

## **The Australian Early Childhood Education and Care sector – a time of change and an insight into the crisis of identity experienced by those working in the sector....**

The Australian Early Childhood Education and Care sector (ECEC) has moved through some major changes in the last 9 years. During the time since 2009, the National Quality Framework, National Quality Standard and our first nationwide curriculum, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) was introduced. Depending on where you are positioned within the ECEC sector, be it as a Service Provider, a customer, a policy maker, a teacher, or a child; your view and experience of our highly complex and at times ideologically contested, misunderstood, misrepresented, yet highly important field will differ.

As a service that has been in operation since 2005, we have worked continuously to move with policy changes, information that comes from research and professional knowledge and service regulation changes, in a fluid and integrated manner. We have always aimed to understand and embed ....

these changes contextually within our service, not just adhere to them for the sake of meeting regulations. This has involved coming together as a team and discussing, debating and critically reflecting on many different practices and perspectives. We and all services need to remain up to date with all changes and reforms and contemporary knowledge which will ensure that the children within our service remain the primary focus and touchstone of why we are there each day.

In the past 5 years, the ECEC sector has concentrated a great deal of our efforts on understanding who we are as professionals, how we can commit to quality provision for our different service types and also embed our own individual philosophical understandings and viewpoint so that they are evident in our everyday practices. This was supported by the Federal Government's Long Day Care Professional Development Funding. This funding has now

ceased, but we feel that it was hugely beneficial to the development of our team as educational professionals. This is the lens that we as early childhood educators look through each day. We see ourselves and our roles as important for social change and work with dedication within the constraints that our sector faces.

However, we understand very clearly, that due to the multifaceted and complex make up of all of those who are a part of our profession, that there are many different lenses and viewpoints that need to be understood whilst meeting these needs.

It is important to advocate for our profession and to have a strong standpoint as an educator, and to invest in taking the time to explain the work that we do, the challenges we face and the commitment we make to children every day. Early Childhood Education and Care is political and a key social policy issue, and at times when we as a sector

are under pressure and cannot depend on policy cohesion from our Federal Government we can struggle in finding a strong professional voice. For a sector such as ours where professional identity has historically never been strong, where we refer to ourselves as "just nice ladies", we can tend to back away from the politics and advocacy work that forms part of our professional identity and our professional practice.

Our sector has been referred to in literature and the media as fragmented; it has even been described as a "pink ghetto" due to a highly gendered workforce with diverse qualification levels.

The sector is viewed as being challenged to consistently deliver quality programs due to some services within Australia operating with a high proportion of very young, inexperienced and under qualified educators. We hear from politicians and economists...

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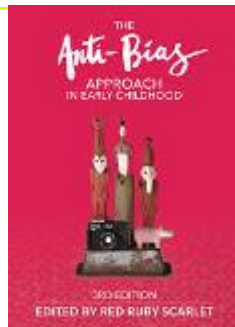
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stand up and call ourselves professionals and advocate for early childhood education robustly?

Whilst we dispute these generalizations we do also recognize that part of these arguments can be true in some cases within our profession. However, this type of generalized characterization of our chosen vocation does nothing to assist in galvanizing a strong professional identity and discourse for those already working in ECEC or for the developing professional identity of people who are so desperately needed and working towards a qualification to pursue teaching in the early childhood education sector. Social media has become one platform where the everyday early childhood educator can voice their frustrations on the structures and systems that can often fail educators and services. However even with the best of intentions these forums are simply seen as more of the same downtrodden rhetoric by our sector about our sector and is not achieving a great deal in terms of positive change. These are some of the challenges that we as an early childhood education sector face.

The cost of providing quality service delivery is very high and our educators are still not remunerated adequately considering the highly taxing and hugely important work they carry out each day. We are yet to receive pay parity with our primary school educator colleagues also working with children in their early childhood years. Despite all of this, we work every day to try to balance quality with equity within the constraints that we face. ECEC is a highly accountable and regulated sector due to the federally funded rebates that we receive on behalf of family's to support them in accessing care. More importantly we are highly regulated and monitored due to the fact that we work with very young children who are viewed as not having a voice or rights and therefore are vulnerable to those that are in power and in charge of their education and wellbeing whilst away from their family. We strongly value and support all of these accountability structures and also understand very clearly the huge responsibility we have every day in caring for and educating children during their early childhood years.

