



Action Research in OSHC
2015 Project Reports

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“What are the outcomes for children as a result of collaboration between schools and OSHC?”

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Abstract: During the course of our project we wanted to enhance communication within our school community, and in particular teachers working in the prep area to benefit the children’s development, and demonstrate that the complementary learning in the play-based learning environment at OSHC is also beneficial to the classroom environment.

Introduction

Our project topic was of interest to us because of conversations with other OSHC Educators and prep teachers about similar observations, and the opportunity to investigate. Karen the service’s Coordinator did some relief teacher aide work in a prep classroom last year, and observed that the curriculum-based learning the children were participating in did not allow for much physical activity, sensory, or social play compared with her previous pre-observations of school activities. Cathy the service’s Assistant Coordinator is also a Teacher Aide at the school, and as a result has contact with children during the school day as well as at OSHC.

Collectively we had observed social and behavioural issues with prep children, particularly in the afternoons and wondered if the lack of physical, and sensory activities during the school day were a contributing factor. From discussions with other OSHC services and prep teachers, both at our school and other schools we learned the issues we were encountering were widespread. We were motivated to understand and positively impact the development and learning of the children accessing the service, in particular the prep students, and we wanted to illustrate that time spent at OSHC, although play-based, is still a valuable learning environment and beneficial for the children. Our action research question is a result of the opportunity that OSHC has to provide complementary learning and developmental activities, experiences and resources to enrich the learning provided in the classroom. We believe a closer collaborative relationship with the school and its teachers is one of the keys to providing improved outcomes for children.

We gathered information, papers and articles from a number of sources, which discussed the benefits of play-based learning for prep children as in contrast to curriculum-based learning. The authors of these articles expressed that play-based learning fostered children’s agency and independence in navigating and understanding the world. There is a view that children are not learning important social and emotional skills in their current

learning environment (Facebook, 2015; Miller & Almon, 2009; Teacher Tom, 2015; Uren & Stagnitti, 2009).

All of the information we read, and discussions with peers supported our belief that children's concentration in the classroom, social development, and behaviour was being adversely affected by the lessening of play-based learning in the prep environment. We felt that while implementing 'My Time, Our Place Framework for School Aged Care' (MTOF) we had established excellent partnerships with families and the school community. We wished to build on that by embarking on an action research project that would strengthen these relationships, increasing positive outcomes for children at the same time.

Method

When we expressed an interest in participating in action research last year, we approached the school Principal with our idea and asked permission to approach the Prep Teachers. Karen attended a meeting with the teachers late last year to explain what we wanted to do and ask for any ideas and input. We spent Term 4 planning and reflecting our research so that the beginning of Term 1 we could put our ideas into action. We recognised the benefit of capturing children at the beginning of their school journey. Planning in Term 4 allowed the teachers to offer some insight as to what areas might be helpful.

At the beginning of the year all prep children are evaluated by their teachers by way of a 'Prep Initial Skills Test'. The test includes:

- colour recognition
- shape recognition
- number recognition
- rote counting
- 1-1 correspondence
- alphabet recognition
- optical movement
- preferred hand
- pencil grip
- cutting skills
- writing and name recognition

We were given these results by the prep teachers to use as our base line data. We also asked permissions from parents to see if they had any issues, concerns or suggestions, and provided information about the project and the intended aims. The parent response to our project was positive. Parents stated they felt like the children's time at OSHC was constructive, and they didn't feel as guilty leaving them in care, when they were so engaged in our planned activities.

After collating the initial evaluations we looked for activities that would benefit specific children, and improve the skills and abilities highlighted by the prep teachers. We were mindful about selecting activities and resources that targeted development but could also be enjoyed and be beneficial to the group as a whole. We didn't want children to feel like they were doing homework at OSHC, or being targeted individually, so we had to source

resources that were 'fun and engaging', yet were also for specific learning. We also sought to gain valuable insight and strengthened relationships with the prep teachers to inform our knowledge, skills and practice, while also sharing our valuable insights.

We intentionally planned at least one sensory activity each day which may have been activities and experience like play dough, moon sand, slime (or similar) in water troughs to encourage social interaction, learning and development. A description of the resources, activities and benefits of this programming is outlined below:

Sensory Play House



This Playhouse features three internal mirror panels and three external magnetic whiteboard panels. Children can easily sit inside the playhouse and investigate reflections, shape, colour and identity with the mirror panels.

The external magnetic whiteboard panels are used for magnetic construction, letters or numbers, or for drawing with whiteboard markers. The vertical surface makes it easier for children to interpret position concepts such as top and bottom, right and left. Working vertically strengthens shoulders, arms and hands.

Giant Peg Board

The Giant Peg Board helps young children learning to write, and also benefits older writers who struggle with handwriting.

Pegs encourage the development of the dynamic tripod grasp while gripping the pegs and pushing them into the board strengthens the relevant finger and hand muscles.



Following the pattern cards teaches children visual perceptual skills, assisting in the development of left-right integration, hand-eye coordination, directional rules and the creating of lines and shapes that lead on to forming letters. Drawing patterns from the pegboard provides the child with opportunities to perfect pencil control. Secondary learning includes colour recognition and sequencing.

Light Panel and Tray



Children used paintbrushes to brush away sand and discover the bugs in the sand. This activity benefits pre-writing skills by developing grasp and hand strength.

The children were given spoons and containers to sort the coloured orbs. Some children chose to divide them into specific colours. Others chose to count groups of five or ten and



put them in the containers. This activity benefits prewriting skills, numeracy and colour recognition.

Colour Matching and Mixing



Benefits are colour recognition, word recognition and writing skills from using the paint brushes.



Stepping Stones & Obstacle Courses

As we journeyed through our research the collaboration and relationship with the school strengthened. The Physical Education Teacher at school approached OSHC staff, and informed us that she was concerned that the Prep children were struggling with skipping, jumping, hopping and galloping, as well as balance and spatial awareness. We asked her for ideas for specific activities that she felt would be of benefit. Children were asked which equipment they liked best, and Educators were asked to create activities using the chosen

equipment and information from the teacher. As a result of this information we were able to program activities like obstacle courses to challenge and develop physical movement.

River Stones



Assists with coordination, estimating distances, and conquering fear of jumping on or off objects.



Sack races and obstacle courses to encourage children to jump, hop, skip and gallop. We are continuing to monitor the development of the children as they become more competent in these areas, and have progressed onto some activities to include the development of ball skills.

Findings

As a result of the programming and collaboration with the school we have observed a number of positive impacts. Staff at OSHC feel like they are a more valued part of the school community. Planning activities for the research project has also enabled staff to develop a better understanding of MTOP, learning outcomes, and how the children spend with us at OSHC can complement their time in the classroom at school.

