

To the Presiding Commissioner Dr Wendy Craik and Commissioner Mr Jonathon Coppel,

My name is Marie-Brigitte Mitchell, I am four year trained early childhood teacher, union member and advocate for my profession. I work in a community model early education and care setting. It is not for profit and has a board of community directors including families of the centre.

I have been working in early education and care for fifteen years and gained qualifications whilst working. I have been at my current early education and care centre for eight years. It is my vision for all early education and care to be like my centre and continue to improve on quality standards.

This begins in the most important learning spaces of a centre: the birth to three's rooms. It can continue well into later years such as preschool and the early years of school. However, the most compelling evidence of growth and learning occurring in relation to brain development is in the first three years. It is concerning if the outcome of this inquiry is to enable very young families to return to work confidently for a range of reasons. In particular for financial benefit to our country and their ability to house and raise a family that these early years potentially will not get the important attention they deserve. I am actually in a position of great privilege and power to act using my specialised education degree and being able to work in the sector with a centre that values children, families and the community access to an education that lasts a lifetime.

Brain research and early years are affected by promoting a healthy lifestyle, forming ongoing, secure trusting relationships with safe good role models in language and emotions, repeated experiences and challenges using the senses, through everyday living experiences (Ngala, 2012).

This is a sensitive period of learning and where a real difference can be made and the environment in which children are cared for can increase stress in children which affects brain development in a negative way or decrease it in a positive way. If children have a stressful home environment a sensitive and well trained and not overworked or many casual educators make a difference. When families, health care and child care and preschool are coordinated they can make a positive impact (Powers, 2013).

My everyday practice or curriculum is everything I do to support the learning and development of the birth to twos in my learning environment. It is my own informal ongoing action research and reflection that I hope can contribute to evidence to keep early childhood degree and diploma trained educators working in all parts of a centre and particularly in birth to three environments in all centres.

My teaching philosophy informs this and draws on the rights of the child, the national law and standards, my centre philosophy, policies, procedures, leading and managing the Diploma and Certificate 3 trained educators (full time, part time and casual).

It involves making all care routines learning experiences down to eating, nappy changing, toileting, greeting and leaving, sleeping and clothing (how I approach and finish a task and speak

and communicate with a child to respect their rights). It also includes setting up learning centres with open ended resources to foster all developmental domains, key learning areas, dispositions for learning and planning and implementing strategies which include interactions to provoke thinking and responses in relation to all of the above. I do this in a collaborative way with my team, children and their families input and feedback. This is an ongoing long term process that begins at enrolment, orientation and through the year. It also involves documenting progress and making learning visible. I also reflect and continue to plan and document actions whilst maintaining a safe, healthy and nurturing learning environment.

This complex web of processes inspires and challenges me. *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) details the complexity of pedagogy and benefits of investment in early education and care in response to the policy research leading up to the COAG bi partisan agreement on early education and care in Australia for which it was produced. A few examples of my practice are as follows

1. I speak to infants and toddlers all day. Nappy change time is when we get to communicate best. I encourage and integrate a range of developmental domains and dispositions through this. One way is by counting stairs aloud as they learn to walk up and down them (maths sequencing and
2. By singing a song about the concepts of up and down with different musical concepts such as pitch and tempo.
3. By chatting about information given by families to make learning connections and continue building rapport. This could include speaking key words or phrases in home languages.
Children also gain a sense of autonomy and agency in choosing new nappies and holding or gathering them.

Outcomes of this were. A child actually wanting changes as they are fun and it's challenging to climb the stairs or have a hug and learn songs and rhymes.

Children start to speak and repeat songs. Children's faces light up when you encourage their home language/s maintenance by speaking key words or phrases. Families chat or follow up on information shared by educators. Then more learning occurs in the form of communication and it continues to occur and delight educators and children. Suddenly a child with an interest in saying *truck* could become *blue truck* after singing a related song at the centre then singing it at home. This can then be seen in them pointing to the same colour and saying the word *truck* they know best. The way an educator responds and recasts this helps increase their vocabulary and conversation practice frequency. Children get individual attention within large group of a 1 to 4 or 8 educator ratio in this nappy change context too. Therefore a considerable concern should the recent productivity commission proposal occur for averaged ratios occur during a week. In conclusion children enjoy coming to the centre, grow in confidence and I get to see the child they are with unique strengths that their family knows. My centre knows families grow in reassurance their child has a rich day of happy being and learning much more than general babysitting.

I look forward to your favourable final draft recommendations where very young children will come first.

Kind regards,

Marie-Brigitte Mitchell.

References

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