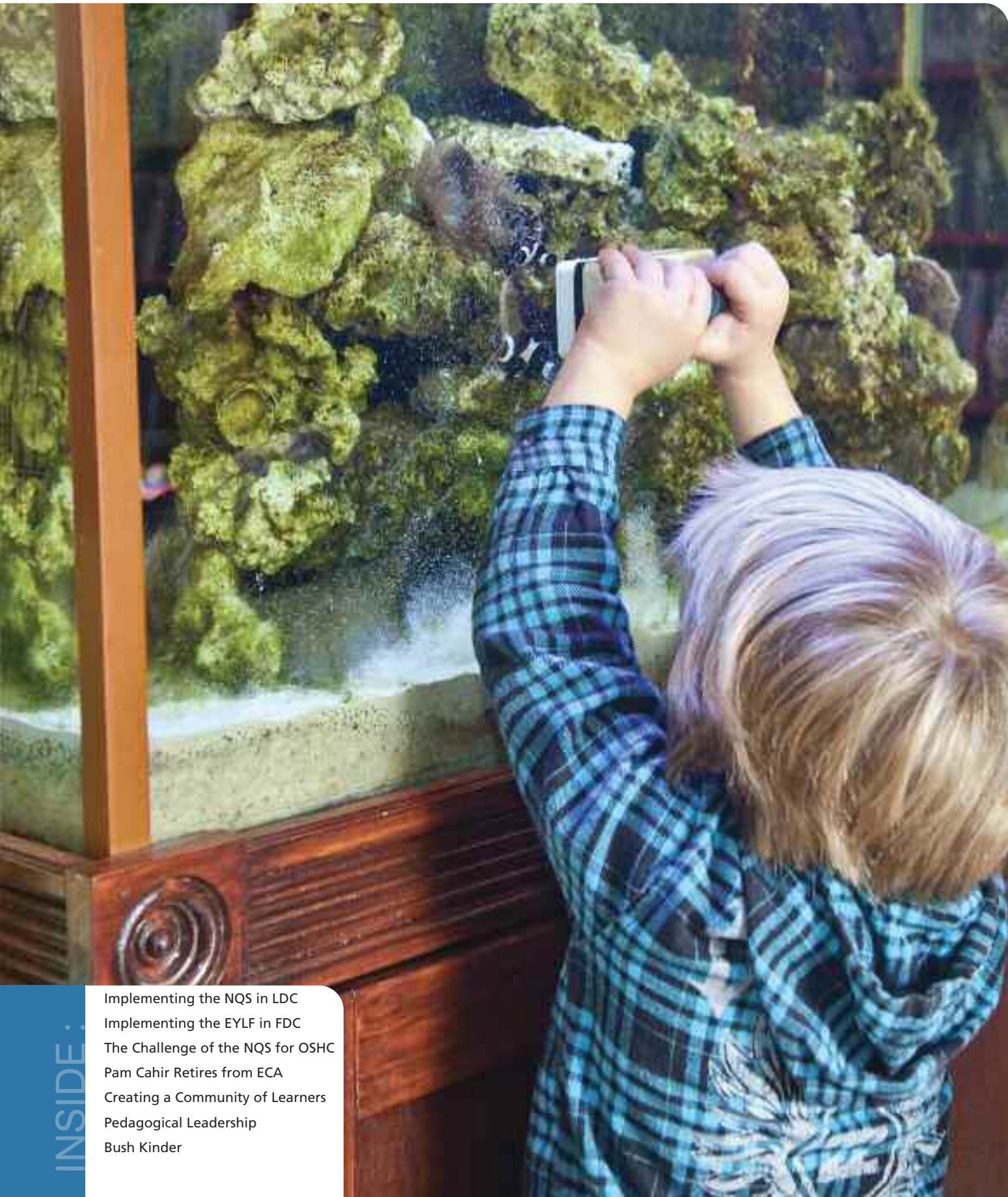


reflektion

GOWRIE AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION • WINTER 2012 • ISSUE 47



INSIDE:

Implementing the NQS in LDC
Implementing the EYLF in FDC
The Challenge of the NQS for OSHC
Pam Cahir Retires from ECA
Creating a Community of Learners
Pedagogical Leadership
Bush Kinder

Reflections is a quarterly publication by Gowrie Australia for educators and families in Children's Services.

PUBLISHER

TTR Print Management Pty Ltd on behalf of Gowrie Australia

EDITOR

Josephine Musumeci

DESIGN

Angela Reeves

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Centre Staff

PRINTER

TTR Print Management



COMMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Feedback, suggestions and contributions are most welcome. Please contact Gowrie Australia to discuss ideas or to submit an article email: lyndsay@gowriesa.org.au

PHOTOCOPYING

Permission to reproduce any articles published in *Reflections* must be obtained from Gowrie Australia.

POSTAL ADDRESS

PO Box 408
Hindmarsh SA 5007

Telephone: 03 6230 6800
Facsimile: 03 6230 6811
Email: lyndsay@gowriesa.org.au

DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed in *Reflections* are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of Gowrie Australia. By publishing diverse opinions we aim to encourage critical reflection and motivate practitioners in Children's Services to respond. Gowrie Australia's privacy policy precludes the use of children's names. Fictitious names are substituted.

ISSN 144-5387. Issue 47, Winter 2012
© 2012 Gowrie Australia

CONTACT DETAILS - Gowrie Australia

Gowrie SA

39a Dew Street
Thebarton SA 5031

Ph: 08 8352 5144 **Fax:** 08 8234 1217
Email: lyndsay@gowriesa.org.au
Website: www.gowriesa.org.au
Contact: Lyndsay Healy

Gowrie NSW

Level 3, 215 Euston Road
Alexandria NSW 2015

Ph: 02 8571 9741 **Fax:** 02 8571 9790
Email: merise.bickley@gowrie-sydney.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-sydney.com.au
Contact: Merise Bickley

The Gowrie (QLD) Inc.