The children were retested using the original format during Term 2 and there were significant differences for many of them. We acknowledged there would be changes without our input as a result of classroom work, however since we have been planning specific activities with the prep children in mind, we have had few if any behavioural issues as opposed to the previous 2 years with this same age group of children.

Communication with children, families and teachers has been important for the duration of this project with new awareness from all parties regarding the Learning Framework we work within, and the value of the children's attendance at OSHC. Parents are much more aware of our activities, and are comfortable to approach staff to request help/input for areas such

as homework, or discuss issues which may be affecting their child's performance at school, for example, handwriting or social skills. The following are some comments from children, parents, and teachers:

Parents were surveyed and asked to comment on the benefits of their child's attendance at Outside School Hours Care.

Parent responses to action research

- "I believe my child has developed much better social skills by attending OSHC."
- "It's fantastic to know that my child's overall progress is important and noticed by ASC staff as well as teaching staff within the school. I like that there is open communication between everyone involved in his day. "
- "I love that she has learned to use scissors properly and tie her shoelaces. These are just a couple of things that she has learned at OSHC."
- "I feel my daughter responds much better to the play based learning at OSHC than she does in the classroom, and is less likely to lose concentration because the activities are fun and she doesn't realise she's learning."
- "I love that the children get to participate in physical activities which are well staffed and coached"

Children's responses to activities and resources

- TH – Water Orbs
"I like the squishy balls. They are pretty colours and they bounce on the floor if you drop them. I like picking them up with spoons."
- IC – Pegboard
"The giant pegboard is fun because I like to make the patterns on the cards."
- JD – Sensory Play House
"I like sticking letters to the outside. I can make my name."
Water Orbs
"Cause I can squash them!"
Mobilo
"Making things with my friends."
- MS – Sensory Playhouse
"I like writing my name with the letters that stick on the side."
- RC – Light Panel and Tray
"Digging the bugs out of the sand was fun."

Teachers were asked what benefits they saw as a result of our Action research and the improved communication between themselves and OSHC.

Teachers response to OSHC collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Promoting the classroom and OSHC as the ‘Whole School’ and consistency across whole school with behaviour management strategies.”• “Incorporating the curriculum into OSHC by programming activities to improve fine motor skills etc.”

OSHC Educators agreed that our Action research has given us direction with our programming and enabled us to plan activities with more intentionality. Our reflection and evaluation practices have also benefited because we’ve been able to assess the success of activities by desired outcomes, in particular MTOP Learning Outcome 4 – children are confident and involved learners. The children have been involved in the selection of activities for the duration of our action research. They’ve been challenged by the increasing difficulty of many of the activities, for example obstacle courses and have tackled them with confidence and enthusiasm. Educators were involved in the purchase of resources to target specific areas and critical reflection during staff meetings. Involving all of our Educators in the Action research process has helped them to gain a better understanding of developmental milestones, and what the children do at school during the day when they’re not at OSHC. Through our Action research process the school community in general have also developed a much better awareness of our Learning Framework and the valuable learning opportunities the children experience at OSHC.

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“How do we develop systematic practices by embedding holistic approach into our programming and practices?”

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Abstract: Our research project is based on holistic approaches and embedded practices in the OHSC program. We opted to undertake this project as there was an opportunity to enrich our program. As a result of undertaking this action research we have made significant changes in Educator’s involvement and self-direction in programming and the efforts to collaborate with families. This has impacted the focus of our service’s cultural, social, emotional and sustainability thinking and practice.

Research aims: To have all the elements of holistic approach such as cultures including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, community involvement and participation and sustainability embedded into our programming and practices.

- 1) To make the program holistic and embedding all the aspects/elements into our regular program and practices
- 2) To find various ways to involve children, Educators and parents into program planning and implementation
- 3) To collaborate and learn from others in the OSHC community, gain insight into how others embed holistic approach within their programming.

Introduction

Our service is a multi-cultural service. We have significant diversity not only within the families that attend our service but also in our team of Educators. Our service not only caters for the needs of our school and community but children from a neighbouring school also attend our service, again adding to the diversity. Therefore it is very important to us that everyone feels that they are included and are part of our program. As a result of reflection and feedback from our Assessment and Rating report (in which we received an overall rating of ‘Meeting the National Quality Standard’) we identified the opportunity to enrich our programming and practices through a process of strengthening our collective understanding and practice of a holistic approach. To influence this change in our programming and practices we introduced greater autonomy and responsibility to staff in the form of our ‘projects’. As leaders of the service our intention was to create great involvement of staff in the change process and enrich their understanding and practice. These projects varied in the focus of children’s wellbeing or cultural competence and are outlined further in the report.

What does embedding holistic approaches mean to us? In our research, holistic approach is developing systems and processes to sustain all the aspects/elements of OSHC into our program such as sustainability, cultural competence, local and international community events, involvement of children, parents and staff in planning and programming cycle, child development theory such as multiple intelligence theory and social and emotional learning.

The My Time, Our Place Framework, talks about how 'being holistic in our approach also means drawing on a range of relevant factors which result in responsive and stimulating program planning. This includes collaboration with children, families and communities, while drawing on our own values, beliefs, strengths and interests, as well as a range of theoretical approaches'. To begin to embed a holistic approach in our service we explore the processes we undertook to generate our program. It is clear that our centre has started to achieve this outcome, by focusing on and exploring a different culture and country each month and fostering children's ideas on what activities we can incorporate into the centre that revolve around that specific country/culture. As well as empowering Educator's self-directed contribution towards our program, by working on specific projects as per their interests and skills.

The opportunity of rich exploration into a different culture and country each month has supported the notion that 'cultural competence is about our willingness and actions to build understanding between people, to be respectful and open to different cultural perspectives, to strengthen cultural security and work towards equality.' Prior to undertaking action research our cultural practices weren't showcased, having multicultural resources and doing some cultural activities, it wasn't embedded as part of our regular program. We wanted children to learn about various cultures and respect the differences in each other. Our intention was to embrace and engage our community – the children, parents and Educators, utilise their experience, background and expertise about various cultures. We have started achieving this by embedding this into our day to day discussions with children and helping them understand the differences and similarities in cultures and people.

The Multiple Intelligence Theory by Dr. Howard Gardner focuses on how an environment designed for children, whether it is a school or a childcare program should have activities and materials that meet all children's needs. In our service, we felt it was important to incorporate Multiple Intelligence Theory by designing our space in a way that support all the intelligences so that children could thrive in the areas that appealed to them.

Method

Embedding holistic approaches is about putting systems and process in place so that it is embedded into our program and practices. As a result of reflection we started with increasing Educator's involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of our programming and practices. As previously stated, our initial focus was on the cultural competence of the service, as our action research progressed, we started reflecting on our environment and the opportunities we could further support the wellbeing of children through the service's environment. Below is our journey of actions undertaken as a result of our reflection and approach to embedding reflective practice.

