*

- *knowledge of curriculum approaches and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach in particular settings or with particular children*

- *access to current research about curriculum and a desire to guide others in reflecting on their practice*

- *knowledge of individual children and learning styles so that approaches can be differentiated to meet complex needs of children from a range of backgrounds and abilities*

- *personal qualities and a willingness to listen as well as coach, mentor and reflect alongside their team'.*

The *Guide to the National Quality Framework* (ACECQA, 2018, p. 304) details the key areas that the approved providers should expect the educational leader to focus on:

An effective educational program includes realistic goals which have a clear purpose in line with the service's philosophy (see Element 7.1.1). The educational program and practice reflect the principles, practice and outcomes of an approved learning framework (see Element 1.1.1).

When the approved provider offers appropriate levels of support to the educational leader, the whole service benefits. It empowers the educational leader to foster a positive culture, ensuring the consistent delivery of quality educational programs and practice. The following section explores what is expected from approved providers regarding supporting educational leaders.

The benefit of educational leadership to service operations

The educational leader role brings numerous benefits to a service and these are increasingly well-accepted across the sector. But less well understood and articulated is how the role contributes to the viability and reputation of a children's education and care service. After all, the success and sustainability of a service is the responsibility of the approved provider. But, by supporting the educational leader in delivering a high-quality education and care program, approved providers can optimise the service operations regarding compliance and satisfaction of those who participate in the service.

When actively supported, the educational leader can directly contribute to the quality, viability and reputation of the children's education and care service by:

- effectively leading the development and implementation of the educational program, and assessment and planning process

- working with educators to document the learning, development and wellbeing program and ensure that families understand it

- addressing complaints that relate to the program

- talking with families about the quality of the educational program and the process implemented to drive continuous improvement—these conversations can take place when families enquire about the service, during the enrolment process, at planned information nights or other service events.

Empowering educational leaders should be a high priority in children's education and care settings

The National Regulations emphasise the importance of the educational leader role in all children's education and care services. This role is just as important in the unique family day care (FDC) setting. The role involves not only extending the practice and pedagogy of educators, but also inspiring, motivating and challenging them.

FDC is a unique environment, where children's education and care is delivered from an educator's own home. This makes the educational leader's role a little more complex and intricate. Unlike a long day care service, where the educational leader can engage with educators on a daily basis, the educational leader in FDC may only be able to engage with an educator fortnightly or monthly. An FDC educator may also be situated hundreds of kilometres away from the educational leader, making motivation and support a challenge.

So how can FDC educational leaders be supported? The role of the educational leader needs to be a shared obligation, even though the official role is delegated to just one person. Each person on the leadership team specialises in different areas of practice, and brings differing areas of expertise to the role. The educational leader must have a clear job description, outlining the scope and limitations of the role. This should be clearly identified to all staff and educators in the organisation.

Holding regular meetings, sharing ideas and implementing inspired change and enthused practice can help support the educational leader. In addition to formal meetings, natural conversations and spontaneous dialogues throughout the week also prove helpful in providing support. Building a strong and trusting relationship with management is very important to ensure constant support, mentorship and guidance for the educational leader. By working closely with the educational leader, management can identify if and when additional training is required, to ensure that the role is fulfilled to a high standard.

Set clear expectations, goals, visions and expected behaviours in conjunction with the leadership team and the educational leader. These should align with the organisation's mission, vision and values, and always be linked to the organisational philosophy and Quality Improvement Plan.

Empowering your educational leaders with emotionally sensitive support and ensuring they have access to the tools they need to succeed in their role should be a high priority in children's education and care settings. In addition, organisations must adopt a culture that encourages a high point of learning at all levels.

'From little things big things grow', and the success of the educational leader in FDC will see growth within your service.

— **Sarah Fowler**
Executive Director, Kentish Lifelong Learning and Care
(Northern Territory)

Resources

ACECQA video: Leadership in education and care

Professor Joce Nuttall discusses leadership in children's education and care services and how it impacts the NQS quality areas.

https://youtu.be/m3REgglzvpA

ACECQA video: Conceptualising the role of educational leader

Joce Nuttall shares her thoughts about conceptualising the role of the education leader and how leaders can make the role their own.

https://youtu.be/6NOIBH7TblY

ACECQA video: Support for educational leaders

Joce Nuttall takes us through the kind of support educational leaders benefit from in different service contexts.

https://youtu.be/pvohMQFkqPs

Appointing an educational leader

Maximising the potential of the educational leader role in a children's education and care service starts with the right appointment. Recruitment processes can be complex and finding the most appropriate candidate can take time.

Before the recruitment process begins, clarify your requirements by creating a clear and contextual role description that includes the expectations of the role—as described in the National Regulations and the NQS (refer to 'The educational leader: National Regulations and the National Quality Standard' on p. 12 of this Resource)—and how the role will be supported.

Following are some ideas for a successful recruitment process:

1. Develop a **position description** that links with the expectations of the NQS, in particular, Quality Area 7 (refer to Quality Area 7.1.3 [ACECQA, 2018, p. 91]). Include preferred attributes, skills and qualifications as detailed on pp. 64–66 of this Resource.

2. Determine the resources available to support the role, specifically:

   » the **hours** allocated for the role, in relation to the number of educators in the service—to be effective, the role of an educational leader requires time allocation in addition to, and quarantined from, other responsibilities (e.g. the second-in-charge or room leader roles)

   » a **budget** to support the work and enable the educational leader to work and meet with staff (e.g. a relief staff budget to enable educators to be backfilled)

   » an ongoing **professional learning budget** for the educational leader and support for participating in local networks

   » access to **contemporary educational** journals, online tools and other subscriptions to support professional learning.

3. Develop a **comprehensive interview** process that might include a representative from the educator team. Consider the following questions:

» Why do you want to be an educational leader?

» How would you lead the development and implementation of the education program?

» How would you lead the development and implementation of the assessment and planning cycle?

» How would you describe your own pedagogy/pedagogical influences?

» How do you critically reflect?

» Can you tell us how you led reflective practice discussions with your colleagues, and what strategies you used to help people engage with this part of practice?

» What support would you require to fulfil the role?

» Continuous improvement is an expectation of this service under the NQS. Can you tell us about a process of improvement that you have led? What happened? What were the challenges and how did you overcome them?

» How do you see the role of educational leader unfolding? What is your vision for the way the role works in a service?

» If you are selected for this role, how would you ensure that you keep practice expectation and quality improvement up-to-date? What resources do you rely on/refer to? What processes do you use? How do you share them with others?

» Can you tell us about a pedagogical issue that you have had to deal with (for example, using stencils) and how you managed it?

- » Communicating with the team is an essential part of the role—can you tell us about your communication skills? What communication strategies have you used, and how did you know they were effective?

- » We are keen to see the mentoring role in the service progress—can you tell us about your experience in mentoring others? How would you go about convincing your colleagues to engage in this process, if they have never been a part of it before?

- » What do you think are the most important challenges for educators in delivering quality education?

- » At times, planning and documentation cause anxiety for our educators. What is your experience with this part of quality improvement and how have you supported educators in feeling more confident about planning?

- » How do you/would you work with educators to ensure the cycle of planning is implemented?

- » What is your experience in working with educators who may have different strengths? How have you used these in building a team?

- » The educational leader may, from time to time, have a challenging conversation with the team about practice—can you tell us about a time when you have had a conversation like this? What did you learn about yourself from this experience?

- » The educational leader role is a lot about supporting change—can you tell us how you have managed change with teams? How do you feel about change? What strategies would you use to help people change and improve?

- » Ongoing professional learning is important for quality—can you tell us about your commitment to professional learning? How have you supported others in their professional learning? What do you believe is the role of the educational leader in professional learning?

- » How do you see this role in relation to families? How would you go about partnering and collaborating with families?

- » What systems and processes have you established to support educators? How did they work? What was the impact? What made them successful?

4. Organise an induction process that prepares the educational leader not only for working in the service but also for helping them understand the current approaches to quality and continuous improvement. Effective induction processes for an educational leader might include:

- » a discussion about the vision and mission of the organisation or company, such as major achievements and plans for the future

- » a discussion about the existing quality improvement process—what has worked well, and the current rating and assessment status

- » a discussion about the teams and how they have responded to the expectations of quality improvement

- » an opportunity to identify shared goals and expectations of the role.

What about qualifications?

Qualifications, experience, well-developed knowledge, skills and attributes are all important factors when selecting a suitable educational leader. While the NQS and National Regulations are not prescriptive about the qualifications that educational leaders must hold, educational leaders need to demonstrate that they can undertake the role effectively.

As outlined previously, education and care qualifications; knowledge of theories, learning and development; and knowledge of curriculum approaches are essential for success in this role.

Assessment and rating data indicates a correlation between the educational leader element and NQS Quality Area 1, that is, services that meet the requirements for an educational leader, generally do better in the elements and standards related to educational programs and practices.

Leadership roles need to be separated and managed by a team

At Malin Friends, we have separated the main leadership roles. However, it is not uncommon in early childhood services for the educational leader, nominated supervisor and coordinator to be one individual. While combining roles may seem efficient from a staffing perspective, I feel that these roles need to be differentiated, separated and, where possible, managed by a team.

The three roles (educational leader, nominated supervisor and coordinator) are so significant and important in their own right that we have allocated an individual person for each position—nominated supervisor compliance, financial and budgets, and educational leadership. Our leaders work together to ensure that there is close communication and continuous exchange of important information. However, by separating the roles, each area can be focused on, thoroughly understood in terms of its requirements, and followed through in terms of action.

Merging these roles can be confusing, and adequate allocation of time to each area may not be possible. The juggling of many hats may mean that all areas are not given the requisite attention or time to ensure they are completed at a high standard. As a consequence, one area may be prioritised over another. For example, the need to focus on compliance may lead to some responsibilities of educational leadership being neglected. This can be avoided by having two or more leaders undertaking these roles.

Another reason why I feel it is important to have a team approach is that different educators are suited to different roles. For example, the person assigned to the role of educational leader may not perform as strongly in the role of nominated supervisor. Each role requires different skills and strengths, and it is best to allow those who enjoy the role, and who have demonstrated strength in the role, to undertake the responsibilities that the role requires. For example, our educational leader focuses on programs and is strong in that area, while the nominated supervisor is excellent at overseeing compliance.

— Claire Vellios
Director and Lead Teacher (Victoria)

Qualities of an educational leader

Appointing an educational leader is as much about the qualities that a candidate may bring to the team as it is about meeting the requirements of the National Regulations. But what skills, knowledge and attributes would best suit the setting and the demands of the role? The following ideas might assist in selecting the right candidate.

Knowledge

Using and sharing knowledge is an essential element of the educational leader's role. (This dimension of the role will be described in more detail in Part Two of this Resource.)

Ideally, educational leaders should demonstrate:

- an understanding of the expectations of the sector and, specifically, the National Regulations, NQF, NQS, approved learning frameworks, child development, theory and philosophy

- contemporary understanding of evidence-based best practice approaches to teaching and learning

- a strong interest and demonstrated practice in acquiring knowledge (for example, reading widely and taking up opportunities to learn more about working with children and families)

- a good knowledge of the children's education and care sector, the setting they will be working in, and a willingness to learn

- a capacity to share with others the knowledge they acquire

- a commitment to upholding professional standards such as the ECA *Code of Ethics* (ECA, 2016).

Skills

Educational leaders will need a range of skills to effectively undertake the role. As part of the job requirements, an approved provider must seek, or hope to develop, skills such as:

- educational program planning
- application of the assessment and planning cycle, as applied to each child (jurisdiction-specific) and the program as a whole
- excellent communication skills (both written and oral) and the capacity to convey complex ideas in accessible ways
- offering inspiration and motivation to the team, to encourage exemplary practice and an excitement for change
- delegating responsibility and key tasks to others, as a means of empowerment and capacity building
- the ability to come up with creative and innovative solutions, and work with others to try new ideas and explore alternative ways of practice
- the ability to give and receive feedback, and use it to support growth and improvement
- time management skills and the capacity to prioritise multiple expectations
- taking responsibility for their work and the educational effectiveness of the program
- leading change and supporting others to shift practice
- mentoring and coaching others.

Attributes

Many attributes contribute to the effective practice of educational leadership. They are similar to those required in leaders generally, and make engagement with teams considerably easier. Attributes or characteristics that an educational leader is expected to portray include:

- respectfulness—acting with empathy; mindful of the needs and right of others
- honesty and integrity—always being truthful and following through on agreed actions
- confidence—demonstrating a willingness to speak up and advocate for best practice
- courage—being prepared to address difficult issues
- enthusiasm—being positive, open-minded and willing to try new approaches
- commitment—showing a level of responsibility to the role and those in the team
- decisiveness—making clear and transparent decisions
- empowerment—sharing the power and decision-making with others
- generocity—being courteous with colleagues and families in the service
- cooperation—showing a commitment to collaboration with all members of the team, especially those who find it difficult to participate.

Supporting and monitoring the educational leader

Offering support to the educational leader is a key responsibility of the approved provider and an expectation asserted by the NQS. It is outlined in Element 7.2.2 (Educational leadership) that 'the educational leader is supported and leads the development and implementation of the educational program and assessment and planning cycle' (ACECQA, 2018, p. 303).

The 2018 NQS reflects the importance of this support and requires clear processes that ensure educational leaders are given support to accomplish their goals (Table 1.3 on p. 67 outlines some strategies).

The support that approved providers can offer educational leaders may take many forms. It may be shaped by factors like the setting where the educational leaders are working, the teams that they are working with, and their own knowledge, skills and attributes. For example, an approved provider might appoint an experienced educator who is skilled at supporting educators to develop innovative programs. In this case, the support will be more about empowering the educational leader to make decisions about practice, and allocating the resources accordingly. In another scenario, an approved provider may appoint someone relatively new to a leadership role because of their high level of enthusiasm and energy. In this case, support could be provided in the form of regular meetings to determine priorities and help manage the change process.

The nature and level of required support will have to be established in collaboration between the approved providers (or their representatives) and the educational leaders. It will also need to be reviewed regularly.

Table 1.3: Support strategies for approved providers

Level of experience and confidence of an educational leader	Strategies
Beginner ↓ **More experienced**	*Regular meetings with the educational leader*
	Building and promoting the role
	Showing interest in the work of the educational leader
	Clarifying the leader's roles and responsibilities
	Listening to the experiences of the educational leader and reflecting on future action
	Asking questions about the challenges and opportunities that arise during the educational leader's work
	Workshopping different strategies
	Aligning strategies with organisational goals
	Prioritising actions and strategies
	Formally reviewing performance to support professional growth
	Encouraging opportunities for personal growth and learning
	Empowering independent decision-making
	Enabling strategic decision-making and an ongoing contribution to organisational goals

Other strategies include:

- holding regular meetings about service operation (see meeting agenda template on p. 140 of this Resource)

- allocating set hours for the role in relation to the needs of the service, for example, the number of educators in the service

- providing a budget and enabling the educational leader to work and meet with staff; for example, a relief staff budget to enable educators to be backfilled

- providing a professional learning budget for the educational leader—supporting their participation in local networks, and other formal educational leader training and support opportunities

- providing access to contemporary educational journals and other subscriptions to support professional learning (see resources on p. 70)

- allocating a supplementary equipment budget to allow for the purchase of additional items to support continuous improvement projects

- covering membership fees of professional organisations—these allow educational leaders to access up-to-date information and resources, and stay connected with other leaders

- funding membership fees of local community organisations that support education and innovations, such as environment and sustainability groups, reconciliation groups and other community initiatives.

Case study

Build a relationship based on respect and understanding of each other's responsibilities

The outside school hours care (OSHC) team at Wheelers Hill Primary School often connects with busy working families that don't have regular contact with the school community. There is also a strong connection between the school and the OSHC program, as we share information about the children who attend the program, and work on how children's learning and social skills can be supported.

The relationship between Sharyn Veale, our OSHC co-ordinator/educational leader, and myself (as the school principal) is built on respect and understanding of each other's responsibilities. We both understand the big picture of running a school and the many roles and responsibilities required to manage an OSHC program. This enables us to have open conversations about the direction of our OSHC program and how it supports the school community.

We consider Sharyn to be part of the school education team. She attends regular staff meetings, professional development (PD) training on social capacity or whole-school approaches, and staff wellbeing training. The OSHC voice is an important part of seeing many children in different environments and can often fill in the blanks about a child in need or a family in crisis. By including the OSHC educational leader in these meetings, we affirm that the school and the team values Sharyn's opinions and the work she does. Children's wellbeing is a combined approach and having the OSHC educational leader as a member of our School Improvement Team ensures we are all on the same page in supporting children's growth and wellbeing. The educational leader is also part of individual meetings held with professionals and families of children who are struggling or are dealing with trauma or other difficult issues.

Having open communication has allowed for individual mentoring on situations, or feedback as situations happen. We hold regular informal chats and organise check-in meetings about how the program is going, to identify current issues that need addressing. As the educational leader, Sharyn is also prepared to see issues and discuss possible solutions. This helps in developing outcomes that are both beneficial to the program as well as the families and children attending. We also make the time to develop learning goals within the Professional Development Program together and hold mid-cycle chats about its progress and what support is needed for achieving the planned goals.