In February this year, the 2018 National Quality Standard (NQS) commenced across all states and territories. Services approved under the Education and Care Services National Law are now assessed and rated against the 2018 National Quality Standard. This is the third system of National Regulations and assessment tool that our service will be reviewed under in the last 14 years. Our last assessment and rating was in 2013 which makes our service now overdue for re-assessment by 3 years. This is an indication of not only the pressure that the regulatory body is under to work through the process of assessing and maintaining a system of quality provision for all services, but also evidence of the latest boom in new services opening, especially in the Hunter area. The new wave of corporatization of our sector, (which notably, after the fall of the ABC corporate chain of services we were assured would not be allowed to happen again), appears to be having a second coming. With this comes the risk of the dilution of quality provision on many fronts due to a strain on sourcing appropriately qualified and experienced leaders, teachers and educators. It has also invited the genus and simplification of a new strain of "educational" software programs flooding the ECEC marketplace. These programs provide a one size fits all approach to education program delivery that appeals to the masses using smart phone and/or tablet devices. This type of practice invites and sustains the exact professional identity problems that our sector is accused of (lack of professional agency and autonomy, lack of critical thinking and general professional attributes) that we are trying so hard to challenge and reimagine. Whilst we work hard to find enough hours in the day to provide a quality education and care program, we are true to the knowledge and understandings of how to best deliver this for children in their early childhood (0-8yrs); and that is a play based child and educator co-constructed



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curriculum that is guided by a service's own phil-

osophical approach, the EYLF & in partnership with families and the local community. ECEC does not have a set curriculum, we do not have key learning areas, we do not share one template for "how to" educate and care for children in their early years. This is intentional. This is a curriculum decision in itself that each service needs to make. Our teaching needs to remain committed to an open and bespoke service delivery to the children and families that attend our services. It would be much easier if we took up the option to stop thinking for ourselves and in the process water down the quality of our work and never advocate to the families who belong to our community or the wider community the important work that we are aiming to achieve every day. However, this won't happen, our team wouldn't let it happen and we would never short change the children the wondrous childhood learning opportunities they deserve. However, when we untangle ourselves from the political, commercial and policy chaos, what remains central to our sector, is the child and the family. This is our core purpose and we have great hope that working openly, critically, and transparently and in partnership with the children, families and community, we will deliver what we as early childhood education professionals believe is a meaningful and contextually relevant education and care experience. There is hope, there is passion, and there is commitment and dedication aplenty in the field of ECEC. As advocated by Australian sociologist Hugh Mackay, what is needed in our community right now is more compassion, more understanding and more connection. We also understand that this is best begun from within our own backyards. We need to talk, listen, understand and trust each other to make change occur. This is **our** commitment to **our** backyard. We are hopeful that if we create this connection and compassion and are supported by families and the community by them understanding and advocating the important work that we do, that we will teach the children with us now to share these same values more broadly with other communities further afield as they continue on their journey as citizens of their local and global spaces and places.

By Mel Duffy-Fagan

## Partnership with Parents Survey—thanks for your input..



Thank you for the responses we have received so far this year via our online survey. We have had really helpful and supportive feedback and as usual like to address issues raised by a few for the benefit of all. We do this each year in our newsletter and then add these areas to our Quality Improvement Plan. We are overwhelmed with the wonderful feedback and support that we have received from the questionnaires and also from the recent Child Development Profiles that were made available for families to read. Thank

you so very much for your involvement and appreciation for our team's work. Here are some of the responses that we have been made aware of and ways we will address them:

**Issue:** We have logged on to our child's program folder but find it to be not very user friendly. There is a lot of going from folder to folder which takes time to download.