228 St Paul's Terrace
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Ph: 07 3252 2667 **Fax:** 07 3252 2258
Email: sharron@ladygowrie.com.au
Website: www.gowrieqld.com.au
Contact: Sharron Palmer

Lady Gowrie Tasmania

229 Campbell Street
Hobart TAS 7000

Ph: 03 6230 6800 **Fax:** 03 6230 6811
Email: info@gowrie-tas.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-tas.com.au
Contact: Ros Cornish

Gowrie Victoria

Cnr Newry & Canning Streets
Carlton North VIC 3054

Ph: 03 9347 6388 **Fax:** 03 9347 7567
Email: melodied@gowrievictoria.org.au
Website: www.gowrievictoria.org.au
Contact: Melodie Davies

The Gowrie (WA) Inc.

61 Lowan Loop
Karawara WA 6152

Ph: 08 9478 7500 **Fax:** 08 9313 1827
Email: toniaw@gowrie-wa.com.au
Website: www.gowrie-wa.com.au
Contact: Tonia Westmere

This publication is supported by the Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations through the Child Care Conference and Publication Support Scheme

Dear Colleagues

With the initiatives of the National Reform Agenda now a clear focus for the Education and Care sector, this edition of *Reflections* shares practical approaches taken by a range of service types to enhance understanding and support the implementation process. Despite different approaches, each articulates the importance of deep critical reflection - educators regularly assessing their own practice and examining all aspects of the curriculum as part of continuing the journey of quality improvement. The importance of ongoing collaborative and professional dialogue between educators is also highlighted, along with partnerships with families and communities to support improved service delivery and create positive outcomes for children and families. Catharine Hydon supports these views in her article where the creation of a 'community of learners', with members committed to collaboration, describes a powerful model for supporting the achievement of shared goals for children.

As further highlighted in Catharine's article, the sector is undergoing rapid change. Such change demands strong and focused leadership and one aspect of leadership is shared in an article on "Pedagogical Leadership" which explores the challenges and opportunities of such a role in the early years sector. The provocations throughout this article provide readers with the opportunity to unpack the pedagogical leadership role and its place within a program.

Continuing on the leadership theme, Margaret Young, National President of Early Childhood Australia, has highlighted the significant contribution to ECA, and more broadly to the early childhood sector, of the retiring CEO Pam Cahir. Pam has been a vibrant, visionary leader whose powerful commitment to the importance of advocacy has influenced policy makers' thinking and decision making. Margaret's article also provides a plotted history of the immense changes within the sector since Pam commenced with ECA in 1988. As the sector faces further changes, which provide both challenge and opportunity, it is a time to reflect on the achievements over this period and celebrate the gains as we, like Pam, move forward to further rewarding times.

Given the strong and long relationships between ECA and the Gowrie's, on behalf of my colleagues within each Gowrie, I take this opportunity to thank Pam for her collegiality, support and, importantly, her friendship over many years. Enjoy this next phase of your life Pam, particularly those much loved grandchildren!

Until next time...

Ros Cornish
CEO Lady Gowrie Tasmania

GOWRIE CEO'S

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Ruth Callaghan | - | Gowrie NSW |
| Sue Hart | - | Gowrie Victoria |
| Jane Bourne | - | The Gowrie (QLD) Inc |
| Kaye Colmer | - | Gowrie SA |
| (Acting) Tonia Westmere | - | The Gowrie (WA) Inc |
| Ros Cornish | - | Lady Gowrie Tasmania |



4 Quality Practices: the Implementation of the National Quality Standard in Long Day Care



6 Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework: A Family Day Care Scheme's Journey



8 Meeting the Challenge of The National Quality Standard for School Age Care



11 Pam Cahir Retires as CEO of Early Childhood Australia



14 Creating a Community of Learners



16 Pedagogical Leadership: Exploring New Terrain and Provocations



18 Bush Kinder

20 Back Cover - National & International Conference Updates

Quality Practices: the Implementation of the National Quality Standard in Long Day Care

Author:
Melissa MacMaster
Manager Children's Program
Gowrie Victoria

Dear Children's Service Provider,

For the last 11 years Gowrie Australia's *Reflections* has been circulating in a magazine format to children's services across the country. As with any printed material, we have been aware of the difficulties for our readership of sharing within a large team, and costs of printing and distribution have increased over the years.

It is therefore with great pleasure that we announce that *Reflections* is now available to download for free, as an e-magazine from Gowrie websites. This has been made possible via funding from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The e-magazine format will allow individuals to access content at their convenience. We hope that this will mean that specific articles can be selected and circulated for distribution to staff and families - to stimulate professional conversations and learning within staff teams and to support understanding and partnerships within centre communities.

Follow any of the links below to start downloading your very own e-copy of *Reflections*:

www.gowrie-brisbane.com.au

www.gowriesa.org.au

www.gowrie-sydney.com.au

www.gowrie-tas.com.au

www.gowrievictoria.org.au

www.gowrie-wa.com.au





As an integrated long day care provider, Gowrie Victoria has worked under a Quality Assurance system for many years. For us, like many services, the introduction of a national set of standards and regulations is about continuing the journey of quality improvement and providing children with access to quality early childhood education and care, regardless of service type. The principles, practices and learning outcomes of the National and Victorian Frameworks have, in recent years, been a driving force in ensuring high quality programs.