To begin our engagement with staff, we created a Pinterest account for St Catherine's OSHC where we started creating boards for each month and started pinning activities relevant to each month's theme. We encouraged the Educators and families to create a personal Pinterest account so that they can get involved and pin activities on the boards for each month. Our next aim was to increase children's involvement by getting children to pin activities of their choice using the service's tablets. This enriched our child-centred practice

and holistic approach as we were collaborating with children by drawing on their own beliefs, needs and interests.

To begin our journey towards embedding holistic approaches we chose a culture and country of focus for the month. The children were quite keen and excited when we presented this idea. We started with India as the first country and culture in focus, during November 2014. We explored arts & craft activities, celebrated Diwali (Festival of lights) and various sport games around India. As the action research continued, we made adjustments to how we presented and approached our program. At first, we had a handwritten version where we drew a monthly calendar on a big piece of paper and started recording the activities. Later, we started getting each month's calendar printed on a big sheet of paper. We then decided to include local and international community events into our program so we made it as part of our programming calendar. We celebrate some local and international community event such as (including but not limited to):

- Mother's Day
- Allergy Awareness Week
- Refugee Week
- Chinese New Year
- Harmony Day
- Pay It Forward Day
- Be Cruelty Free Week
- World Salt Awareness
- International Happiness Day
- Families Week

To extend learning and engagement with countries, cultures, local and international community events, we decided to write interesting facts about each country and community event. Many children, parents and Educators were amazed by some of the facts that they did not know or had misconception such as French toast is not from France! Surprisingly, there were many facts that children knew but we as Educators did not know especially when we explored Japan as children may have learnt about Japan at school. Many times, children did research and shared facts with us. This activity fostered children's interest and self-directed exploration on culture and diversity.

Upon further exploration of holistic approaches and reflection on our environment, we identified action that could be taken to enrich the children's experience and learning by experimenting different room set up. There was a need to re-shuffle the room to make a space for the tables where children could socialise, have breakfast/afternoon tea, do homework and to separate the noisy spaces from less noisy spaces to balance the noise level in our one big room (children's sensory needs). We tested a few set ups and the current set up has been the best set up we have had so far. We have set up a row of tables in the middle of the room, T.V. mounted on the wall in the corner of the room, which has made a big difference in terms of the reduced noise level in the room along with the building area, foosball table and air hocky table which tends to be more noisy areas. The other side of the room is the reading area, arts and craft area and home corner. The children, Educators and parents have responded very well to the new room set up.

As a result of reflection on our environment, we identified opportunities to further extend the children's and Educator's involvement and experiences in demonstrating our practice. These activities and experiences are outlined below:

Cultural tree

We ordered a 3D wooden tree which children painted and they came up with the idea of making it a cultural tree with leaves that would have their photos or names and their cultural background to see how they are connected to one another!

Health tree

We thought of making a tree next to our kitchen on the wall which children decided to call a health tree. We cut out the shape of the tree and put it up on the wall with the help of children. Children decided to do a collage on it. We brought some old magazines and children cut healthy food from the magazines and stuck on the tree. There were many discussions about what makes food healthy and unhealthy, difference in likes and dislikes and how we have to try different food before we decide we like it or don't like it. We decided to make branches of our health tree with the leaves hanging which contains each child's favourite healthy food. While children were doing this, the Educators prompted them to think about how they can make meals or their favourite food healthier, by just swapping to some healthy ingredients in the recipe.

Picture wall

We thought of creating a picture wall with the progression of the activities we have done from the beginning of the year. On top of the paper we have written the months and under which there are photos displayed of the activities we have been doing each week/month. This has caught a lot of attention from children and parents.

Sustainability vines

We had developed the health and cultural tree to display so to exhibit our sustainability project in different a way, we thought of making vines with our sustainability actions on vines and on the top we have clouds with goals where we would like to reach.

Multiple Intelligence theory by Dr. Howard Gardner:

After we had reshuffled our room, we started thinking about the theory that best describe our service and we realised that our beliefs, values and practices best reflects 'Multiple Intelligence Theory' where children are seen to have different strength. When we looked at each area that we had set up, it aligned well to multiple intelligence approach.

With this thinking we wanted to teach children that everyone is 'smart' (has strengths) in some way and some may resemble more than one intelligence. While we were putting up the poster, a child commented 'I am not very good at arts, I am not very creative but when she looked at the other intelligences she got very excited and said 'I am people smart because I love talking and I am also self smart because I love reading'. We had a number of discussions with children about respecting others talents and intelligences as everyone is different. See table below – a representation of how 'Multiple Intelligence Theory' was applied to our service's environment.

Our approach to applying Multiple Intelligence Theory into our environment and translated into child-centred language		
Arts & craft area	Picture smart	Spatial
Outdoor play	Body smart	Bodily-Kinaesthetic
Reading corner	Self smart	Intrapersonal
Home corner	People smart	Interpersonal
Building corner	Number/logic smart	Logical/Mathematical
Dance and drama area	Music smart	Musical
Gardening area	Nature smart	Naturalist
Displays (vines, trees, wall of positive etc.)	Word smart	Visual/Linguistically

Sports Program

Last year, children enjoyed doing different sport each term as a part of active after school care program. This year there is no longer funding available to have active after school care program for OSHC services so we decided to plan our own sports program. We started doing badminton every Monday. At first our focus was to teach children skills for badminton but it ended up being more a leisure sports experience then teaching-focused activity. Children had been looking forward to every Monday to do badminton that we set up in the hall. There were a lot of children seen playing badminton on the other days as well. We had a discussion at the staff meeting and the Educators felt that we need to introduce sports that are not very popular like frisbee or ten pin bowling and the focus need to be more leisure/fun based instead of teaching focused. We decided to change the sport each term.

Bulletin boards with more pictorial displays

We had all our felt boards filled with lots of information but it had too much writing which wasn't appealing for children or parents so we have started making them more visual which even younger children can have a look and be able to understand the message behind it.

Wall of positives

We had been thinking about ways we could collect children's and parent's comments about our program and activities. So we thought of creating a wall of positives where children and parents could write their comments. Although, we do appreciate parents and children's constructive or reflective feedback and they are always welcome to share that via suggestion box or email or talk to us in person, we wanted to encourage them to write what they liked and enjoyed about our program, activities and our centre. We were looking to celebrate the positive impact we make into our community. This wall is near the entrance where parents have to walk past to get to the parent area and port racks. We wanted to make it positive so that everyone one can enter and leave our centre on a positive note.

