



Australian Children's
Education & Care
Quality Authority®

Educational Leadership in Family Day Care **STORIES FROM THE FIELD**

The Educational Leader Resource Addendum for Family Day Care



“If I have seen farther than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants.”

Isaac Newton

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INTRODUCTION

This Addendum to *The Educational Leader Resource* brings to life the stories and experiences of educational leaders in family day care. While there are many similarities with colleagues who work in centre-based services, practice wisdom suggests the role of the educational leader in family day care has unique aspects that provide challenges and opportunities worthy of recognition and celebration.

These stories are as diverse and unique as they are in all types of education and care settings. Each story in this Addendum highlights a critical strategy that builds the effectiveness of educational leaders' practice. The stories come from practitioners working in a diverse range of services and highlight practices that confirm the essential role of educational leaders in family day care.

Positioned alongside the resource, these ideas and strategies speak directly to those who are in the educational leader role in family day care services, those who are considering taking on the role, and those who support them.

This Addendum provides insights and perspective about educational leadership within a family day care service from approved providers, coordinators, educators and other staff who work in family day care and support educational leaders. This Addendum will provide additional guidance as well as practical support to realise the intent of the role under the National Quality Framework (NQF).

As highlighted in *The Educational Leader Resource*, there is no one size fits all approach to educational leadership. For family day care services, this is particularly true – context is a critical factor that shapes how the role is enacted and how it can be maximised to ensure learning and development outcomes for each child.

Using this Addendum

The Addendum is designed to build on *The Educational Leader Resource*. Educational leaders, and those who support them, are encouraged to read these documents together and use the collection of reflective questions to consider how the strategies and ideas could be used in their context.

It is important that educational leaders in family day care see themselves as part of the rich and diverse fabric of quality children's education and care leadership, and continue to add their perspective to the broader conversation.

Each of the practitioner stories transform theoretical understandings and technical guidance into the lived experience. They aim to inspire and motivate educational leaders to maximise their potential in supporting the delivery of quality outcomes for children and families in family day care across Australia.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADER IN FAMILY DAY CARE

Educational leadership is widely understood as one of the most important ways to ensure children's learning and development are supported and enhanced. Educational leaders have the important role of supporting educators to critically reflect on, improve and deliver quality outcomes for children and families.

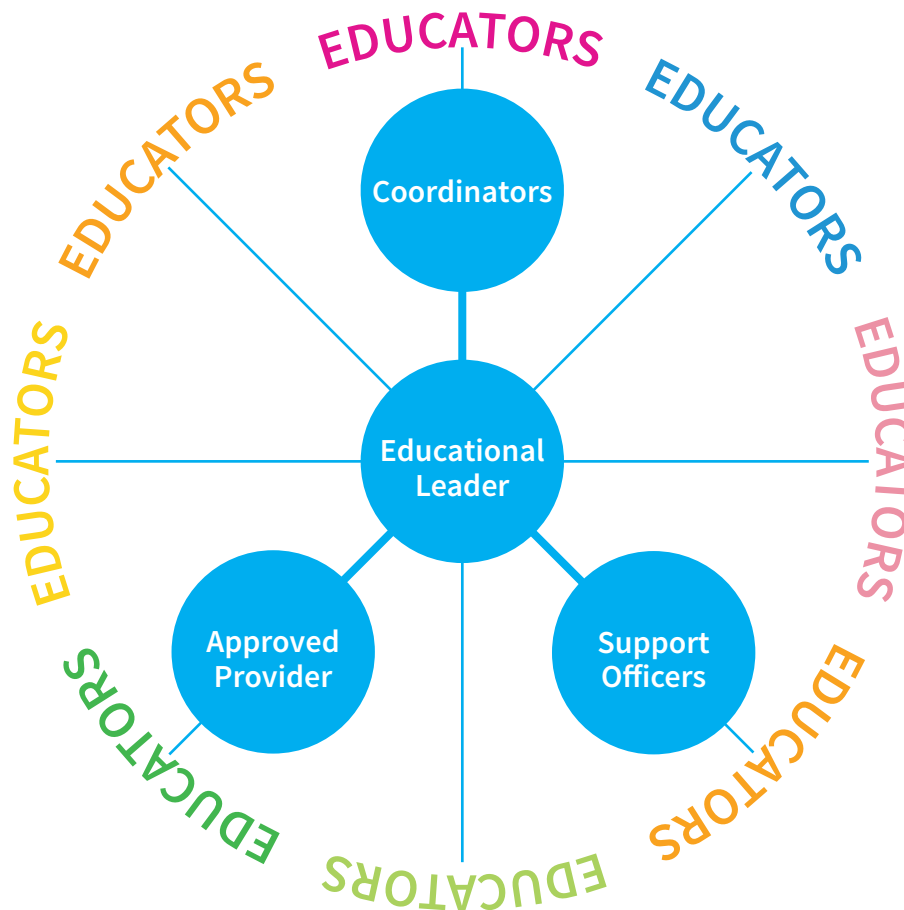
Being an educational leader in family day care is fundamentally about leading transformation towards this vision. Transformation that builds the confidence of educators to maximise the potential of the programs and practices they offer in their unique home-based service. Transformation that supports a culture of professional reflection that encourages innovation, and strengthens the focus on practice that benefits robust curriculum decisions and children's learning.

In recognition of the unique context of family day care, defining the role of the family day care educational leader is important. While some aspects are different to family day care, others are central to the role wherever it is practised. Across all education and care settings, the role emphasises and actively invites reflection on teaching and learning practices, as well as supporting and increasing the capacity of all educators to make stronger pedagogical decisions. In family day care, this role is both exciting and challenging because of the diverse settings where educators work and the individual ways in which they practice.

Greater confidence in the possibilities of the role in family day care begins to emerge when the role of an educational leader is understood in a distributive way. In family day care an educational leader may not be working directly with individual educators, as is often the case with their centre-based colleagues, so they'll need to be able to collaborate with a number of people to progress and communicate key messages to educators. Educational leadership in family day care draws on a diverse range of information and resources to support educators and other staff as they work to achieve improved outcomes for children. For example, the educational leader might support and inspire coordinators to lead program design and challenge practices in their everyday interactions with educators rather than working directly with every educator in the service.

Being an educational leader in family day care is about promoting key ideas and sharing expectations through the organisation's network and reporting structures. The educational leader becomes an advocate for teaching and learning. At their best, they distribute and exchange inspirational ideas to those who are in daily contact with educators and connect with the whole team to consider how the diverse settings that make up family day care can become a strength.

The model of family day care educational leadership is, therefore, more like a 'wheel and spoke', influencing and shaping decisions and supporting and strengthening local decision-making.



BEING AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL LEADER

Being an effective family day care educational leader relies on adopting multiple strategies that bring together educators, and those who lead and work with them, to commit to improving the quality of educational programs and practices.

The following practice strategies articulate the multiple approaches to the work of educational leaders in family day care. Separately they contribute to quality; combined they transform home-based education and care services into powerful learning environments.

1. Develop effective systems and process

Family day care educational leaders develop a suite of systems and processes that underpin the everyday work of enhancing the education and care practices of educators. These systems and processes are utilised by the entire service and address the geographical and operational challenges of family day care.

2. Be a proactive advocate

Family day care educational leaders are proactive advocates for the unique qualities of home-based education and care and promote the potential to families, educators, and the wider community. They pursue every opportunity to encourage family day care educators to maximise children's learning.

3. Engage in ongoing professional learning

Family day care educational leaders commit to, and actively engage in, continuous professional learning that focuses on education and care, quality improvement and children's learning and wellbeing. Using these insights, they actively share ideas with their colleagues in an ongoing effort to lead change, build capacity and improve outcomes for children.