The introduction of the National Quality Standard (NQS) compliments this work by guiding curriculum decision-making and assessment in order to support children's learning. The suite of documents within the National Quality Framework has invited the community to engage in deep critical reflection, which has involved examining all aspects of the curriculum. Educators, for example, regularly assess their practice, in order to recognise their strengths and identify areas that can be improved (NQS, 2012, QA 4.2.2). Children, families and visitors to the service are given many opportunities and outlets for providing feedback that also improves practice. Regular exchange of ideas and information, with each other and with our sector partners, are based on *"the foundation of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes and building on the strengths of each other's knowledge"* (EYLF, 2009:12). An effective self-assessment and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) demonstrates to the community how feedback is received and utilised. This generates willingness and a desire to engage more frequently. It is this feedback that drives our continuous QIP, making it a living, ever evolving, document (NQS, 2012, QA 7.2.3).

Continuous quality improvement is the responsibility of the whole community. Quality Area seven of the NQS describes the importance of effective leaders of education and care services being able to *"...set direction and establish values for the service that reflect its context and professionalism"* (Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2011:171), in order to build a positive organisational culture and empower others to drive continuous improvement. For the past six months the children's program team has been engaged in reflection and assessment of service delivery in order to modify our existing QIP in line with the new NQS.

We began 2012 with a review of practice and professional behaviour and agreed to a set of shared expectations that are reflective of our commitment to pedagogy, the environment and team culture.

We have agreed that:

- we will remember the value of the early years and the impact a positive start to life can have on a child's emotional health and wellbeing
- we will not lose sight of the fact that the early childhood years are not solely about preparing children for the future, but also about their active participation in the present - the here and now
- we will remind each other to laugh often, smile much and find fun in every opportunity presented to us
- we will make decisions that are in the best interests of children and families
- we will engage in meaningful discussions about practice
- we will support each other to clearly articulate the how and why behind our work with children and families.

Educators use reflection journals to examine practice and have been emailed provocations and articles on a regular basis to challenge thinking and to encourage critical reflection of philosophy, ethics and practice to enrich decision making about children's learning. Educators have, for example, been challenged to invite theory into their thinking – What theoretical perspectives influence our pedagogy? Through what lens do we view children and what impact does this view have on the way we set up environments, interact with children and support a developing sense of agency (NQS, 2012, QA 1.1.6)?

Reflecting on practice has been confronting at times, but it has been valuable in ensuring a collective view of children as capable and competent and a consistent approach to strength based teaching and learning principles. Best practice is achieved through consistency – consistent images of the child (there may be many), a consistent view of the role of families and educators, and a shared understanding of how we believe children learn. Balancing critical reflection of practice with the acknowledgement of the valuable work that is done to generate best outcomes for children ensures educators continue to feel supported and not criticised throughout the process of self-assessment.

"Effective collaboration with families regarding the education and care their children receive occurs when constructive strategies for ongoing two way communication are established" (Guide to the NQS QA 6 Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities, 2011: 147). Valuable feedback enables us to reflect on practice, improve service delivery and create positive outcomes for children and families. We actively engage with all stakeholders to gain feedback and varying opinions on service delivery. Building a service of excellence is the collective responsibility of the whole community. Our QIP and our interactions with the community are reflective of this commitment.

References

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (2011). *Guide to the National Quality Standard*.

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (2009). *National Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*.



Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework: A Family Day Care Scheme's Journey

Author:
Kathy Cripps
General Manager
Lady Gowrie Tasmania Children's Services

Lady Gowrie Tasmania has been a strong proponent of the National Reform Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care and the elements therein including the Frameworks – Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), Framework for School Age Care (FSAC) and National Quality Framework (NQF).

This has been demonstrated in the organisation's Family Day Care Scheme when the coordination unit team and home based educators began their EYLF conversation in late 2009. At a scheme meeting all educators were provided with a copy of the EYLF and introductory information for distribution to all families. Lady Gowrie Tasmania Family Day Care Scheme (LGTDFC) wanted to ensure families were well informed about the EYLF so they could be supportive of educators as they commenced implementing the Framework.

The co-ordination unit team organised an out-of-hours session for families to hear what all the "fuss" was about. This initiative aimed to inform and engage families so they would embrace and support the educators in implementing a curriculum with the focus on improved outcomes for their children. The LGTFDC philosophy is based on true partnerships and valuing the importance of relationships with all stakeholders. This initiative clearly reflected this philosophy and the organisation's position statement of "Children First".

The information session resulted in 45 families attending – *the enticement of providing drinks and nibbles helped!* Families came, they listened, they asked questions and there was animated dialogue between the group and the facilitator with many long held truths shared and debated in the three hours. Existing friendships were enhanced and new ones formed. Families left with a better understanding of "all that stuff" and with more confidence in talking about the "Early Years Learning Framework" and what it means. The beginning of our partnership journey had commenced.

At the beginning of the EYLF journey the educators were all at different stages of their careers - some with formal qualifications, others commencing their pathway to a formal qualification and some were from non-English speaking backgrounds. This provided some challenge but, by providing information and materials using a range of strategies and methodologies, educators were supported to gain an understanding of the Framework.

The next step in the journey was developing an information package that was visually appealing to the educators. It needed to grab and excite the educators, to support them to navigate their way, in order to make the process meaningful for them as individuals and ensure a deep understanding of the EYLF.

It has been recognised that the EYLF involves educators undertaking deep critical reflection on their current practice. With educators at different stages of their professional development, the coordination team devised a learning journal to support individual progress.

The Scheme Manager worked closely with the field staff and became the pedagogical leader for educators, supporting them through mentoring and coaching, providing a positive and enthusiastic outlook as they reflected and unpacked the EYLF. Continual professional dialogue during regular field visits and more often via phone and email has been an enabler for both enhancing and changing existing practice.

