QUALITY AREA 4

BELONGING, BEING AND BECOMING FOR EDUCATORS

The approved learning frameworks – Belonging, Being & Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care (MTOP) – are designed to inspire conversations, improve communication and provide a common language about children's learning.

While the frameworks are aimed at children and families, they are also a valuable resource for educators and service staff to reflect on practice and learning, and can be used to foster their own sense of belonging, being and becoming.

LINKS TO THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

The professional expectations of educators are reflected in Quality Area 4 and Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standard (NQS), in particular:

Element 4.2.1: Management, educators and staff work with mutual respect and collaboratively, and challenge and learn from each other, recognising each other's strengths and skills.

Element 4.2.2: Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships.

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

Element 7.2.3: Educators, co-ordinators and staff members' performance is regularly evaluated and individual plans are in place to support learning and development.

WHAT DOES 'BELONGING' MEAN FOR EDUCATORS?

According to the approved learning frameworks, 'Experiencing belonging – knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence… Throughout life,

relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming' (EYLF, p.6 & MTOP, p.6).

A sense of belonging for educators can also occur when they feel their work is valued, they are respected and accepted, and have positive relationships. In this safe environment, educators can draw on the support, practice and professional guidance of other educators.

WHAT IS 'BEING'?

'Being recognises the significance of the here and now… building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting the challenges in everyday life' (EYLF, p.6 & MTOP, p.7).

As an educator, it is vital you ensure you are 'being' with children, challenging yourself and learning with children. This involves making a conscious effort to bring elements of your identity, culture and pedagogy to your work with children and families while balancing the other requirements of your role.

BECOMING, GROWING AS A PROFESSIONAL

Continual learning and critical reflection of practice are central to ongoing growth and development as an educator.

Collaborating with a range of professionals, community members and seeking the expertise of families helps to build professional understandings and enables educators to critically reflect on their practice.

Performance review processes allow educators and leaders the opportunity to celebrate achievements, consider areas for improvement and to develop a plan for professional development. This learning and development can take on a range of approaches that build on educators' knowledge and experience including:

Reflective approaches and self paced learning

Formal learning- accredited training and qualifications

Existing understandings, experience and learning styles and new knowledge

Workshop sessions and learning encounters

Leadership and partnerships

Inquiry and research

CREATING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Adopting an approach to learning that is shared, ongoing and supportive helps create a place where all team members can flourish. Opening up a dialogue about the learning that is occurring within the program with children and through professional development helps to build an understanding of how children learn through play and leisure activities.

Things to consider:
- How are educators made to feel valued and empowered to have a voice?
- What strategies are used to ensure educators have the opportunity to experience a sense of belonging, being and becoming?
- How does the service self-assess concepts such as inclusion, empathy and equity for educators?
- How does the induction process draw out information about the culture, identity, skills and strengths of new educators?
- How does the performance review process inform and support professional development?
- What opportunities exist for educators to build positive relationships with each other?

CONNECTEDNESS AND EMPOWERMENT

Belonging, being, becoming and wellbeing are all closely related. Educators who experience a sense of this are more likely to have a greater sense of connectedness to what they do and feel empowered to contribute. When educators feel they can communicate openly and participate in respectful conversations and professional enquiry, the culture of the service benefits.

For educators to feel a sense of belonging, being and becoming, their values should be reflected in the service's vision, philosophy and commitment to continuous improvement.

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND SUPPORTING WELLBEING

Resilience enables educators to bounce back from stresses and disappointments. It supports educators to persevere and succeed in the face of challenging situations. Resilience is typically built over time through experience.

Educators who feel they cannot be themselves at work may have trouble engaging with their team. A 'closed' environment can significantly impact an educator's involvement in the service, potentially resulting in stress and anxiety, low morale, increased absenteeism and retention difficulties.

It is vital educators build strategies to manage their own wellbeing – including managing expectations of workload and contributing to improving systems and processes with a goal of quality improvement. A crucial part of belonging, being and becoming in a team of educators is taking an active role in change.

> EDUCATORS WHO ALSO EXPERIENCE A SENSE OF BELONGING, BEING, BECOMING AND WELLBEING ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A GREATER SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS TO WHAT THEY DO AND TO FEEL EMPOWERED TO CONTRIBUTE.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A POSITIVE CULTURE

The Kidsmatter blog Creating an organisational culture of your dreams recommends the following:

"As a team, decide what the 'culture of your dreams' is. Then using the many ways we have to identify and communicate culture, compare how closely the visible and 'under the surface cultures' correlate with each other and your collective ideal."

Respect for diversity underpins the approved learning frameworks and the Educators' Guides. Both documents recognise the diversity of educators':

- personal history
- professional pathways and qualifications
- beliefs about childhood, children, learning and curriculum
- journey and drive for cultural competence
- use of theoretical perspectives.

(Educators' Guide: Belonging, Being, Becoming p. 4)

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Gowrie South Australia's Reflections publication at www.gowriesa.org.au Developing a learning community for educational leaders

Child and Family Studies team at Griffith University.
Leading learning circles for educators engaged in study

Children's Services Central publication at www.cscentral.org.au
Professional Learning Framework

Kidsmatter Blog www.kidsmatter.edu.au Creating an organisational culture of your dreams

Educators' Guide: Belonging, Being & Becoming at acecqa.gov.au

More information is available on the ACECQA website **acecqa.gov.au**

Acknowledgment
The information in this publication was adapted from a National Childcare Accreditation Council resource.