4. Make time for professional conversation and reflection

Family day care educational leaders make time to lead and participate in reflective discussions that generate new thinking and support continuous improvement. Over time they cultivate a lively culture of professional inquiry that supports innovation and educator research.

5. Foster respectful relationships

Family day care educational leaders foster relationships built on trust, honesty and mutual respect. Applying a range of strategies that recognise diverse perspectives, educational leaders support connections and shared thinking between children, families, educators and the community.

6. Connect to practice

Family day care educational leaders maintain a solid connection to everyday care and education practices in family day care. Through observation and a commitment to spending time with educators as they work with children and families, educational leaders develop a strong understanding of how ideas translate into practice.

7. Invest in educational leadership

Family day care educational leaders benefit from a strong investment in the role and the development of structures that support positive outcomes. Working collaboratively with approved providers, educational leaders plan for and allocate resources to ensure educators are supported to strengthen educational programs and practices.

8. Build a shared philosophy

Family day care educational leaders champion the service philosophy as the foundation for teaching and learning decisions. Through ongoing dialogue, they support educators and service leaders to create shared understandings of the service philosophy and use the philosophy to shape practice decisions and to sustain quality improvement.

9. Utilise multiple ways to expand thinking and learning

Family day care educational leaders utilise multiple approaches to expand the thinking and learning of both educators and those who lead them. By offering space and time to reflect, educational leaders share new ideas, challenge taken-for-granted practice and create opportunities for innovation.

10. Support and mentor the leadership team

Family day care educational leaders support and mentor the leadership team to focus on improving the quality of educators' practice. Recognising the contribution of each member of the team, they work to distribute responsibility for improvements in the educational program and practice.

11. Champion curriculum in family day care

Family day care educational leaders champion the importance of curriculum decision-making that enhances teaching and learning in home-based services. They take a proactive approach to deepen understandings of the role of theory, pedagogy and assessment in the design of unique family day care educational programs and practice.



1. DEVELOP EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS AND PROCESS

Family day care educational leaders develop a suite of systems and processes that underpin the everyday work of enhancing the education and care practices of educators. These systems and processes are utilised by the whole service and address the geographical and operational challenges of family day care.



Practice Story – City of Casey Family Day Care

Changing roles from long day care to family day care, I identified from the beginning that I needed to develop strategies, systems, and processes that allowed me to influence pedagogical delivery in the programs within the service. We currently have 180 registered educators providing education and care to 1500 children. The impossible task of working directly and consistently with the educators on a day to day basis meant it was difficult to see a uniformity in educational delivery. I was very reliant on the coordinator's feedback of information that I could assess and evaluate to develop a way forward.

As feedback came through, it was clear educators felt that information about the program was sometimes inconsistent. Along with the coordinators, it was important to ensure I was supporting educational programs and curriculums with similar information and teachings. Therefore, I developed master classes and training for the coordinators to build a shared understanding and identify any areas of child development and teaching needing more support.

To safeguard this approach, the format of the coordinator home visits have now been structured through fortnightly team meetings where the coordinators share stories of educator practices. These can then be used to collaborate discussion points intended to enhance learning and provide meaningful mentoring discussions that spark opportunities for critical reflection and exploration among the staff.

Educational programs and documentation on children's learning is also an area that poses a challenge as a family day care educational leader. How was I meant to ensure the evidence collected on children's learning was not only being collected but also assessed, evaluated and advanced? The answer...? Digital documentation and programming systems.

Truth be told, I wasn't a big fan of this in the beginning. Although, when I considered the many educators in our scheme, this seemed to be the best way I could access learning documentation and then give guidance and feedback in real time, eliminating the wait time until my visit in person. I feel this has given the educators direct access to information and mentoring from the educational leader in a timeframe that supports their learning momentum, as well as a connection with resources and materials and a sense of connectedness to me.

My own critical reflection as the educational leader for family day care, highlighted that consistency amongst the staff is an integral element for a service

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to demonstrate their embedded practices. It is also really important to mentor educators in a way that supports their individuality and diversity in their approach to teaching and curriculum development. This is how we ensure educators are feeling supported and are able to actively pursue providing children and families with opportunities to achieve the best possible outcomes in a quality education and care program.



Practice Story – Wynnum Family Day Care

Over the past few years, our leadership team has looked at different ways to utilise and mobilise our resources in supporting our educator team's program and practice. In 2018, we implemented cloud-based storage designed specifically for educators to save their planning and assessment of children's learning documentation. This system means each educator has their own file for all matters relating to their program and practice. This allows the educational leader and other coordinators to engage with this documentation, provide feedback, add resources and identify areas of development in relation to Quality Area 1 – Educational Program and Practice.

In particular, the educational leader allocates time to explore each educator's planning and assessment cycle, and engage in conversations with the educator about their thinking and what they noticed about children's learning and development. The aim is to create a professional dialogue to influence each educator's practices and educational program, and support their ability to implement and reflect on the assessment and planning cycle. Our cloud-based system assists us in being knowledgeable about each educator as well as ensuring we target our resources by allocating time for the educational leader to:

- provide programs which build onto children's learning experience
- ensure educator support visits are meaningful and add value to the outcomes for children
- focus mentoring and training on areas that will promote quality teaching practices, dynamic programs and meaningful pedagogical documentation.

Making educators' practice visible, extending their learning and creating intentionality about self-assessment and quality improvements as education and care professionals, are important to influencing change and key drivers in our work as educational leaders. Encouraging educators to talk about practice and recognise their areas of development has strengthened our ability to engage in deep discussion about program and practice. Working with the educators to unpack best practice and facilitating discussions has extended and inspired new thinking, while also supporting educators to connect with evidence-based practice.

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It's been important for us to have a planned approach with systems in place for engaging educators in exploring their professional practice. Promoting opportunities to discuss pedagogical practice has assisted educators in building a deeper understanding of themselves and the practices and theories which support them in their work. Inspiring educators to discover what they know and what they might research has been a significant part of this process. Celebrating their strengths and assisting them to recognise their areas of development by focusing them on their goals, identifying learning styles and having a dedicated person (the educational leader) they can discuss pedagogical matters with, means our educators are building confidence and competence as education and care professionals.

Just as educators are expected to incorporate routines and transitions into the educational program as rich opportunities for children's learning and wellbeing, so too does the educational leader who needs to plan for and consider how they empower and enrich learning and reflection for other staff and their educator team working externally.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved provider consider how effective systems and processes are established or strengthened, the following ideas are worth considering.

- Review the expectations and requirements of the NQF (legislation and standards, as well as service policies) and identify the systems that enable these obligations to be met. For example, the expectation that each child's learning is planned for would benefit from a well understood and clear system that ensures the educational leader and the whole service leadership team is confident that this is taking place.
- Document a list of the systems and processes currently in place at your service, the rationale for their implementation and how they are effectively used. This will be helpful to share with an authorised officer at an assessment and rating visit and will ensure systems and processes are understood by new staff when they join your service.
- Define the systems and processes that will support the service to deliver outcomes for children, such as:
 - » cloud-based shared file locations where key documents, tools and templates are stored and easily accessible to educators and staff
 - » meeting records noting important conversations with educators that can be accessed by the leadership team for follow up, to monitor trends and to address emerging issues in real time
 - » an online-based communication system (such as Skype or Zoom) that enables face to face meetings when both parties are in different locations.
- Hold a leadership meeting with those responsible for systems and processes (including the administration personnel) to identify the current requirements and needs of educators, and the leadership team.