Throughout 2010 and 2011, reflective practice and meaningful conversations between educators and the coordination unit team was the focus of field visits. They met as a group regularly to continue the professional dialogue, discussing and debating practice issues. This included the presentation of a series of reflective questions based on the EYLF with the opportunity to discuss their views in a safe and secure environment with a group of likeminded individuals all wanting what is best for children. Each session included a training component to build on existing knowledge and skills. These group discussions were followed up and supported during individual field visits.

The co-ordination unit developed an Educator's Record Book to document each carer's professional journey. This element was linked to the regular processes of the field visit, including the ongoing registration process to capture the overall professional development progress.

The Book contained a copy of the EYLF formatted so that conversations could be recorded. Coordination unit team members assisted carers to identify current and future practices, offered suggestions for how these could be implemented in the environment, and recorded their dialogue in the Record Book. The EYLF journey was regularly reported to families in the scheme newsletters, inviting and presenting ideas to support implementation.

The strong relationship between the EYLF and the National Quality Standard (NQS) means that educators are more confident as they unpack the National Law and Regulations. Their commitment to implement the EYLF into their programs for children means that they are also on the way to meeting the requirements of the NQS.

The LGTFDC educators have embraced the statement: *"the drive for change is based on clear evidence that the early years of children's lives are very important for their present and future health, development and wellbeing"*. (Guide to the National Law and Regulations 2011)



Reference:
Australian Children's Education
and Care Quality Authority.
(November 2011), *Guide to the
National Law and Regulations 2011*.
<<http://www.acecqa.gov.au>>

Meeting the Challenge of The National Quality Standard for School Age Care

Author:
Mandy Richardson

Director
St Pius X OSHC

With the implementation of the National Quality Standard this year, the educators in our service were nervous about embracing large-scale changes and the uncertainty of what to expect. However, when we met regularly as a group over several months and systematically went through the seven quality areas and associated material in the Guide, we discovered that it wasn't such a daunting task after all. The process was quite affirming in allowing us to identify how much our service had developed, but it also provided motivation to look at other ways our service might grow and continue to grow.



Many discussions were generated regarding our strengths, as well as strategies to improve service delivery. This process was particularly useful for our less experienced and unqualified educators in increasing their understanding of *why* we implement certain practices. We recognised that the process is about continuous improvement and constantly reflecting on our own practices to look for ways we can improve and adapt to our community. We feel that staying up-to-date with the latest thinking through professional development enables us to continuously reflect on our practices, which in turn, drives responsiveness and improvement.

We discovered that programming, documentation and the environment were the areas that needed improvement. But, while the introduction of a school age care framework should be a huge change, it seemed that we had already been programming around the content of *My Time, Our Place* – we just didn't know it! Having the framework available makes it so much easier to cover all areas and identify any gaps.

Programming

As a team, we have spent time discussing and analysing just exactly what our programming encompasses (looking at the definition in *My Time, Our Place*) and how we can promote this more with children, families and the educators. We devised an A3 poster (after reading posts on the www.mytimeourplace.com.au website) that we use to share and gather information each week regarding the everyday activities, programmed activities, routines and other areas that make up the programming. We use this poster to share themes, long-term projects, and regular use of indoor and outdoor equipment (which in the past was often left in the cupboards). There is also space on the poster for educators and children to add their thoughts and ideas as they go along. We use these posters in our fortnightly staff meetings to start discussions and generate thoughts, programming ideas and proposed changes. While we had done this informally before, we now have one place to record all the ideas and thoughts and a process for regularly addressing them.

Documentation

One of the greatest challenges of our new system for OSHC educators (and probably the assessors) is navigating the change around evaluation, which now clearly focuses more on 'each child'. As a team we have reflected upon what is an appropriate amount of documentation for each child and even defining just what 'each child' means. We believe that any increase in documentation must not come at the expense of quality time with our children and families. Strong relationships are at the core of our work and we must ensure we preserve relationships and continue to build on them. Our team of educators has devised a level of documentation that we hope will serve to build our knowledge of children and families and thus strengthen our relationships. For casual children we are ensuring we have a two page 'About Me' sheet, which looks at each child's strengths, interests and backgrounds. On top of this we are endeavouring to create a better picture of each child at our regular fortnightly staff meetings. We share our observations of six different (pre-identified) children at each staff meeting. At the meeting we then record any identified strengths and interests for each child discussed and also identify one area for development. This could be as simple as, '*Helping to tie their own shoe laces*', or it could be something like, '*Help Sam to use his words when he is angry*'. We find that sharing our observations helps to build our knowledge of 'each child' and allows us to program more effectively and apply a consistent approach to the children.



Environment

We are lucky that we have recently gained sole use of our room. It used to be a shared facility, which meant that we had to set up and pack up every day. We have certainly noticed the sense of belonging that exudes from both children and educators now that we have our OWN room. However, while we have over the past year, progressively developed our indoor environment, we have become aware that our outdoor environment is sadly lacking. Being based on a school site, our outdoor environment is governed by the school, and their focus seems to be on safety, durability and cleanliness – not natural exploration. We have asphalt, artificial lawn and limited garden beds. Our sandpit was disposed of because of the mess it made.

We have brainstormed ways we can start to re-introduce more nature back into our service. We have bought indoor plants, collected many natural objects, planted flowers and herbs in wine barrels and care for two bearded dragons which the children adore and spend time holding each day. Just recently, we identified a small area outside where we could move the fencing and create an enclosed outdoor area adjacent to our room. We have sought permission to develop this into an explorative outdoor area for our OSHC children and are now excited by the endless possibilities – sand pit, fairy garden, water play area, gardening, mud kitchen and perhaps even a Bali hut! We have collected photos and pictures from books and have created a display asking children, families and educators to comment and vote on what their favourite elements might be.

