Relationships hold the key to quality early childhood education?
This talk today will draw on the wisdom of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), the National Quality Standard (NQS) and my experiences and professional readings and conversations as an early childhood educator.
Relationships with Families Matter

Relationships with Children Matter

Relationships with Community Matter
The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

• The EYLF has been designed for use by early childhood educators working in partnerships with families, children’s first and most influential educators.

• The EYLF tells us ‘that relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become’. EYLF p 7

• ‘The diversity in family life means that children experience belonging, being and becoming in many different ways. They bring their diverse experiences, perspectives, expectations, knowledge and skills to their learning’. EYLF p 9
Children thrive when families and educators work together in partnership to support young children’s learning.

Educators’ practices and the relationships they form with children and families have a significant effect on children’s involvement and success in learning.

When educators establish respectful and caring relationships with children and families, they are able to work together to construct curriculum and learning experiences relevant to children in their local context.
The Victorian Early Years Learning Framework reminds us that:

- From birth, secure attachments formed through warm and respectful relationships with familiar adults are fundamental to children’s learning and development.
- They provide a secure base that helps children to feel safe and confident to try new things.
- Interactions with children and families inform educators knowledge of children’s distinctive interests, skills, cultures and abilities.
- This is crucial to providing positive experiences and a safe and stimulating environment that will encourage children to expand their capacities and deepen their knowledge and understandings.
• Today- lets think about our responsibilities to young children.

• We know educators’ professional judgements are central to their active role in facilitating children’s learning. In making professional judgements, we weave together our:
  • professional knowledge and skills
  • knowledge of children, families and communities
  • awareness of how our beliefs and values impact on children’s learning
  • personal styles and past experiences.
Relationships Matter

We as early childhood educators draw upon a range of perspectives in our work which may include:

- developmental theories
- socio-cultural theories
- socio-behaviourist theories
- critical theories
- post-structuralist theories

In thinking about relationships, socio-cultural theories emphasize the central role that families and cultural groups play in children’s learning and the importance of respectful relationships as well as provide insight into social and cultural contexts of learning and development.
• Drawing on a range of perspectives and theories can challenge traditional ways of seeing children, teaching and learning, and encourage educators, as individuals and with colleagues, to:

• investigate why they act in the ways that they do discuss and debate theories to identify strengths and limitations

• recognise how the theories and beliefs that they use to make sense of their work enable but also limit their actions and thoughts consider the consequences of their actions for children’s experiences find new ways of working fairly and justly.
Lets think about our relationships with families?

**Principles of the EYLF - Partnerships**

- Learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when early childhood educators work in partnership with families. They create a welcoming environment where all children and families are respected and actively encouraged to collaborate with educators about curriculum decisions in order to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful.

**QA6 Collaborative partnerships with families and communities**
Why do relationships with families matter?

Parents, carers and early childhood services working together

- When parents, carers and early childhood services work well together to promote social and emotional development, it is more likely to yield substantial and sustained improvements for children. Parents and carers will be much more likely to access available parenting support, information and education if they have had the opportunity to build respectful and collaborative relationships with staff at the service. Additionally, families can have a positive impact on their children’s mental health and wellbeing by working closely with staff and providing opportunities for children to practice and reinforce the social and emotional skills they are learning in the early childhood service.

The family is central to children’s mental health

Kids Matter Early Childhood Initiative
Relationships Matter

• What might they look like?

Early Childhood Education and Care Services encourage collaboration and relationships when they provide opportunities -
• for children and families to be involved in a range of service activities
• they encourage families to be involved in decision making and all parts of the service’s program
• families and staff exchange information regularly in various ways that cater for individual family needs
• they provide opportunities for extended family members to get involved.
What might they look like?

- Encouraging family involvement at the service by informing them about the daily activities and how they can help

- Arranging regular meetings and information sessions and guest speakers

- Having an open door policy where families are welcome throughout the day

- Obtaining parenting resources for parents and educators to access

Kids Matter Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative.
Relationships Matter
The EPPE study tells us

• *There were more intellectual gains for children in centres that encouraged high levels of parent engagement in their children’s learning.*
• The most effective settings shared child-related information between parents and staff, and parents were often involved in decision making about their child’s learning programme.
• More particularly, children did better where the centre shared its educational aims with parents. This enabled parents to support children at home with activities or materials that complemented those experiences.
• The EPPE study recommended that educator Engage parents in their children’s learning and share educational aims with them.
Relationships with Families

• When do they begin? – at enquiry, at enrolment, at orientation, child’s first day
• How do we build and maintain these over time? – learning names; connecting families with each other; ‘letting go being the expert,’ less judgement, more understanding; finding ways to connect with ‘hard to reach families;’ inviting them into our classroom; social functions............