- Make sure this discussion clarifies the systems currently in place, as well as their purpose, practicality and effective use.
- Undertake a review of the systems and processes in place and how they support children’s learning. Do they enable educators to engage in continuous improvement? This review should include educators, families and children and offer genuine opportunities to critique the systems and processes that are outdated or difficult to comply with. The review should also allow educators, families and children to offer suggestions for improvements.
- Spend some time networking with other family day care services to identify the systems and processes they have used successfully and how their approaches were developed – you don’t need reinvent the wheel! Make sure that a systems and processes conversation is part of the induction process and these steps are clearly noted in educators’ handbooks, policies and other documentation.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- What are the systems and processes that are used in your family day care services? What are their purposes? Do they work effectively? How do you know? What would you change?
- How well do systems and processes support the educational program and practice for each educator?
- Do these systems take into account and respond to the diverse learning capacity and style of the educators?

2. BE A PROACTIVE ADVOCATE

Family day care educational leaders are proactive advocates for the unique qualities of home-based education and care and promote its potential to families, educators and the wider community. They pursue every opportunity to encourage family day care educators to maximise children's learning and reflect on practice.

Advocate: Someone who supports or promotes the interests of a cause or group.



Practice Story – Leichhardt Family Day Care

As the educational leader at Leichhardt Family Day Care, my role is to support, inspire and motivate educators. I believe this is fundamental to my position not only as educational leader but also as the service coordinator. This can be challenging due to time constraints, especially when trying to spend time with each educator to keep them motivated as they work independently.

To overcome this, I have focused on identifying each educator's strengths while challenging them to recognise the best approach for documenting and analysing their curriculums. Through face to face meetings and conversations, I discovered that while three quarters of all educators were using their mobile devices to capture the learning, they were not completing the planning cycle by following through by sharing with the child or adding to the children's learning story.

As the educational leader, I have challenged educators to change their mindset and think about a key question: Who is the documentation for? The responses have been interesting as most considered it as compliance rather than the foundation for their future programs. I shared with them the simple secret that documentation is, in fact, what makes learning visible – it allows educators to get to know the children and share stories with the families while offering children and families opportunities to engage and contribute to the program.

By always being a strong advocate for facilitating change in both practice and educator mindset, we have seen a decrease in the use of photos as the core evidence of learning, with educators now creating more meaningful documentation which reflects the growing understanding of their teaching role. As the educational leader, I support educators varying programming styles – from digital online applications (that allow me to access a management view to offer hands-on support) to collaborating with educators via phone support and face to face meetings. I believe it is essential to acknowledge that each educator is unique and so is their programming style. No one style fits all; I support each educator to decide on what is the best approach for them when it comes to presenting their curriculum and each child's assessment of learning documentation.

Our service achieves this through a team approach, with the coordination unit

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team working collaboratively with me to follow up and support the educators during home visits. We critically reflect at staff meetings to continually improve our approaches and the support we provide to build educators' practice and knowledge. We encourage our educators to share their practice and curriculum documentation with each other as a way of offering peer support and encouraging critical reflection.

To be an educational leader in family day care is complex and somewhat challenging because you are supporting many educators who have different levels of experience and knowledge and are in different environments with their own professional philosophy. I continue to encourage educators to be knowledgeable, committed and professional when focusing on their practice and curriculum. I continue to build a positive and trusting relationship, which I believe is essential to being an effective educational leader in family day care.

Getting practical

As educational leaders and approved providers consider how the educational leader role can strengthen their work as proactive advocates for home-based education and care, the following ideas are worth considering.

- As an educational leader, take some time to reflect on what you understand to be the potential of family day care – what makes it effective and where do the challenges lie. These reflections should consider the theory, practice evidence and the collective wisdom of those working in the sector. These reflections give advocates a platform from which to base their activism. These opportunities are better when they are shared – find formal and informal ways to ‘talk up’ family day care and establish a shared vision for quality in this unique service type.
- Hold a leadership meeting with the leadership team to reflect on and consider what the service, and those who work in it, understand advocacy to be. What is the purpose, and what outcome are we all looking for? Use the reflective questions below as a prompt for that discussion.
- Host an advocacy meeting with educators and invite reflection and decision-making about what an advocacy plan might look like for the service.
- Join existing advocacy campaigns run by local, state and/or national organisations that match your own advocacy agenda and service philosophy, for example, promoting mental health or diversity.
- Make advocacy a permanent agenda item at leadership meetings and orientate the whole service towards opportunities to speak up about family day care.
- Develop an advocacy strategy that involves a range of steps, including:

Establishing SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timed)

Clarifying your message

Gathering support – build the team

Determining the resources needed

Deciding on actions

Evaluating the goals

Adapted from Social Ventures Australia

<https://www.socialventures.com.au/sva-quarterly/seven-steps-to-effective-advocacy>

- Be brave and invite yourself to meet with or speak to a group of colleagues about the work of family day care, or better still, offer to speak to education and care students (at universities, and training organisations) about the practice possibilities of working in family day care.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be utilised in your service?
- What does 'being a proactive advocate' in family day care mean to you? Is it scary or exhilarating? Why?
- Who do you think is an effective advocate – and why?
- What aspects of the practice story inspire or challenge you?
- What are the issues or areas of family day care practice that you believe need advocacy?
- What messages do you want to promote with your families, children and community?
- Who do you need to influence?
- What matters are within your influence and what is beyond your control? What can you do to make a difference to family day care?

3. ENGAGE IN ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Family day care educational leaders commit to, and actively engage with, ongoing professional learning that focuses on education and care, quality improvement and children's learning, particularly in home-based services. Using these new insights, they actively share ideas with their colleagues in an ongoing effort to lead change, build capacity and improve outcomes for children.



Practice Story – Bright Futures Children's Services

I have been the educational leader/educator support officer for four years at Bright Futures. My experience working with children and families spans more than 20 years, during which some of my roles have included family centre service manager, hospital play leader and educator. Over the years, I have become a lifelong learner, from undertaking research projects on forest schools and multi-disciplinary team working, to being the chair of the service's Reconciliation Action Group.

Through the support of the management team, I am able to research, generate and implement quality improvement ideas, new initiatives and rethink processes that are no longer working. The ability to distribute these to the wider team and educators consistently is sometimes a challenge. During my career, I have researched several initiatives and observed how their implementation (seen as laborious at times) really does have a huge impact on children's learning and development.

One research project that reflects my passion for connecting children to nature was how the forest school concept could be interwoven into long day care. I used my reflections on this learning to look at the way this could be incorporated into the practices of family day care. This then set our service on a journey to extend educator-child playgroups from being held only in a home or a community hall, to playgroups in natural settings and parks. Over time, this has developed into our service facilitating a bush playgroup once a week.

To allow the program to develop into a specific bush playgroup, I established approaches to encourage the support team and educators to follow the change in practice. Articles and research were shared through our social media platforms, as were the aspects of the playgroup relating to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standard (NQS). As well as photographic and video data, observations were taken of the children to establish the benefits of this forest school approach on their learning, development and wellbeing. These observations were informal and spontaneous and did not interfere with the way the children explored the forest or what they learnt during the sessions.

All ethical concerns were taken into account, including consent from the children, families and staff. This documentation was shared on social media platforms and in family and educator newsletters. The sharing of this documentation enabled families and the community to have a better understanding of the importance of

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children's experiences and activity outdoors not only for their physical development, but also their emotional wellbeing.

The bush playgroup has been a motivator for both educators and families to engage children in the natural environment independently at other times and additional to the bush playgroup sessions. More recently, educators have become more involved and taken on roles as Bush Champions to work collaboratively with the educational leader and further develop their teaching practices and enhance the learning outcomes of children.