Reflecting back on our service's journey over the past year, I marvel at the idea that we might not have had any (or as much) of the reflective growth, which has led to improvements, if not for the introduction of the National Quality Framework. Change can be challenging and somewhat stressful, but sometimes it can spark wonderful outcomes, such as the reflection, growth and direction it has afforded our service.

Pam Cahir Retires as CEO of Early Childhood Australia

Author:
Margaret Young
National President
ECA



July 2012 brings the retirement of Pam Cahir as Chief Executive Officer of Early Childhood Australia (ECA). Pam is a dynamic leader who has made a major contribution to the early childhood sector since joining ECA in 1988. This is a significant event for the sector, as well as for ECA. It is timely to reflect on the changes that have occurred in the sector and in Early Childhood Australia and to acknowledge Pam's role in these changes.

Snapshot of history

When Pam came to ECA, the early childhood world was a very different place.

- Most of the service and program types that we know today existed but, Australia wide, there were significantly fewer centre based long day care services and most of them were in the not-for-profit community based sector
- Most long day care services received an 'operating subsidy' grant from the Federal Government as a contribution to operating costs
- Family day care was a growing sector
- 'Fee relief' was not able to be accessed by families who used privately operated services - Federal Government policy was that the purpose of child care was to 'mind' children to support women's workforce participation
- In most jurisdictions, with the exception of larger long day care centres in NSW and some far sighted individual services, early education delivered by qualified early childhood teachers was provided in (usually sessional) pre-schools or 'kindies' which were the domain of State and Territory Governments
- There was no national accreditation and quality improvement system
- Inclusion support was provided in a few child care services by a limited number of Supplementary Services (SUPPS) Workers
- The Training Reform Agenda had not yet happened and vocational training was delivered only in TAFE colleges
- The Lady Gowrie Child Centres were prominent as demonstration services and Federal Government funded providers of in-service training.

And of course, the widespread use of computers as workplace and personal tools was just beginning, the 'world wide web' had not arrived, we did not have email, mobile phones were rare and at a price of \$4,000+, way out of the reach of ordinary people. At that time Early Childhood Australia was known as AECA (the Australian Early Childhood Association). ECA members were mainly organisations' and services' members (individual membership was introduced only in 1987). AECA's national publications consisted of the quarterly Australian Journal of Early Childhood (AJEC), the Research Into Practice Series (RIPS), an annual commissioned book as a 'special title' and some

training videos. The AECA conference was rotated among the states and territories as now, but run entirely by the relevant hosting Branch. AECA's national council meetings were very formal occasions that many new participants found quite intimidating. AECA received funding from the Federal Government, part of which was to 'co-ordinate' the national Lady Gowrie Child Centre program. The National Office occupied several rooms in a section of the Majura Public School in Canberra.

ECA as an advocacy 'machine'

Notwithstanding this different world, ECA has always had a focus on the main game of the wellbeing of young children and its mission to advocate this generally, and in particular in early childhood services and programs. This was well captured with the adoption of '*ECA..Voice for young children*'.

One of Pam's important contributions to ECA has been to lead the development and reach of ECA's activities as effective and high quality advocacy tools in support of the best interests of young children. In doing this, ECA led by Pam, has continued to give a voice to the many skilled and dedicated professionals around Australia who contribute to our work and give it richness and authority. In turn, this has increased ECA's standing and credibility as an organisation that others turn to for opinion and support.

Some of the highlights of this have been:

- The development and promotion of the *ECA Code of Ethics* as an aspirational instrument and a basis for critical reflection, to guide professional behaviour
- The initiative to establish and provide continued funding and secretariat support for the *National Children's Services Forum* as a very effective liaison forum where national peak organisations come together and meet with Government and other relevant bodies
- The addition of the newsletter *ECA Voice*, the magazine *Every Child*, and the series *Everyday Learning* to AJEC and the RIPS as ECA publications, broadening the reach of our opinion and information sharing capacity
- The development of ECA's web based capacity - including the e-newsletter *ECA WebWatch* distributed free twice a month to 17,000 subscribers, more recently, the ECA Facebook page with its great potential for involving people in ECA activities through social media and, of course, the DEEWR funded web based information, forums and resources that support educators and service providers in implementing the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Agenda

- In partnership with the Australian Psychological Association the delivery of the Department of Health and Ageing and "beyondblue" funded *KidsMatter Early Childhood* project, highlighting the issue of children's mental health and the capacity for well-resourced Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services to have a positive effect.

Underlying achievements such as these, have involved a great deal of work by the National Board and Branches (supported by Pam in both thinking and information) on ECA's strategic directions and governance.

A comprehensive picture of the activities of Early Childhood Australia as it is today, can be seen at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Key advocacy activities

Having a basic message and good advocacy tools is nothing without the ability to identify and deal with key issues effectively, and in this area Pam has also served ECA and young children very well. She brings a strong commitment to the fundamental principles of social justice, an unwavering vision of the wellbeing of young children, and a very enquiring, creative and constructive mind to this work.

Over her years with ECA, Pam has worked on many important issues. Highlights include:

- *Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* - The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 and was ratified by Australia in 1990. This important statement incorporated the full range of human rights in a special convention for people under 18 years to provide the particular care and protection that children often need, and to show the world that children have human rights.
- *Reconciliation* - for many years Pam has been one of ECA's active and vocal leaders in its journey of Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and in particular in the commitment to take meaningful actions to help bridge the gap in life experiences, opportunities and outcomes for young children.