The OSHC budget provides for PD training within the program and externally. We encourage Sharyn to attend conferences and training that supports the growth of the program and her individual development. We also look at training sessions to support individual goals for the year and for attending network meetings or participating in community organisations, which support OSHC in providing quality care for all children within work hours.

OSHC is part of our school's whole approach to working with families and children's learning and wellbeing.

— Michael Ramsey
Principal (Victoria)

Resources

Academic journals

Subscribing to academic journals that showcase contemporary pedagogy and practice will help support educational leaders and, in turn, educators to extend their professional knowledge and develop new strategies. This will further enhance children's learning, development and wellbeing.

Early Childhood Australia: Australasian Journal of Early Childhood

The *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* (AJEC) is Australasia's foremost scholarly journal and the world's longest-running major journal within the early childhood sector. Published quarterly, AJEC offers evidence-based articles that are designed to impart new information and encourage the critical exchange of ideas among early childhood practitioners, academics and students.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/australasian-journal-early-childhood/

SAGE Publishing: Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood

Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood (CIEC) is a peer-reviewed international research journal. It provides a forum for researchers and professionals who are exploring new and alternative perspectives in their work with young children (from birth to eight years of age) and their families. The journal covers interdisciplinary, cutting-edge work which may include the following areas: poststructuralist, postmodern and postcolonial approaches; queer theory; sociology of childhood; alternative viewpoints of child development. It also looks at issues such as language and identity, the discourse of difference, new information technologies, stories and voices, curriculum, culture and pedagogy.

https://au.sagepub.com/en-gb/oce/journal/contemporary-issues-early-childhood

Common Threads: Journal of Playwork Practice

Playwork is an approach to working with children that aims to support and facilitate play. The *Journal of Playwork Practice* is used by professionals working with children in a variety of international settings, from parks to prisons and deserts to development projects. The journal aims to advance playwork research and practice through the publication and dissemination of scholarship and literature relevant to the practice.

http://www.commonthreads.org.uk/jpp.html

Time allocation

There is no set time prescribed for the educational leader role in the National Regulations or the NQS. It is up to the approved provider to determine and ensure that adequate time is allocated to fulfil the expectations of the role effectively. So, it will require a contextual approach, as each service is unique.

While it is difficult to indicate a preferred model of hours and times for the role, the following parameters might help approved providers in appropriately allocating time, based on:

- service size—depending on size, services may require less or more educational leader hours and related resources to effectively support the number of educators and educational programs in their practice

  » a smaller service might need to combine leadership roles, for example, educational leader and assistant manager—this is a good option when resources are limited; however, care should be taken to ensure that the management roles do not consume the educational roles, as mentoring and management may bring in a conflict of interest for both educational leaders and educators

  » larger services might consider redefining the role to allow for specialisations, such as working with children aged birth to three years, or the oldest children in the school age care program, or in terms of the outside space

- staff size—services with a number of part-time educators might need to consider allocating educational leader hours across a week and with some flexibility to ensure all educators benefit from support

- service type—for example, family day care services might consider fixing a certain number of educators per educational leader to ensure that support is offered equally.

Note: If roles are combined (for example, the nominated supervisor and educational leader) approved providers need to be mindful that adequate resources and support are available to ensure that the educational leader role is effectively implemented and supported.

Case study

Split the role based on support requirements for different programs

As part of the annual review and in consultation with educators, the leadership team of a large service in the northern suburbs of Melbourne identified that the role of the educational leader was becoming far too stretched. At times, educators felt that they could not access the support they needed. Following a brainstorming meeting with the leadership team, the decision was made to implement a more innovative approach that split the three-day role into two new roles: a three-day position for the educational leader of the under-three programs, and a two-day role supporting the three-to-five programs.

— **Approved Provider**
Early Childhood Centre (Victoria)

Resources

ACECQA: Quality Area 7 (Governance and leadership)

This page on the ACECQA website contains information and a collection of resources about Quality Area 7 of the NQS.

www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard/quality-area-7-governance-and-leadership

ACECQA: Leadership and management in education and care services—An analysis of Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standard

This occasional paper offers insights into children's education and care services quality ratings for Quality Area 7 (Leadership and service management) of the 2012 NQS.

www.acecqa.gov.au/acecqas-occasional-paper-5-quality-area-7

ELAA: Employee Management and Development Kit

The Employee Management and Development Kit has been developed by Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA) to support early learning services in the ongoing management and development of their employees. The kit includes a collection of customisable electronic forms.

https://elaa.org.au/resources/free-resources/employee-management-development-kit/

ACECQA Information Sheet: Quality Area 7—Using complaints to support continuous improvement

Complaints can be an opportunity for critical reflection and can drive quality improvements. This information sheet offers suggestions for addressing complaints from families, and provides information about legislative and reporting requirements.

www.acecqa.gov.au/media/22986

What will be considered in the assessment and rating process?

The *Guide to the National Quality Framework* (ACECQA, 2018, p. 306) provides examples of what assessors may observe, discuss or sight in the assessment and rating process in regard to the educational leader role. For example, they may observe the educational leader working with educators to build capacity and understanding about pedagogy and practice, including ways in which educators assess, reflect on and plan for children's learning.

In addition, the assessor may discuss, for example:

- how the service supports the educational leader to have opportunities for discussions with educators, provide mentoring, lead reflective practice, and realise the intent of their role
- how the educational leader assists educators in promoting children's learning and development and, when necessary, facilitating discussions with families
- what strategies and processes the educational leader uses to lead the development of effective programs within the service, and to ensure the planning cycle is implemented effectively.

To support the information collected, the assessor may also sight evidence of:

- designation of the educational leader in the staff record
- documentation of the educational leader providing feedback and guidance to educators about the assessment and planning cycle
- reflective practice discussions that critically examine current practice and that lead to quality improvement.

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For a full reference list for the NQS Quality Areas, see the ACECQA website: **www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about/guide/NQS-reference-list**.
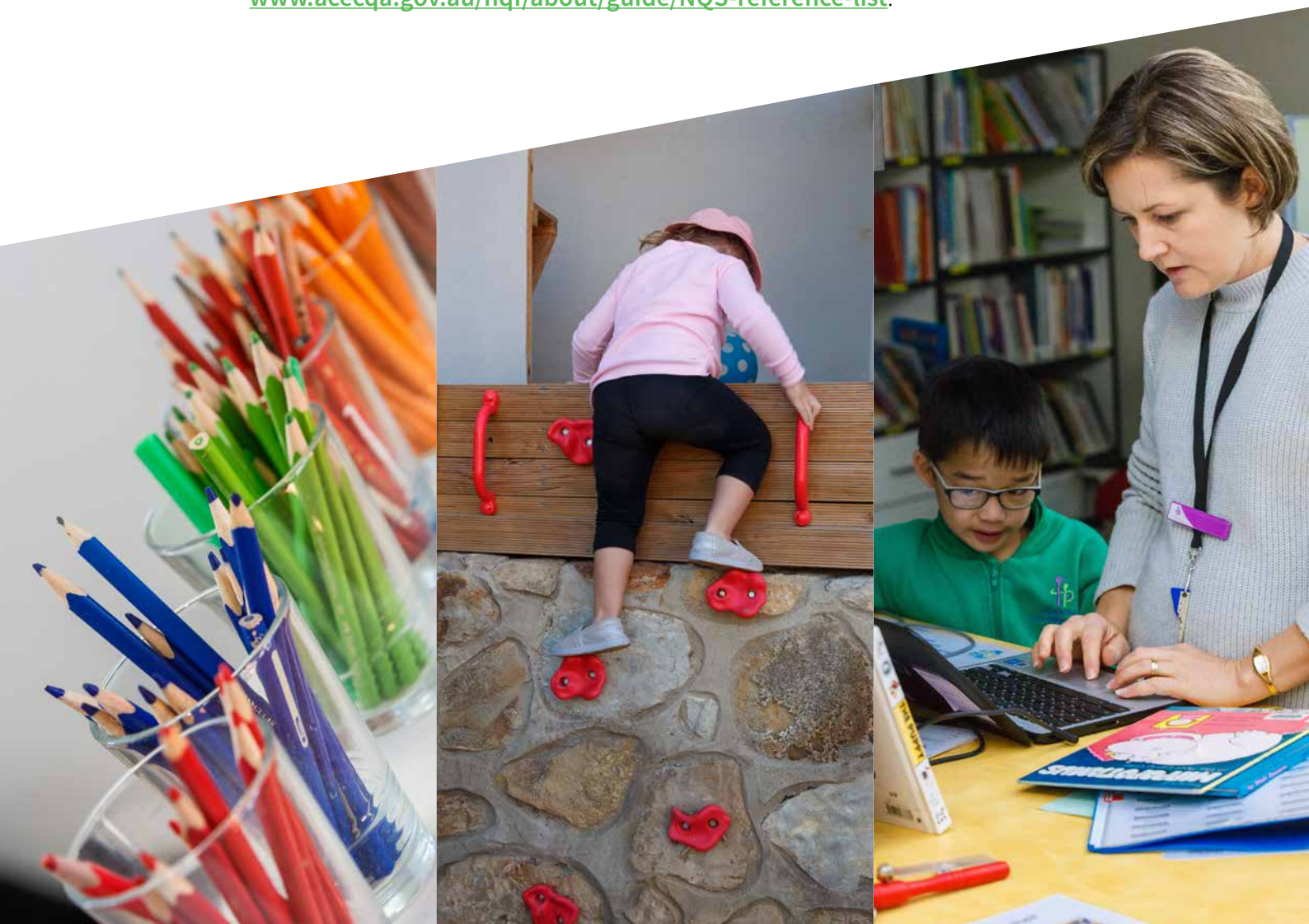
PART TWO

A Model for understanding and exploring educational leadership

PART TWO: A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Analysing educational leadership

This part of the Resource uses an **Educational Leadership Model** (ELM) to further analyse the educational leader's role, and to promote an expanded view of it. The Model is presented as a set of key capabilities, or abilities, within which an educational leader might grow and develop as a leader. This Model is drawn from Elizabeth Stamopoulos's (2012) research into leadership in early childhood and, in particular, her article, 'Reframing early childhood leadership'. Similar to primary and secondary school settings, the ELM defines the role in holistic terms and explores the ways of knowing and interacting within a setting and in relation to others. It aims to cultivate a stronger understanding and enactment of children's learning and wellbeing.

The dimensions of the Model are described first in terms of what these ideas mean for an educational leader, and then in more detail by four leading academics and researchers from universities around the country. They examine the dimensions from their own perspectives, sharing research insights and practical suggestions.

The Model invites educational leaders to broaden their thinking and reflect on the role as one that requires growth and development of key capabilities. It caters to those who are interested in imagining the possibilities of the role for themselves, as professionals, and for the sector overall, besides ensuring the key responsibilities under law are addressed. Ultimately, the Model's goal is to work towards empowering educator teams in diverse settings to enrich and enable children's learning and wellbeing.

Elements of the Educational Leadership Model

The ELM comprises four key elements—knowledge, professionalism, relationships and reflection—that intersect and form the basis of educational leadership (Figure 2.1 on p. 79).
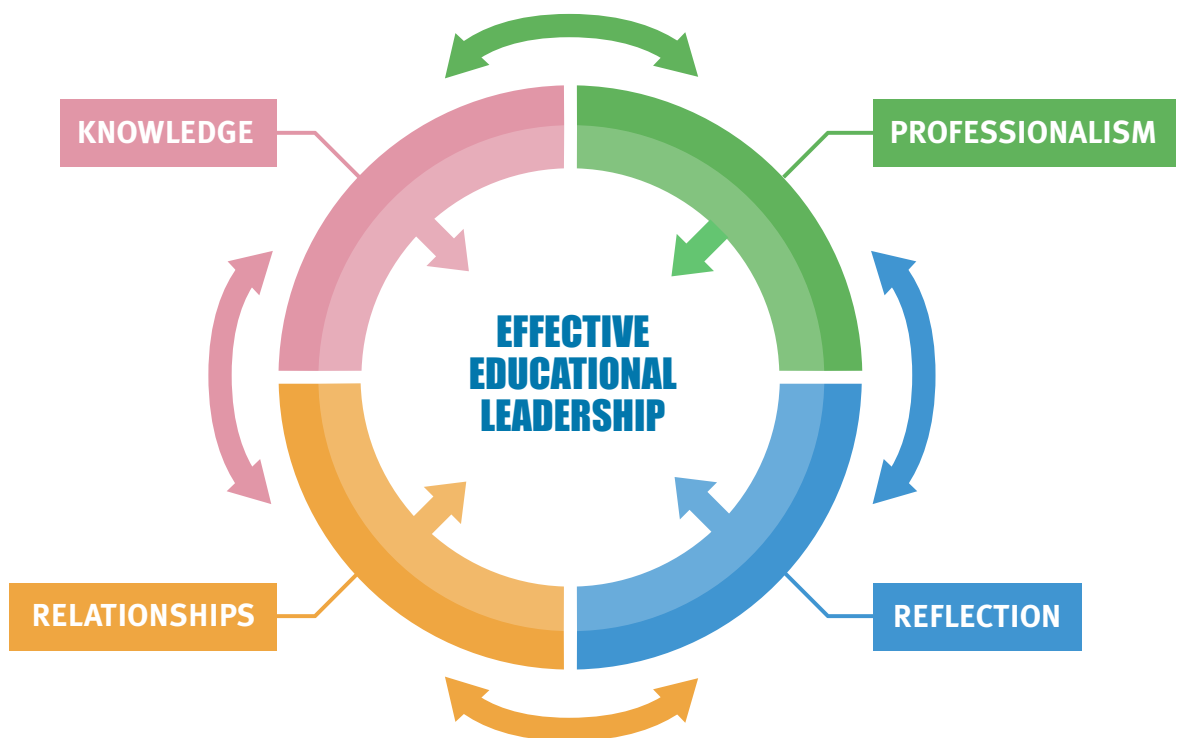
Figure 2.1: The four dimensions of effective educational leadership

Knowledge

This dimension recognises the educational leader as being knowledgeable about children's learning, wellbeing and the quality practices that promote outcomes. In addition, educational leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to ongoing learning, and actively pursue new ideas and contemporary understandings related to the children and families in their service.

They demonstrate this commitment by sharing their knowledge—with colleagues as well as the community of children's education and care services—in order to understand how theories shape practice and how the lived experience of educators influences research.

The knowledge that leaders need is broad and contextual: knowledge of pedagogy, curriculum, assessment processes as well as the theories and practices that support effective teaching and learning within specific program settings. It is also essential to know how these ideas play out in specific settings and contexts, what factors influence the delivery of quality educational programs, and how educators learn.

With an understanding of how important it is to be a learner, the educational leader is a knowledge broker and knowledge generator, who commits to building a knowledgeable community of practice.

Reflective questions

- What do educational leaders need to know?
- What specific knowledge do I need in my service?
- How do I build my knowledge?
- What do I already know?
- What do I need to know?
- How can new knowledge best be communicated to the team I work with?

Professionalism

This dimension recognises that educational leaders demonstrate professional and ethical practice in their interactions with others, and use their influence to establish what the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13) and the *Framework for School Age Care* (DEEWR, 2011, p. 12) refer to as a 'lively culture of professional inquiry'.

Acting as a professional, and articulating why these behaviours are important, helps others understand the scope of ethical responsibilities that shape this sector's work with children, families, colleagues and the community. In this way, educational leaders challenge the prevailing image of educators as mere technicians, and remould their identity as educators engaged in the complex task of enhancing children's learning and wellbeing.

The process of setting the tone for professionalism begins with educational leaders thinking of themselves as professionals with ethical responsibilities to which they hold themselves accountable. These commitments have been outlined in the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) *Code of Ethics* (ECA, 2016) and apply to all childhood professionals who work in children's education and care services across Australia.

Professionalism is also about advocating for the place of effective educational programs and practice in the delivery of children's education and care. From time to time, it might mean taking courageous action and having the capacity to speak up for children's right to quality education. This skill is enhanced by the development of the other dimensions in this Model.

Reflective questions

- What does it mean to be professional and ethical as an educational leader?
- What do educational leaders need to know to be professional?
- How can I demonstrate my professionalism to others?

Relationships

This dimension recognises the role of the educational leader as being intensely relational. Much of what is prescribed and promoted as fundamental to the role, and to bringing ideas to fruition, relies on effective and collaborative relationships. These relationships are sophisticated, dynamic and, at their best, are built on respect, dialogue and an emphasis on collaborative thinking. They are much more than friendships and go beyond simple agreement. Connections of this kind work to promote a shared vision of practice and endure the ebbs and flows of service delivery.

Educational leaders commit to nurturing relationships not because it is easier, although this is invariably the case, but because practice in children's education and care services grows from, and is shaped by, effective relationships.

It is often the case that when educational leaders assume the role, they notice a shift in their relationships with others, especially with colleagues. As they move from peer to leader, they balance being part of the team while also offering advice and support, and driving a vision for quality.

