

New Professional Development Publication



Child Care Staff: Learning and Growing Through Professional Development.

This new publication was launched in Canberra by Parliamentary Secretary Maxine McKew on Monday 16th March. The launch was followed by a seminar which brought together child care directors and managers from each state and territory. The seminar was designed to explore more deeply issues around engaging staff teams in professional development and support and the information from the day will support PSC in their work with the sectors.

The new publication was recently sent to child care services by the PSCs in each state and territory as a resource to assist centre directors and staff to reflect on and plan for professional development in their services. The resource has been based on national research conducted by a team of researchers from Macquarie University and Charles Sturt University during 2007 / 08.

The research on which the publication is based, was commissioned by the **Professional Support Coordinators' Alliance** (PSC Alliance) to provide recommendations to guide their work in the delivery of comprehensive and effective professional development and support services to the children's services sector, from funding through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP), Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

The results of the research have been published in the report ***Practice Potentials: Impact of Participation in Professional Development and Support on Quality Outcomes For Children In Child Care Centres.*** Practice Potentials is one of the first studies investigating the current context of Professional Development and Support (PD&S) available to child care staff working within child care centres, from a national perspective.

During the study, 684 child care service directors/managers/owner-operators and staff across all states and territories, shared their views and experiences about the types of professional development they access and the ways they have incorporated their learning in working towards continual improvement in the quality of their programs. The findings are believed to be transferable to Family Day Care, Outside School Hours Care and Long Day Care.

The study utilised a multi-modal approach and collected data via a national online survey, focus group discussions and individual interviews in selected case study

centres from the community based and private/commercial sectors in each state and territory.

The research was framed around three key questions:

1. How do children's services directors/managers view the value of professional development and support and the relationship between professional development and support and quality outcomes?
2. What are the measures that are effective in supporting services to implement improvements / changes to practice?
3. What are the links between participation in professional development and support and achieving quality outcomes?

The research demonstrated clearly that staff who work in childcare services that commit time and other resources to supporting ongoing professional learning and who also provide ongoing support for the process of implementing related changes, will be well positioned to create a work place in which staff feel confident and purposeful in their work. Professional development is central because it enables us to contribute to developing practices that are guided by current theory and research. Developing deeper levels of understanding about our work in this way, enhances our effectiveness in work with children, families and staff teams.

The new publication, ***Child Care Staff: Learning and Growing Through Professional Development***, records some of the insights and innovative practices shared by participants. It draws on information published in the full report as well as records of unpublished case study interviews.

It is expected that seminars will be made available in the near future to support services to use the new resource.

The national research study and the new resource can be accessed online at the websites in each state and territory.

National Research Study

Waniganayake, M., Harrison, L., Cheeseman, S., De Gioia, K., Burgess, C and Press, F. (2008) **Practice Potentials: Impact of participation in professional development and support on quality outcomes for children in childcare centres**. Canberra: Professional Support Coordinators Alliance, Access Macquarie and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

New Resource

Russell, A (2009): **Child Care Staff: Learning and Growing through Professional Development**, Professional Support Co-ordinators Alliance

SA PSC Lady Gowrie Child Centre: <http://www.pscsa.org.au>

QLD PSC Health and Community Service Workforce Council Inc: <http://www.pscq.org.au/>

NSW PSC Children's Services Central : <http://www.cscentral.org.au/>

WA PSC CHILD Australia: <http://www.pscwa.org.au/>

NT PSC Child Australia: <http://www.pscnt.org.au/>

VIC PSC Community Child Care Association <http://www.cccvic.org.au/>

ACT PSC Communities at Work: <http://www.actpsc.com.au/>

TAS PSC Lady Gowrie Child Centre Hobart : <http://www.psc tas.org.au/>

The Power of Reflective Practice, Action Research and Practitioner Inquiry.

Participants in the Practice Potentials research study and seminar stressed the value of professional development experiences that involved the whole staff team and that extended over a period of time. Action learning and practitioner inquiry projects were seen as having great impact on the quality programs and strengthening the teams in the services that had utilised these approaches. The dynamic nature of this way of working had also made a considerable impact on staff morale and motivation.

Inquiry approaches to professional development involve staff in activities that provide opportunities to:

- question our own experiences and views (not just simply validating them)
- think critically about the values and assumptions underlying our practice and consider events and situations from different perspectives
- gather and reflect on information and knowledge about alternative practices / perspectives at both theoretical and practical levels
- investigate real life examples in our own settings. (Mitchell & Cubey 2003)

These strategies are a significant move away from the more familiar training session approach. They are based on the idea that developing and improving practice is not just a matter of 'quick fix' approaches and transferring tips, tricks and information from one source to another, but rather emerge from a process of constructing shared understandings amongst staff teams. In this approach, we work together to reflect deeply on the meaning behind what we actually do in our day to day work.

Practitioner inquiry is changed focused and revolves around a cyclical process that has some distinct phases. In Glenda MacNaughton's book "Doing Action Research in Early Childhood Studies(2009), these phases are identified as

Phase 1 Choosing to Change - *we begin with hopes, dreams and desires.....we hope we can create a change for the better, we dream of a better world and we desire to make a difference*

Phase 2 Planning for Change – *this phase involves discovering what we need to know and do if our project is to succeed*

Phase 3 Creating the Change - *this phase involves cycles of gathering information about the way things are, implementing the first change and gathering information on the effects of the change in recurrent cycles*

Phase 4 Sharing the Lessons- *this phase involves sharing the lessons from our work with colleagues. Sometimes this happens formally through conference presentations and published writing but also informally through networks our own networks.*

(MacNaughton 2009)

The inquiry process is rich with opportunities for learning. The outcomes achieved are usually lasting and deep for individuals and for services as a whole. The PSCSA is looking forward to developing connections with services who are interested in learning about working this way over the coming year.



Participants gathered in the foyer of Parliament House prior to the official launch



Parliamentary Secretary Maxine McKew addressing guests at the official launch at Capital Hill Early Childhood Centre in New Parliament House.



Kate Ryan from South Australia talking at the launch about the important relationship between professional development and quality in services for children and families.



Leanne Gibbs (PSC NSW) facilitating the seminar program which was held in the Members Dining Room, Old Parliament House



Pat Reid and Ellen Witten(TAS) described the role and impact of mentoring in ongoing professional development and support



Fawn Law Davis (WA) described some innovative ideas for services in rural and remote locations.



Louise de Bomford (NT) discussed the positive impact that strategic professional development and support has on attracting and retaining staff.



Kate Ryan (SA) discussed the power of practitioner inquiry for enhancing curriculum and learning experiences for children



Linda Harrison (Charles Sturt University) and Manjula Waniganiyake (Macquarie University) outlined some key findings from the original research and the role of deep level learning in working towards sustainable changes in practice.



Participants considered ideas about future directions in the work of PSCA.

The launch and seminar program was an important and enjoyable opportunity for networking and sharing ideas and experiences in relation to professional development and support. Presentations and summaries of discussions during the day will be made available soon.

Special thanks are due to Kaye Colmer (PSC SA) for initiating and leading this major research project on behalf of the PSCA and Annette Russell (SA) for developing the resource publication and liaising with participants and PSC reps to assist in planning the seminar program.

Thanks are also due to Leanne Gibbs (NSW PSC) for her skilled facilitation, and Bronwyn McNally and Sarah Ritches (ACT PSC) for organising wonderful venues, accommodation and press coverage.