



## National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program



### Talking about practice:

# The role of the educational leader

## Interview with Kelly Gleeson and Beth Smith

This video is part of the *Talking about practice series* (TAPS) and is designed to promote critical conversations about practice. The video is presented in three parts. Each part looks at different aspects of the role of the educational leader as part of the *National Quality Framework* (NQF). The videos examine how the role of educational leader is understood and interpreted in different early childhood settings. It might be useful to refer to the NQS PLP e-Newsletter No.33 The educational leader. (Please see: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/NQS\\_PLP\\_E-Newsletter\\_No33.pdf](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/NQS_PLP_E-Newsletter_No33.pdf) in conjunction with these videos.)

### Introduction

The requirement within the National Regulations for early childhood settings to nominate an educational leader is evidence of the importance of a focus on curriculum. Ensuring that children's experiences in early childhood settings contribute to positive learning experiences that are appropriate for their age and interests is really what matters for children and families. Research (see Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007) indicates that strong and informed leadership in curriculum and pedagogy makes a difference to the experiences of children and the outcomes they can achieve. While the National Regulations for Education and Care (ACECQA, 2011a) require one person to accept the position of educational leader, this video explores a shared approach and recognises that larger organisations will require a different approach to smaller settings. In this video, Kelly and Beth talk about very different early childhood settings and how their organisations have interpreted the role of educational leader to suit each setting's unique circumstances.

### Part 1

In Part 1 of the video, Kelly and Beth talk about how the role of educational leader has been created to suit the uniqueness of their settings. The qualities that they identify in themselves as being important in the role include:



- a keen interest in early childhood curriculum and a willingness to research and investigate new thinking about children's learning
- a commitment to building trusting relationships with staff that enable open and constructive conversations about curriculum
- a leadership style that recognises the diversity of experiences, backgrounds and contributions that educators bring to their work with children.

While the Regulations require one person to be nominated as educational leader, there is scope to see educational leadership as a shared or distributed responsibility. As Kelly explains, their setting's Nominated Supervisor has accepted the official role but Kelly has taken on the role of curriculum mentor. It is likely that in larger organisations, several curriculum mentors might work together and report to the official educational leader. In a small, stand-alone setting the role of educational leader might be naturally assumed by the Nominated Supervisor but with a view to up-skilling other educators to contribute to this important work over time.

### After watching Part 1

Discuss with your colleagues the reasons behind the decisions made about your educational Leader.

- Read over the *Guide to the Education and Care National Regulations* (ACECQA, 2011a, p. 85) and the *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (ACECQA, 2011b, p. 178) and consider how the role of educational leader might be interpreted in your setting.





- What are the unique features of your setting that need to be considered when thinking about the role of educational leader? For example the size of the setting, the experience and qualifications of the educators, the physical resources and constraints, the ability to meet and talk with educators—both geographic and time considerations.

Beth and Kelly both acknowledge the support of their organisations in enabling them to carry out their role effectively. Both leaders are part of a wider network of educational leaders. In Kelly's case her Council initiated a curriculum group where regular meetings promoted sharing of ideas and problem solving. For Beth a regular regional meeting for Family Day Care Coordinators saw the opportunity to build an educational leaders' network to discuss this new role.

- What are the possibilities for establishing or joining in with a network of educational leaders in your area or organisation?
- What would you see as the purpose of this network and how might it operate?

### The day-to-day role of the educational leader

Beth and Kelly both talk about using spontaneous conversations as well as formal time to meet and talk in some depth about curriculum issues. The video shows footage of educators having incidental conversations in the playground or when children are having their lunch. While some may consider this to detract from time spent with children, Beth and Kelly see these as important in building trusting relationships with other educators and talking about issues as they arise. They recognise the limitations of these conversations and that it is not always appropriate to discuss curriculum issues when the children are present.

- Do you feel there is a place for spontaneous conversations in your setting similar to those in the video—for example when children are playing independently or having their lunch?

- What are the possibilities for establishing more formal meeting times to discuss issues in more depth?
- What other ways can educational leaders work to build trusting professional relationships with educators?

### The importance of curriculum vision

This may be a natural starting point for the educational leader—to establish 'what it is that we are aiming to achieve at this setting?' It makes sense for this conversation to draw on the Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF). A clear vision gives direction to the educational leader and frames the work they will do in supporting other educators.