Reflective questions

- How do educational leaders build relationships?
- How effective are my current professional relationships?
- What skills will help me build relationships?
- What challenges am I likely to face as I build relationships?

Reflection

This dimension recognises the educational leader as being a reflective professional who takes time—alone and with others—to consider the impact of the sector's collective work with children, families, colleagues and the wider community. The art of reflection is ingrained in the educational leader's daily work, and is demonstrated by an inquiring attitude to practice and a communication style that is focused on asking questions rather than presenting answers.

The EYLF specifically identifies this capability as 'an ongoing cycle of review through which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed and new ideas generated' and that 'in such a climate, issues relating to curriculum quality, equity and children's wellbeing can be raised and debated' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13). Educational leaders cultivate this culture by demonstrating reflective practice in their informal conversations with others, and in more formal reflection processes.

A commitment to reflective thinking and interpretive decision-making is not always easy. This process inevitably challenges the taken-for-granted practices embedded in a service and, as such, relies on the capabilities of the other dimensions in this Model—in particular, the capacity for building trusting relationships and having the knowledge to support change.

Reflective questions

- What processes do I use to reflect?
- What is my knowledge of reflection and how can I support this in others?
- How can I strengthen my own reflective practice?
- How can I lead and support a culture of reflective practice in others?
- What are the challenges that I need to be mindful of?

The next section explores the Model's dimensions from the perspective of four leading academics. They address the dimensions from their own unique points of view, linking the ideas to their own research and experience in the field.

They represent the diversity of perspectives that shape our understanding of the role of leading educational programs and practice in service settings across Australia. Through these insights, readers are encouraged to make a deeper connection with, and reflect on, contemporary research on the role, the effectiveness and lived experience of the educational leader, as well as the emerging research evidence.

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KNOWLEDGE

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Charles Sturt University

What do educational leaders need to know?

Many articles concerning educational leadership focus on what educational leaders can or should do to be successful in their leadership role. This often includes the activities, techniques or strategies they can use to support effective practice. The question to be discussed here is somewhat different. Stamopolous (2012) identifies professional knowledge as a key element of successful educational leadership. Therefore, it is important to ask: what do educational leaders need to **know**? Answering this question requires us to first touch upon the educational leader's role.

Educational leaders lead knowledge development and support others to translate knowledge into everyday practice (Boe & Hognestad, 2017). They do this to enable all educators within the service to strengthen, improve and even transform the education and care they provide to children within the early childhood program. At its best, educational leadership enables 'staff to perform at a level beyond expectations' (Brownlee, Nailon & Tickle, 2010, p. 5).

To successfully lead knowledge development, educational leaders need to 'lead with intent' (Stamopolous, 2012, p. 42), to provide the intellectual stimulation that encourages thinking, learning and reflection (Bass, 1995, as cited in Brownlee et al., 2010), and to link theory with practice (Colmer, Waniganayake & Field, 2014). This requires knowledge.

What is knowledge?

The term 'knowledge' can be understood in different ways depending upon the context. For example, knowledge might be thought to consist of a collection of 'facts' or 'truths' that we learn from another source. This type of knowledge can appear to be fixed or certain. When this is the case, learning or teaching knowledge may appear to be simply the transmission of what is known.

Deep learning, however, requires the assimilation of knowledge (Campbell & McNamara, as cited in Colmer et al., 2014) and therefore involves more than accumulating or memorising 'facts'. An alternative way to think about knowledge is to understand it as 'personally constructed, evolving and evidence-based' (Brownlee et al., 2010). That is, we come to 'know' through processes of thinking and reflecting upon information, evidence, our own learning and that of others.

This view of knowledge recognises that what we know can change over time and according to context. For example, new understandings might come through research, or through exposure to new perspectives, or because changes in society and culture affect what we think is important or necessary. Educators who view knowledge as personally constructed and evidence-based tend to be better equipped to reflect on the nature of their own and others' learning, and engage in transformative teaching practices (Brownlee et al., 2010).

The importance of knowledge lies in its ability to help us move beyond belief and opinion toward understanding. By seeking out knowledge, we can test our ideas and gut reactions against diverse sources of information and evidence. This is essential to improving practice and problem-solving.

What knowledge do educational leaders need?

It is, of course, impossible to provide a definitive list of everything educational leaders need to know. Every day and every circumstance will provide its own set of opportunities and challenges for which new knowledge and information might be sought. However, it can be helpful to think about both the **categories** and **types** of knowledge that educational leaders can draw upon in their work with others.

For the purposes of this discussion, the knowledge that educational leaders need can be broadly categorised as: information, evidence and understanding. Cutting across these categories are the various types of knowledge central to the work of educational leaders: pedagogical knowledge, theoretical knowledge and contextual knowledge.

Knowledge as information: At its most fundamental, the role of the educational leader is to 'work with educators to provide curriculum direction' (Rouse & Spradbury, 2016, p. 497). Therefore, educational leaders must become familiar and keep up-to-date with the content of the key policy frameworks that set standards (such as the National Regulations); establish expectations (such as the National Quality Standard [NQS]); and influence the pedagogy of educators, (for example, the EYLF for early childhood educators, and *My Time, Our Place* for those working in outside schools hours care). Depending on where the service is located, educational leaders may also need to be familiar with a state/territory or organisationally based curriculum document or guideline.

Educational leaders also need to seek out information to help inform discussions around specific practices within the service. This might, for example, include reference points such as the ECA *Code of Ethics*, or best practice guidelines in relation to issues such as infants' safe sleeping practices, or the particular health and developmental conditions facing the children with whom they work.

Knowledge as evidence: While a working knowledge of documents such as the approved learning frameworks and the NQS are essential, they are not designed to tell educators what to do. Rather they are reference points for an ongoing cycle of curriculum decision-making in which educators exercise their informed professional judgement (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9).

The development of informed professional judgement involves seeking out evidence. Over the past three decades, there has been a groundswell of research on children's experiences of, and outcomes from, participation in education and care settings outside the home and school. A familiarity with contemporary research and evidence can support practice that is automatically in line with the NQS. Further, it can deepen educators' knowledge and practices in a way that cannot be achieved solely through 'self-reflection against policy documents' (Kah Yan Loo & Abenyega, 2015, p. 129).

Knowledge as understanding: The role of understanding is to know what we are doing and for what purpose. Understanding grounds our actions, decisions and deliberations in various bodies of knowledge and forms the foundation of what we are doing. Without this foundation, we risk being pushed and pulled in different directions by competing opinions and perspectives. Knowledge as understanding enables us to articulate a stance

and explain or defend our actions and intent. It also enables us to enter into dialogue with those whose views may be different and, in doing so, discover intelligent or thoughtful responses to even the most challenging of circumstances.

Knowledge areas

There are a number of ways to think about the areas of knowledge needed by educational leaders. Rouse and Spradbury (2016), for instance, state that educators need a knowledge of child development to understand children as learners, and an understanding of the pedagogies that promote and support children's learning and development. Nicholson and Kroll (2015) argue that educators need to be supported to deepen their understandings and widen their perspectives. This enables them to analyse and interpret situations in a way that creates a more diverse range of choices in responding to, or planning for, the complexities of the work.

For the purpose of this discussion, the areas of knowledge required are identified as pedagogical, theoretical and contextual (Figure 2.2 on p. 87).

Pedagogical knowledge: Curriculum tends to be oriented to content and outcomes. The concept of pedagogy is much broader and relates to the processes and art of teaching. It captures not only what is taught but how it is taught. It is based on an understanding of children as learners and is responsive to the contexts in which teaching takes place (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). Pedagogy encompasses, and is dependent upon, educators' interactions and relationships with people, including children, families and other educators. A robust pedagogy is grounded in the service and educators' philosophical stance of the setting and its educators' knowledge about such things as the image of the child, the nature of childhood and the purpose of education (McCrea, 2015).

Pedagogy is developed and informed by ongoing reflection upon its impact. Educators and educational leaders gather various types of information to reflect upon and evaluate their pedagogy. This information may include observation of children—individually or in groups—and pedagogical documentation. The challenge for educational leaders is to ensure that such information gathering is meaningful and purposeful. Observations and documentation are time-consuming and should not be regarded as an end-product in themselves. Their value derives from how they inform our understanding of children— their interests, capacities, theorising, perspectives and challenges—and the pedagogical work itself.

Theoretical knowledge: The conscious application of theoretical knowledge enables educational leaders to guide and collaborate with educators in developing the early childhood program. Rather than educators drawing on a grab-bag of strategies in their work, explicitly using theory as a reference point can help build cohesion within teams and across the service. In some types of programs, a central theoretical approach is the clear and obvious driver of practice (for example, Montessori and Steiner schools). Typically, programs in Australia may be informed by a range of theories. The EYLF identifies that the work of early childhood educators in Australia may be informed by developmental theories, socio-cultural theories, socio-behaviourist theories, critical theories and post-structural theories (DEEWR, 2009, p. 11). Theories are a tool to help us develop our understanding. By being conscious of the theories they are drawing on to inform their work, educational leaders and educators can recognise their strengths and limitations, and seek alternative ways of understanding when needed.

Contextual knowledge: Contextual knowledge requires educators to understand the important features of the context in which they work—the community, its strengths and challenges, as well as knowledge of each child and their family. Importantly, contextual knowledge also involves being aware of the overarching aspirations of the service, that may be expressed in its philosophy, vision and stated values.

Most writers on educational leadership stress the importance of context. Male and Palaiologou (2015) argue that leadership depends upon a contextual interpretation, understanding and application of knowledge, ideas and action. They describe pedagogical leadership as an activity and process negotiated between knowledge, learners, personal contexts and community.

Chan (2017) uses the term 'contextual intelligence' to describe the ability to step back and view the organisation and the problems encountered within it holistically. In turn, this enables knowledge to be adapted to the reality of the immediate context.

KNOWLEDGE

- Pedagogy
- Theory
- Contextual intelligence

- Information
- Evidence
- Understanding
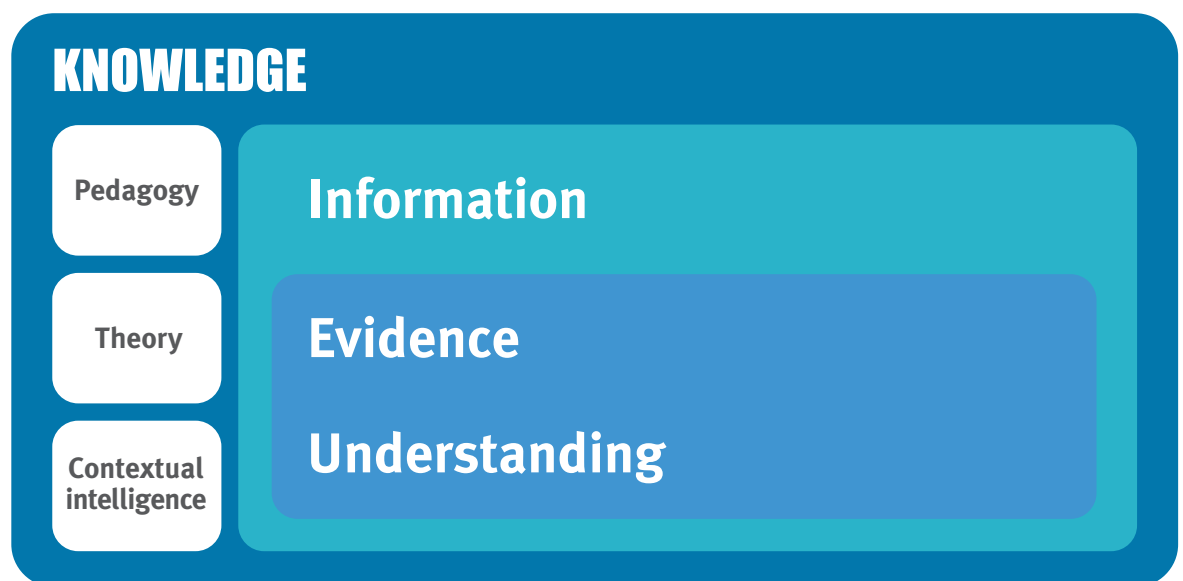
Figure 2.2: Knowledge areas

The value of uncertainty

'Feeling comfortable with uncertainty' (Cartmel et al., 2013, p. 407) is identified as an important trait in being an effective leader and, ironically, an important component of 'knowing'. Nicholson and Kroll (2015) argue that it is important to learn to use uncertainty to our advantage. Uncertainty is a trigger for the educator to step back from practice and assumptions and to investigate and question more; in not knowing, we are open to increasing our understanding. On the other hand, assumptions and preconceived ideas can block dialogue and obstruct knowing (Carroll-Lind, Smorti, Ord & Robinson, 2016). Uncertainty opens the possibility of examining a situation from different perspectives, to unpack the assumptions and values that lie behind practices.

Educational leaders build knowledge collaboratively

Knowledge is key to the educational leader's role. However, the educational leader does not simply transmit knowledge and provide direction, but draws upon their own knowledge and that of others to influence and facilitate collaborative knowledge development and understanding (Boe & Hognestad, 2017).

GETTING PRACTICAL

An educational leader reading this may now be thinking that there is just too much to know—how can one person know all these things? Rather than being overwhelmed, remember that the role of the educational leader is a facilitative one. The educational leader is not the expert in everything but a facilitator of knowledge-building within the team. This involves supporting a culture of reflective practice and encouraging the abilities and growth of others.

Encourage a culture of reflective practice

Rouse and Spradbury (2016) argue that in order to build and sustain reflective practice in others, educational leaders must 'reflect on their own practice, focus on curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning processes and recognise the importance of nurturing relationships' (p. 506).

In other forums, educational leaders might be asked to reflect upon the type of leader they envisage themselves becoming. With respect to knowledge building, and in order to facilitate a culture of inquiry and reflective practice, educational leaders can do the following:

- First, consider the processes of learning as well as the content of learning, by reflecting upon themselves and others as learners.

- Second, recognise that work in children's education and care services is dependent upon effective teamwork. Participation, active involvement, dialogue and shared knowledge typify the culture of pedagogy and professionalism within such settings (Murray & McDowall Clark, 2013). As a result, educational leadership must build in opportunities for staff to inquire and learn with others.

- Third, educational leaders build a repertoire of resources to support the intellectual stimulation that encourages thinking, learning and reflection.

- Finally, recognise that improving, extending and developing pedagogy and successfully responding to challenges is an ongoing endeavour, not a one-off event.

Be comfortable with uncertainty

Sometimes educators will find themselves uncomfortable or confronted by a different perspective or way of doing things. This can be a prompt for asking:

- Is there more we need to know?

- Is our knowledge on this issue up to date?

- What additional information might be needed to consider this question more fully?

- What is our current justification for doing what we do?

- Having investigated the issue more fully, does this justification still stand?

Have resources on hand and seek them out when needed

Build a repository of resources that supports knowledge-building and decision-making. This can include books, journals, professional publications, websites, networks with other professionals and support agencies. These can be used to encourage and support self-directed learning in others and be a catalyst for thinking about how to improve practices.

Ensure resources are credible. With so much information available online, it is important that the information we draw upon is credible. When seeking out resources, look for signs that establish their credibility, such as:

- Are they produced by a reputable professional organisation, professional agency or government body?
- Are journal articles research-based and peer reviewed?
- Is the author an expert in that field?
- Does the author refer to research or other experts in the field?
- How old is the resource? Does it discuss information that may need to be updated?
- Are websites produced by a reputable organisation?
- Are they regularly updated?
- What is the purpose of the writing—to inform you, or to sell you something?

Become familiar with the range of information available. National bodies, member organisations, representative bodies, and professional support agencies are all potential sources of information and support.

For example, there is access to a wide range of evidence-based materials specially developed to support the sector from bodies such as:

- The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) **www.acecqa.gov.au**.
- State and territory regulatory authorities **https://www.acecqa.gov.au/help/contact-your-regulatory-authority**.

There will be times when it is necessary to seek out information outside the field of education and care. For example, the websites of the Centre for Community Child Health (**www.rch.org.au/ccch/**) and Raising Children Network (**raisingchildren.net.au**) provide evidence-based information on a range of issues concerned with children's health and development.

Organisations that represent particular sections of the care and education sector, such as ECA, Family Day Care Australia (FDCA), and the National Out of School Hours Services Association (NOSHSA), often provide their members with access to information and professional support.

A comprehensive list of potential support can be found on this page of the ACECQA website: **www.acecqa.gov.au/help/links**.

In addition, find out what is available through and in your local community—both within and outside the service. Some ideas include:

- Use your local library.
- Educators undertaking further study can access materials through their university or TAFE libraries to share with the team.
- Families can be sources of information and support.
- Participate in your local inter-agency and networks.

Identify the information you always want to have on hand to help the team make decisions and make sure these are always accessible. The following are recommended core materials that you can add to:

- the service's philosophy/vision

- the service's policies
- the NQS
- the approved learning frameworks that apply to your work
- ECA *Code of Ethics*.

Make the implicit, explicit

Complacency can embed a pattern of behaviour that prevents creativity, innovation and change (Hadley, Waniganayake & Shepherd, 2015). This can be counteracted by creating sufficient space and conditions for 'in-depth dialogue [that] can reveal contextually embedded practices' (Nicholson & Kroll, 2015, p. 18).