**Response:** We are going to trial making the documents pdfs to see if this help with download speed for families.

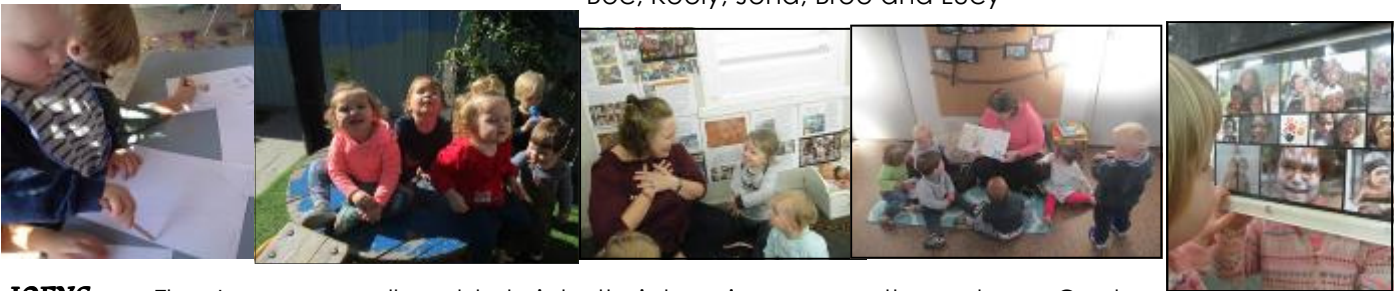
**Issue:** We would like meetings with our child's teacher like half yearly parent-teacher style.

**Response:** We welcome meeting with families at any time of the year. As we are not school but our own very special before school educational service, we will always remain open and flexible to meetings with families. As parents who have children at school are aware, access to your child's primary school teacher is a very different experience to that of an early childhood teacher. We are available to talk with parents morning and

afternoon every day. Therefore we do not see a need for scheduled meetings like those in school environments. What we do advocate for is organising times to meet at times of your child's development that you feel would be beneficial to you and/or the teachers. Our individual approach will always remain our highest priority and understand that all families have differing needs and schedules to contend with. **Continued on page 7...**

## ROOM NEWS...what's been going on in our rooms for may & june????

**BABY POSSUMS....** Our learning is really coming together in the Possum Nursery; we have been learning as a group and focusing closely on the children's individual development goals, all of the details of this can be read in your child's online folder. We have found the children to be demonstrating all the wonderful learning dispositions that we would hope for, being curiosity, revisiting their learning through practice and repetition, showing questioning cues verbally and non verbally and also engaging in sustained shared thinking with educators. This is wonderful for us to be able to confidently see their learning as assessable and measureable all within a play based learning program. The areas of learning that have been at the heart of the program have been mark making (the joy of creating a mark that wasn't there before), art appreciation, indigenous perspectives and learning about our local communities. These areas of learning have all tied in very nicely as each area lends well to the other one. The children have been so engaged in every aspect of the experiences, indoors and outdoors. The children have been learning and practicing their own Acknowledgement of Country and practice this every morning when they gather together. We are noticing the children's language and comprehension is developing very quickly which is really assisting in their relationships taking on new depths of meaning. There is lots of chatting, connection and lovely displays of actions to songs and excitement as they share their knowledge. Thanks for reading Paula, Roxi, Bec, Keely, Jena, Bree and Lucy



**JOEYS....** The Joeys are well and truly into their learning groove these days. Our belonging and identity project has found a beautiful rhythm and the children are now so naturally engaged with the tools of the project ie, family photos and persona images, that we can't imagine learning and life without them. As outlined in our documentation panels in the atelier, we have noticed children that are more empathetic to each other, a deep connection to the understanding of family and our community of families and a tool to help each other self regulate; if you are sad, you get your friend their family photo and they will feel better! We should never underestimate the empathic abilities of young children, we have learnt through this project that if they feel authentically understood and connected to themselves- they are able to be very connected to others. Our next phase of the project is to bring our life at home and our family stories a little closer to care. We will be sending home the persona images with a little tag describing what we would like families to do. We have already seen some of the persona images go on great adventures with their families on the weekend. Audrey and her family took "persona Audrey" to Vivid in Sydney and shared some wonderful photos with us of that event. Other areas of learning have been focused on building independence and supporting the children to seek supported help to achieve tasks such as putting on socks and shoes. Our goal is to help the children through that initial resistance to get them to experience that wonderful feeling of achievement when they complete a task. We need to remember not to rob them of these resilience moments by taking over or "saving" them from a meltdown. Being present and encouraging reaps such wonderful development rewards. Colours both man made and natural have also been on our learning radar. We have noticed the colours changing in our natural environment and also exploring the concept of colour, shade, tone etc in art experiences. Please come into the atelier to check out the story of our project in our beautiful documentation panels. Thanks for reading—Lauren, Mykala, Bec and the team