A landmark in this was the 2002 publication of the book and video *Building Bridges*, which explored the significance of family and culture for early learning by asking Aboriginal families to film their own 'practice' with their children and choose which parts to share with a facilitated discussion group of their peers, discussing the questions (quintessentially Pam Cahir questions) 'What is it about my family that everyone who watches these videos can see?' 'What is it that only I can see because it is my family/community?' and 'What is it that is so much a part of me (my culture)

that I no longer notice it anymore?' Since then Pam has continued to pursue and develop the powerful conviction that if we are to make a difference we must transform our thinking, our practice and ourselves and this is now one of the platforms in ECA's developing Reconciliation Action Plan.

- *Accreditation* – Pam willingly embraced ECA's long standing commitment to quality improvement in early childhood settings and, from her early days as CEO, made significant contributions to ECA's support for the introduction of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System for long day care centres by the Federal Government. Our focus on children led to the position, often articulated by Pam for ECA, that quality is important for all children, regardless of the setting they are in.
- *'Early Childhood' as a profession* – ECA has a long standing interest in the development of 'early childhood' as a profession and this has, if anything, strengthened in more recent years with the growing international evidence of the importance of qualified, consistent and appropriately remunerated staff in delivering the relationships and pedagogy needed to achieve the best outcomes for young children.

Side by side with this, however, is our evolving thinking, developed and articulated by Pam in her public addresses over recent years, that no one outside the profession can give us this professional status and standing – we must take responsibility for ourselves and build it from inside. The ECA Code of Ethics is one example of this, but much more is needed. With Pam's leadership this belief informs ECA's current work on professional standards and leadership, and motivates our development of professional communities and conversations through social media.

- *Current early childhood reform agenda* – ECA's commitment to, and strong advocacy for, the current National Reform Agenda is well known and has had a great deal of support from the early childhood community. The leadership of the Federal Government and the COAG (Council of Australian Governments') agreement brought the opportunity of a generation to achieve much needed fundamental reforms for the wellbeing of young children, and Pam has been tireless in her advocacy and support for this. In this process she has also led ECA to understand the importance of using professional support in public campaigns and this remains an ongoing commitment.

ECA and the Gowries

The links between ECA and the Gowries go back to the beginnings of the organisations and are part of Australia's social history. In the late 1930s, when the Federal Government established the Lady Gowrie Child Centre national program and built a centre in each of the states, the Australian Pre-School Association, as ECA was then, was designated as the national co-coordinator. This arrangement continued for many years. Even much later, when each Lady Gowrie Child Centre had its own direct links with the Federal Government, ECA received funding to 'co-ordinate' the national program.

By 1988, when Pam joined ECA, the Gowries were functioning as mature independent organisations and the ECA 'co-ordination' role was redundant. Change was negotiated and matched by changing Federal Government funding programs. In the early 1990's Gowries formed a national alliance – Gowrie Australia.

The long standing Gowrie – ECA connection has endured however, forged by the common interest in working for the wellbeing of young children, promoting high quality services and supporting people working in these settings. For many, ECA is a key public advocate in ways that they cannot achieve alone, and the Gowrie centres, along with other organisations in the sector, have been very active supporters of ECA, contributing staff time and expertise through Branch and national boards and other activities.

With Pam Cahir as CEO, ECA has grown into the vibrant, forward looking and inclusive advocacy organisation that it is today, while remaining always true to its mission and vision, and we look forward to maintaining and developing this legacy into the future.

We say a heart felt 'thank you' for all that you have given us, Pam, and we know this is echoed in many places around Australia. We wish you many happy and rewarding times to come.

Margaret Young

Margaret has been the National President of ECA since 2006 and worked at the Sydney Gowrie from 1988 to 2008, including a period as the Chief Executive Officer.

Creating a Community of Learners

Author:
Catharine Hydon
Hydon Consulting Pty Ltd

It's no surprise that in times of rapid change we look for answers from those amongst us who we perceive to have effective solutions, in the hope that they will provide clear direction into the future. It is simultaneously to be expected that we are cautious, sometimes suspicious about these processes and the very people who have responsibility to guide us into new ways of accounting for our work. The children's services sector is currently experiencing something of this phenomenon – questions abound about how the reforms will be rolled out, whether we will comply, who will be charged with making judgment and are they worthy of the task.



The need for clarity and certainty is partly about our reluctance to change but is also, perhaps, more reflective of our sector's commitment to 'getting it right' from the start, and to always providing the best for the children and families we work with.

But the truth of the matter is, that during change of this nature - substantial in terms of practice and scope - there is no **one** source of answers. There is no one component, group or procedure that will make or break the process. A much more holistic and indeed, more contemporary view, is to see ourselves and each other as part of a community of learners who collectively take responsibility for the change. Instead of believing that the answers are to be found in single components, we actively choose to see ourselves as equal participants in a process of meaningful discovery, alignment and articulation. The single solution (the training of educators or the qualification of assessors, for example) gives way to a sophisticated model of quality practice where many effective strategies deliver outcomes for children and families. Such a model invites all players – services, practitioners, families, governments, assessors, managers, communities, operators and indeed children - to become a learning community that embarks on change together.

If then the 'community of learners' model provides the frame, if the solutions are found together in many forms, what should we be looking for? What aspects of this reform might we look for to bring us the clarity and certainty we seek? The answers of course are numerous, but the following signs can assure us that the community of learners can deliver on outcomes and that, collectively, we can map a shared future.

21st Century Policy

Unlike the policy makers and regulators of the past, today's politicians and bureaucrats do seek to make policy and law in collaboration with those who are affected, and in the best interests of the majority. It might sound like hollow promises, but there are strong signs of this having occurred throughout the process to date and commitments for this approach into the future. The sector's choice now is to take up the offer, to make the permanent shift from 'nice lady' to activist professional and to speak up as often as we can, and in as many different ways as we can imagine. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) has publically, on more than one occasion, invited us into professional dialogue. We must act to become effective advocates with state and territory jurisdictions.