A key focus for educational leadership is to support professional learning that guides educators in thinking more fully about what they are doing and why, and how things might be different. Time, resources and opening up practice to informed questioning can help teams reflect deeply upon what they do and to think about the implications of the practices we take for granted. As well as providing opportunities for reflection, encouraging inquiry as a group endeavour can be enormously beneficial.

The questions in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 are not a definitive list, but provide examples of what educational leaders and teams might ask in relation to what they know, and what they might need to know.

Table 2.1: Reflective questions to explore what teams know and what they need to know

CATEGORY	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Knowledge as information	What information is foundational to our work to meet required standards?
	What additional information is needed to supplement the expertise within the service?
	What is known about the issue that can inform our approach?
	What don't we understand?
Knowledge as evidence	What research has been done on this issue?
	What have others learnt through their investigations?
	What can we learn from tracking and evaluating what we do?
Knowledge as understanding	What do I know about this situation? What do others (educators/children/families/other professionals) know?
	Does this approach work? If so, how does it work? Why does it work?
	What are we learning? How are we learning it?

Table 2.2: Reflective questions to explore what affects your work, as an educational leader and as an educational team

CATEGORY	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Pedagogical knowledge	Do we explicitly use theory to inform what we do?
	What explicit and implicit theories underpin our approach to teaching and learning?
	Which theorists do we, or can we, refer to when thinking through ideas and pedagogical approaches?
	Are the theories we adopt consistent with the service's philosophy, aims and values?
Theoretical knowledge	What does our service aspire to achieve for children, their families and community?
	What do we understand about each child and his/her family?
	What information is used to inform decisions about what is taught and how it is taught?
	What do we know about our community?
	Is our community knowledge up to date?
Contextual knowledge	What does our service aspire to achieve for children, their families and community?
	What do we understand about each child and his/her family?
	What information is used to inform decisions about what is taught and how it is taught?
	What do we know about our community?
	Is our community knowledge up to date?

In summary

As educational leader, you can build knowledge by:

- valuing the body of professional knowledge you bring to your work, and becoming familiar with and recognising the expertise of others in your team
- compiling a list of key reference points for reflection and problem-solving
- viewing difficult situations as holding the potential to deepen your learning and skills and that of the team
- asking questions and encouraging others to do the same
- building a repository of resources and having credible references on hand that are accessible to the team. These can inform your work and that of others, and become a reference point for problem-solving and improving practice.

Acknowledgement

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PROFESSIONALISM

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Edith Cowan University

Educational leaders display professionalism in all aspects of their work and assist others to do the same. Educators in children's education and care services demonstrate their professionalism by:

- having specialised knowledge about childhood, and all aspects of quality education and care programs for children

- having good communication skills and articulating their philosophy and theoretical perspectives of how children grow and learn effectively

- forming effective relationships with children, families, colleagues and community members

- increasing their knowledge through ongoing professional learning and reflecting on practice with others

- acting as change agents to advocate for socially just legislation and policies that affect children, families and the profession, and for high-quality children's education and care for all

- working to ensure high standards of practice, as they know that their actions reflect on the whole profession

- committing to work within an ethical and moral framework usually set out in a professional code of ethics, and acting with honesty and integrity

- displaying a positive attitude and work ethic, and conducting themselves in a professional manner—they are polite, attentive, dress appropriately and conduct themselves as a good representative of the profession (adapted from Barblett, Hydon & Kennedy, 2017; Feeney, 2012).

Building a professional identity as an educational leader

Educational leaders have been selected for the position in reference to the criteria as described within the National Quality Framework (NQF), and because they demonstrate the hallmarks of being a children's education and care professional. They work to build their professional identity not only as an educator but also as an educational leader who has different roles and responsibilities.

It is important to reflect upon and develop a leadership mindset and establish this identity. Thinking about how you want to be known as an educational leader assists in developing your identity. Seemiller and Priest (2015) describe four spaces for developing a professional identity as an educational leader. They include:

- exploration (will it fit for me?)

- experimentation (does it fit for me?)

- validation (do others think it fits for me?)

- confirmation (how do I validate others?).

They also suggest that many variables can affect movement back and forth in these spaces, such as key life events, contextual issues, personal agency, the people who you work with, commitment and expertise.

Look through the four spaces in Table 2.3 and ask yourself the questions. Are they questions that you have considered in establishing your professional identity as an educational leader?

Table 2.3: Spaces for developing a professional identity and related reflective questions

Space	Description	Questions to ask
1. Exploration	Exploring the roles and responsibilities of an educational leader	What is this identity and what does it mean for me? What are the roles and responsibilities of being an educational leader? Do my values, beliefs and styles fit with my perceptions of this identity? What are my colleagues' expectations of this identity?
2. Experimentation	Trying on all the parts of being an educational leader until they feel right	How do I feel about parts of this identity? What will be the core parts of my educational leader professional identity? How can I find out more about being an educational leader?
3. Validation	Self-approval and approval from others in your role as educational leader is important	What counts as approval from myself and others? What do I need to do to demonstrate my professional identity as an educational leader?
4. Confirmation	Professional identity as an educational leader has been established	As an educational leader, how do I assist others with our profession's understanding of being an educational leader?

(Adapted from Seemiller & Priest, 2015)

Much of the literature paints a picture of some educational leaders that perhaps do not think of themselves as leaders and who have not established their professional identity as educational leaders. Of the many different styles of leadership, distributed leadership has been found to be most effective in educational settings. This style of leadership does not set the educational leader at the top of a hierarchy. Instead, the leader is also a team player and the power of the position is shared or distributed.

Distributed leadership (Figure 2.3 on p. 95) for the educational leader means that they share power; they don't sit themselves at the top of the team but form an integral part of it.

They use their professional capabilities in the following four main areas to distribute leadership and glue the team together:

1. **Culture**—they lead in building a positive professional organisational culture where participatory learning is key.

2. **Connection**—they assist teams to connect to each other in respectful ways and connect to new learning and thinking with positive attitudes.

3. **Collective responsibility**—they help everyone understand that continuous improvement and provision of quality programs is everyone's responsibility.

4. **Commitment**—they model and inspire others to commit to professional values, ethics and commitments, and to accomplish the goals of the organisation.

Embracing the position and finding out more about how to lead others, how to lead their learning and transforming pedagogy and practice is important.
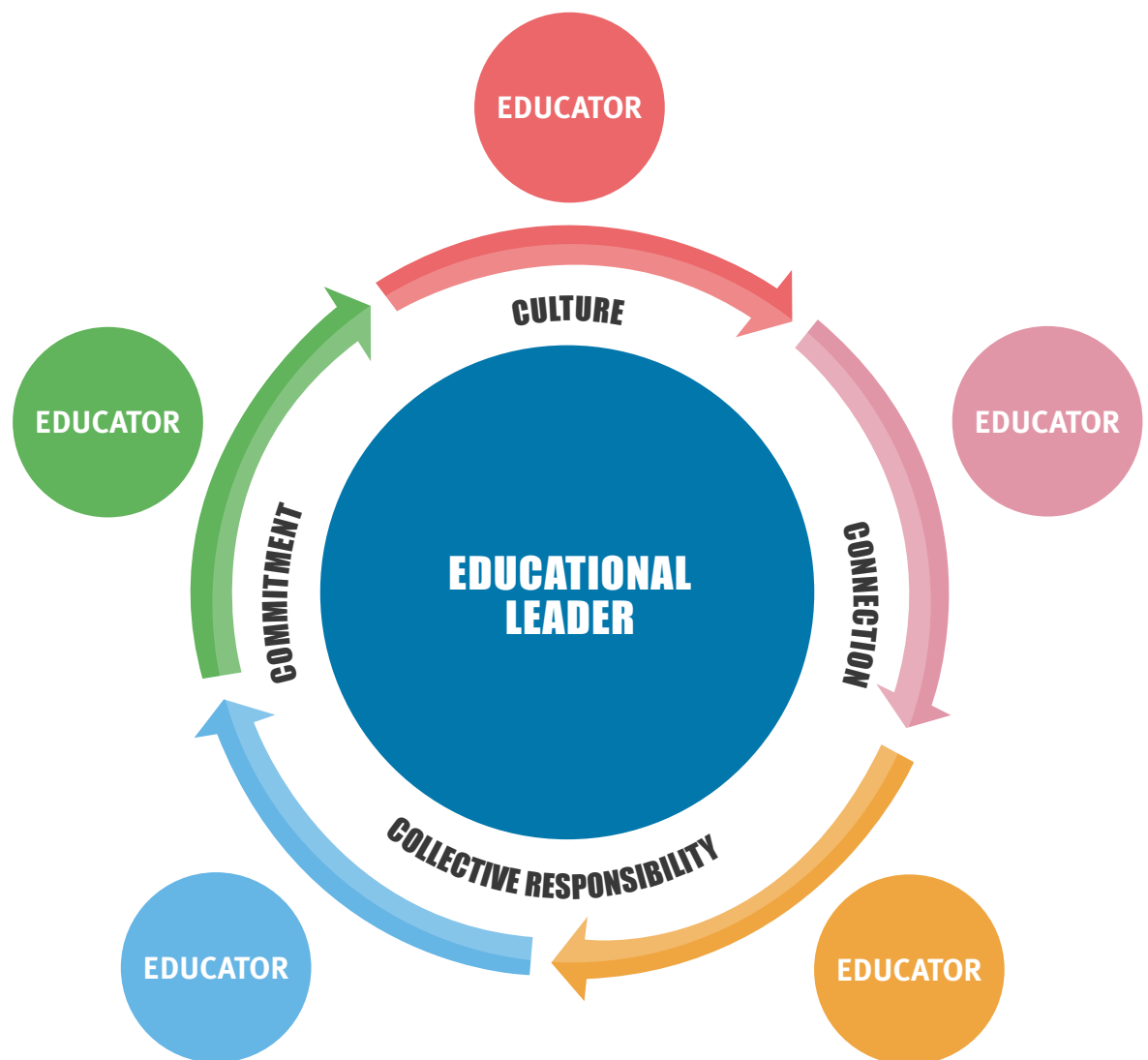
Figure 2.3: Educational leaders and distributed leadership

Identifying as an educational leader requires a fine-tuning of professional responsibilities and an understanding of leadership that transforms and motivates team members. The role of an educational leader includes:

- supporting quality improvement

- strengthening educators' knowledge and practice

- assisting others in their curriculum decision-making to develop, implement and assess effective programs for amplifying children's learning, development and wellbeing.

It is important to get this right, as pedagogical leadership was found to have the most significant impact on learning outcomes for children than any other form of leadership (Robinson, Hopea & Lloyd, 2009). Therefore, a deeper exploration of the professional roles of an educational leader is needed to assist with building culture, commitment, collective responsibility and connection.

Building respectful relationships with knowledge of power dimensions

The work of the educational leader is nested within a series of relationships. These are reciprocal, responsive and caring relationships that are characterised by 'respect, honesty, empathy, trust and warmth' (Feeney, 2012, p. 58). Respect is a fundamental understanding that underpins all relationships in the setting: each individual has value and should be appreciated no matter their age, gender, culture, ethnicity or professional status. Valuing an individual's right to a different point of view and supporting them to make choices for themselves is important in building respectful relationships, leading learning and transforming programs.

The educational leader's work places them in a position of power. By applying this power ethically and thoughtfully across all facets of the role, the educational leader's actions and decisions will contribute to the development of a positive team culture, in which collaborative relationships are built with trust and honesty, and where interdependence between team members is created.

Educational leaders often have a responsibility for the team and a responsibility to the team, as they will be team members themselves (Jones & Pound, 2008). They put the interests of the team before their own and this modelling acts as a guide and a motivator for others to do the same. When a positive team culture is established, an intellectual and emotional connection is built between members and the educational leader, and everyone becomes equally responsible for the achievement of common goals.

Leading professional learning, language and thinking

The educational leader has a professional responsibility to increase their own knowledge and skills in order to effectively model and lead the learning of others to transform pedagogy and practices. While Morrison (2011, p. 13) suggests that professionals in this field are never 'finished products', as the rate of change in the children's education and care sector makes it impossible to learn everything at once. When educational leaders seek to understand their own pedagogy, they can assist others and explore ways of improving practice.

In demonstrating their professionalism, educational leaders will know the approved learning frameworks, NQS, National Regulations, and how to contribute and plan for continuous quality improvement. A key task is mediating the regulatory frameworks with contextual factors and the expert knowledge of all educators so that practice is guided by collaborative, evidence-based practice.

Every child has a right to high-quality education, so it is important that educational leaders' knowledge of educational practices, theory and changes to regulatory and learning frameworks is up to date. They improve their own knowledge and skills by:

- accessing and using professional information; studying for higher qualifications; forming a reading group and/or reading professional literature, such as journals; participating in online learning; joining professional networks, educational leader forums and organisations

- linking into community networks to assist in building the infrastructure to support children and families in the community

- participating in other people's professional research or developing an action inquiry model that grows the knowledge base of individuals and the team.

The educational leader has a professional responsibility to lead the learning of others in ways that make sense to each individual. They understand that leading the learning of others is as much about emotional practices as the gaining of new knowledge (Hargreaves, 1998). Talking about changing ways of doing things can 'touch raw nerves' and affect feelings of 'professional identity and competence' as educators question whether they have 'done enough' (Stoll, 2011, p. 123). The educational leader can overcome this by working to bring about change in ways that empower and amplify the good things that team members do in their practice. Learning can be presented as a shared process in which all team members have the opportunity to lead and follow at different times, and defined as a reciprocal process (meaning back and forth) in which team members learn with and from colleagues, families, community members and children.

Educational leaders engage in 'leaderful action' (Dalli & Thornton 2013, p. 310) that includes:

- being responsible
- taking responsibility
- having responsibility
- sharing responsibility.

To do this, they take their role seriously in continuing their own learning, leading the learning of others, collaboratively supporting educators to develop and implement effective educational programs, and mentoring others to build a culture of inquiry to inform better practice. They show team members how to value professional learning and show a commitment to continuous improvement. In so doing, the educational leader creates a 'safe' environment where questions about curriculum quality and new ways of working can be raised, discussed and contested to improve programs and practices.

Leading communities of practice—in which the team works together to improve practices because they share a common vision, interest or professional expertise—is one of the most effective ways to shape professional identity for both the educational leader and educators (Wenger, 1998). Educational leaders assist the community of practice to develop a service-wide shared knowledge base, and support the capacity of the group to find out more by identifying gaps and silences, and challenging accepted ways of doing things. Nurturing curiosity (what if?), open-mindedness (how else could it be?) and resilience (so if it didn't work that way, how else could it work?) are ways this can be achieved. Educational leaders understand that making mistakes in learning is part and parcel of the learning process, so they encourage educators to make well-considered plans for change.

Educational leaders can also assist educators with the professional use of language, as the way in which they describe their work has an impact on professional identity. Describing professional learning as 'training' and people working 'on the floor', rather than at or in the service, harks back to thinking about education and care as an 'industry' rather than a profession or sector. To raise the professional standing of those who work with children in the community requires educational leaders to articulate their professional identity with 'greater clarity and conviction' (Barblett et al., 2017, p. 71).

Inspiring and motivating others to transform pedagogy and practice

Educational leaders build their professional identity and display the professional dispositions that characterise successful leaders: they are caring, fair, honest and responsible. They show self-confidence and lead by example as they inspire, motivate, affirm and, at times, challenge or extend the practice and pedagogy of others (ACECQA 2017). They understand that educators will follow when a good case for change is made and a collaborative plan of small steps to achieve the goal is put in place—including strategies to identify and measure success.

To be inspiring and motivating, educational leaders:

- encourage others to share ideas, experiences and opinions
- listen carefully and communicate in ways that others understand
- inspire others to follow a collaboratively described vision and goal
- support others to work collaboratively
- remain positive and frequently praise others
- empower others as they are shown and asked to demonstrate their professional identity and ethical practice
- lead others in thoughtful and varied ways to improve their practices (adapted from Stamopoulos & Barblett, 2018).

Oates (see Johnston, Nahmad-Williams, Oates & Wood, 2018) notes the importance of practitioners engaging in consultations and debates if they are to engage with their own professional identity.

Developing interdependence and team accountability

In displaying professionalism and expecting the same from all in the team, educational leaders develop a positive team culture that looks inwards and outwards to improve the practice and pedagogy of educators. Looking inwards means examining individual values, experiences and teamwork practices. Looking outwards means using professional and ongoing learning and critical reflection to improve program provision. With a deep understanding of the learning process, educational leaders know that taking risks in learning and making mistakes are part of the learning process for adults as well as children. So they will find ways to help others plan, implement and then assess and reflect on what they do in ways that help the team move together towards organisational goals.