One initial focus of the bush playgroup was to demonstrate how children learn from the natural environment. It became apparent as the bush playgroup grew that the learning was twofold. Educators scaffolded children's learning to assess and manage any risks that were presented while children used gross motor skills more effectively to manage these risks. Educators reflected afterwards on how children demonstrated their capability in this environment as opposed to their own family day care environment. Children were observed as having increasing confidence and independence with the activities in the bush, providing them with a sense of success and growing self-esteem. It was demonstrated that the forest school concept could contribute to promoting children's personal and social development. Children were also more motivated and excited to use meaningful language in an outdoor context and recall skills from previous sessions, allowing educators to build on previous experiences and introduce new learning concepts.

An educational leader, as mentioned earlier, has many roles and wears many hats – and the hat you have to wear yourself is the one of a lifelong learner. However, you cannot be a learner in isolation in family day care; you have to be able to communicate and share this learning with enthusiasm to take educators and staff on the journey with you. I will continue to develop the bush playgroup in collaboration with the local community to incorporate more learning of our local Aboriginal culture. The learning will be used to assist the formation and implementation of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Educational leaders share your passions, share your knowledge, learn from others and give those ideas a go – you never know where and what they will lead to.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved providers consider how the educational leader can strengthen engagement with ongoing professional learning, the following ideas are worth considering.

- Plan for regular participation in professional learning that focuses not only on the role of the educational leader but also the 'big ideas' that inform the work of education and care professionals. There is sometimes a tendency for an educational leader to spend time planning for the professional learning of others while neglecting to plan for their own. In practice, this means including provisions for professional development in the service budget. Consider conferences,

webinars and other forms of professional learning that you could undertake and sign up for newsletters and other communications which will keep you informed.

- Subscribe to children’s education and care research journals (Australian or international) that regularly feature articles about home-based services as well as children’s education and care more generally. This is a great way to expand thinking and make assessments about the effectiveness of education programs and practice.
- Develop a resource library that not only assists educators in exploring new practice ideas but also reflects the work of educational leadership and contemporary ideas in children’s education and care.
- Develop an alliance with a university, peak body or research institution. From time to time, research projects are made possible through these alliances, and open to sector contributions. These connections will mean that family day care educators and leaders are more likely to be considered if participants are required or partnership possibilities are available.
- Consider a scholarship opportunity for educators and leaders that enables further study. Build in a process that requires sharing this work with the broader educator team.
- Promote research and develop strategies to share contemporary research findings and evidence-based practice with the whole service as a way to build understanding, quality improvements and strengthen outcomes for children.
- Use inquiry-based or an action research approach to tackle local issues at the service. Many resources support practitioner inquiry approaches and not enough of these talk about inquiry in family day care – lead the way!



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- What is your attitude towards ongoing professional learning and research? What do you believe about the purpose and responsibilities associated with this work?
- How is professional learning and research supported in your service?
- What resources do you currently have in place to support professional learning? Where are the gaps? What else needs to happen to make professional learning accessible and possible?
- What happens after staff participate in professional learning? How is the information shared? How are the ideas generated from this professional learning discussed and implemented within the service?
- What alliances and connections are in place to make the most of research opportunities? Where could new possibilities lie?



Practice Story – Enhance Family Day Care

This educational leadership journey starts with a new role focused on mentoring, guiding and supporting our 14 family day care services located in mostly rural and remote areas. I was appointed as the Program and Practice Manager, and quickly identified the need to support our educational leaders to engage their full intellectual and emotional intentions as pedagogical leaders. At the time, I asked myself a series of important questions: What does educational leadership look like in family day care? How do we ensure the role and work of educational leaders is innovative and creates transformational change while fostering consistency and security for those we lead? How can we identify, recognise and celebrate the pedagogical capacities of our team while challenging long-held beliefs? How do we actively support new thinking and understanding about our role as leaders?

My first thought was to create an organisational Educational Leadership Framework. It would provide an opportunity to engage educational leaders in robust conversation and reflection on the intent of educational leadership for our services. My intention was to develop a clear plan outlining our commitment to building on the skills, knowledge and competencies of our educational leaders. This continues to be a work in progress and links to our Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). In the first phase of the framework development, it was identified the best way to start this process was by creating a forum for discussion and reflection.

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This led to scheduling monthly online network meetings with the educational leadership team. Each meeting has a structured agenda focused on the pedagogical leadership role and includes videos, research documents, stories from the field, reflection questions and links to key parts of The Educational Leader Resource. The aim is for participants to take a deep dive into their understanding of their role while provoking discussion and reflection, which can also be facilitated within their service team (educators and coordinators). To support our meetings, I created a shared space via Yammer to save all meeting documents, comments and stories, and provide access to the recorded sessions for anyone who missed the meeting.

At the first network meeting, we documented the agreed purpose: 'We bring people together to build knowledge and skills, create a space for sharing, learning and practice, build partnership with peers with similar ideas, and pull together a toolkit of ideas, current research and resources that can be used for mentoring coordinators and educators.'

We have recently reflected on the benefits of these meetings. The educational leaders stated they have gained confidence in their pedagogical skills and knowledge, and now have access to the collective wisdom of this network of pedagogical leaders to draw from. The group has developed a comprehensive Educational Leader Toolkit which they can access to support the educational program and teaching practices of educators.

This story is only one part of our Educational Leadership Framework journey. We continue to create a robust foundation for service programs and practices through strong connections, challenging ourselves to explore other ways of thinking, and embedding ongoing discussion and reflection.

4. MAKE TIME FOR PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Family day care educational leaders make time to lead and participate in reflective conversations that generate new thinking and support continuous improvement. Over time they cultivate a lively culture of professional inquiry that supports innovation and educator research.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved provider consider how the educational leader can make time for professional conversation and reflection, the following ideas are worth considering.

- Schedule regular opportunities for educational leaders to engage in professional conversation and reflection with various members of the team. These conversations will most likely be in the form of reflective practice meetings where the agenda is dedicated solely to matters of pedagogy and the improvement of practice.
- These meetings require a disciplined approach to the agenda so educational leaders can ensure the pedagogical conversation is privileged. Matters of housekeeping or daily operations and compliance are not typically discussed or noted and only considered if there is time.



- It is helpful to schedule these meetings well in advance so all members of the service know that there will be multiple opportunities on an ongoing basis for conversations and reflection.
- Try these meetings in online meetings formats. Despite initial caution about online platforms, this can be very effective and allows for reflective conversations even when working over vast distances.
- The content of these meetings and conversations can be wide-ranging. Inspired from the many ideas and dilemmas that present themselves in family day care services as well as the new perspectives that the educational leader believes are worthy of further consideration and possibly robust debate. Conversations (perhaps lasting months) on new ideas are spread around and ‘mulled over’ rather than demanded – it is a slow and careful process that takes people to new places.
- It is worth noting that the best conversations have rules or protocols. The educational leader might consider teaching the art of conversation and reflection as a way to support the whole service to engage in quality discussions. For example, listen, wait and don’t be afraid of silence, ask questions to find out what others are thinking, be honest – say you don’t know.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be utilised in your service?
- Where do these sorts of conversations or reflections currently take place in your service?
 - » Are they planned or responsive or both?
 - » How do you feel they support improvement?
 - » Are there people who never seem to be a part of these sort of conversations or reflections – why? How could they be included?
- What skills do you think you need to cultivate?
 - » What does the team need to learn to do better?
- What are the new ideas that you consider worthy of further conversations? Why?
- What dilemmas and challenges could benefit from a longer reflective conversation rather than a new policy or procedure? Why?