Writing and displaying reflections from Educators

We have always been looking for ways to display our reflections so that they are more visual to engage parents and children to read them. We tried journals to write reflections but we discovered they were not as engaging with parents as we hoped. We decided try to write daily reflections on a big piece of paper which will fit the whole week. We stuck this on the door next to the parents sign in and our area. The Educators still have an option of typing it up or handwriting it but it is displayed on a big piece of paper for the whole week. There have been a few parents and children have been stopping and reading the reflections which have increased Educators' confidence. There is a room for improvement in terms of the structure of the reflections by making the reflections more 'attractive' and 'visual' for parents and children so that they are drawn to reading them when entering the centre. As well as critically evaluating the learning experiences by thinking about what worked and what didn't work during the particular activity and how we can extend on the experience.

Findings

We have been receiving a positive verbal feedback from children and Educators about the changes we made in the room and our program. We surveyed the parents, Educators and collected feedback from children though this wall of positives. We also send regular emails and publish programming updates into our termly newsletter to communicate with the families on what we have been up to in terms of our program and to encourage them to give us feedback.

We had a great response from children, parents and Educators about the program. There is a lot room for improvement and a great potential to develop however now we have a strong foundation to build our program on. We will keep learning new ways and keep making changes as we go.

We developed a survey for parents and Educators to provide us their feedback in regards to our centre's programming over the last 12 months. The response we received back from Educators was overwhelming and has formed a great base for us to collaborate on. The findings were as per below:

Survey Question 1: What does holistic approach mean to you in terms of our programming and practices in OSHC?

The general feedback we received from Educators was that they believed a 'holistic approach' was to:

- Cater for all areas of development for children.
- Provide programs that encompass major aspects of child development, for example: literacy, numeracy, creativity, social interaction, and motor skills/kinetics.
- Engaging in children's learning experience's such as spiritual, emotional, cognitive and social development.
- Having daily set activities that all ages can take part in.

Question 2: How did you feel about the program 12 months ago?

- Some of the staff struggled with activity ideas for the older children.
- 'I personally feel the program was not as well executed as the program is now'.
- Not that many children were engaging in the planned activities because there was not a big enough variety.
- 'I feel the program was still at its early stages as we were not sure what was expected of us from My Time, Our Place'.
- 'I feel the program was not evolving enough and activities were not linked. Whereas now the program is linked week by week and it's great!'.

Question 3: What are your thoughts and feelings about the current program? Please explain this with the specifics of what and why?

- 'I feel the program now is continuing to evolve and adapt as children's interests change'.
- 'Still find it difficult sometimes coming up with ideas for each age group of children'.
- 'Having a monthly calendar displayed is great as it shows international events around the world, it may also be a good idea to add children's birthdays onto the calendar as well!'.
- 'I think our menu could be added to with possible different afternoon tea's two/three times per week. For example, instead of having just spreads on bread we could add meats and salad'.
- 'Having a range of different set activities incites more involvement from children than before when we just had a rotating program each week of roughly the same activities. I feel now the program is working well and I am finding more children are engaging in each activity'.

Question 4: How do you feel about being part of a project and program? Please explain how your project evolved, the current status, the goals and future recommendations or suggestions?

- 'I am happy with being part of a project, I feel like I have full control over how it is planning out and what type of improvements can be made. I am excited to watch this grow'.
- 'It was great to see progression with many of the younger children when being involved in the sports program. For example; their fine and gross motor skills'.
- 'I found it great that we were able to choose our own projects!'.

Question 5: Do you have any suggestions for our OSHC program?

- 'The only suggestion I have is trying to think of some new ways we can implement sustainability into our service'.
- 'I think more interactive group games may be a good idea to start implementing into the service, especially with the older children'.
- 'The program in our service is great and it is easy to see the amount of planning and organisation that goes into making such a good program. I do think it is important to

remember the variety of age difference when selecting activities. This may mean ensuring that the older kids whom especially come during vacation care have activities that are interesting and fun for them not only the younger children’.

- ‘In regards to our programming being based around a particular culture for each month, activities should be carefully considered and deemed appropriate in the eyes of the community from each corresponding culture. For example, lack of knowledge and/or research of culturally significant practices may inadvertently lead to cultural insensitivity’.

We choose some parents from St Catherine’s school and some from Wishart State School, some who have been attending our service from last 3 to 4 years and some from 1 or 2 years to have distinct responses. We received two survey’s back from parents and the feedback received were as per below:

Question 1: What changes have you noticed in our OSHC program in the past 12 months?

- ‘I have noticed there has been more interaction with ideas from children, especially the vacation care program’.
- ‘The dining tables have been added with plastic table cloths for a more homely feel’.
- ‘The notice boards and comments from kids are more noticeable’.
- ‘There appears to more structure in the physical set up of the OSHC room to separate areas based on activities being undertaken’.
- ‘The positivity board has been an inclusion that is very evident, by placing it near the bag area where that children need to walk past each day to bags as well as the parents walking past to sign their children in and out. It gives an opportunity to discuss the comments’.

Question 2: What has your child enjoyed in our new program?

- ‘When my children leave ASC for an evening, they talk most about different cultures and they seem fascinated by the fact that people in different countries do the same activities – even if they are performed slightly differently’.
- ‘I believe they are also quite pleased with the positivity board as it encourages their own positive thinking’.
- ‘I find the vacation care program great for my children, they love all of the incursions and excursions that are planned, especially movie day and rollerblading’.

Question 3: Do you have any ideas or suggestions for our OSHC program?

- ‘I think that there should be more activities for the older children to take part in’.
- ‘Continue to introduce different activities that keep the kids engaged, included and curious’.
- ‘Activities that help promote self confidence’.
- ‘Homework lessons would in invaluable’.

There are many areas in our program that can be further developed or utilised more such as the monthly calendar can be utilised by documenting activities happens each day etc.

Initially, Educators were hesitant to take on projects but as they realised that they will have the support they need then they were more confident. We received many comments such as 'it feels good to be part of the project and be doing something that is working and has made a difference into our program'.

It has been challenging to involve parents into planning and programming process. We have tried many ways such as emails, newsletter, wall of positives but the best way to gain their involvement and feedback is quick verbal conversation.

Involving the Educators in the planning process of the daily activities has been a struggle. We started using the Pinterest account thinking it might be easier for the Educators to pin the activities for each month however it has been hard to get them to use Pinterest. We might try and demonstrate how to use Pinterest to create their personal Pinterest account, follow our program and pin activities at the next staff meeting.

It has been a great learning journey for all of us. We have worked really well as a team and have achieved great results. It has been a very effective approach to increase Educators' responsibility and empowering them with the projects. The projects were dispersed based on Educator's interest, skills and choice. The Educators have grown in their role and have built their confidence over a period of time.

Through undertaking this action research we have learned the cycle of planning, implementing, evaluating and reflecting. Our program has evolved greatly over the last 9 months. We have tried and tested various things and some worked some did not work. There are now processes in place to ensure the program is always going to keep changing and evolving as the needs and the interests of the service change. The most prominent outcome we have achieved through this project is Educator's involvement via 'projects'. Educators have been able to bring their expertise and knowledge into practice in order to support our program and children's learning.