Leading and embedding ethical practice

A code of ethics describes a profession's collective values and aspirations, and raises expectations that those identifying as professionals will act according to it. Everyone who works with children makes ethical decisions, and a demonstrated commitment to a code of ethics informs the professional identity of an educational leader. The Early Childhood Australia *Code of Ethics* (ECA, 2016) was developed by the profession and is built on the belief that children are citizens with civil, cultural, linguistic, social and economic rights from birth. Educational leaders use the ECA *Code of Ethics* to:

- raise consciousness of what is expected of educators and their responsibilities to children, families, communities and the profession
- improve the professional identity of those who work with children
- assist colleagues in making wiser and more informed decisions in their practice, leadership and advocacy
- support colleagues to commit to the values of the profession, leading to a broader community understanding of the complexity of children's education and care
- remind themselves, as well as others, that some relationships have 'power over' others but ethical practice is everyone's responsibility and building relationships that show 'power with' is required (adapted from Barblett et al., 2017).

Educational leaders demonstrate and model ethical behaviour and decision-making. They are courageous and act with honesty; they assist educators to work in ways that are inclusive, respect the rights of children, and promote children's learning, development, health and wellbeing. They speak out and take action against unethical behaviours and assist others to embed ethical practices in all that they do.

Educational leaders take it as their professional responsibility to ensure that educators use the *Code of Ethics* to inform their work practices and professional interactions. One way to do this is to embed the thinking of the 5-V model, which can help educational leaders to guide the ethical thinking and actions of others in the following ways:

- **Values**—ethical educational leaders understand and commit to the profession's core principles and commitments. They have aligned these with their own values that influence their choices in their personal and professional lives, and influence others to do the same.
- **Vision**—ethical educational leaders frame their actions within a picture of 'what ought to be' in quality education and care, in ways that others can both understand and follow.
- **Voice**—ethical educational leaders articulate the service's vision to others in ways that inspire and support them into action and pursuit of this vision.
- **Virtue**—ethical educational leaders strive to do what is right and good. They are courageous in supporting ethical practice in children's education and care settings and beyond the workplace.
- **Validate**—ethical educational leaders increase the ethical know-how of everyone in the service. They use the ECA *Code of Ethics* to revise the service philosophy and policies, at staff meetings, for recruitment, induction and for difficult conversations with colleagues (Barblett et al., 2017).

(This model was adapted from the Centre for Ethical Leadership **www.ethicalleadership. org/concepts-and-philosophies** and The Workplace Coach **www.theworkplacecoach. com/the-importance-of-ethical-leadership**)

Acting as a change agent

Children's education and care has an ever-changing face as more is known about how children develop and learn and about the practices that best amplify this. Change can be external (for example, a change in law or regulation) or internal (for example, a new policy on documentation). Educational leaders have a positive attitude to change and understand their role in promoting the same in others. They know that change is part of being a children's education and care professional, because it allows the transformation of thinking that leads to improved practice.

Personal agency is an attribute of effective educational leaders as they work to motivate, inspire and lead others to make positive change. Managing effective change involves collaboration; teams must work together to investigate and research what and how the change might take place. They discuss and negotiate how this change should take shape, who will complete the agreed tasks and when, and they plan ways to measure the success of the change. Educational leaders understand that implementing change requires time and careful planning, and will encourage individuals and the team to celebrate achievements along the way.

Educational leaders act as change agents to ensure their team delivers high-quality programs that are culturally responsive and socially just, and guide educators in using their expertise and knowledge to advocate for children and change things that negatively impact families. This is done by looking outside the service and working with others to support positive change to laws, regulations, policies and public thinking in the best interests of children, families and the profession.

Educational leaders take it as their professional responsibility to attend and comment on such things as changes to laws, regulations and curriculum when asked by the profession. They advocate for evidence-based practice in all areas of children's education and care, and promote the growth of the profession's knowledge base by assisting in research and investigation.

GETTING PRACTICAL

Activity: Dispositions

Dispositions are a good way to describe your professional identity as an educational leader. For example, it is important for a leader to have the dispositions of honesty, respect for all and fairness. List some other dispositions that you, as an educational leader in children's education and care, consider important to demonstrate to others.

Reflective questions

- What does being a professional mean to you?
- Who do you consider the best example of a professional?
- Describe the characteristics that make them stand out. How do those characteristics compare to your list of dispositions?
- What is different? What is the same? Would you add to the list or change it in any way?

Activity: Educational leader monument

Design a monument that captures you as an educational leader. The monument may include words, phrases, symbols and any other design elements you like to visually communicate who you are, what you stand for, and how you would like to be known. You want someone viewing this to recognise your professional characteristics, your values, and the traits and capabilities you believe are important in a professional and ethical educational leader. Remember you are a designer with an eye on the future.

Reflective questions

- In designing the monument, did you concentrate more on the now or the future?
- Are there certain characteristics or capabilities that are repeated? How do these fit with the beliefs and expectations you have for yourself as an educational leader?
- Do you think the educators in your team would use the same descriptors as you? What makes you think that?

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RELATIONSHIPS

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Relationships influence leadership effectiveness (Stamopoulos, 2012), however, building strong professional relationships must be considered alongside the diversity of qualifications, experiences and positions within the different contexts of the children's education and care sector. Motivation, a sense of empowerment, team leadership and strong communication skills are considered the foundations of an effective relationship (Stamopoulos, 2012).

Building relational trust with the educator team and those who support the delivery of the program

Trust in leadership is noted as a key concept in a number of leadership theories, and its importance is emphasised across multiple disciplines (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Relational trust has been described as being built on 'movements of the human heart such as empathy, commitment, compassion, patience, and the capacity to forgive' (Palmer, 2017). The existence of relational trust fosters collaboration and promotes willingness among staff to grow professionally (Cranston, 2011). This highlights the important role that educational leaders play in establishing relational trust as a precondition for the growth of a professional learning community (Stamopoulos, 2012).

Relationships that are open and trusting have been shown to enhance the development of personal and professional collaborative work skills (Kochan & Trimble, 2000), and can build a sense of comfort and safety that enables the sharing of ideas, experiences and knowledge. By providing the condition of comfort, participants can confront their dilemmas (Nolan & Molla, 2018) in a supportive relationship. Educational leaders need to acknowledge that when colleagues begin challenging their long-held beliefs and ways of working, they can feel that their own identity as an educator is threatened (Thompson, 2003). This is why building relational trust is important; it allows educators to feel they can openly share without being judged.

'A strong community [of practice] fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one's ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully' (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 29). A respectful and trusting relationship is established through the use of non-judgemental communication and by ensuring confidentiality (Nolan & Molla, 2017), where educators feel a sense of comfort to freely and reflectively critique practice.

Mentoring educators to refine practice skills and support outcomes for children

Mentoring supports the professional growth of educators (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Nolan, 2017; Jacobs, 2001; Risko, Vukelich, Roskos & Carpenter, 2002), including core attributes of effective educators encompassing professional competence and ongoing learning capability (Nolan & Molla, 2017). It can improve reflective practice (Elliott, 2004; LoCasale-Crouch, Davis, Wiens & Pianta, 2012; Nolan, 2017), offer reciprocal and mutual

learning opportunities (Nolan & Molla, 2016), support collegial interaction (Elliott, 2004), and influence practice change, thereby enhancing outcomes for children (Davis & Higdon, 2008; Nolan & Beahan, 2013).

Effective mentoring can assist educators to feel a sense of belonging, and an acknowledgement of the value that each party brings to the mentoring relationship. This can support everyone involved to experience professional growth (Nolan & Morrissey, 2016). The mentoring relationship is crucial to the success of the process (Elliott, 2004), as mentoring is a social practice (Nolan & Molla, 2017). It is now recognised that educators can be more effective when they are supported by colleagues in a community of practice, moving mentoring from an expert–novice positioning to a more reciprocal and collaborative relationship (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). These professional relationships influence educators' access to knowledge, information, expectations, obligations and trust, thereby highlighting the importance of networks and reciprocity amongst educators (Nolan, 2017). This also highlights the desire for mentoring to become an integral part of the professional culture in education and care settings, positioning it as inquiry into practice rather than the 'hierarchical dispensations of wisdom' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000, p. 55).

Collegiality (trust and respectfulness) and collaboration are important ingredients in a mentoring relationship, as they make it possible for participants involved to establish a learning environment in which to safely and collaboratively explore their assumptions and beliefs about their pedagogic work (Nolan & Molla, 2016). 'Hierarchical structures of expertise', with mentors positioned as authority figures rather than as colleagues who offer professional support and guidance in the workplace, can inhibit collaborative learning and interdependence among educators (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015, p. 5, noting the work of Sergiovanni, 1994).

While mentors can be seen as transformational change agents who bring clarity, voice, compassion, attitude and direction to their colleagues (Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2009), to be effective, the mentoring relationship needs to be reciprocal, reflective, respectful and responsive (Nolan, 2017).

- **Reciprocal** relates to establishing an equal professional relationship amongst all involved, by positioning participants as having knowledge while still being learners.

- **Reflective** collegial discussions about practice are a feature of effective professional development.

- The recognition of existing skills, knowledge and experience of participants speaks to the importance of **respect** in an adult learning setting (Nolan & Molla, 2016).

- To ensure it is meaningful, a mentoring relationship should be seen as fluid and able to adapt as individual situations change over time. This is what makes the relationship **responsive**.

What is clear from the research is that mentoring is a skill that needs to be developed, practised and supported (Stanulis & Russell, 2000). Educational leaders who are capable and competent in their professional work will demonstrate some of the characteristics of effective mentors. These include being a good listener, applying analysis skills, reflecting then taking consequent action, and working to support others to reach their potential and achieve success in life (The Coalition of Childhood Umbrella Organisations, 2010).

Collaborating with educators to cultivate a lively culture of professional inquiry that drives continuous improvement

The role of the educational leader is to empower colleagues to enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities, to confidently and effectively contribute to the children's education and care sector regardless of their workplace (The Coalition of Childhood Umbrella Organisations, 2010). One important aspect of 'intentional leadership' is collaborating with others to 'achieve collective goals' (Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley & Shepherd, 2012, p. 13). Working collaboratively, rather than individually, harnesses the group's collective thinking, experience and creativity to address the problems of practice (Nuttall, 2013; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009).

Collegial discussions provide opportunities to consider alternative perspectives and ways of working (Waite & Gatrell, 2004), removing the possibilities of self-deception (Fisher, 2003) that can be fostered when critical reflection is conducted alone (Brockbank & McGill, 1998). Allowing for and embracing different perspectives supports individuals and services to co-evolve, promoting a broader view of teamwork and leadership (Hard, Press & Gibson, 2013; Whalley, 2006). Teamwork is viewed as a 'pre-requisite' to learning and professional development, 'rather than as a consequence of development' (Nuttall, 2013 original emphasis).

In order to position structural tensions as 'a source of productive dialogue, not as a source of stress or insecurity' (Nuttall, 2013), educational leaders can focus on tasks rather than on the individual, to open up the space for sharing of ideas. A meaningful collaborative relationship, grounded in mutual respect and recognition, enables educators to commit to deeper engagement in their deliberations on practice (Nolan & Molla, 2017). Engaging in 'professional conversation' (Irvine and Price, 2014) promotes constructive dialogue and mutual exploration that supports continuous improvement of services.

It has been shown that working collegially (for example, by forming peer networks) plays a key role in building professionalism (OECD, 2016). Through collaboration, educational leaders can engage colleagues in guided critical reflection to help them deepen their self-knowledge, challenge their pedagogic assumptions, and consider new possibilities (Nolan, 2008). Effective collegial relationships aim to create an environment where all participants feel empowered as they discuss their own practice, and, in the process, gain insight into their roles and responsibilities as professionals (Nolan, Morrissey, & Dumenden, 2012).

Building relationships with other professionals and community members to enhance the program

Effective practice requires the building of collaborative partnerships within and outside of services. Factors that impact the **effectiveness** of this collaborative work can be external, organisational and personal (Whalley, 2006; Nolan, Cartmel & Macfarlane, 2012; Edwards, 2009; Sumsion, Press & Wong, 2012; Wong, Sumsion & Press, 2012).

Specific factors that can influence the **success** of these partnerships include:

- knowledge regarding team building
- clarity of vision and how to work with others to achieve this vision
- having a sound philosophy and comprehensive discipline knowledge
- leadership skills
- respect for the knowledge base of others
- an openness to being both reflective and reflexive.

Working with professionals from other disciplines calls for leadership that enables transdisciplinary practices (Cartmel, Macfarlane & Nolan, 2013). This means considering multiple perspectives, including adapting and creating new practice; building sustained, respectful relationships; engaging in critical thinking and reflection; and sustaining a strong professional identity (Cartmel, Macfarlane & Nolan, 2013). To be able to consider multiple perspectives, educational leaders require inter-professional literacy, critical literacy and the ability to think otherwise.

- **Inter-professional literacy** (Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010) is an awareness and understanding of the knowledge bases of professionals from other disciplines. It is the ability to work within one's own understanding of practice while being willing to learn from others.

- **Critical literacy** (Sumsion, 2006) is reading and critiquing information, policy and social discourse in order to advocate for the profession.

- **The ability to think otherwise** (Foucault, 1984; Macfarlane, 2006) involves consideration of the polar opposite to your own ideas and practices, allowing the critiquing of your own practice in an authentic way.

An effective leader will be able to imagine how things might be otherwise and create new possibilities. They will be able to suspend judgement when working with other professionals and community members who hold different beliefs and understandings to reflect in more informed ways, questioning their own biases (Lather, 1996) and promoting tolerance.

Working with other professionals and community members brings with it opportunities and challenges. Educational leaders need to be aware of these challenges so they can dispel reservations and build the capacity of all educators and professionals involved (Nolan, Cartmel & Macfarlane, 2014).

GETTING PRACTICAL

Building relational trust

Educational leaders and approved providers need to consider how relational trust is built within their service. No matter the service type, without relational trust there is no foundation from which staff can grow professionally. This can be challenging as trust is earned and takes time to build.

Reflective question

- How do we, as educational leaders and approved providers, establish and maintain relational trust within the service?

Thought needs to be given to how the key aspects associated with trust—empathy, commitment, compassion, patience and the capacity to forgive—are demonstrated, supported and experienced by staff. Leaders act as role models, so it is important that they consistently demonstrate these aspects in their work with others, as we know that trust fosters collaboration and professional growth. This means engaging in non-judgemental conversations with colleagues in the everyday work of the service. It also means acting in ethical ways and ensuring confidentiality. As the ECA *Code of Ethics* states, professionals are in a unique position of trust and influence in their relationships—not just with children and families, but also with colleagues and the community. The core principles on which the code draws require a commitment to respect, and maintain the rights and dignity of children, families, colleagues and communities, which means all staff, including leaders are professionally accountable (ECA, 2016).

Educational leaders and approved providers might like to consider their own emotional intelligence, and the role it plays in influencing their actions and the actions of others. Research shows that interacting in ways that convey genuine and mutual respect builds trust; however, acting in these ways calls for a certain level of emotional intelligence. In a work setting, this means being perceptive about your own emotions and the emotions of others, and ensuring these are managed respectfully and professionally. Being aware of your own emotions will help you understand their impact on the experiences of your colleagues.

Reflective questions

- How do we, as educational leaders and approved providers, harness the strengths we bring to relationship building, and how do we further develop emotional intelligence?
- How often do we, as educational leaders and approved providers, pause to consider how our actions impact the experience of others?

Mentoring educators

While mentoring has been shown to improve practice, educational leaders must be mindful of establishing reciprocal and collaborative relationships with educators, rather than one where the leader is positioned as the expert. This means taking a non-hierarchical view of mentoring, and acknowledging the value of each party's contribution while recognising them as learners. Incorporating a learning culture where the focus is on inquiring into practice helps establish mentoring as part of a service's culture. It is helpful to think of mentoring as building networks between colleagues, so they can support each other in their reflections on practice.

The four Rs of mentoring (as described on p. 105) need to be considered for effective mentoring to take place.

These are:

- **Reciprocal**—an equal professional relationship in which all members are positioned as having knowledge but, at the same time, are considered lifelong learners. It acknowledges that we can learn from each other.

- **Reflective**—collegial discussions about practice are a feature of effective professional development.

- **Respectful**—the knowledge, skills and abilities that everyone brings to the relationship are acknowledged and this is based on professional support and professional learning.

- **Responsive**—the mentoring relationship can adapt to changing situations to ensure that it remains meaningful for those involved.

Reflective question

- What would the four Rs look like in practice in our service?

Being an effective mentor requires the development and refinement of certain skills. These include being an active and reflective listener, and having open and honest communication with colleagues.

Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. Often, when people talk to each other, they don't listen attentively. They may be distracted; half-listening, half-thinking about something else; or busy formulating a response to what is being said. They assume that they have fully heard what the other person has said, but this is not always the case. Engaging in active listening involves:

- acknowledging to the other person that they have been heard

- taking note of both the verbal and non-verbal communication

- using verbal, facial and non-verbal communication to respond, such as nodding or attentive positioning

- clarifying, questioning and repeating what is being heard, as well as the messages that are communicated emotionally.

Conversations need to be structured in a way that empowers others to become more reflective about their practice. We know that thoughtful and deliberative professional conversations can change educational practice. Reflective conversations are respectful and promote a sense of mutual inquiry and collective knowledge.