5. FOSTER RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Family day care educational leaders foster relationships built on trust, honesty and mutual respect. Applying a range of strategies that recognise diverse perspectives, educational leaders support connections and shared thinking between children, families, educators and the community.



Practice Story – We Belong Family Day Care

Being the educational leader in a family day care service has been an absolutely fulfilling role and one that has allowed me to follow my passion of promoting best outcomes for children and families, supporting educators with pedagogical practice and advocating for the rights of the child, and best practice within the field of education and care.

Along my journey, I quickly realised this was not a role I could successfully achieve on my own and began searching for community connections to support me. I began to contact and talk with other services in our area about creating opportunities to connect as education and care professionals. As a result of creating connections, we have established a local early years network – Partners in Pedagogy.

Through these relationships I have built a deeper knowledge of children’s development, inclusive practices, working with families and communities and, above all, leadership. I believe it is leadership that drives change. Enrolling in a leadership program supported me to strengthen the role of a leader in education and care, while backing up the work I was doing and solidifying my beliefs of quality leadership.

Stepping into the community as an advocate of children and family day care, making meaningful connections with other education and care services, schools, inclusion support agencies, allied health services and community support services has provided a strong foundation when working with children, families and educators. From these connections I became a leading founder of ‘Our Nangara’, a small group of professionals who organise a large annual community NAIDOC event. They have also opened up a number of other opportunities including: engaging with Inclusion Support to work with children, families and educators; hosting PEDS Pop Up clinics; becoming an advisory member of Logan Together project group ‘Kindy to Prep’; being an active part of ‘Communities for Children Logan’; and running a community playgroup at a local school.

Active engagement in the community has better equipped me to support children and families. It has helped me create strong collegial relationships with local services and confidently connect families with appropriate services. I play an active part in children’s transitions to other services, making myself available to join families and allied health professionals in meetings with kindergartens and local schools. Taking an active role in the community has benefited the services

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and supported my advocacy of the unique qualities of family day care. It has also enhanced the work of our educators and staff – a great example of this occurred in 2019 when our service was invited to participate in a Pathways to Resilience professional development program offered by a local university.

I am intentional in my practice, with a focus on being an ethical professional and active community member, promoting best practice, listening to the voice of the child, knowing the needs of the community, being true to age-appropriate pedagogy, and being a willing advocate for family day care.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved provider consider how the educational leader can foster respectful relationships, the following ideas are worth considering.

- In the first instance, an educational leader might consider developing a relationship strategy or a plan that maps out how key relationships will be nurtured. Just like the development of other plans for improvement, a relationship strategy or plan details the action, resources and timeframes of how each connection is made. For example, an educational leader might plan for building a relationship with new educators through the induction meeting or with the administrative staff by attending one of their monthly meetings. Relationships are cultivated through what we do as well as what we say.
- As part of the relationships strategy, make a plan to visit each educator's residence over a course of time (depending on the size of the service) to have an education philosophy catch up – an informal conversation about your shared beliefs about teaching and learning, curriculum and outcomes for children. These meetings should be free of compliance or operational discussions to support the development of relationships built on shared endeavours. If difficulties arise in practice, these meetings will be a source of shared understanding.
- In another part of the relationship strategy reflect on the external relationships that might need to be considered. If the service is thinking about using a park or a nature reserve for a regular playgroup, who might it be helpful to connect with? It could be a local government officer, the next-door neighbour or the local volunteer fire service or authority. Again, should issues arise in the use of these spaces, the quality of the relationships already established will ensure positive outcomes of the practice.
- Make it a policy to always address issues of practice quality directly and in person. (If this is geographically challenging, online meetings are helpful). Practice wisdom suggests that relationships are nurtured when difficult conversations are undertaken in an open, honest and respectful way. Emails will never replace a good conversation.
- Consider the practicalities of fostering relationships – they take time. Plan for part of the hours allocated to the role of the educational leader to be dedicated to building and nurturing the range of relationships necessary for quality practice to become embedded in the service.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- What does the service believe about relationships and their connection with quality?
- Which key strategies currently in place have assisted in fostering positive relationships? Why do they work?
- How is the educational leader time allocated? What time is allocated to establishing and fostering relationships? Where are the barriers? What are the enablers?
- Which group/s (both internally and externally) are more difficult to establish relationships with? Why is this the case? What new strategies could be considered?



6. CONNECT TO PRACTICE

Family day care educational leaders maintain a strong connection to everyday care and education practices in family day care. Through observation and a commitment to spending time with educators as they work with children and families, educational leaders develop a strong understanding of how ideas translate into practice.



Practice Story – Wynnum Family Day Care

The Wynnum Family Day Care pedagogical team is made up of four practice mentors, an educational leader (four year Bachelor of Early Childhood) and 68 educators (Certificate III to four year Bachelor of Early Childhood degrees). Wynnum Family Day Care uses a distributed leadership approach to educational leadership across the service. The support and mentoring of pedagogical practice is a collective approach. Each week the manager, practice mentors (coordinators) and the educational leader meet and determine the educator they will visit based on their observations of practice, previous visit outcomes, knowledge of children and conversations they have had with educators since the last home visit. This supported approach demonstrates the agility of the service to respond to the practice needs of the educators. It reflects an effective use of staffing resources, targeting staff where they can most efficiently influence pedagogical practice and support outcomes for children.

The educational leader has the primary responsibility of supporting professional practice across the service and is given time to research topics and/or theories to support new thinking, challenge current practices and create an ongoing conversation about best practice and contemporary pedagogy. Critical to changing thinking is the process of linking educator's everyday practice to theory, using real observations of practice to support a deeper understanding of why we do what we do.

The educational leader also follows this up by developing a weekly Pedagogical Leadership Newsletter to facilitate the sharing of ideas, create conversation starters and highlight resources, training and relevant articles. There are embedded routines of sharing insights about what the team has noticed about educator practice, including an end of day handover process after educator visits. Targeted agenda items at the service staff meeting focused on educational program and practice provide the educational leader with a deep knowledge and insight of practice across the service. Other routines include coming together as a team to discuss the newsletter prior to distributing to educators. This routine creates a shared understanding and commitment to engaging in professional conversations within the coordination unit team as well as when visiting educators.

The Pedagogical Leadership Newsletter encourages educators to investigate their own pedagogical practice. Its focus is on assisting educators to consider themselves as learners and facilitators of children's learning. This moves educators away from the notion of this as another task to add to the list of compliance to refocusing on

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who they are as education and care professionals. Educators are supported with the critical reflective process of self-assessment, culminating in practice based professional development goals which aim to explore and reshape new thinking and understanding.

The educational leader has continued to build her professional knowledge of leadership by engaging in professional leadership practice sessions, taking the time to be well read, engage in professional learning and test available training for educators. This has allowed the educational leader to consider the skills and knowledge of educators across the service while committing to extending knowledge and celebrating changes in practice.



Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved providers consider how the educational leader connects to practice, the following ideas are worth considering.

- Practice currency or the up-to-date knowledge and understanding of everyday family day care practice is a critical part of what educational leaders bring to their role. The only way to acquire and maintain this currency is to spend it working alongside educators as they plan for and implement educational programs for groups of children.
- These times could be planned in advance or come about in response to a colleague's observations of great practice. These opportunities are practice orientated and focus on an active part of the day rather than what might occur on a compliance or observations visit.