This project has met our service's specific goals and needs. So the findings and impact may or may not work for other services. However, we have demonstrated when Educators are empowered to develop and build activities and experiences around a strong vision for the program, like what we have fostered around cultures and community then programming can be built and altered as per individual service needs.

This project encouraged us to be critical and engage in research to make the program effective and beneficial to our children, families, community and service. It has been a focus articulated in our quality improvement plan to develop a program that is more responsive to our service's needs.

Acknowledgment

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“Exploring pedagogical documentation as a tool for enriching OSHC Educators’ reflection and inquiry as professional development”

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Abstract: Our Action Research focused on the importance and exploration of documentation in OSHC. We analysed the very purpose of documentation – wanting it to have an authentic meaning and utility – not being done as a mere requirement under the National Quality Standards (NQS) but truly understanding the different types of documentation, how to critically reflect and how we as various stakeholders can benefit and learn through the different processes of documentation to support better outcomes for children. We found that the insights provided through quality documentation support the growth of our community of learners as we reflected on ourselves, our practice, the children, families, their strengths and needs. This process, we found, enhances the quality of education and care we provide to the children attending our service.

This action research enabled us to pair an understanding of ‘quality’ as determined/measured by National Quality Standards with ‘meaning making’ documentation described by Moss as ‘contextualised interpretations of actual practices and actual environments’ within a Reggio Emilia approach. As Educators we have varying ideas of quality, as do children, parents, management, and governing bodies that oversee the service we provide. Each comes with their own knowledge, understanding and accountabilities that will impact on their view of what ‘quality’ is.

The research has therefore enabled us to really begin following a journey of combining these elements of quality while working out how to gain an understanding of what the children and families need from us to equip children both now and for the future. This action research project confirmed to us the power of pedagogical documentation as we engaged with raised awareness and spirited exploration in this process of experimentation and dialogue. Thanks to action research, we took the time and created a space dedicated to talk about documentation as a social, collaborative, and interactive approach to professional development.

Introduction

Since the advent of My Time, Our Place (MTOP), there has been a great focus on using reflective practice as an important professional tool for OSHC Educators. The Educators Guide to MTOP tells us that ongoing reflective practice is a crucial component in our commitment to continuing professional development and better outcomes for children and communities (The Guide: Educators My Time, Our Place—Educators’ Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia, 2011). At our centre, our team value this ideal of lifelong learners and as a group of committed Educators we have always engaged in reflections of different types to support better outcomes for children and for our own personal and professional growth. However, we wanted to evaluate if our system is effective and if we have been able to grasp the richness of our reflections through

documentation that makes visible and meaningful the learning processes of children, Educators and other stakeholders at our centre. Hence, we entered the action research project with three questions:

How can our OSHC team engage in planning and documentation that is meaningful, useful and doable?

How can we provide Educators with opportunities to experience the benefits of pedagogical documentation and reflective practice for the individual, children, community, team and organization we work with?

How can we maximise our team's leadership capital?

Framework and Literature on Documentation

The Action Research project has been an interesting journey and our Educators are open to the challenge. We all have embraced this exploration of pedagogical documentation as a tool for enriching our reflection and inquiry as professionals in the sector. We decided to look into the pedagogical documentation model developed by the early childhood institutions of Reggio Emilia in Italy. Reggio Emilia approached pedagogical documentation as collecting and organizing written observations, transcripts of children's conversations, children's work, and still photographs and video recordings that illustrate a process, all of which then, can be used to collegial Educators' interpretations of children's thinking into tangible artefacts for individual and collaborative reflective inquiry (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Kocher, 2(K) 4; Rinaldi, 2006). The word collaboration became a key component of our documentation practice.

Malaguzzi (1998) founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, stated that "*...professional growth comes partly through individual effort, but in a much richer way through discussion with colleagues, parents, and experts*" (p.73). It was Malaguzzi's concept that has guided our journey of documentation as a community process with a combination of individual commitment to self-reflection and a keen desire to share reflections in a collaborative and trusting environment where everyone's opinions matter.

We were also inspired by Wien, Guyevsky, & Berdoussis, (2011) who put it beautifully, "*pedagogical documentation stops the train of standardized expectations and slows down our thinking processes to consider some topic with exquisite care.*" A relational approach to documentation has certainly invited us to slow down, to reflect on and understand the deeper meaning and value of every interaction between people and within ourselves as lifelong learners as well as our right to take the time to reflect on practice when necessary. In this process, we are asked to be truly present with children and families, engaged in a deep dialogue and action. This process of careful observation and trusted sharing has challenged us to listen closely to children's understandings about their lives and about the world they perceive. We have also learnt that documentation is not a 'set-in-stone' process but a flexible and organic journey that enriches the quality of communication and interaction that exists between stakeholders.

Pedagogical documentation involves the development of shared understandings about children's learning, with a variety of stakeholder groups. It therefore acknowledges and affirms the diversity of these stakeholder group's understandings of worthwhile learning.

We also have to acknowledge that in current times, the political importance of Educator's use of pedagogical documentation for accountability is crucial for the assessment of learning and evaluation of programs. In this way, Educators can publicise the value of education and care services for children and society.

The present day emphasis on pedagogical documentation seeks to understand the whole child in context, acknowledging a diversity of perspectives and interpretations. Acknowledging the diversity of Educator's documentation with a variety of technological tools, as well as children's own voiced ideas. In this way pedagogical documentation can assist the development of shared understandings of children within the social, historical and cultural contexts which influence their co-construction of learning, thinking and knowledge. Through openly sharing pedagogical documentation Educators, children and stakeholders all become learners.

Within the Reggio Emilia centres themselves, beautifully displayed pedagogical documentation on walls and shelves serves several functions including (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993; Gandini, 1993; Katz, 1993):

- contributing to the aesthetic awareness of children and adults
- allowing adults and children to revisit experiences
- demonstrating publicly the creativity and competence of young children
- making public the thinking and learning process of young children

Pedagogical documentation in all its forms is the essential lynchpin for recording and reflecting on past learning, from multiple perspectives, via multiple "languages" (Malaguzzi 100 languages of children) as children are encouraged to use multiple languages, (Drawings, sculptures, dramatic play, writing to represent their theories and ideas). This process ensures that present and future programmes retain meaning and relevance to children's learning. The acknowledgement of diverse "languages" for thinking and communicating has important implications for valuing and respecting diversity in any place or culture. Multiple languages can facilitate communication between multiple groups from children, to parents, school and other stakeholders.

In Reggio Emilia, the public face of pedagogical documentation keeps parents, families and all citizens informed of early childhood practices. Hence, we aimed to inform and communicate with a wide range of stakeholders through pedagogical documentation, so they can see and understand the value and role of OSHC programs in the education and well-being of children. In this way pedagogical documentation legitimises OSHC programmes at a local, political and macro level.