In order to model an open-minded attitude to colleagues, educational leaders should temporarily suspend their beliefs and value judgements. Encouraging honest and constructive feedback ensures that mentoring becomes an educative process rather than a judgemental one. The focus is on supporting and working with others and taking action to ensure the right outcomes are achieved.

Reflective questions

- Do our current conversations with colleagues empower them?
- Are there any changes that need to be made to ensure our conversations are more reflective?
- When reflecting on practice, what strategies do we use to demonstrate that we are really listening to what others are telling us?
- What role could a community of practice play in mentoring?
- What should be the balance between autonomy and guidance in a mentoring relationship?
- How could mentoring be positioned within a continuum of professional growth for our service?

Collaborating with educators

One of the roles of a leader is empowering others to enhance professional practice. Working collaboratively rather than individually enables the collective wisdom of the group (experience and creativity) to support learning. Collaborative approaches can include the following:

- **Collegial discussions** create a space where ideas and perspectives can be shared regardless of qualification, years of experience or position within the service. Seeking contributions from educators of all qualification levels delivers a broader cross-section of opinion. It also encourages educators to value their own unique skills—for example, being caring, enthusiastic, resilient, kind, patient, dedicated and having confidence. While absent from the policy discourse, these skills can strongly influence the quality of pedagogy and, consequently, programs.

- **Inquiry-focused dialogue** (as opposed to dialogue that focuses on individuals) promotes a dynamic culture where all inputs are valued and no one feels insecure or judged. Hearing a diversity of beliefs or ideas can prompt educators to reconsider their own values and understandings. It is not as important that everyone hold the same view as it is for all to be in agreeance of the direction that is being taken.

- **Guided reflection** can be employed by the educational leader to ensure everyone is thinking about their own views and opinions, and that these are shared and discussed in open and non-judgemental ways. It enables educators to consider views other than their own to guide their reflective activities. It is about asking questions to generate further collective thinking and discussion and a sharing of thoughts. This can help colleagues to discover what they have stopped seeing or questioning in their own practice. Working in this way helps to shape and deepen reflections.

Educational leaders should encourage educators to incorporate professional inquiry into their practice. In this 'space of inquiry', relevant aspects of each knowledge base are shared and seen as complementary to the other discipline knowledge bases. The task at hand can then be explored from multiple perspectives so more informed action can be taken. In this different space where the inquiry is the focus, the educational leader could think more broadly about teamwork and how to position themselves and their staff. This means holding a clarity of vision for the service, a knowledge of how to work with others and achieve a collective vision, and a sound philosophy and disciplinary knowledge that can be clearly articulated to other professionals to aid their understanding of the knowledge and experience that educators bring to a collaborative partnership. It also means showing respect for the knowledge bases of other professionals. Through such partnerships we can become more informed and this can be utilised to deepen our individual and collective reflections on practice.

Building partnerships

When establishing effective partnerships, educational leaders need to be mindful of the following principles:

- Partners share mission, values, goals and measurable outcomes for the partnership.

- Authentic mutual trust, respect and commitment characterise the relationship.

- The relationship builds on strengths and assets, but also addresses areas needing improvement.

- Power is balanced among partners.

- Clear, open and accessible communication occurs among partners that prioritise listening, common language and constant clarification of terms.

- All partners jointly establish roles, norms and processes in a manner that reflects input and agreement of all members.

- Interaction occurs among all partners to improve the partnership and its outcomes.

- Partners share credit for accomplishments.

- Partnerships evolve and thus require time to develop.

Characteristics of effective collaborative partnerships include having clearly agreed and defined functions, tasks with agreed boundaries, well-organised and established communication, well-developed local relationships, common goals, common language, respect for the different skills and knowledge of partners, and overcoming ignorance and prejudice about each other. Working in partnership is not easy, so leaders and approved providers will need to consider how they can support their staff in these relationships, noting that building effective partnerships takes time.

Reflective questions

- How do we currently incorporate working in partnership into practice?
- Can we identify additional opportunities for working in partnership? What would be the benefits of this and for whom?
- What additional training might we need to be able to effectively work in partnerships?
- What additional support/resources would we need for working in partnership?
- How do we build leadership capacity to support transdisciplinary practice?

Practical action could include a number of activities that become part of the broader service systems, such as changing the culture to support collaboration. This can be achieved by focusing on building and nurturing relationships to facilitate collaborative work with other professionals, rather than simply emphasising completion of a task. Other activities that support effective relationships could include:

- encouraging shared decision-making
- encouraging shared accountability and reporting frameworks that reflect shared effort and responsibility
- setting goals that indicate collaborative work
- recognising and celebrating successful professional partnerships.

Over time, these collaborative behaviours will become the 'norm' and part of everyone's position descriptions.

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REFLECTION

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Reflection features in the Australian approved learning frameworks (*Early Years Learning Framework* [DEEWR, 2009] and *My Time, Our Place* [DEEWR, 2011]) as guiding principles and practices in children's education and care. To be effective in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing, and to support families and their colleagues, educational leaders require a deep understanding of the features of the reflective process. It is an important skill that educational leaders need to undertake for themselves and support in others.

This type of reflection is needed to work effectively in their role and, when working with children, introduces the notion of power and how it is used in thinking and decision-making (Nicolson, Kuhl, Maniates, Lin & Bonetti, 2018). To be reflective is to understand the impact that power has on the principles and practices upheld in the approved frameworks, such as building secure respectful relationships and collaborative decision-making processes.

Critical self-reflection suggests the introduction of considerations of power in looking back at one's thinking and decision-making processes. Educational leaders use reflective practice to engage in the type of critical questioning of leadership practice that 'can expand choices about how to think and to act against knowledge and actions that oppress or discriminate' (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 11). This type of reflection provides a self-audit that allows one to challenge the assumptions that lead to taken-for-granted or poor-quality practice, and instead strive for the practice that is in the best interests of all children and families.

Reflection includes the ability to think backwards and forwards. Principles and practices are considered and reconsidered from more than one perspective. This is an important strategy to help transform daily practices through 'thinking otherwise' or thinking from a place of possibility (Macfarlane, Nolan & Cartmel, 2014).

Critical thinking and reflection are important and high-level skills, and an essential component of quality practice.

If leaders are to be effective in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing, and in supporting families and their colleagues, they need to have a deep understanding of the features of the reflective process. The use of critical thinking and reflection allows educational leaders to move beyond the boundaries of the early childhood education and care discipline and take their knowledge base to new spaces for learning. Engaging in discussions with colleagues and professionals from other disciplines helps to consider new ideas and ways of thinking and doing from more than one perspective (Cartmel, Macfarlane & Nolan, 2013; Nicholson et al., 2018). This allows educational leaders to consider aspects of their own leadership practice and further expand thinking and questioning about practice. This, in turn, will influence the way in which relationships are established with all stakeholders including children, families, colleagues and other professionals involved in children's education and care.

Reflection and critical thinking help educational leaders to support the transformational changes in practice that are responsive to the needs of children and families. It is important to practice reflection as an individual by thinking about the way you do things and why. However, it is also important for educational leaders to be reflective when engaging in conversations with colleagues in the workplace and professional community (Casley & Cartmel, 2009). The skill of reflection involves both listening and talking with others, as it is through listening to others that we deepen our own knowledge and understandings. The skill of reflection has the potential to strengthen and build confidence at an individual and team level.

What is needed to support meaningful reflection?

Firstly, educational leaders require self-awareness and an understanding of why they do what they do. This involves being aware of their own beliefs and values about their actions or pedagogy in the light of their understanding of theory and research.

Secondly, because reflective practice is more effective when it involves dialogue with others, educational leaders need to be able to build relationships with colleagues and encourage educators to listen and talk to each other, find common ground and create the partnerships required to provide the best environments in which children can grow and develop.

Thirdly, educational leaders and educators need to build their knowledge of contemporary theory, research and practice about children, children's services and the social and political context in which they operate. This enables educators to examine possibilities so that they are unconstrained by their own beliefs and value systems, and by taken-for-granted understandings and ideas.

Reflection and change

In order for transformational change to occur, a cycle of reflection and action needs to take place. In this process, individuals come together to build relationships and make the necessary connections to share knowledge. Together they can act as a 'whole' to co-create new opportunities and innovative ideas to address their most complex challenges (Scharmer, 2009).

Collective knowledge opens up the possibilities for action, and the capacity to sense something new arises from the shift in our awareness and intention, moving from preconceived notions to operating in a more connected way (Scharmer, 2009, 2018; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005). Listening is the basis for this process—listening to oneself, to others and to what emerges from the group. The capacity to listen to what is emerging from the group is the place where change occurs. Hence, understanding the characteristics of listening is important to the process of reflection.

Generative listening

Listening is not just important in leadership, it is essential. Most of us learn to be reflective listeners, where we learn to listen to another person's point of view. However, the ability to listen and to hear the views of others is not always enough to improve practice or affect change. Generative listening, on the other hand, is the deepest kind of listening. Generative listening is the ability to listen to oneself, listen to others and listen to what emerges from a group (Scharmer, 2009, 2018). Generative listening requires a high level of reflexivity and openness to hearing what other people have to say. It involves giving meaning to the message and value to those who are being listened to, which requires a deep awareness and suspension of judgment and habitual ways of thinking (Rinaldi, 2001; Scharmer, 2009, 2018). Listening from this perspective involves hearing, interpreting and co-constructing meaning through shared dialogue.

Generative listening requires listening with open hearts and minds and an open will, so that we no longer look at something only from the outside, or only empathise with someone. Generative listening takes us to a space where a deeper understanding of our lived experiences exists, and future possibilities can emerge (Scharmer, 2009, 2018). You know you are in generative listening as you go through a change and are no longer where you began, but have connected as a group with a deeper source of knowing. This opens the way for new ways of being, knowing and doing.

The ability to shift from simply reacting to a situation, to thinking about what could be different about the circumstances is critical to effective leadership. As we face rapidly changing environments, educational leaders will need to rely less on past patterns of thinking and learn instead to pay attention to the emerging opportunities for themselves and their team, organisation and community (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). Shifting from past to future thinking is not an easy journey, as we are easily trapped and tricked into going back to what we know and trust. To make this shift, leaders need to start with themselves. This can only happen by learning to suspend judgment, which is about listening to oneself. Suspending judgment requires:

- a willingness to not impose your own pre-established frameworks and policies onto what you are seeing and hearing (Senge et al., 2005)
- patience, without which one can easily revert to past ways of thinking rather than allowing new ideas to emerge.

This only happens through shared dialogue with others in a safe space that allows for building trusting relationships. Hence, listening to others is about creating a safe space and building the necessary relationships to be able to think into the future.

Powerful questions

Asking questions is a powerful trigger in the reflective process. Asking the right kind of questions is a skill equal to undertaking the appropriate kind of listening processes.

Often we focus on having the 'right' answer, rather than the 'right' question. Effective questions challenge our current operating assumptions and may be the key to creating more positive outcomes. Questions open the door to discovery, particularly when they are based on genuine inquiry into a situation or others' perspectives. Learning to be genuinely curious is the key to asking powerful questions.

Consider the processes of listening and talking. When an individual is engaged in generative dialogue, they are opening their thinking to what is emerging within the conversation. When an individual ends a conversation, they no longer have the same thoughts as they did at the beginning of the conversation because they have been thinking about their own ideas and linking them with the ideas of others. This opens up the possibility to 'think otherwise' (Foucault, 1984) and, therefore, have a new perspective on their own thinking.

Scharmer (2009) takes this concept a step further, stating that a person will be fundamentally changed at the end of the conversation, as the dialogue of the conversation has changed their thinking and perspectives.

What makes a question powerful?

There are definitions for 'open' and 'closed' questions; however, it is important to understand the characteristics of an effective statement of inquiry in order to be able to construct a powerful question. The following statements help to define what a powerful question is:

- A powerful question can catch people from where their thinking is and meet them where there is most energy (to go deeper) and relevance for them to make a change.

- A powerful question is simple, clear and penetrating (i.e. it challenges one to reflect and find the knowledge or wisdom that's already there).

- A powerful question involves people's values, feelings, hopes and ideals. The question needs to be larger than them so they can connect with, and contribute to, it at a deeper level.

- A powerful question will shift from a problem or fix-it focus to a possibility focus.

- A powerful question can help others to shape their questions, as they know their situation better.

Thus a powerful question:

- generates curiosity

- stimulates reflective conversation

- is thought-provoking

- surfaces underlying assumptions

- invites creativity and new possibilities

- generates energy and forward movement

- channels attention and focuses on inquiry

- touches a deeper meaning

- evokes more questions (Vogt, Brown & Issacs, 2003).

Generative listening and powerful questions are features of processes that support reflection.

Models of reflection

Educational leaders need to facilitate the cycles of reflection that underpin educators' ability to create knowledge and act together out of their individual and common experiences.

'Real work' is often seen as detailed analysis and immediate decision-making, whereas 'knowledge work' takes time. Knowledge work includes engaging in meaningful conversation and critical thinking. Knowledge-making is what helps the team to understand each other's diverse perspectives, and it's what enables the team to come together.

Working as a team to support children's growth and learning requires that staff broadens its ability to solve complex problems, and there needs to be a continual process of coming together to discuss what is happening. One of the most important mechanisms for holding a safe space for deeper learning is based on 'awareness-based leadership', where generative listening processes are seen as part of the culture of an organisation. When this happens, the educational leader is well positioned to facilitate a conversation (Cartmel, Macfarlane, Casley & Smith, 2015; Stanfield, 2000) to support the staff in using reflection and critical thinking.

GETTING PRACTICAL

Reflective point

A group of emerging and experienced educators joined together for some conversations about their practice. One of them said, 'A variety of practitioners have come into the sector. They've come from a variety of backgrounds, a variety of pedagogical knowledge and understanding … it is important to have community scholarship because there's a lot of fragmentation, so if we can bring that together in some way … We are all working for the same thing and we all want to improve the scholarship of the field and improve practice in the field'.

This educator was stating how important it was for each member of the group to share their tacit knowledge in order to expand their collective knowledge and understandings. However, they could not rely on their tacit knowledge alone to make themselves think about things differently. They needed to also share their ideas about what they had researched and read, and how, through critical reflection, they could link existing ideas and understandings with new knowledge in a very supportive way.

Reflection can be an intentional practice facilitated by the educational leader. It is critical that a service prioritises time for the staff team or small groups or individuals to engage in the process. (In school age child care, the children may also be involved in reflective conversations with the staff team [Casley & Cartmel, 2010; Cartmel, Casley & Smith, 2017].) Uninterrupted time should be set aside each week, fortnight or month for facilitated reflective conversations to occur.

The process of reflection is linked to 'being curious' (Jones, 1998). The notion of being curious helps individuals to listen with an 'open heart, open mind, open will' (Scharmer, 2009). Reflection and curiosity are important for critical thinking, which leads to problem-solving and decision-making that are embedded in the principles and practices of working with children and families.

A useful way for educational leaders to support educators or other professionals, by leading critical reflection, is to use a guided conversation process such as the highly effective 'Circles of Change' model of reflection (Cartmel et al., 2015). This four-step action-learning model is fundamental to the process of critical reflection. In order for participants to become confident and skilled at using this model to inform their reflective practice, it is recommended that educational leaders guide them through at least four 30- to 60-minute sessions. These four sessions would include presenting some information about how the reflective process works—and, in particular, importance of generative listening—to help each staff member focus on their capacity to engage in reflective thinking.

In using the 'Circles of Change' model to guide educators through reflective practice, the educational leader may assist them to focus on an aspect of practice, an issue of concern, or a topic of interest that is relevant to their work. Educational leaders can help educators and other stakeholders to engage in the guided conversation process to utilise reflection by involving everyone in the communicative activities. This involves asking powerful questions and using generative listening.

Using this model of reflection leads to understandings and actions that can change and improve practices to achieve a higher quality of education and care in children's services.

Table 2.4 on p. 122 presents an outline of the four steps that comprise the 'Circles of Change' model, along with some questions to stimulate thinking and engagement in the process.

Table 2.4: The four steps in the 'Circles of Change' and related reflective questions

Step 1: Deconstruct—the process of describing what is happening.
Question to ask: • How would you describe the situation?
Step 2: Confront—approach personal, social and community issues head-on by examining difficult topics, including those previously considered 'untouchable'.
Questions to ask: • What are the different aspects of the situation? • What are the demands and pressures? • What is it like being in this situation?
Step 3: Theorise—understand the importance of linking theory to practice, and the need to apply what is learnt theoretically to what is implemented in the field.
Questions to ask: • What values do you want to hold in thinking about the situation? • What are your options in responding to this situation? • Which options would you want to explore further?
Step 4: Think otherwise—think differently from what is presently happening and come up with other ways, or better ways of practising.
Questions to ask: • What would the impact of your thinking/reflection be on the situation? • What will you do next?

(Adapted from Cartmel et al., 2015)

Further questions to ask while completing the mode:

- Who benefits from what I do and what I know?
- How and why do they benefit?
- Do I want this to continue?
- Why do I take this particular action or use this particular knowledge?
- Whose interests does this knowledge or action support? (Nicholson et al., 2018)

Developing your questioning style

In order to ask questions that most effectively support the reflection and thinking of staff teams, it is recommended that educational leaders consider the three elements of how to design a powerful question: construction, scope and assumptions (Vogt et al., 2003). These three dimensions are described on p. 123.