- Following these practice encounters, the educational leader might ask for feedback from the educators about what they notice. In this way the educational leader receives real-time practice feedback in a peer to peer conversation. This will not only assist in building open and honest relationships but give both parties insights into practice approaches.
- Educational leaders might consider planning occasional times to relieve educators and enable them to participate in professional learning opportunities. This gives educational leaders the opportunity to understand the everyday practice challenges and opportunities faced by educators.
- Playgroups are a practice orientated opportunity for educational leaders to connect the art of teaching and learning. Not only is this a great place to mentor and support educators' interactions with children, but it is also a place to refine or test new pedagogical strategies – for example, cooking with two year olds or a science experiment with babies or a new group game with four year olds.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- How do you plan to update your knowledge about the practice of family day care?
- What are the specific practice skills that you consider essential in a family day care educator? And how does an educational leader get opportunities to practice these skills?
- How could connection with practice be strengthened in your service?
- What might be the challenges and opportunities in connecting educational leaders to practice?
- How could this be resourced?

7. INVEST IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Family day care educational leaders benefit from a strong investment in the role and the structures that support positive outcomes. Working collaboratively with approved providers, educational leaders plan for and allocate resources to ensure educators are supported to strengthen educational programs and practices.



Practice Story – Cobar Shire Far West Family Day Care

When the service manager started at Far West Family Day Care, there were 10 educators in Cobar and three in-home care educators as a new part of the business. There are now 30 educators across Cobar, Broken Hill, Bourke, Walgett, Lightning Ridge and, until recently, Nyngan.

The service covers over 900 square kilometres stretching from Nyngan to the South Australian border, north east to Moree, south to Hay, Ivanhoe and down to Wentworth. With about 70 educators (including 40 in-home carers), the small leadership team has worked hard to ensure the investment in educational leadership has delivered a “more confident team of professionals who are focused on relationships with children and families not just compliance”.

The shift towards educational programs did not happen overnight for us. We previously had a model of staffing that emphasised compliance and a stronger focus on inspection, but more recently we have separated the roles so that we now work with our team to think about quality. We have created an educational leader role which focuses on connecting with educators to build their confidence in delivering educational programs.

I have noticed the way our educational leader has become a sounding board and a professional link for the team. There are many opportunities created to provide professional feedback, a space to talk through ideas and whether a particular decision is right for children and families. It’s a space where educators can ask – “Is this right for the children in my care? What do you think if I did this?”

We have had to be creative and think a little differently given we have educators located across a huge geographical area. Sometimes visits are a four-hour drive – one way! We have set up a closed Facebook page where the leadership team, including the educational leader, support the educator. It’s been another great tool to increase confidence and also link the educators with each other. Mentoring between educators has been a big bonus, as has sharing ideas and strategies.

The manager of the service takes the support of the educational leader seriously, building in regular formal and informal meetings to debrief and plan. “We always debrief after site visits – we run through the issues and think about how we might plan better into the future. We link our calendars so we know what we are all doing. That way we can schedule the visits and offer support where we need to.”

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Our manager is available to the educational leader and open and supportive of their ideas, recognising that they are doing the best they can, sometimes with significant challenges. Investing in the role is not just about budgets – it's about the spaces that you create to be open to ideas, change and improvements.

The service manager has been a strong advocate for family day care and argues for a reshaping and increasing of the hours allocated to the role of educational leader. It's about "being able to argue that the investment is doable and without it we would not be able to deliver to our community. You have to be clever about the way you talk up that investment. Find your hooks and talk up why it works for whole communities. Make it relevant and real for who you are talking to. We started the job description and over time and with lots of thinking we have created a role that we all believe in and we know can make a difference."

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved providers consider how to strengthen the investment in educational leadership, the following ideas are worth considering.

- As a way of ensuring the role of educational leadership is respected and privileged, the approved provider might consider leading a consultation process with the broad team about the vision and scope of responsibilities of the role. In this way the role is more than a response to legislation – it becomes a significant strategy investment in the ongoing quality of the service.
- Develop a budget line item for educational leadership in the global budget calculated using a formula that assigns hours per educators in the service. While there is no prescribed expectation of the amount of time an educational leader in family day care should be allocated, it is reasonable to suggest that a larger service will need more time than a small service.
- The budget for an educational leader could also consider professional learning resources and other educational materials that support pedagogical thinking. These might include a subscription to a journal, texts or online resources.
- Ensure the educational leader has a specific job description that outlines the purpose, responsibilities and expectations of the role. Be wary of absorbing the role into a general leadership position.
- Communicate information about the role to the whole service and beyond, including to families in their information packs, on the service website, in educators' handbooks and to all administration staff.
- Support the educational leader to attend conferences and other professional learning meetings and networks – this not only supports improvement in individual practice but also builds the reputation and understand of family day care.
- Allocate time in any strategic planning work undertaken by the service to include the educational leader. In this way, pedagogy and the educational program and practice are prioritised and supported.

- Ensure time is planned for regular leadership meetings with the approved provider or their representative and the nominated supervisor to plan for continuous improvement in the educational program and practice.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- Why is it important to invest in the role of educational leadership? What are the benefits? Is this understood by the service as a whole?
- What is the current level of investment in the role of educational leadership in your service? Do you consider it to be adequate? Why or why not? What would make it stronger?
- Consider the nature of your service – geographic and demographic. What resources might assist the educational leader role to be maximised?

8. BUILD A SHARED PHILOSOPHY

Family day care educational leaders champion the service philosophy as the foundation for teaching and learning decisions. Through ongoing dialogue, they support educators and service leaders to create shared understandings of the service philosophy, and use the philosophy to shape practice decisions and sustain quality improvement.



Practice Story – Family Day Care Association of Queensland

History and experience provide an opportunity to reflect on and share my observations of educational leadership within a family day care context. During my 30 years in a range of leadership roles, I have had the unique opportunity to work across a large number of family day care services, building close professional relationships with nominated supervisors, educational leaders, coordinators and educators. This has provided an insight into what I believe sits at the heart of excellent service provision and ultimately high quality outcomes for children.

Services are leading the way through their deep commitment to exploring the organisational culture and the beliefs and values which underpin and sustain a focus on teaching and learning. These services have considered educational leadership as a priority, explored what this means, and reached a place of understanding that contemporary teaching practices and a focus on children's learning sit at the core of their work. All decision-making hinges on this commitment.

One specific thing that stands out is if the focus is on the business of getting the task done without considering how this contributes to high quality outcomes for children or building the capacity of teaching practices and knowledgeable educators. Services can sometimes lose sight of these values and beliefs, forgetting why they do what they do. In this approach, educational leadership becomes a secondary consideration.

All services will have a philosophy statement gracing their wall, which generally talks to their values and beliefs. In services that are genuinely committed to a philosophy of teaching and learning, this statement is a central conversation piece in their everyday work, including the selection and induction of staff and educators. The service's values and beliefs are the foundation of all practices, and a point of shared understanding for all stakeholders. The words represent actions and a deep commitment to walking the talk, with the educational leader leading the way.

When services are committed to a philosophy of teaching and learning, they approach their work using this lens. While ensuring their service is compliant with legislation is essential, they prioritise their energy on exploring the strength of the programs offered. Their work is focused on the educators' teaching capacities and children's learning opportunities. There is a strong focus for the educational leader on researching contemporary pedagogy, building capacity and collaboration, enacted by sharing knowledge, and critical reflection. There will also be a strong

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focus on creating an organisational culture where there is time for the educational leader to challenge educators and staff to think about how their practices and programs contribute to high quality learning outcomes for each child.

At its simplest, a service philosophy acts as a guiding principle for behaviour. When the educational leader engages others in the development and review of the philosophy and ensures the service philosophy elevates the study of knowledge and thinking, we see the rights and voices of children emphasised. This ensures a service commitment to practice bolstered by contemporary theory and deep reflection.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved provider reflect on how the educational leader can champion the service philosophy as the foundation for teaching and learning decisions, the following ideas are worth considering.