Actions and Findings

At the beginning of the journey we had mixed approaches to documentation but usually these were not applied consistently. We frantically took photos that later on could be collaged and decorated by children and Educators in our visual diary. This type of documentation lacked richness and had limited to no connection with Educators' reflections on pedagogy. A couple of Educators did learning stories to show to families and to explore pedagogical approaches. We also developed more elaborated documents like the Inclusion Support Plan and the Quality Improvement Plan that have overarching planning goals for

improvement. Alas these more elaborated documents are primarily worked on by the coordination team pulling together Educator's ideas with more specific input of a few Educators with an interest in inclusion.

In our first action research cycle the recurrent worry was having the time to create thoughtful and meaningful documentation. The second worry was how to use the abundant amount of information that we generated. At first the intention was to give Educators plenty of choice and options around documentation. As a result, in the beginning we developed several formats for Educators to use weekly and a tracker form so we could see what people were doing. The feedback after several weeks was that people perceived the process somehow compulsory or forced so they were doing documentation more as a requirement, hence the act became mechanical and shallow. Educators at this point in time felt that they were not sure what we wanted from them and found hard to grasp how to put themselves in the picture and see that documentation is not only a reflection about the child but also of us the Educators, as lifelong learners.

In the documentation meetings people expressed feeling satisfied with some of our processes and at a loss with others (forms, learning stories) but continued experimenting and developing ways to document children's learning that worked for them. Educators agreed that the best way they felt documenting was verbal sharing. In conversations, the majority of Educators expressed they felt comfortable sharing not only what they do well at OSHC but also their struggles. This lead us to update the role of Coordinator/Assistant Coordinator so we could encourage Educators to document and provide the time and the tools to build their capacity to create more in depth reflections. We started sending the professional development bulletin to Educators every week with information to keep them abreast in early childhood education knowledge, including readings about pedagogical documentation. When we engaged in conversations with Educators we wrote about the event and it was placed in the handover notes for multiple uses. We tried to encourage connections to MTOP in all our conversations, this being probably the side Educators felt less at easy with.

To demonstrate the learning that was happening within the environment the children's work was made visible through wall displays, daily A3 photo dairy, children's displayed pieces of work, Emailed newsletters to families, and children's portfolios. However, we have learned through this action research process that pedagogical documentation, encompasses much more than these visible forms. We wanted our documentation to make visible and meaningful the interweaving of actions of children, parents, members of the community, school, Educators and the MTOP framework. This approach has made us aware of the misdirected intentions when we create crammed walls with artefacts of the program. We realised that the majority of these displays had no analytical explanation and explicit linkage to neither critical reflection nor theoretical frames. These colourful products created a sense of busyness and clutter more than being an insightful pedagogical reflection. At present we have recognised that these displays which sometimes accompany children's artwork do not invite the sort of questioning and understanding in observers that enriched pedagogical documentation should provoke.

We have recently carried out a survey to collect data and understand how Educators are journeying with documentation. Educators were asked about their perceptions of documentation on themselves as Educators, also on families and children. The majority stated that it was crucial for the team to be aware of the happenings at OSHC so we could plan ahead and support children's progress. Interestingly, there is a common notion of people believing that documentation is crucial to support children's wellbeing especially to support behaviour improvement. Everyone agreed that documentation is important for all the stakeholders involved at OSHC. They found documentation useful to inform parents about their children's activities and behaviour so we could have a more holistic approach. Educators were asked how we could present our reflections in a way that makes children's learning more visible to children themselves, to Educators, families, school and other stakeholders. The majority agreed that having the handover notes system was really useful with one interesting comment "*people think that lots of documentation is not acknowledge or used purposely*". This comment may need to be explored to continue refining what we think is useful documentation and documentation for the sake of it. Everyone mentioned children's books as a potential way to engage children in documenting their thoughts, ideas, wishes and feelings. Many Educators mentioned photos but interestingly photos is something we do a lot but we end up not using much as people claim there is no time to put this together.

When asked about the role of families in documentation, everyone agreed that conversations, requests, feedback from families expectations needs to be more visible to all Educators in the form of emails and as an added column to the handover notes (a column has been added with parents/coordinators feedback). People also asked to communicate with families via email and SMS to, get their feedback via small surveys at the end of the term and with the use of feedback boxes.

Educators were also asked about the role of children in documenting, they all thought that it was important to have spaces to share their thoughts and ideas. They wanted children to use more their portfolios and use photos in their journaling. The use of a board where children can add their ideas for the following week was also mentioned.

When asked about the role of school in documentation Educators agreed that the school should have a more proactive approach, this feedback will be taken to our monthly meeting with the school. Educators want the school to email us about any events or happenings that may impact on the well-being of children. We do share information with the school and teachers but it is limited by how busy the school staff can be to deliver their messages.

We have found that all along our team understands the critical importance of talk in the process of pedagogical documentation; it is then how to make these reflections and their leading actions visible to others, therefore the following is the plan of action. The Coordinator/Assistant Coordinator will continue to encourage Educators to do handover notes every day, having a debriefing session with the whole group at the beginning of each session and individual/group debriefing sessions at the end of the shift. Each Educator will do handover notes on a weekly basis, recording what he/she assesses to be an important event in the child's or Educator's learning process. This information needs to be provided free of bias, written in simple language and stated within a 'strength based approach'. This

information is shared at the end of the week with the whole team via email so all Educators have the chance to read everyone's notes. This information will also support our planning talks, and may be taken to staff meetings if important patterns are identified or an important learning experience can come out of this process. Handover notes are always updated and may be also shared with the parents and the school when needed. Educators and Coordinators check for patterns, strengths and needs and create a sort of summary that can be provided to different stakeholders according to relevance. This is the most common way to document and share the happenings at OSHC between Educators. Handover notes are also useful when parents ask for our feedback to share with health professionals or when the school wants our feedback to develop their action plan for a child or group of children.

We also can write specific reports about a child and a targeted program (including inclusion support plans) if we want to support children's specific needs. Emails between school teachers and OSHC coordination or parents and OSHC will continue to be done according to supports in place for different children. We are aiming to archive these emails in an organised manner for easy access for the team as well as evidence for our A&R.

Time has been allocated for an Educator and the Educational Leader to collate handover notes and compose meaningful and useful summaries. These summaries will be shared with Educators every Friday and some may be shared with families at the beginning or end of a shift or at a meeting if we require more in depth discussion or plans of action to support better outcomes for children. Another Educator has been keen to gather children's feedback to planning for the following week at least twice a week. This person will also have cameras ready for the sessions, print photos at the end of session and will approach all Educators to access their feedback on printed photo stories. These photos then will be displayed in the notice board and collaged in our visual diary. We will continue sending our term's OSHC newsletter to families and our monthly 'food for thought' that is sent to families to let them know about resources and programs available in the community, that may support children and families.