The idea of working together and helping each other has taken a strong hold in our understanding of quality practice. It is a compelling theme in the National Quality Framework (NQF), the Learning Frameworks and the National Quality Standard. A community of learners relies on its members believing in collaboration as a fundamental way of behaving. We can take heart that we will increasingly measure quality by how well we work together to achieve shared goals for children. The NQF is built on the notion that quality does not evolve on its own and that the process needs a range of voices and a robust exchange of ideas. While many things are known, there is room for ongoing collaboration in the shaping of this new system.

Lifelong Learning

Our broad commitment to lifelong learning is yet another reassuring sign. The literature that underpins the reforms is teeming with references to learning that begin the moment you are born and last beyond the classroom. It opens up the space for ongoing change for the better, where lessons of the past are learnt (at least in part), and where experience will continue to be our teacher. And progress is underway – educators and assessors are learning new systems together; teams of educators are committing to ongoing training; networks of educators are talking to each other across cyber space and children and families are contributing to improvement plans along with educators. With lifelong learning as a mantra, this is simply another thing to be learnt.

These are but a few signs of the many that will emerge in the coming months to reassure us that together we have the know-how, the drive, the courage and the commitment to take us into the future.



Leadership
A leadership is a process of ability to motivate a group of organizing a group of achieve a common g intentional influence

Authors:
Anthony Semann,
Director, Semann and Slattery
Rod Soper,
Head Early and Primary Years,
Northern Beaches Christian School,
Sydney

Pedagogical Leadership: Exploring New Terrain and Provocations

This article explores the role of the pedagogical leader. It exposes some of the ‘niggles’ currently being explored in the early years sector. The authors provoke and promote the readers to reflect on and see opportunities for the role of the pedagogical leader to grow into a sustainable and successful role within early years programs.

The National Quality Standard brings to the attention of the early education sector the need to explore the role of a pedagogical leader. Through such leadership, positive outcomes are anticipated as both the skills and knowledge of educators are improved through increased attention to the importance of combining pedagogy and leadership. Inclusion into the National Quality Standard would suggest that pedagogical leadership is an important component in delivering and maintaining quality. Despite the fresh focus on this role, we should not dismiss the important role that pedagogical leadership can play within a program. However we are acutely aware that a greater focus in recent times on pedagogical leadership may raise a number of questions, as educators grapple with what the role of the pedagogical leader actually is.

Pedagogical leadership is the combination of two words, “pedagogy” and “leadership”. Pedagogy is the vision and approach that unpacks the opportunity for teacher and child alike to participate in knowledge transformation. Central to the process of teaching and learning is the ability of educators to understand both the theory behind their decisions and the most effective way to enact the art of teaching.

Leadership is a contested term, which is often cited as a set of behaviours and actions. It is our belief that leadership has the ability to transform both the leader and the team. It takes a determination and belief that, as a result of one's leadership, more good than bad will result. Leadership does come with a set of challenges that many in the early years sector have encountered. Specific to pedagogical leadership these challenges include, but are not limited to:

- An understanding of the theory that supports educational practice
- The tensions of documenting learning and outcomes in a respectful and robust manner
- Working in a sector where there are diverse qualifications, skills and experiences
- Inspiring others to act
- Creating and maintaining a shared and common vision.

If one assumes that the act of leadership has a 'cause and effect', we may be correct in assuming that pedagogical leadership may display the same phenomenon. This raises the question: "What is the effect of leading pedagogy?"

Pedagogical leadership must be about a transformational relationship between leaders and those they work with. If this is the case, then consideration must be given to how pedagogical leadership impacts on families, children and educators.

Contemporary scholars on leadership have challenged the long held view that leadership produces only positive outcomes. As such we are troubled by, and remain curious about, what happens if pedagogical leadership does not lead to positive outcomes? So, how do we measure the positive or the negative outcomes of pedagogical leadership? Perhaps there is benefit in the early days of coming to understand pedagogical leadership by creating a space that allows for critical dialogue to surface, for educators' hopes and dreams about pedagogy to be shared, and to explore educators' understanding about pedagogical leadership and its impact on children, educators and curriculum. Perhaps one way to progress the debate forward is to share the following questions during a staff meeting:

- What is pedagogical leadership?
- What does pedagogical leadership look like when enacted effectively?
- What does the relationship between pedagogy and leadership look like in our program?

Both our lived experiences and research endeavours suggest that effective leadership requires both time away from everyday practice, and the ability to work alongside the educators one is attempting to lead and support. The inevitable challenge for the early years sector is the time required for the pedagogical leader to effectively take up this role. Is there an expectation that the role of the pedagogical leader will become an additional task for an individual to squeeze into an already hectic role, or will sufficient time be granted for this individual to both reflect on, create opportunities to enact, and develop the necessary skills to be a pedagogical leader? Alternatively, will individuals acknowledge the importance of such a role and create time, spaces and relationships to explore and enact the role of pedagogical leader of their own accord?

There is a risk that the role of a pedagogical leader becomes an isolated and too often 'turn to' role when educators require support, or are in crisis. We propose that the role of the pedagogical leader is not the savior of all curriculum issues. Rather, the role may act as a critical friend to educators, an individual who promotes intellectual stimulation and challenges the norms of practice. There is great benefit in also creating opportunities for pedagogical leaders to come together and nourish their minds and souls through connecting with others in a similar role.

In closing we wish to leave you with some further provocations to reflect on:

- What specific professional learning is required to assist educators to become pedagogical leaders?
- Is there sufficient research on pedagogical leadership to inform the content of such specific professional development requirements?
- Given the high level of staff turnover in the early years sector, what is required to build the necessary pedagogical leaders that would allow the sector to grow and thrive into the future?