**PRESCHOOL WALLABIES....** We would like to start with a huge THANKYOU!! Thanks for all those lids and for helping us to “save the planet.” As teachers we constantly discuss, assess, notice and review what we believe the children are learning. Another very important part of teaching is to reflect on what we as educators are also learning about ourselves as teachers and co-researchers with young children. This project has taught us that taking our time, not rushing the children’s ideas or trying to push the direction of their thinking, but guiding it with observation, provocation and conversation has really enabled the children to think critically and reflectively about the project’s core concepts of sustainability and creative arts. All of this learning has been recorded in our documentation panels that are on display in our preschool room. The children often go to these panels to revisit their work and it’s progress since February. This allows for meta-cognition; which is thinking about their thinking. This is so important for life long successful learning as it is a move away from learning by rote or instruction, and instead being an active participant in the learning at all stages. So, now to update you all on what all this collecting has amounted to... we have visited our local community to collect lids and had our local coffee shop barista collect more lids on our behalf from other coffee shops in Newcastle! We have visited other sculptures and discussed the connection between sustainability, reusing and how this can also be used to make meaningful art and shared the idea of art being a message; a way to communicate by asking “what is the sculpture telling us, what does it make you think about?” We have gathered all of this learning data and also created a story authored by the children called “The People who want to save the Planet from Plastic”; we have acted out the story in the playground, we have created bottle top lid designs based on the key features of the story (the rubbish dump station, the rubbish boat, the planet earth). This information has led us to the point of departure for beginning the design process of the sculpture. We know it will be a wall panel sculpture that will be on the fence at the back of the playground. The children are now working on drawing the features of the sculpture from the story which we will magnify to make bigger and position within our overall sculpture panel to then use the lids to create the details. We will need all hands on deck when we are ready to start building— have your cordless drills charged! Meanwhile other learning also continues....tonnes of individual goals being achieved in outstanding fashion. We have some very talented and focused learners who are building literacy and numeracy understanding at an enormous rate. We recently reviewed our learning spaces and resources to broaden the children’s construction thinking away from simply creating the same magnetic tile buildings every day—from this we have seen fantastic innovative ideas and a calmer learning space. We are slowly embedding further understanding around indigenous perspectives and bringing our thinking together about our own Acknowledgement to Country. Instead of focusing only on this outcome, we have taken time to listen to the children’s emerging interest in indigenous culture and how they are connecting to it at home and in the broader community. We have also been inundated with overseas educational visitors! The children have greatly embraced these cultural experiences and have been confident to chat, answer questions and host our visitors around the centre and playground. This has been a great experience to build on our newest goal of understanding our own and other’s cultures. Till next time.... Kate, Carley, Donna, Bec, Jena, Bree, Keely, Lucy and the team :)



## Equipment Levy Spends!

Thank you to families for suggestions for resources to include in our learning environments. We will be sourcing a few of the ideas suggested from your input. We are having a special light table made for our Possum room and also a creek bed and new grass surface for their playground. We will also have some smaller items purchased from our educator's wish lists.

We had some requests for swings. Sadly our outdoor environment does not have the space to cater for a swing. We will have to leave that fun for the park :)

## Upcoming Visiting Shows/Events at the Centre

**Mon June 25**—Interwoven Indigenous Workshop (Preschool only) 10am

**Fri 27 July**—Mic Conway RRR show—reduce, reuse, recycle (all ages)

**Fri 31 Aug**— Fathers & special men in our lives event—further details to come....

**Thurs Sept 13**—Indigenous Art appreciation workshop (preschool only)



## Happy Birthdays to....

### May

Elliot turned 1, Hamish turned 2, Max turned 2, Ming-Ai turned 3, Austin turned 5 & Will turned 5

### June

Isabelle turned 2, Alba turned 2, Cruze turned 3, Patrick turned 4, Abbey turned 4 and Amelia turned 5

**We hope everyone has enjoyed some wonderful celebrations together!**

## REMINDERS & NOTICES

- Make sure your child has a full set of spare warm clothes in their bag each day
- **PLEASE LABEL YOUR CHILD'S BELONGINGS**—it is like a form of torture to try to remember what belongs to who
- Wash your child's hands on arrival and before departure each day
- Now that plastic bags are being phased out by supermarkets in NSW (YAY!!!) we will require families to provide their own solution for the storage of wet/soiled clothes. We would appreciate families either investing in a "wet bag" of some sort that they could purchase, or providing your own plastic bags. There are some bags on the market that you may want to check out
- <https://www.bambooty.com.au/bambooty-large-wet-bags>



Newcastle Lake Macquarie Yarnin' Circle— Roxi and Mel joined a professional learning initiative provided by KU Children's Services in our local area known as the Yarnin' Circle.