- Does your setting have an articulated vision about curriculum and pedagogy?
- Do all educators know what they are working towards—is there a shared vision for children's learning?
- Do families contribute to this vision? Are they aware of the setting's goals for children's learning?
- Does your vision for children's learning reflect the big ideas of the EYLF?

## Part 2

### Clarifying the role of the educational leader

The NQF provides a broad and general definition of the role of educational leader. Under the Regulations, the Approved (service) Provider is required to appoint an educational leader to '... guide other educators in their planning and reflection, and mentor colleagues in their implementation practices' (ACECQA, 2011a, p. 85).



It is perhaps important to document how the role of educational leader is to be interpreted in each setting and how others within the early childhood setting will know about the role of the educational leader. It is important that each educator knows who their educational leader is and can talk about how they support their work.

Beth and Kelly talk about the various ways that they work with educators. It varies considerably according to the needs and interests of each setting and each educator. The setting's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is perhaps a good place to start in determining the priority areas for attention in relation to pedagogy and curriculum. Setting goals and working on specific projects as a focus, rather than trying to do everything at once, seems to be an effective way to work and ensure that new learning is consolidated and goals identified in the QIP are achieved.

- Is the role of educational leader at your setting clearly articulated for educators and families?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of the educational leader clearly identified in that person's position description?
- How can the setting or organisation support the work of the educational leader? Is there adequate time for the educational leader to carry out the responsibilities that they have accepted?
- Is there a connection between the QIP and the goals of the educational leader in relation to pedagogy and curriculum?

## Part 3

### Dealing with curriculum challenges

It is perhaps important to be clear about the limitations and boundaries of the role of educational leader. While the educational leader is responsible for guiding and mentoring other educators, there needs to be clear guidelines when there are issues of poor work performance or conflict that are beyond the scope of this role. Beth and Kelly speak of the importance of developing positive and constructive relationships with educators that build trust and a willingness to talk about curriculum challenges. Their organisations have developed strategies for involving the Nominated Supervisor when there are

concerns about an educator's performance that is beyond the scope of guiding and mentoring. Beth and Kelly also recognise the importance of open communication with the Nominated Supervisor to resource their work and to be a support with challenges. In this way the educational leader is not solely responsible for the educational program.

- Does your setting have processes for dealing with concerning work performance?
- Is the role of the educational leader clearly understood in relation to performance concerns?

### Documenting the work of the educational leader

Deciding how to show evidence of the work of the educational leader is not clearly defined in the *National Quality Standard* (NQS). It is up to each setting to determine how this can best be demonstrated. Element 7.1.4 of the *Guide to the NQS* (ACECQA, 2011b. p. 178) provides some guidance as to the evidence that an assessor might look for. There is no specific requirement for documented evidence but it probably makes sense for the educational leader to keep track of conversations and decisions and to record the goals for teaching and learning that the educators are focusing on. Kelly shows an example of her journal where she keeps a record of her work. It is handwritten and is a working document that she can carry with her to record spontaneous conversations or more formal meeting decisions. Her journal is time efficient and an effective record of her role. It is perhaps important to keep this evidence simple and time efficient and to avoid creating unnecessary paperwork. Remember that the focus of the NQS is on evidence that can be observed, discussed and documented. It is equally important that each educator in your setting is able to identify their educational leader and is able to discuss how the educational leader supports them in their work.

- Look at the guide to Element 7.1.4 on page 178 of the *Guide to the NQS*. How might your setting show evidence of the work of the educational leader?
- If you have a system of documenting the role of the educational leader, is it time efficient and effective as a record of the role? Are there ways to simplify this documentation but still keep it meaningful?



## Taking on the role of educational leader

Kelly talks about the importance of considering her own leadership style and what approaches to leadership work best in her setting. Striking a balance between affirming what educators are already doing and motivating them to take on new challenges seems to be an important focus for educational leaders. Leadership styles that are more authoritarian or controlling might be less successful in inspiring educators to take on new challenges. Leaders who demonstrate greater warmth, understanding and scaffolded approaches to learning will probably have more success in motivating and mentoring educators.

- Has your educational leader undertaken any professional learning in leadership?
- How do educators respond to the educational leader? Do they see the educational leader as a welcome support to their work?
- Brainstorm with educators the qualities that they would like to see in an educational leader—what styles of leadership are most effective in promoting ongoing improvement?



## References and further reading

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