- Formally link the role of the educational leader to the ongoing promotion and review of the philosophy. This can be articulated in the job description and discussed as part of the regular work of the educational leader and included in performance reviews.
- Communicate to all staff (educators, leaders and administrators) the role of the educational leader in the ongoing promotion and review of the philosophy. This will enable a more transparent approach to the way the philosophy is used and championed throughout the service.
- Ensure the educational leader plays a central role in the establishment and regular reviews of the service philosophy. The educational leader could be supported to drive engagement with the philosophy and develop plans that encourage consideration of how these ideas will be implemented in daily practice.
- Develop a suite of resources and ideas that support the key ideas in the philosophy and make them available for educators and service leaders. Some of these resources could be generated directly from educators in the form of interviews, photos, videos or written materials that illustrate exemplary practice.
- Develop a professional learning calendar that explores the key ideas in the philosophy to inspire the whole service.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- How does a service philosophy shape the practice of educational leadership? What do you believe the role of the educational leader is in relation to the philosophy?
- What does it mean to be a champion for the service philosophy?
- Who might you need to champion the philosophy to in your service? Families? Educators? The community more broadly? Other education and care professionals?
- Which aspects of the service philosophy might be particularly difficult to advocate for?

9. UTILISE MULTIPLE WAYS TO EXPAND THINKING AND LEARNING

Family day care educational leaders utilise multiple approaches to expand the thinking and learning of both educators and those who lead them. By offering space and time to reflect, educational leaders share new ideas, challenge taken for granted practice and create opportunities for innovation.



Practice Story – Communities@Work Family Day Care

Family day care is unique and deserves a unique approach to educational leadership. In 2014, the Communities@Work Family Day Care team reflected on their educational leadership model, comprising of one educational leader supporting 150 educators. Reviewing our Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and latest assessment and rating report, we identified the importance of providing more opportunities for discussing, reflecting and role modelling pedagogy and practice.

Our educators have a vast array of pedagogical practices, beliefs, values, skills and learning styles. Taking time to critically reflect on and evaluate our own leadership styles, expertise, strengths and approach to educational leadership, we concluded there was a need for us to have two educational leaders to support and mentor our educators.

We are fortunate to have a diverse team who have a wealth of knowledge and various mentoring approaches, which are integral to our educational leadership model. It was essential to first review and analyse each educators learning style, abilities and needs. We based this review on information gathered from professional development plans, discussions and documented observations. Based on this information, we created two cohorts of educators, enabling us to provide individualised support and mentoring.

Supporting educators in providing quality outcomes for children, we drew on a range of strategies, tools and internal and external support. We have a close relationships with Communities@Work's registered training organisation (RTO), out of school hours care (OSHC) programs and centre-based education and care services. We believe educational leadership takes on many forms including one-on-one support visits, phone calls, emails, role modelling during playgroups and home visits, and professional development. Our playgroups allow us to share our team's individual passions in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), music, gardening, nature-based play and caring for a sustainable environment while providing an opportunity for leaders to role model best practice.

Fortnightly, educational leaders meet to reflect on the QIP, our Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) and our philosophy. This is a time to critically reflect and to share our experiences and knowledge. We research, source and create tools and resources. We have developed a professional development calendar based on identified areas in

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need of support during these meetings. Based on educator's feedback, networking opportunities are provided to allow for educators to network, share experiences, information, reflect on their pedagogy and practice and allow educators to take the lead in guiding their own learning.

Over the years we have learnt that change is crucial to quality improvement and that it takes time. As a service there needs to be realistic, relevant and attainable goals made for the team to ensure best practice outcomes are achieved.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved provider consider how the educational leader can utilise multiple ways to expand thinking and learning, the following ideas are worth considering.

- Set aside some time to become familiar with adult learning styles and the art of teaching adults. This is distinctly different from the process of teaching children and relies on fundamental principles that connect the learner with the way ideas are practically implemented. Using Malcolm Knowles' six adult learning principles (Knowles, 1984) in the family day care context, these can be understood as:

1. Educators are internally motivated and self-directed

Family day care educators make choices relevant to their homes and educational programs. They identify learning goals with guidance from support staff and need to be given the freedom to become responsible for their own learning choices.

2. Educators bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences

Family day care educators are encouraged to connect past experiences with current knowledge and practice.

3. Educators are goal oriented

Family day care educators need clarity about the intent of the professional learning – what is the purpose and what needs to change or be replaced. Once the learning goals have been identified, educators can align the learning activities to their own practice experience.

4. Educators need relevant learning

Family day care educators benefit by relating the learning tasks to their own learning goals and experience. When it is clear the activities they are engaged in directly contribute to enhancing their own practice and experiences, they become inspired and motivated.

5. Educators are practical

Family day care educators benefit when theoretical learning is translated into practical activities. Learning is assisted when appropriate ways of implementing theoretical knowledge in real-life situations are made clear.

6. Educators thrive and succeed when they are respected and supported

Family day care educators thrive within collaborative relationships with other educators. Learners become more productive when they are considered as colleagues and contributors to quality.

- There are many articles and references that can help develop an educational leader's understanding of how to support and expand thinking and learning.
- Undertake an audit of educators' learning styles or ways that educators prefer to receive information. This can be done in a fun and engaging way that not only alerts the leadership team to the diversity of their team but also provides educators themselves with useful insights as they reflect and learn.



- Consider providing information and learning opportunities to educators in a range of formats and channels. These icons represent just some of the ways an educator might engage with information. For example, an electronic newsletter might be great for some educators, while others would prefer a conversation with a colleague.
- Hold a meeting with the leadership team and a couple of representatives of the educator team to plan a range of communication and learning strategies that respond to everyone's diverse needs.
- Consider holding educator meetings in languages other than English – this may assist educator teams to engage in deeper reflective practice.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- How well are the principles of adult learning understood by the leadership team? How could these be communicated more effectively?
- Are the diverse needs of the learners in the service understood and noted?
- What are the range of approaches your service currently supports to expand educators' thinking?
- How well do they suit the range of learning you have in the service?
- Who are the learners disadvantaged by the current learning opportunities offered? Who finds it easy to participate and why?

10. SUPPORT AND MENTOR THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Family day care educational leaders support and mentor the leadership team to focus on improving the quality of educator practice. Recognising the contribution of each member of the team, they work to distribute responsibility for improvements in the educational program and practice.



Practice Story – Enhance Brisbane Community Family Day Care

The most effective change management strategy used by Enhance Brisbane Community Family Day Care is our closed Facebook page. We have created a place for sharing where we encourage educational leadership across the service through peer mentoring, sharing ideas, photos of experiences and commentary on their significant to the educator and children. The educational leader also connects daily with service leaders to support robust conversation, encourage reflection and introduce new ideas and theories, enabling everyday authentic practice-based learning to occur.

The service has around 80 educators from a wide range of diverse communities. Since the educators are located across the outer suburbs of Brisbane, technology is an essential factor in influencing practice and facilitating educational leadership. The service uses a software program where practice mentors (coordinators) document their observations, mentoring and support of educators. Making this available to our leadership team is a critical element in our educational leadership mentoring process. These systems, along with formal and informal professional development, assist our educational leader to reflect on and observe practice while providing support to the practice mentors and educators by way of resources, ideas and strategies to challenge thinking. It also allows the educational leader to find new insights into good pedagogical practice aimed at promoting effective learning programs.

With 80 educators, it is impossible for the educational leader to visit all educators regularly. Instead, the service's approach is focused on building the pedagogical capacity of the practice mentors who then collaborate as the educational leadership team for the service. Our educational leader manages the research and conversations with the team around contemporary pedagogical practice and documentation. Collectively they work to facilitate and lead practice-based change with their team of educators.