As a commitment to our service's Reconciliation Action Plan we aim to **"promote respect, reflection and understanding of the topic of cultural competence regarding indigenous culture via community engagement."** After attending 3 sessions that included teachers from other

services along with the Inclusion Support team from KU, we came away feeling more confident, pro-active, engaged and ready to learn and teach more. It was a wonderful experience to share any fears, concerns, hopes, aspirations, stories and ideas on connecting with Aboriginal people meaningfully and respectfully and to also learn so much from the experienced team from KU. Our group has decided to meet again on a regular basis to continue the conversations around cultural competence and how we can reach out to the broader community to ensure that we have an ongoing inclusion of indigenous children, families and educators in our services. Roxi and now Bec will be continuing the representation of Elder St in this forum. They are also heading off to the Aboriginal Early Childhood Conference on Saturday 23 June in Sydney.



## Partnership with Parents Survey—thanks for your input..



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If families are worried about when to know if they may need to arrange a meeting with teachers, we would suggest that possibly mid year for children 0-4 years (often it can be to discuss goals achieved and goals going forward) and for children in their last year before school, around October of that last year. We would also like to mention that if there is an issue or need for teachers to meet with families, we will always take the initiative to organise this. Relationships are the touchstone to our practice and this is why we don't feel the need to schedule formal meetings.

**Issue:** We would like to know more about the new Child Care Subsidy **Response:** We are with you with that one! We will be in contact with families as soon as we receive any new information regarding the new system. At this stage families would have been receiving emails to remind them to register to be assessed for the new system that begins on 2 July, 2018. **THIS IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE FOR ALL FAMILIES TO DO!** There have also been links provided in emails which directs families how to find out more about the changes through the Department of Education and Training websites. At this stage as a Service Provider we are registered, linked and reading and following up on directives every day in preparation. It does at times feel like we receive new information every day as the system is preparing to launch. We remain positive and hopeful that the transition will be a smooth one for all.

**Issue:** We would like to know a little bit more about the Food and drinks provided—particularly some photographs of the meals so we can possibly replicate them at home for our child to eat. **Response:** What a great idea! Catherine and Mel have begun talking about this and are hoping to produce some lovely recipe cards for families to view and use.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM....

### Learning goals

The latest round of individual child development reports were uploaded to our online program server in the last couple of weeks. An email was sent to all families to let them know that now was the time to sit down and have a read of your child's progress against your own and our teacher's set learning goals from February to May.

All 80 of them were wonderful to read and captured the children's knowledge and learning in a beautiful and meaningful way.

Please email us and let us know what you would like us to focus on with your child fro the next round of learning. This round goes from 5 June to 17 September and as we understand very well, parents are the child's first and most important teacher and we very much value your knowledge about your child. Early childhood education learning undoubtedly works best for all involved when there is authentic partnership and connection between the child, teacher and family. If you aren't sure what to suggest for your child, please let us know and we can ask some questions that may bring some thoughts to mind.



*Congratulations  
on your <sup>tiny</sup> human!*

*Noah and Lola (Wallabies) welcomed a new baby sister **Phoebe** to the family.  
Congratulations to Steph & Ben*

*Lewis (Joeys) is now a big brother to baby girl **Eve**. Well done to Rachael &  
Clint*

*Frankie has a little sister **Olive**. Big congratulation to Sally & Shane*

*Lots of love from the Elder St Family xoxoxoxoxox*

## Elder Street Team Professional Learning Team Retreat—June 2018



A fantastic weekend of connection and professional learning at the Crowne Plaza in the Hunter Valley.



Our facilitator Anthony Se-mann pushed us to think critically, trust and engage with our professional identities.

We learnt and laughed a lot!



A team that acknowledges the strengths of its members is a team that will support, trust, communicate openly and collaborate well.

Fantastic work team!