Talking about practice: Reflecting on practice
INTERVIEW WITH CARMEL RICHARDSON

This is the third in the ‘Talking about practice’ series designed to support discussion and reflection about the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and its relationship to what educators in varied settings currently think, plan and do. The series is intended for use in conversation between early childhood educators, whether in teams or as a whole staff, or informally as educators undertaking similar roles such as in Family Day Care settings.

The video is in four distinct parts each with an accompanying film vignette:
- A philosophy of respect—reconciliation and relationships—Sorry Day clip.
- Theories behind our work—socio-cultural theory, the role of the educator, learning through interactions—sandpit clip.
- Teaching from children’s interests—seeing the possibilities, having long-term plans, building on what children know—balloon clip.
- Small group learning—structuring the day, focusing on literacy, sustaining children’s engagement, building concern for the environment and positive attitudes to sustainability—story clip.

Reflective questions to guide the discussion:
‘Reflective practice’ is one of the five key principles that the EYLF identifies as underpinning effective early childhood pedagogy or educational practice. Reflective practice involves educators, whatever their background or setting, closely examining their ethics, philosophy and decision-making processes. Reflective practice starts with a review of your personal and collective values and beliefs about children, families, education and learning.

Socio-cultural theory underpins the particular interactions on these videos. That theory base recognises that children learn in their social and cultural context in interaction with others. It acknowledges that other learners, including other children and adults, play an important role in taking the child on from their current understanding about how and why things happen, to more sophisticated concepts and principles about how the world works.

PART 1: A philosophy of respect
- Why is having a personal philosophy about early years’ education important?
- How does your personal philosophy inform your interactions with young children?
- What knowledge or theories about learning inform your personal philosophy? (What do you think is important for children to know and learn and why?)
- What do you believe about the role of families in children’s learning lives?
- What kinds of ideas and issues do you see as appropriate for young children to consider and think and talk about?
- Why do you think it might be important to include Indigenous perspectives in early years’ education?
- What are you currently doing and what else could you do to develop the understanding of all children about Australia’s history, cultures and heritages?
- What does a ‘philosophy of respect’ mean for our work with children and families?
- How do we establish and maintain true relationships with families that demonstrate mutual respect in our every day dealings?

PART 2: Theories behind our work
- Why is it important to know what theories underpin our work with young children?
- The director talks about socio-cultural theory and suggests that this approach acknowledges that the educator plays a significant role in children’s learning. What do you think she means by this?
- When do we use other theories such as those about children’s development, about attachment, or about managing behavior?
- What effect does it have if we apply a particular theory base to a situation?
- Are there other ways of viewing the same situation?
How might we respond differently? (For example, if children are in conflict, should we always intervene, or how could we develop children's independent capacity to solve problems and learn to get along with others?)

**PART 3: Teaching from children’s interests**

- Why do you think teaching from children's interest is important?
- What benefits can you identify in following spontaneous interests?
- How can spontaneous events, such as the balloon experiment, lead to more sustained learning?
- How can you use socio-cultural understandings of learning to better understand this episode? (Think about the interactions between the educator and the children. What is the child cutting with scissors in the background learning? Is the educator leading the learning or are the child and educator co-constructing understanding together?)
- How could the educator support the younger child's next-stage learning by following their obvious interest in the 'experiment'?
- If children learn through interactions with others how can we demonstrate this through documentation? (That is, what do we record when we document group learning? How do we focus on the interactions and the learning, rather than the ‘activity’?)

**PART 4: Small group learning**

- How does this book experience contribute to children’s ‘literacy development’?
- How is the educator supporting the children's understanding of reading conventions? (Think about the way he introduces the book, the author and illustrator and focuses the children's attention on the illustrations.)
- How does the educator sustain the children's interest in this book reading experience?
- What does he do when particular children divert attention away from the book experience?
- What roles does the educator undertake—e.g. modeling, demonstrating, scaffolding, responding to and extending children's interests and knowledge.
- How is the book used as a way into thinking about environmental issues?
- Do you think this is a good strategy? Why?
- What else are the children learning as they work with the educator to construct the concept map?
- Another educator is documenting this learning episode. What sorts of things do you think she might record?
- How can this documentation support reflective thinking about this teaching episode?

**Finally**

From these video clips and the interviewee's reflections, we have learnt about how important it is to establish and maintain a philosophy for a setting and a set of strong relationships with children, families and the local community.

We have learnt that we all have ‘theories’ that influence our work and that professional educators bring their theory bases to the surface, discuss and review them and reflect on whether and when each theory has a place in their daily work. For example, we use ‘behaviourist’ theories when we prevent children from running on the road and developmental theories when we wonder if a child should be reaching particular milestones such as movement or speech. Our interactions, however, might be informed by socio-cultural theories so that we ‘scaffold’ children's learning through questions and suggestions and careful listening and response.

We have learnt that an everyday experience such as a story, can follow and extend children's interests, build literacy knowledge and positive attitudes, model concepts and thinking, lead on to further investigations and contribute to long term goals such as environmental understandings.