Scope

The 'scope' of a question needs to take into account the stakeholders or the context being discussed. The scope of inquiry can be progressively broadened as the questions are structured. However, the inquiry needs to remain within the realistic boundaries of your role and the situation in which you are working. You may want to make this explicit prior to or during the inquiry.

Reflective questions:

- How can we best manage supporting the team?
- How can we best manage supporting the service?
- How can we best manage supporting inclusive practice at a community level?

Construction and assumptions

The construction of powerful questions means that they will often contain implicit or explicit assumptions. These assumptions shape the question and are used by the individual to give them cues about the kind of response they could make. For example, consider the construction of the following question:

'How should we build an inclusive service?'

What are the underlying assumptions here? The question assumes:

- everyone knows what an inclusive service is
- everyone wants to build an inclusive service
- error or blame (the service is not inclusive at all, so you need to do something about it).

In facilitating a conversation to help staff engage in critical thinking, the educational leader can structure the powerful questions to prompt generative listening. This, in turn, will uncover assumptions and open up the conversation to new possibilities. In the first instance, the self-aware educational leader might consider the following when framing their questions:

- What are the assumptions or beliefs you are holding that could influence this conversation? For example, the service may hold certain assumptions about the educational leader's role, so you would need to put that 'on the table'. You need to explain your role and the collaborative way in which you are going to enact that role.

- How 'safe' does the staff feel about engaging in conversations? Staff members need to understand that engaging in reflective conversation is a mechanism to help overcome the challenges they experience in implementing the program or supporting individual children or their families. The reason that the educational leader is asking the questions is to engage in an authentic dialogue that involves generative listening.

As an educational leader, asking genuine, powerful questions in conversations with your team supports critical thinking and reflection, and will generate new insights and possibilities for your practice with children and families. Engaging in regular conversation with your staff team, away from the everyday routine, will ensure that the time and space is created for deep thinking and testing out new ideas.

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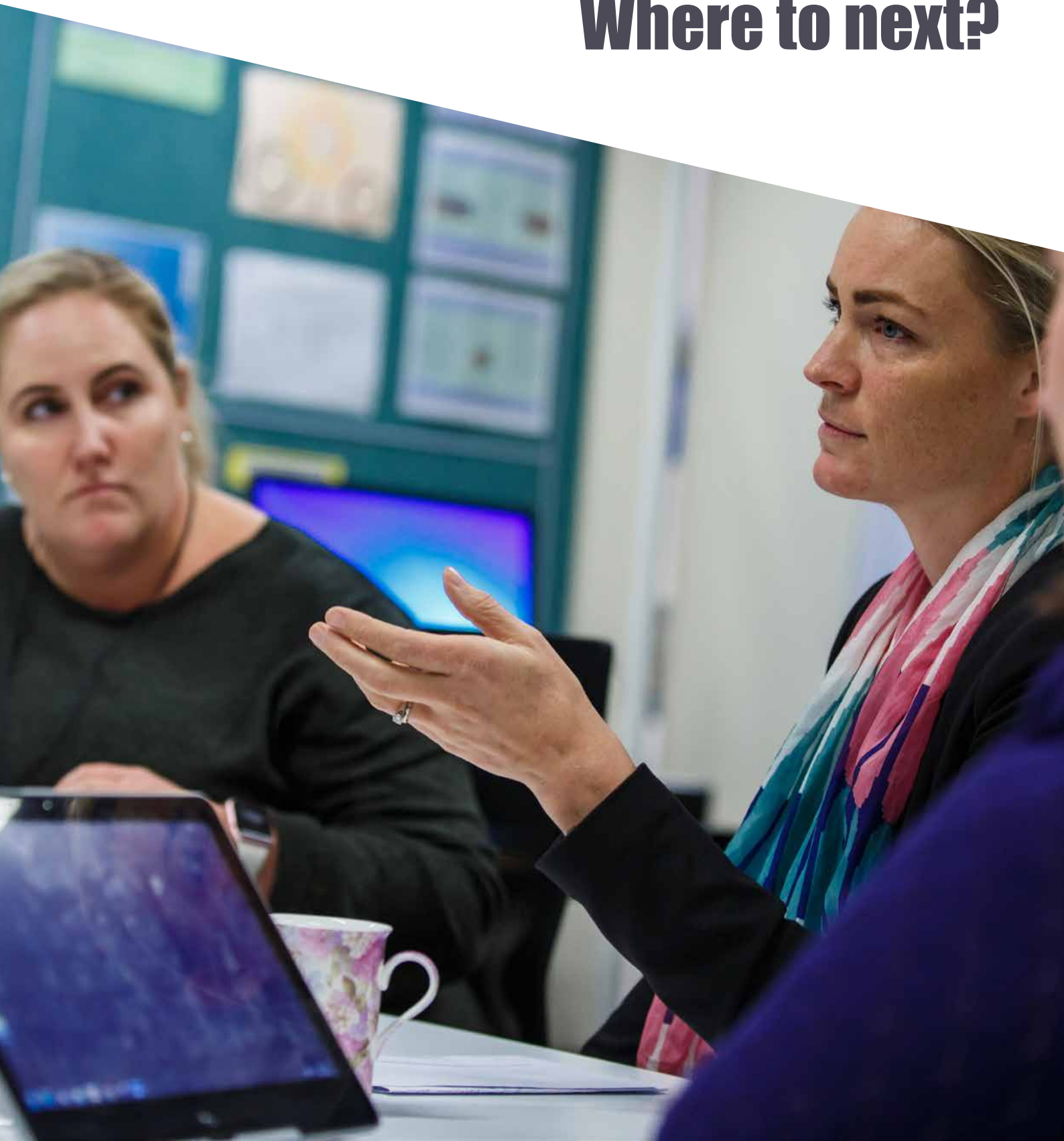
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PART THREE

Where to next?

PART THREE: WHERE TO NEXT?

Be daring, be different, be impractical, be anything that will assert integrity of purpose and imaginative vision against the play-it-safers, the creatures of the commonplace, the slaves of the ordinary (Cecil Beaton).

This Resource has sought to do what Gunillla Dahlberg describes as 'walk[ing] on two legs' (Dahlberg, 2013, p. 87). On the first leg, the Resource formally describes the role of the educational leader in terms of what is required and expected in the National Regulations. These expectations give the educational leader a place to start and some parameters, but they are not the only way of understanding the role. So, on the second leg, this Resource shows educational leaders the possibility of imagining and re-imagining the role in many different ways. The case studies are a good example of what is possible.

The policies and legislation have only given us a starting point for understanding the role. The real measure of the depth of this leadership role will be created by the leaders themselves and those who enable their work to flourish.

So where to from here? As the research deepens and the lived experiences of educational leadership in children's education and care are documented, it is anticipated and indeed expected that new insights will emerge.

There are many possible pathways for educational leaders to engage in deeper exploration of quality in children's learning, development and wellbeing. Inspiration can be found in the pages of this Resource, from governments, universities, organisations, agencies, local networks and the plethora of other sources available online. The following are a few ideas to get you started.

Set some goals

Educational leaders might like to consider setting goals for themselves, as a way to engage in critical self-reflection and development as a professional. Similar to the way they support educators and teams in identifying learning goals, educational leaders might use the Educational Leadership Model (outlined in Part Two of this Resource) to determine specific goals to expand their knowledge, skills and capabilities.

Try something new

Commit to investigating and trialling a new idea or different approaches for the development and implementation of educational programs and practice. It doesn't have to be a 'blue sky' idea that no one else has thought of, just something that has never been tried in your service. There are many sources for new ideas, such as:

- the approved learning frameworks and the supporting documents that accompany them—these are a great place to revisit
- the resources listed in this document will provide inspiration for new approaches
- a visit to another type of children's education and care service might spark an idea—there may be ideas that others have tried that will be completely new and outside-the-box for your team of educators.

It doesn't have to be a huge 'system-changing' project; even something small can open up a new way of understanding children's care and education.

Examples of 'trying something new' in action

- An educational leader in an outside school hours care program might have noticed some posts on social media about young children learning and practising an Acknowledgement of Country in their early childhood service. She might wonder what something like that would look like in her program.
- An educational leader in a family day care service might have read an article about a great vacation care program, where the children made short animations using readily available software. He might decide to visit the program to see how new technology can be introduced for the school-age children attending his family day care service during school holidays.

Get involved in research

Research into children's education and care practice is being undertaken in increasing numbers across Australia. The breadth and depth of the work is impressive and the findings influence practice and policy-decisions locally and globally. Sometimes these research projects attract funding that allows them to include several service settings, practitioners, children and their families. These opportunities provide a space for those who participate in children's education and care to share their perspectives, connect with interested colleagues and open up a world of new knowledge for those who work within the service.

External research opportunities

Look for opportunities to join in—they are often advertised through local departments of education or via social media, other newsletters and alerts. Educational leaders may even want to find out what their local university is doing, or keep the university in loop about their current projects and offer to join forces.

Educational leaders will need to ensure that any research they get involved with has ethical considerations and approvals—particularly regarding the project being in the best interests of children and their families—and ensure that informed consent is gained before participating.

Resources

The following resources contain more information on the ethical considerations of participating in research.

Early Childhood Australia: *Code of Ethics*

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/

Ethical Research Involving Children (ERIC)

ERIC emerged out of a need to connect researchers with stakeholders who are committed to research approaches that promote, rather than diminish, the dignity, rights and wellbeing of children.

https://childethics.com/resources/case-studies/

Develop a research project of your own

Practitioner research is now a well-regarded way of deepening the profession's understanding of children's service delivery, and, specifically, the way it supports children in learning and growing. The central idea behind this type of research is to empower educators to explore new ideas and find out why things are as they are. It directly challenges the ideas that educators should wait to be told what to do and how to do it. Importantly, in this approach, educators become masters of their own destiny and have the evidence to prove their assertions. Educational leaders might consider leading such a process.

Resources

There are many stories of practitioner inquiry or research available, and a number of publications detail the process. These are helpful places to start investigating:

Department for Education and Child Development (South Australia): Teachers as researchers

This document provides an example of teacher research undertaken by a South Australian school teacher. It also provides a link to a web-series that discusses the importance of teacher research. Though this example is based in a secondary school setting, it might prove helpful in understanding and applying the research process.

www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/g/files/net691/f/teachers-as-researchers-learning-design-based-experiments.pdf

NAEYC: Teacher Research Resources

These resources provide children's education and care professionals with tools to learn more about the teacher research process. They also explore examples of teachers conducting research in their own setting.

www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/vop/about-teacher-research

Become a pilot service for a new or developing approach

From time to time, local-, state- and federal-funded projects or initiatives aimed at children or their families will invite participants or partners. These projects represent great opportunities to extend the work of the service and learn more about the wellbeing of children and families. It is also a tangible (and sometimes funded) way of enacting the third 'Exceeding NQS' theme relating to meaningful engagement with families and the community. Sometimes these partnerships will bring external expertise to the service and have a lasting impact on the knowledge and understanding of the educator team.

Educational leaders play an important role in sourcing, establishing and guiding these partnerships as well as presenting the findings to others.

Read broadly

When great changes occur in any sector's way of working, they are preceded by much thinking and writing by academics and policy-makers, who have closely observed the lived experience of everyday practitioners. This is most certainly the case for the children's education and care sector in Australia. Educational leaders looking to deepen their understanding of the ideas and research informing the National Quality Framework, including the approved frameworks and the National Quality Standard (NQS), might consider reading from the extensive quality area reference lists on the ACECQA website. From there the possibilities are endless. Most publications have reference lists that are a rich source of further information.

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ABOUT THE
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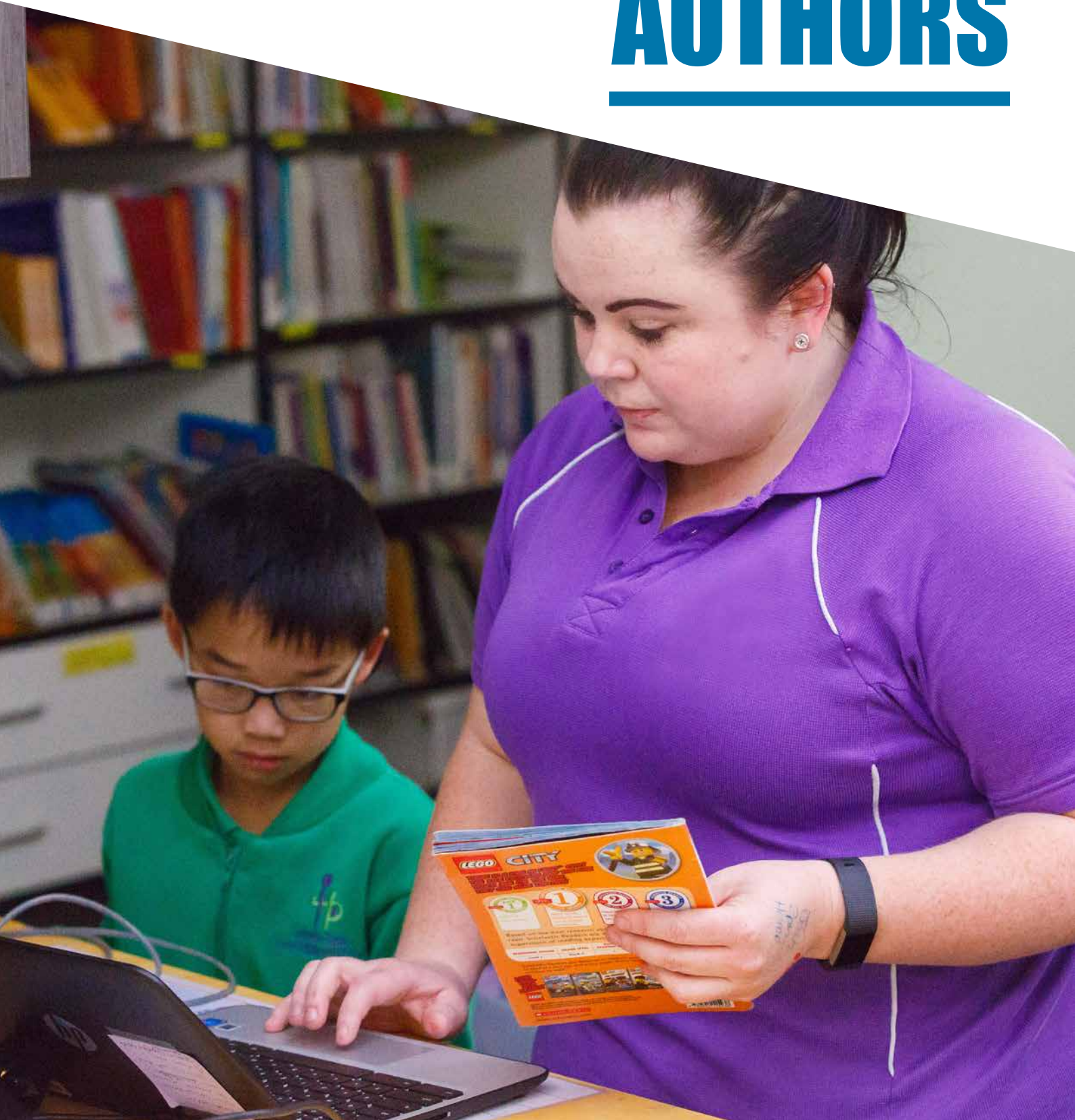
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Catharine Hydon is the Director at Hydon Consulting. Over the past 10 years, she has worked as an independent education consultant for a range of organisations and governments to support the articulation of quality and inspire change. Catharine has extensive experience in the early childhood sector, having led a range of services and projects for children and their families.

Catharine has a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education, specialising in early childhood practice, policy and governance, the delivery of integrated services and the exploration of innovative programs to engage vulnerable children and their families. She draws on this study and her ongoing practice research to consider how theory connects with and informs practice.

Catharine is a long-time member of Early Childhood Australia (ECA), currently serving as Co-chair of the Reconciliation Advisory Group. She is a regular contributor to ECA publications, including co-authoring the recently published *Ethics in Action* implementation guide. She is also a member of the Respectful Relationship Expert Advisory Group for the Victorian Department of Education and the EY-10 Curriculum and Assessment Committee for the VCAA.

Catharine is a dynamic speaker and collaborative facilitator and is skilled at engaging professionals in reflective dialogue and creative conversations.

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Andrea Nolan is Professor of Education (Early Childhood) in the School of Education, Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria. She has had extensive experience teaching in early childhood education and care settings, as well as in primary schools. She has also taught in the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and university sectors, teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students besides supervision of higher degree research students. She has conducted research in both schools and preschools, and has worked on a number of state, national and international projects concerning literacy development, program evaluation, and professional learning for teachers.

Andrea was a member of the 'Best Start' state-wide evaluation team, a Victorian Government initiative that saw a major injection of funds to develop initiatives for supporting the education, health and welfare of young children and their families.