BUSH KINDER

Author:

Doug Fargher

Director Westgarth Kindergarten
Bush Kinder Consultant

According to current research (Planet Ark, 2011), Australian parents believe their children need to be outside in nature more often. Yet modern children are spending less than half the time exploring nature than their parents did when they were children.

At Westgarth Kindergarten, we believe childhood is precious and that an important part of childhood is being outside in nature. For many years we have offered a curriculum that uses the outdoor environment as the primary learning space. The children experience the changing weather – they feel the rain, respond to the wind, play according to what nature has provided, get wet or feel the sun on their skin – all of this stimulates the content of their play. Children are supported in their choices to use resources from nature in their play, therefore water, twigs, leaves, flowers, sand and dirt become the favoured play materials.





Forest schools have been operating successfully in Northern Europe for over 50 years. Their success (Robertson, 2008, Maynard, 2007, Davis and Waite, 2005, Murray, 2004) provided further edification and conviction to our belief in creating an Australian outdoor play curriculum.

Australian folklore has its foundation in the bush. Aboriginal Dreamtime stories teach of the land, yet Australian children have not had a model of education which allows children to be outdoors for extended periods of time and to develop a connection with the environment.

When given the challenge to increase the kindergarten hours for each child from 12 hours to 15 hours we saw an opportunity not merely to fill the time, but to enhance our program by offering a Bush Kinder experience to our children.

With drive, tenacity, much hard work, a clear vision, and by working in collaboration with parents and professional bodies, Bush Kinder became a reality.

The Australian bush is a learning environment unlike any other. Each week, throughout the school term, the children of Westgarth Kindergarten learn through play in this unique place. These three hours of uninterrupted quality play in the bush with no fences, using what nature has provided as learning materials relates beautifully to the National Quality Standard's Element 3 on the Physical environment, "Outdoor spaces with plants, trees, rocks, mud and water invite open ended interactions, spontaneity, risk taking and a connection with nature" (NQS, 2010, Element 3 Physical environment).

Bush Kinder is a special part of a Westgarth child's total kindergarten experience. Children have the opportunity to play in the rain, roll down grassy mounds, balance along fallen logs, get involved in dramatic play, find insects, draw with sticks in the ground. Teachers note every child's developmental progression, advancing skill levels and particular interests and use this knowledge to support the children's learning.

Teachers support children as they take the risks and face challenges essential to well-rounded learning. Stories are told, knowledge is shared, songs are sung.

Through play, the children connect with and respect this space. They connect with their land in a way that cannot be achieved under a roof or within walls.

Children are curious, imaginative and creative. Nature provides an ideal learning environment for them. Whilst they are learning about their land and nature, they are simultaneously learning more about themselves and each other.

It wasn't long before teaching staff and families alike were noticing positive changes in their children:

- children who were quieter, prior to Bush Kinder, were behaving in a more assertive and outgoing manner
- easily distracted children were demonstrating longer periods of focus in their play
- competent climbers were sharing their skills with less competent climbers
- boys and girls played together in less stereotypical ways.

Throughout my teaching career I have dreamt of teaching in this fashion. I feel incredibly fortunate to be supported by kinder families and colleagues who have volunteered hundreds of hours to get Bush Kinder up and running.

Interest for Bush Kinder amongst like-minded educators, academics, parents and the wider community has been overwhelming. Bush Kinder is sure to have a growing and bright future ahead.

Hopefully in the near future, Bush Kinder will find a place in many kindergartens across Australia. Bush Kinder enables children to connect their minds, bodies and spirits with the earth and to discover the beauty of nature, providing rich and meaningful learning.

References

- Planet Ark (2011) *Climbing Trees: Getting Aussie Kids Back Outdoors*.
- Robertson, J. (2008) *I Ur Och Skur "Rain or Shine"*.
- Maynard T (2007) 'Forest Schools in Great Britain: an initial exploration', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 8(4), 320-331.
- Davis, B. and Waite, S. (2005) *Forest School: Opportunities and Challenges in Early Years*, University of Plymouth.
- Murray, R. (2004) *Forest Schools project evaluation: A study in Wales*, London: New Economics Foundation.
- Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (2009) *The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*.
- Westgarth Kindergarten
<https://sites.google.com/a/wgkg.vic.edu.au/westgarth-kinder-site-new-look/bush-kinder>

National and International CONFERENCE UPDATE



Spring 2011



Summer 2011



Autumn 2012

7th Family Day Care Australia National Conference

Children the Heart of the Dream
18-21 July 2012
Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, Qld
W: www.cdesign.com.au/fdc2012/

12th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference

Family Transitions and Trajectories
25-27 July 2012
Melbourne Convention Centre, Vic
W: <http://conference.aifs.gov.au/>

ECIA 10th Biennial National Conference

Pathways to Participations: *Engagement and choice for children and families*
9-11 August 2012
Burswood Entertainment complex, Perth, WA
W: www.eciaconference2012.com.au/

The Gowrie (QLD) Inc National Conference

Are We There Yet? Reflecting on Practice and the National Quality Framework
International Keynote Speaker - Professor Ferre Laevers
28-29 September 2012
Bardon Conference Centre, Qld
E: info@ladygowrie.com.au
W: www.gowrieqld.com.au

Early Childhood Australia's 2012 National Conference

Consulting the Compass - defining directions
3-6 October 2012
Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre, WA
W: www.eacaconference.com.au/

2012 NAEYC Annual Conference and Expo

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the 21st Century
7-10 November 2012
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
W: www.naeyc.org/conference/

Gowrie Australia

Promoting and supporting quality
services for all children.

Our Mission

Nationally committed to
optimal outcomes for
children and families.