The service also encourages peer mentoring between educators. When it's identified that an educator has an interest that would positively influence other educators, the practice mentor facilitates informal peer mentoring. The team actively seeks to recognise good practice and celebrate this work by sharing examples on the closed Facebook page. The process of debriefing with practice mentors is a key role of the educational leader. It provides a mentoring opportunity to the educational leader

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to build the leadership skills of practice mentors, aimed at inspiring and provoking change in their own practice and that of educators.

Another key aspect is the induction of all new educators by the educational leader. This induction process means the focus on practice starts from the moment the educator begins their role at the service. The educational leader uses open-ended questions, and remains open to listening and building connections with educators. This ensures a strong network is created and educators are confident in sharing their practice, seeking support and asking questions. The educational leader has the support of a larger professional network of educational leaders from across sister services, which provides opportunities to tap into the shared wisdom of other educational leaders, build knowledge, share ideas and provide and receive peer mentoring.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved provider consider how the educational leader can support and mentor the leadership team, the following ideas are worth considering.

- Identify and articulate the leadership structure. For some family day care services, this is dictated by the structure of a larger ‘host’ organisation, while for others it is the service that determines the approach. Irrespective, it is beneficial to design a structure that facilitates the dissemination of educational leadership across the service and enables pedagogical support for all educators. It may be helpful to review other service delivery models and analyse internal and external expectations as a guide to what will be effective. Models that support and mentor leaders might include:
 - » The appointment of a senior educational leader whose role includes providing support and guidance to the coordinators who also have an educational leader role.
 - » The appointment of two or more educational leaders (depending on the size of the service) who each have a responsibility for a specific group of educators to ensure support is offered equitably.
 - » A smaller service might consider combining leadership roles – the educational leader and the assistant manager, for example. This is a good option when resources are limited, however, care should be taken to ensure the management roles do not overtake the educational roles.
 - » Considering how to redefine the role to allow for specialisations – for example, nature pedagogy, curriculum decision-making and assessment or evidence-based practice to support children with additional needs. This way the expertise of several educators is nurtured and shared across the service.
- Adopting a distributed leadership approach to educational leadership will require the allocation of time to meet with and support the leadership team in their understanding of educational program and practice.

- It should be noted that if roles are combined – for example, the nominated supervisor and educational leader – approved providers are responsible for supporting the educational leader component of a position and ensuring there is adequate time to support quality.



Reflective questions

Use these reflective questions to consider the ways the educational leader can support and mentor the leadership team.

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- How does the educational leader currently support and mentor the leadership team? How do you know if these approaches are effective?
- What other mechanisms could be applied to strengthen the supports offered?
- How are educational ideas and strategies disseminated throughout the leadership team?

11. CHAMPION CURRICULUM IN FAMILY DAY CARE

Family day care educational leaders champion the importance of curriculum decision-making that enhances teaching and learning in home-based services. They take a proactive approach and deepen understandings of the role of theory, pedagogy and assessment in the design of unique family day care curriculum approaches.



Practice Story – Amana Kids FDC

One of the most significant parts of my work as an educational leader is to build the capacity of our team to understand the context of teaching and curriculum in family day care and make the links to theories that inform and underpin learning and development. The unique context of family day care and lack of evidence-based research about home-based curriculum provides an opportunity for this to come to life within the service. By gathering strong practice-based examples and highlighting the theory that underpins teaching and learning practices, I am actively promoting the professional practice and supporting our team's teaching and learning capacity.

Recently we explored Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), providing an opportunity to consider how each educator's service and their curriculum decisions reflected the importance of fostering positive relationships and interactions with the child and their family. Educators were encouraged to self-reflect, seek feedback from families, and post their thoughts on our closed Facebook page. Coordinators focused their mentoring efforts on providing more resources, observing and discussing interactions, and documenting the learning they noticed. The learning stories from the mentoring visits were posted on the Facebook page, adding to the growing practice-based evidence of this theory in action across the service. Educator posts created further conversation and reflection, with more than 70% of the educators sharing their experiences. Many posted information they have researched themselves that added to the abundant learning and discussion.

The process has assisted coordinators to recognise that when they elevate the practice of teaching and learning and connect this to the family day care context, it creates an opportunity to highlight great practice. It also challenges educators to explore new ways of thinking about the unique nature of a family day care curriculum. As one educator commented, "I was always waiting for the families to tell me they appreciated the work I do to promote their child's development. But now I know that if I am unable to articulate my practice, link this to theory and talk about current thinking in pedagogy, then families won't know why this is important for their child."

As an educational leader, I am the champion of teaching and learning. It is my role to always ensure that our approved provider, team of coordinators and educators are thinking about teaching practices and the assessment and planning cycle,

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which facilitate learning and development for children. I am the cheerleader for teaching and learning, keeping them front of mind for others, ensuring they are prioritised during discussions about budget allocations, developing policies, accessing professional development and considering staff work plans. Whenever possible I try to remind others of the unique aspects of teaching and learning that occur within the family day care context. Being loud and proud of this profession means being well informed and having the courage to challenge those who are misinformed about the quality of pedagogy and curricula found within the family day care context.

Getting practical

As the educational leader and approved provider consider how to champion curriculum in family day care, the following ideas are worth considering.

When considering how to champion curriculum it is helpful to keep in mind the expectations of the approved learning frameworks and the NQS.

National Quality Standard

Element 1.1.1 Approved learning framework

Descriptor: Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.

(ACECQA, 2019, p. 95)

Early Years Learning Framework

Curriculum encompasses all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development. The emphasis in the Framework is on the planned or intentional aspects of the curriculum.

(DEEWR, 2009, p. 9)

My Time, Our Place

A school age care program encompass all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, which occur in an environment designed to support wellbeing and foster children's learning and development. The emphasis in the Framework is on the planned or intentional aspects of the program which includes supporting spontaneous play and leisure experiences initiated by children.

- Develop a series of professional learning opportunities that explore and build a shared and distinctive understanding of curriculum design and application in family day care. Ensure these opportunities are open to all educators and invite contributions from the community and families.
- Develop a library of resources (a mix of hard copies and electronic resources is preferable) that support educators to develop their understanding of curriculum.

Ensure these resources are accessible and include examples of curriculum in family day care.

- If these are difficult to find, educational leaders may consider writing or commissioning resources and publications of their own that showcase local practice examples and curriculum strategies.
- Being a champion might also include ‘talking up’ the way educators are designing and implementing curriculum decisions. More than general encouragement, this involves the educational leader making explicit and direct connection for educators to the link between their everyday decisions (such as creating a new routine when children arrive to support an anxious child or family member) and the expectations of curriculum.



Reflective questions

- What elements of the practice story interest you? Why? How could these ideas be used in your service?
- What does it take to be an effective champion for curriculum?
- What do you understand are the key features of an effective family day care curriculum? How well are these implemented at your service?
- Where advocacy and championing of the curriculum is needed the most? Why?
- How can messages about curriculum be crafted so they reach their target audiences?

CONCLUSION

We hope you have found this Addendum to *The Educational Leader Resource* useful and inspiring as you begin or continue as an educational leader, or support the role in family day care. These practice stories reflect the unique aspects of the educational leader role in family day care, while providing an insight into the challenges and opportunities that are worthy of recognition and celebration.

As highlighted in *The Educational Leader Resource*, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to educational leadership. For family day care services, this is particularly true. Context is a critical factor that shapes how the role is enacted and how it can be maximised to ensure high quality learning and developmental outcomes for each child.

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