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Example of practice

Using research evidence in ECEC services

Manuka Childcare Centre, ACT

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This example of practice comes from the centre director and a teacher working in Manuka Childcare Centre (MOCCA) in Griffith, ACT. This early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting has 64 children aged 6 weeks to school age.

MOCCA's mission is to 'nurture, educate and advocate for children, families, the early childhood profession and our community'.

MOCCA uses evidence to improve outcomes for children. The reflection questions at the end are designed to encourage your thinking about how you could adapt aspects of their approach into your own setting.

Supporting children's transition to education and care – a leader's perspective

Infants coming to our service in the past year had lived their entire life under COVID-19 restrictions. I noticed that their experiences at home and transition into ECEC were different from infants who started pre-COVID. As a leader, I wanted to help the team to understand how we could support these infants and their families.

Learning from the research evidence

To learn about ways to address the social and emotional needs of these infants, I first turned to the academic research. I read some articles in peer-reviewed journals and did a small literature review. As I am completing my Master in Education (Early Years Leadership), I was able to combine this research with my studies.

As a team, we revisited our knowledge of infant and toddler teaching and learning. We did some online training together and took part in professional reading and discussion groups. It was important to make time together to talk about the research evidence and what we were learning.

Applying the evidence

The evidence I found in my literature review was immediately relevant and applicable. For example, it helped me to advocate for increased staffing at critical times in the day to support infants making the transition to ECEC for the first time. It also helped me to communicate with the team to ensure they were aware of the needs of the children.

Learning together helped us as a team to refocus on evidence-based practices. For example, we increased our ratio from 1:4 to 1:2 during the critical transition periods. We slowed down our routines and transition points throughout the day, such as mealtimes and nappy change times. Children now have more opportunities to participate in those experiences and educators have more opportunities to develop their relationships with the children. The research also helped us create more time for sibling play to echo what children had experienced at home.

Children are settled and enjoy their daily routines. We can all see the changes for our children and families, which is motivating. We will continue to make small, achievable changes based on what we are learning together. Our next step is to explore the perspectives of our families and gather some more evidence from our children. We have also used the evidence gathered to support our service's quality improvement plan to make sure we can deliver a holistic service for families and children in the community.

Giving children a stronger voice – a teacher's perspective

When I moved into the preschool room, I was looking to make a small change that would have a big impact, both in my program planning and in the rhythm for the day. As part of the research I did throughout my Master of Teaching (Birth to Five Years), I learnt about the many benefits of giving children a stronger voice in decision-making. I saw potential to build on this within the preschool room. I wanted to consider what we could do to listen to the children more and give them more input into our daily activities.

Collaborating with colleagues to put evidence into practice

I worked with the educators in my team to help them understand why thinking about children's voices is important and what we could do to make it happen. Communicating the benefits to my colleagues was important in getting us all on the same page.

We produced a range of ideas to use children's voices more. For example, we ask children and families to fill in an 'about us' form at the end of the year so we get to know the children and their families from the child's perspective. This helps us plan to support children and families in the following years, particularly during preschool – an important period as children transition to school.

We also ask our preschool children what they want to do and learn each day. This helps us with goal setting and planning a program of learning that's both aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework and meaningful to the children. It also helps us to know if there is

something children want to delve deeper into, and how we can support them in doing this. As we reflected on the practice, we noticed some children wanted to work on goals across several days. To accommodate this, we adjusted from setting daily to weekly goals. We have had some great feedback from families that the children are sharing their learning experiences at home.

Finally, at the end of each term, we ask children what they have enjoyed, found difficult, and would like to learn more about. The child's voice becomes the evidence that we use to plan our program of learning. It helps us to understand and explore their motivations, to extend their learning that little bit further.

I have also seen a change in the observations my colleagues are making about the children. There is a shift in how they think about the children in our group, and what they expect them to do each day. It is helping us to be intentional in our planning, to make sure we are covering all aspects of their learning and development over time.

Reflection questions

- How did the leader and the teacher use evidence?

- What types of evidence did they use?

- What type of evidence do you use to support practice in your service?

- What can you do to use evidence more in your everyday work?

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