We are experimenting with our wall displays, how to present children's work respectfully and aesthetically, enabling children to reflect and extend on the learning they have gained through their investigation, as well as opening up to other significant learning opportunities. We are still hesitant but we aim to offer wall displays that raise parents' awareness about what children have been learning and are exploring at OSHC. We hope that this type of documentation challenge parents' preconceptions about OSHC, so they can become more inquisitive towards what their children are learning in a play-based environment. We have also added a big banner with the days of the week and care types. Children can write in sticky notes and place in the banner what they would like to do the following week as well as during the holiday's period.

Every Friday, Educators have the opportunity to send their feedback to plan the following week, with observations about what children have been doing across the week, interests, strengths and struggles. They also provide children's ideas and their own to scaffold learning according to what has been observed. We are also aiming to have more frequent staff meetings so we can evaluate our program and refine future goals. In our yarning sessions,

we collaborate to formulate propositions of what may happen the following week and sometimes longer term goals. In meetings we engage in questions like 'How does this all fit together? How does it link to MTOP principles, practices and outcomes? What does it tell me about the being belonging and becoming of the child? What he loves? Who he is or wants to be? What he is good at and what he wants and needs? Where do I fit in this picture as facilitator? How can we promote positive societal change? From information gathered in our observations, information parents provide and information given by children, we then formulate a hypothesis based on the knowledge we have gathered of individual children, and group dynamics. Collectively, we then prepare flexible objectives which are fitting with the children's interests, strengths and needs as well as goals for societal change (e.g. challenging gender biases). This process is greatly influenced by the thoughts and ideas of children, parents, Educators, our philosophy, the MTOP framework and when relevant, the school.

Lastly to consistently do and analyse documentation Educators need the time and space to regularly and systematically review photos, jottings, anecdotal observations, learning stories, samples of the child's work, information shared by the family, access new knowledge and other information. We have adapted the roles of the Educational Leader and Coordinator so they can empower Educators to document, yarn, plan and evaluate.

Conclusion

Through participant observation, informal group and individual meetings, and conversations we collected data to explore and confirm our understandings about how Educators interpreted and used documentation. In this way it could be analysed for further reflection and add to our action research cycle. Our initial research was to explore the meaningful and efficient documentation process. As we reflected and discovered insights into our practice and documentation further ideas were generated. These emerging research ideas became part of the action research process as Educators' explored documentation using various tools. It was noticed and Educators expressed all along, the greater importance of shared dialogue and how they do all appreciate this as a way to keep up to date with what is happening. Our insights from this research have been:

- Everyone's' opinions are important and people listen to them
- Several views of an issue may give better solutions and consequently better outcomes
- At our OSHC the structural constraints of centre life made it sometimes difficult for documentation to be done
- Educators need time to keep current with their planned written observations especially if photos were used, with the result that the Educators frequently fell behind. This was a recurrent and prominent issue in both formal and informal interviews with Educators. Written observations seemed to be a chore that some Educators seldom felt on top of because of all the perceived constraints

Pictorial records of events whilst nice to look at, were time consuming and did not provide a rich understanding of some of the complex learning that takes place at OSHC. This could however be an area to revisit with increased access to technology which could see an incorporation of videos/photos quickly to support and enhance our observations/children's own reflections and input and extensions of their own experiences.

For our Educators the documentation process was about talking, listening to and recording ideas/opinions/feedback/deconstructing events to learn and move forward with children's ideas and families interests at the forefront of decision making. The next step is to explore ways of connecting theory with practice. Through summing up what has been gathered and reviewing these events through different theoretical lenses we will support Educators to gain greater insight into children's relationships, cultural contexts, interactions, learning styles, dispositions, understanding of concepts and interests. Now how can we engage Educators to draw on educational theories and knowledge during the process? This is a question that we are still continuing to explore.

The process of this Action Research project has demonstrated how our learning in itself can be guided by this model of 'Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect' and matches well with the Quality Improvement Plan template for service improvement and strategic planning. The way ahead for us now would be to continue using these cycles to gain a clearer understanding of children and families expectations and desires for outcomes at St Stephen's OSHC. What do they regard as quality education and care and together we can work on this definition – with Educators and policy makers contributing current research and findings to help support the children to become who they were gifted to be within the existing world and ready for the future society to come.

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“How can a Socio-emotional skill development program for 4-6 year olds improve behaviour and learning outcomes in an OSHC setting?”

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Abstract: This research aims to develop an OSHC program based on social and emotional learning (SEL). A SEL program has the potential to target challenging behaviours which interfere with the successful running of a service due to the time Educators take to support and manage relationships between children. It also increases the opportunity for children to self-manage social interactions, be independent and foster emotional development. This action research has demonstrated a successful development of a culture of shared language and strategies based on Denham and Brown’s Social-Emotional Learning Model; self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, responsible decision making and relationship skills has supported children to develop and maintain prosocial skills.

Introduction

During Term 2 2014 it was observed and noted by Educators of the service that there was significant opportunity to develop the positive social interaction and emotional wellbeing of the children attending the service. Educators observed the relationships between older and younger children were, at times, challenging. Particular children would demonstrate interactions with younger children that were interpreted to be manipulative and controlling. Some children would display positive attention and affection on the condition that these (younger) children complied with what was being asked. When these children didn’t comply, positive interaction and affection were withdrawn. Educators felt these and other behaviours were reducing the agency of the younger children of the service.

Educators believed this dynamic impacted the environment of the service. Much of the Educator’s time and energy was focused on reactive behaviour management. Initial interventions had limited success at creating long-term change in behaviour and relationships. The intention was to be proactive and impact the social and emotional wellbeing of all children. In particular, the researchers were aiming at equipping the younger children with a range of strategies to foster their development of positive social interactions and emotional development. The researchers believed if we intervened with experiences that were aimed at social and emotional learning children would be independent in establishing positive group cohesion, fostering an environment of a safe and independent learning environment.

It was recognized that developing a social and emotional learning (SEL) program, addressing the social and emotional knowledge and skills for the cohort of youngest children would help them to identify and cope with the difficult social situations they were experiencing. In addition, the researchers anticipate this approach would equip them with the skills to describe how they feel in social situations by building their emotional vocabulary and also to give them opportunity to

discuss their feelings with others openly, thus encouraging their sense of agency in social situations.

To address this social and emotional learning, Educators developed themed units to rebuild the self-worth of the children in the service. The first themed unit was to develop a sense of pride in themselves and their culture. The second themed unit was based around developing the skills of friendship. The units focused on the introduction of tools for pro-social behaviour and emotional self-regulation and could be seen to have positively impacted many of the children by the end of the year. We received comments from parents of children of all ages that the concept of 'bucket filling' had been particularly noticeable in the home environment. A positive change was seen in a particular child's interactions with others, as well as her resilience to manage her emotions when play was not successful.