What might they look, feel and sound like at different times of the day? – arrivals, departures
EYLF Principle - Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
NQS - QA5 Relationships with Children

• Educators who are attuned to children’s thoughts and feelings, support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing. They positively interact with the young child in their learning.
• Through a widening network of secure relationships, children develop confidence and feel respected and valued. They become increasingly able to recognise and respect the feelings of others and to interact positively with them.
• Educators who give priority to nurturing relationships and providing children with consistent emotional support can assist children to develop the skills and understandings they need to interact positively with others.
Relationships Matter

Relationships with Children – ideas for reflecting

- When do they begin? – How do we ensure every child feels they belong?
- How do we build and maintain connections for children with us and each other?
- How do we ensure we have time for every child?
- How do we allow the ‘voices of children’ into the curriculum? Whose in charge of decisions? Are children advantaged or disadvantaged in the way we work?
- Conversations matter – conversational or directional?
- Are we active participants in children’s play or passive observers?
Relationships Matter
The EPPE research also tells us

- The most highly qualified staff also provided the most instruction, and were the most effective in their interactions with the children, using the most sustained shared thinking.
- Less qualified staff were significantly better at supporting learning when they worked with qualified teachers.
- What is the proportion of trained teachers on the staff?
Relationships with Community

- Who is the Community – the preschool; the school; the local shopping centre; community health; other early childhood services, our neighbours?
- Why are community connections important?
- How do we balance needs of ourselves, children and families with community needs.
One Approach

A time of the day – An approach to connect many of the principles, practices and outcomes of the EYLF and the requirements of the NQS.

Think about something in your service that maybe needs examining/thinking about/reflecting on.
Time of the Day – Arrivals

- Arrivals provide rich opportunities to build respectful relationships and partnerships with children and families that underwrite the development of a sense of community and belonging and, when done well, give effect to the EYLF and to meeting aspects of the National Quality
**Relationships Matter**

EYLF Principles given effect by rich arrival times

• Secure respectful reciprocal relationships
• Partnerships
• Respect for diversity
EYLF Practices which underwrite rich arrival times

Responsiveness to children

Intentionality

Continuity of learning and transitions
EYLF Learning outcomes contributed to by a rich and thoughtful approach to arrival times

LO1 – Children have a strong sense of identity

LO2 – Children are connected with and contribute to their world

LO3 – Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

LO5 – Children are effective communicators
What does all of this say about our service philosophy?

What does our approach to arrival times say about how we think about children and their families?

Is this reflected in our service philosophy?

If not what might we want to include in our philosophy to make this connection?
Relationships underpin the achievement of all of the quality areas.

- High quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children.

- Settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress.

- Quality indicators include warm interactive relationships with children, having a trained teacher as manager and a good proportion of trained teachers on the staff.
• Research from MacNaughton (2005) and other experts found that professionals who regularly reflect on what they do, why they do it and how this new knowledge can be used to improve their practice, achieve the best outcomes for children and families (MacNaughton, 2005; Sylva et al, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008; Raban et al, 2007).

• Bae (2009) and Dall’Alba (2009) found that the most effective early childhood professionals reflect on and adopt flexible images of children and childhood and reconsider the roles they play in children’s lives.
The Early Years Learning Framework is focused on learning and the role of the educator. It aims to guide the complex, interactive work of early childhood educators that enables particular kinds of learning and nurtures particular kinds of learners. The framework therefore gives serious attention to essential elements of high-quality early childhood practice, including play-based pedagogies, strong relationships with children and families and intentional teaching.
The Guiding Principles of the National Quality Framework.

These principles are:

- The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.
- Children are successful, competent and capable learners.
- Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the framework.
- Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.
- The role of parents and families is respected and supported.
- Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.
Relationships Matter

Teach. Learn. Succeed.

‘All children, regardless of how they look, where they come from or how they learn, can and will achieve school success, when provided with highly effective teachers and positive supportive learning environments.’

The Centre for Development and Learning.

http://www.cdl.org/