Recent projects include a large-scale longitudinal study that aimed to identify factors that are positively associated with high outcomes in literacy in the first year of schooling; a study focused on resilient students, families, schools and interagency collaboration in disadvantaged communities; an evaluation of teacher induction and mentoring in New Zealand; a state-wide program focusing on mentoring early childhood teachers across Victoria who are new to the profession and professionally isolated; and the development and trialling of an NSW Transition-to-School Statement.

Jennifer Cartmel

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Jennifer Cartmel is a faculty member in the School of Human Services and Social Work at Griffith University. Jennifer has worked in a wide range of children's services. Besides teaching practitioners, she has taught in preschools and primary schools, including the hospital school. She has also worked in outside school hours and vacation care programs. Her research interests include the many facets of outside school hours care services, and the role of practicum in undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Jennifer has presented at local, national and international conferences. Her doctoral thesis was titled 'Outside School Hours Care and Schools'. In 2007, she was presented with a national Carrick Award for Higher Education Teaching for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning for the innovative strategy, *Circles of Change*. This strategy enhanced the field education experience for practitioners undertaking practica in children's education and care services and human service organisations.

Marilyn Casley

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Marilyn Casley is a Lecturer in the School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University. Marilyn has more than 30 years of experience working across children's and human services. She has completed a doctoral study on how conversations shape an adult's ability to understand a child's perspective. Her broader research interests include workforce development, with a particular focus on pedagogical leadership and integrated practice in children's and human services.

Lennie Barblett

Qualifications: Doctoral Degree; Bachelor of Education; Bachelor of Arts

Lennie Barblett is an Associate Professor and the Associate Dean, Early Childhood, at Edith Cowan University's School of Education. Lennie has extensive experience in early childhood education and care, working as an early childhood teacher in both preschool and early primary education before returning to university to complete further studies.

She is a long-time member of Early Childhood Australia and has served on the ECA National Board besides serving as a state branch president. She co-wrote the ECA *Code of Ethics* in 2016. Together with Catharine Hydon and Anne Kennedy, Lennie also co-wrote the ECA *Code of Ethics* implementation guide, *Ethics in Action*.

Lennie is a Board member of the Western Australia School Curriculum and Standards Authority, and lead writer of the West Australian Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines. She has vast experience as a keynote speaker/presenter and has travelled accross Australia as a facilitator with the Professional Learning Program on the *Early Years Learning Framework*.

Lennie has been invited to contribute to the work of numerous state and national committees and working parties, focusing on curriculum reform, ethics, teaching standards and learning frameworks. All of her experiences and scholarships have culminated in writing the book, *Early Childhood Leadership in Action*, in partnership with Elizabeth Stamopoulos (published in 2018). As an avid researcher, Lennie's interests include quality early childhood curriculum and practices, learning through play, ethics, Indigenous education, leadership and children's wellbeing.

Frances Press

Qualifications: Doctoral Degree (Sociology); Master of Arts (Women's Studies); Bachelor of Arts

Frances Press's teaching and research interests cover the areas of early childhood policy, the sociology of early childhood, and the leadership of early childhood programs. She has worked extensively with academic, government and non-government bodies on issues related to child and family policy. Frances has a particular interest in examining policy and practice from the stance of children's rights. Besides undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and research, she has strong links with the early childhood field. She is frequently called upon to provide professional support, particularly to leaders and managers of early childhood programs.

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

ACECQA: Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

Approved learning frameworks: A learning framework approved by the Ministerial Council (National Regulations).

Approved provider: A person who holds a provider approval (National Regulations). A provider approval authorises a person to apply for one or more service approvals and is valid in all jurisdictions.

Authorised nominee: In relation to a child, means a person who has been given permission by a parent or family member of the child to collect the child from the education and care service or the family day care educator (National Law).

Children: Refers to each baby, infant, two-year-old, three- to five-year-old and school age child and means children as individuals and as members of a group in the education and care setting, unless otherwise stated. It is inclusive of children from all social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and of their learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic locations (adapted from the *Early Years Learning Framework*, p. 45).

Children's education and care: Education and care across long day care, family day care, preschool/kindergarten, and outside school hours care services.

Colleagues: Everyone with whom you work—educators, administration staff, other childhood professionals, e.g. speech pathologist, primary school principal.

Collegiality: A work environment where co-operative interactions among colleagues are evident, and responsibility and authority is equally shared.

Community of practice: 'A community of practice is a unique combination of three fundamental elements: a domain of knowledge which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain' (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002, p. 27).

Critical literacy: Developing an awareness of the social and political climate and responding by advocating for the profession, colleagues, the child and their families.

Critical reflection: Describes reflective practices that focus on implications for equity and social justice (*Early Years Learning Framework*, p. 45).

Curriculum: In the early childhood setting—'all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development' (*Early Years Learning Framework*, p. 45; adapted from *Te Whariki*).

Dispositions: Enduring habits of mind and actions, and tendencies to respond in characteristic ways to situations, e.g. maintaining an optimistic outlook, being willing to persevere, approaching new experiences with confidence (*Early Years Learning Framework*, p. 45; *Framework for School Age Care*, p. 41).

Educational leader: A suitably qualified and experienced educator, co-ordinator or other individual designated in writing by the approved provider under Regulation 118 to lead the development and implementation of educational programs in the service (National Regulations).

Educational program: A program that is:

- based on an approved learning framework
- delivered in a manner that accords with the approved learning framework
- based on the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child
- designed to take into account the individual differences of each child (National Regulations).

Education team: The team of staff whose main focus is the education, care and wellbeing of the children attending the service.

Emotional intelligence: In a work setting—being perceptive about your own emotions and the emotions of others, and how these are managed in a respectful and professional way. Being aware of your own emotions and how they may impact on the experiences of your colleagues.

Inter-professional literacy: Having an awareness of the knowledge bases of professionals from other disciplines and being open to listening to these perspectives.

National Quality Framework (NQF): Provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for children's education and care and outside school hours care services across Australia (ACECQA).

National Law: Unless otherwise specified, the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* or, in Western Australia, the *Education and Care Services National Law (WA) Act 2012*. This applied law system sets a national standard for children's education and care across Australia. See the ACECQA website for the *Application Act* or legislation that applies in each jurisdiction.

National Regulations: The Education and Care Services National Regulations support the National Law by providing detail on a range of operational requirements for a children's education and care service.

Pedagogy: Educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum/program decision-making, teaching and learning (*Early Years Learning Framework*, p. 46; *Framework for School Age Care*, p. 42).

Reflective practice: A form of ongoing learning that involves engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice. Its intention is to gather information and gain insights that support, inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning. Early childhood educators examine what happens in their settings and reflect on what they might change (*Early Years Learning Framework*, p. 13).

Relational trust: A relationship that is open, trusting and non-judgmental. It draws from dispositions such as compassion, empathy, patience, commitment and forgiveness.

Rights of the child: Human rights belonging to all children, as specified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Transdisciplinary practices: 'Transdisciplinary is a way of working that deals with the complexities of multiple disciplines working together, with the possibility of developing new perspectives or practices that are situated outside of traditional discipline boundaries' (Nolan, Cartmel & Macfarlane, 2014, p. 6).

This glossary is a collection of definitions drawn from multiple sources including the four papers in section three. Other definitions are sourced from the Guide to the NQF Glossary
https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-01/Guide-to-the-NQF-7-Glossary.pdf

SAMPLE TEMPLATES

for educational leaders

MEETING AGENDA

Educational leadership meeting	
Date:	Chair:
	Note-taker:
Present and updates: Apologies:	
Stories of significant change/ideas to share about challenges and achievements:	

Agenda items

Idea	Discussion and action	People responsible

Idea	Discussion and action	People responsible

Ideas, issues, possibilities to progress with the leadership team:

LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETING NOTES

Date:

Attendees:

Apologies:

Operational issue (or operational implications)	Educational issue (or educational implications)	Actions and date	
Sample issue: *Changes to Child Safe Standards: Collection of children's photographic images—permissions from children and safe storage.*	*Educational implications: Each child will be invited by educators to give permission (recorded) for their photos to be taken throughout the year.*	*Educational leader to design form for children to indicate permission.*	*March 2019*

EDUCATIONAL LEADER POSITION DESCRIPTION

Position	Requirements/accountability
Description summary	To oversee, lead and develop quality reflective practices for delivering the approved learning framework/s and the National Quality Standard to a high standard.
Qualifications and training	Must be suitably qualified and have experience in leading the development and implementation of the educational program (or curriculum) in the service. The candidate must have a thorough understanding of the approved learning framework/s to be able to guide and inspire educators in their planning and reflection, and to mentor colleagues in their implementation practices.
Reporting to	Nominated supervisor/approved provider/person in-charge.

Role and responsibilities:

1. Leading and being part of reflective discussions about practice and implementation of the learning framework/s. Reflective discussions and considerations for practice will focus on interactions, collaboration, routines, intentional teaching and learning, scaffolding and being able to really 'see' the children and learning taking place.

2. Mentoring other educators by leading quality practice.

3. Discussing routines and ways to make them more effective, learning experiences, observing children and educator interactions, making suggestions on how to improve interactions and intentional teaching.

4. Talking to families and other educators (within a school-based centre) about the educational program.

5. Working with other early childhood professionals such as maternal and child health nurses, early childhood intervention specialists and/or Inclusion Support.

6. Considering how the service can be linked to the community, by working with other community members such as Aboriginal Elders, and collaborating with others to create a Reconciliation Action Plan.

7. Establishing systems across the service to ensure there is continuity of learning when children change rooms or attend other services, and then in their transition to school.

8. Assisting in documenting children's learning and how these assessments inform curriculum decision-making. Understanding that just as each child is unique, so are the educators. Hence, encouraging educators to find their own 'signature style' of documenting children's learning.

The Educational Leader will demonstrate:

- strong leadership abilities that display respect, dignity and direction

- an ability to inspire and influence educators while giving them the confidence to document according to their own signature style

- a strong understanding of curriculum

- a strong understanding of the demands on teachers and educators

- a strong ability to create vision, as well as communicate that vision
- an ability to support educators and encourage out-of-the-box thinking
- knowledge of cutting-edge current ideas/research
- an interest in and a passion for children's learning
- an interest in collaborating with other educators
- sound verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- a willingness to take on the challenges of this role.

The educational leader should consider what strategies are needed to improve the educational program and, at a minimum, should perform:

- regular program reviews
- early morning group leader meetings
- training on any new research/best practices to assist educators.

'Leaders are able to balance the concern for work, task, quality and productivity with concern for people, relationships, satisfaction and morale. They combine an orientation towards innovation and change with an interest in continuity and stability for the present. They do this by using personal qualities which command respect and promote feelings of trust and security. They are also responsible for setting and clarifying goals, roles and responsibilities, collecting information and planning, making decisions and involving members of the group by communicating, encouraging and acknowledging commitment and contribution.'

(Rodd, 1998, as quoted in Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007)

Acknowledgement:

I have read and fully understand the requirements and responsibilities for the position of educational leader, and agree that I am willing and able to fulfil this role.

Applicant signature: _____ Date: _____

While it is agreed that these will be your duties at the time of employment, management reserves the right to adjust this role's accountability to suit operational requirements.

Educational leader signature: _____ Date: _____

Nominated supervisor signature: _____ Date: _____

References:

Rodd, J. (1998). *Leadership in early childhood: The pathway to professionalism*. Sydney, NSW: Open University Press.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Manni, L. (2007). *Effective leadership in the early years sector: The ELEYS study*. London, UK: Institute of Education, University of London.

Other examples available online:

Gowrie Victoria: https://gowrievictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Educational-Leader.pdf

Community Early Learning Australia: https://www.cela.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Resources/the-educational-leader.pdf

EXAMPLE: EDUCATIONAL LEADER ROLE DESCRIPTION ELEMENTS

Crafting your professional identity as an educational leader is essential if you want to move forward and achieve your goals! Your role description helps you know your role, grow into your role, and it helps you develop your professional identity.

As each service is different, there is no single role description that works for everyone, so Educational Leaders Association (ELA) has prepared this chart of elements for educational leaders to consider, and then check against your employer's position description.

Requirements	Putting it into practice
The educational leader is responsible for oversight of the curriculum and planning consistent with the requirements of the National Quality Framework (NQF), the service philosophy, policies and procedures.	Your qualifications, background and experience offer you a baseline for starting in the role. This element does not mean that you will be required to do everything—far from it—what the team members will want in the educational leader is a guide; their support system. In you, they will see someone who is working hard to gain thorough knowledge of the curriculum requirements.
Accountability	**Reporting structure**
The educational leader's accountability is both contractual and through the NQF (if you are a teacher, then in some states it includes the teaching legislation).	From the outset, it is essential that educational leaders be clear on their role and their reporting structure. As an educational leader, you will have an outline of the agreed key organisational priorities for your role. Your manager will be aware of any plans that you develop, will be clear on the expected progress and on how you have to report back to them. You will have a process where you can report any concerns, or request any learning or resourcing needs you may have identified.
Role execution	**Steps for carrying out duties effectively**
Implementing the philosophy, and relevant policies and procedures.	You will understand the philosophy and how it links to practice. You will develop strategies for leading, guiding and supporting educators in implementing the philosophy, and relevant policies and programs. Your strategies, when working with educators and the service community, will include: • knowledge development—using multiple approaches to support educators as they take up new knowledge and skills • reflection—using targeted questions to promote deep thinking; leading learning about reflective practice; and measuring the effectiveness of reflection, as you go • evidence of practice—finding answers to questions like: 'What does that look like each day? Where can I see this? What evidence can I gather on progress? How does practice relate to the philosophy?'

Role execution	Steps for carrying out duties effectively

Supporting partnerships with the children, their families and the communities you engage with.	You will share your understanding of the importance of relationships, ethical and inclusive communication, and looking at children in the context of the family. This includes:
	
	• developing strategies for leading, guiding and supporting educators in gaining the knowledge and skills that they need
	
	• guiding educators to develop and maintain professional and ethical standards when dealing with children, families and the community, through:
	
	   • learning—using multiple strategies to support educators as they take up new knowledge and skills on what is required of them
	
	   • reflection—using targeted questions to push reflection and reflective practice; and measuring the effectiveness of reflection, as you go
	
	   • evidence of practice—finding answers to questions like: 'What does that look like each day? Where can I see this? What evidence can I gather on progress? How does practice relate to the philosophy?'

Supporting planning and development of a curriculum and environment that supports every child's learning.	Educational leaders are expected to develop a deep understanding of the service philosophy. You will be required to develop an approach for the curriculum and programs at the service, bringing the educators with you. Planning your support strategies for educators, as they work to achieve those goals, will also be your responsibility.
Mentoring, guiding and supporting educators.	Another key responsibility of the educational leader is developing mentoring plans and processes, and mapping how they will be used in the service. The educators' plans will typically include: • setting goals and priorities • the knowledge you want to grow • identifying what success will look like and how progress will be measured • individual personalised plans with steps.
Tailoring your actions, acknowledging that educators possess varying knowledge levels, capabilities and respond to different learning styles.	The educational leader must get to know each educator's knowledge base, and identify needs using observations, discussions, research and evidence. In the role, you will be required to work with the educators and your manager, if needed, to plan for those needs, in consultation with the director/supervisor or manager. Using the principles of adult learning, you will have to create learning opportunities, where required.

Role execution	Steps for carrying out duties effectively
Facilitating the implementation of evidence- and research-based practices.	The educational leader has to work with the manager and educators to identify issues for the service, and utilise evidence and research to support practices. You will need to put this in practice by using trials, pilots and action research as tools for exploration of new solutions for old issues, or for ways of exploring new learning. You can also keep a foundation set of authoritative sites handy to ensure consistently high standards in a consistent language. These include: • Early Childhood Resource Hub (ECRH) • Raising Children Network • Educational Leaders Association (Facebook).
Working with educators towards continuous improvement in their professional practice.	Educational leaders are expected to share a pathway towards growing a shared practice. This will be possible through: • refreshing the team and individual understanding of the policy and procedure requirements for self-assessment and QIP development • developing a shared understanding of why self-assessment and quality improvement are needed • developing a tailored approach for the service • discussions and learning sessions with the service team • desktop reviews and clearing of current QIP.

Educational Leaders Association

Adapted from the Educational Leaders Association Facebook page: www.facebook.com/EducationalLeadersAssociation, and website: www.educationalleadersela.org.

SAMPLE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

The Assessment and Rating Instrument (ACECQA, 2018, p. 53) is a useful self-assessment tool, when thinking about quality improvement planning.

Quality Area 7 – Governance and leadership			
	Concept	Standard	
7.1	**Governance**	**Governance supports the operation of a quality service**	
Element	Concept	Descriptor	
7.1.1	Service philosophy and purpose	A statement of philosophy guides all aspects of the service's operations.	
7.1.2	Management systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.	
7.1.3	Roles and responsibilities	Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and understood, and support effective decision-making and operation of the service.	
Information from desktop review to follow up on during assessment and rating visit			✓
Notes from service QIP			
Notes from service compliance history			

Reference

(ACECQA, 2018, p.53). *National Quality Standard Assessment and Rating Instrument*. Sydney, NSW: ACECQA. Retrieved from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/media/25301.