The outcome of introducing social and emotional tools in 2014 led us to realise the impact that this learning could have on the service if introduced early in the year. The Educators recognized the potential benefits of developing a series of lessons to build, self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills. It is believed that time and effort put into developing skills such as developing positive self-concept, and understanding differences in each other improves the culture of the group of children.

It is the purpose of this research project to investigate whether there will be an observable improvement in positive interactions between children attending OSHC as a result of the implementation of a SEL program. It is anticipated that further benefits such as a reduction in time spent managing and supporting challenging interactions in young students would also occur.

Theoretical frameworks and literature

"Mental health professionals who work with the young have long been acutely aware of how social and emotional experience profoundly affects and even determines children's ability to learn and develop" (Cohen, 1999).

The 'My Time, Our Place' Framework (DEEWR, 2011) highly values social skills and refers to social development throughout the document from principles to practice. Outcome 2 - Children are connected with, and contribute to their world states: *"Friendships are an important feature of children's relationships and assist children in building social capital and resilience. Children are mindful of the way others interact with them and they develop understandings that their actions or responses affect how others feel or experience belonging."* Outcome 2.3 Children become aware of fairness states:

- *become aware of ways in which people are included or excluded from physical and social environments*
- *develop the ability to recognise unfairness and bias and the capacity to act with compassion and kindness*

- *are empowered to make choices and problem solve to meet their needs in particular contexts*
- *think critically about fair and unfair behaviour*
- *understand and evaluate ways in which texts and media construct identities and create stereotypes*

It is the experience of the researchers that taking time to develop understanding of how the child learns and functions socially in the classroom setting by using tools such as Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Test, VARK Questionnaire (initially developed in 1987 by Neil Fleming, Christchurch, New Zealand), personality trait exercises and social skills role play (New Zealand Curriculum 2007) leads to greater understanding of themselves, and improved understanding of how others might behave or react differently to them. This view is supported by research, it has been noted by Kokkinos and Kipritsi (2012) *"that the creation of a positive school climate through teaching emotional regulation, empathetic concern, and social skills enhances students' ability to negotiate interpersonal problems, to develop and maintain positive relationships as well as experience a sense of community and sharing"*.

Durmusoglu Saltali & Deniz (2010) reference Berk 1994 *" that for children who do not have enough emotional skills an education program should be planned beginning from preschool education institutions to make those children gain emotional skills."* The most important phase in children's emotional skills development is between the ages of 4 and 8 years old. This is the best time for children to identify emotional clues, and learn causes and effects of behavioural outputs of emotions.

It was thought that the younger children in the service would benefit more significantly from an SEL program. This thinking is from both research and experience of Educators needing to spend more time supporting the youngest children in the service to support their emotions and relationships with others. Kidsmatter, an Australian early childhood mental health initiative, has identified developing children's social and emotional skills as a key component of their framework. Early Childhood Australia acknowledge *"children who have good feelings about themselves and about others and who know how to express their emotions and relate to others will be more effective learners, achievers and citizens."* Younger children who find interacting with peers difficult tend to have a negative sense of self-worth and this in turn can isolate them further (Kidsmatter, 2014).

The prep children aged 4-5 years old who participated in 2014 activities building their self-worth and empathy for others would be included in the 2015 project (as Year One children) to act as a 'booster' to further embed the learning. Hammond, Westhues and Hanbidge (2009) have found evidence of the short term effectiveness of programs intended to enhance emotional functioning and reduce behaviour problems, and the maintenance of these gains one to three years after participating in such programs. Although they found there are few studies that assessed the impacts of booster programs, several authors have suggested that a booster program might promote maintenance of gains otherwise likely to fade (Baer 1989; Donaldson et

al 200; Furey & Basili, 1988; Gilham & Reivich, 1999; Langinvaino, 1986). Their findings suggest *“Children who participated in the booster program demonstrated a significant increase in emotional awareness, emotional expressiveness and were able to name more calming strategies than the contrast group”*

Method

A previously stated, in order for this series of intentionally planned lessons to have maximum impact, it is proposed to target the younger members attending OSHC as this is where a larger proportion of time is spent managing relationships and where the literature supports that it is most effective. The older children were included in key lessons and were supported to develop as mediators for the younger children at a later date. During lesson times, the older children were be led by a consistent Educator to develop team building and problem solving skills through play.

Prior to starting the series of lessons, it was proposed that data would be collected in the form of observations, behaviour sampling, a sampling of Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Child Short Form, and the completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires by Educators and willing parents. Qualitative data such as comments from Educators, parents and classroom teachers would also be included.

Our SEL program for the prep and year one children in this OSHC setting develops understanding of emotions based on Denham and Brown’s Social-Emotional Learning Model;

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Social awareness
4. Responsible decision Making
5. Relationship skills

There is a common thought that developing students' social and emotional competence is essential for academic and life success. The Denham & Brown Social-Emotional Learning Model is used successfully in schools by American based organisation CASEL -Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning.

“Without social and emotional skills children cannot learn as effectively and cannot make the most of their learning. A child who is afraid in the classroom or in the schoolyard or bringing fears from home cannot concentrate on learning. A child who has not learned to consider others cannot use what they learn to make effective negotiations in the real world.” (Linke, 2011)

It was anticipated that an OSHC based SEL program based on Denham and Brown’s model (Denham & Brown, 2010; Denham, 2006) children would build up their sense of self-worth, their understanding of others, emotional regulation, resilience through direct teaching, play and

reflection thus reducing negative interactions with peers by children managing their emotions, solving their own problems and seeking help after using a range of basic strategies.

Short 20 minute lessons for prep and year one children that included 'circle time' sharing the focus skill, games, role-play and activities to practice the focus skill and reflection time to feedback on their thoughts and successes. It is hoped that by developing social and emotional competence pro-social behaviours would become embedded and allow older children in the centre who have developed as Mentors to help remind/ support the prep and year one children when they struggle socially at OSHC.

The program started in Week 3 after we spent time watching and gathering information on how the younger children at OSHC interact and manage their feelings during before and after school care.

An overview of the program content

Self-Awareness

The goal was to build up emotional vocabulary so that children are able to recognize and name their own feelings.

- They looked at pictures of people feeling different emotions (happy, sad, confused, angry, surprised, bored, disgusted and frightened) and they named the emotions in our own language eg. Angry= cranky, grumpy, upset...
- They experimented with the emotions and role played a time when they were feeling that feeling eg. Happy –playing and splashing in water at the pool in the holidays. Their partners tried to guess the feeling.
- They played Emotions Memory –matching different faces & emotions on small cards.
- They looked at images of people feeling different emotions and talked about times when they felt like this.
- They learnt about how to say how they feel in an assertive way not accusing people. We say “**I feel...** (angry) **because ...**(I was working hard on this and you bumped me)...
- They learnt about ‘filling up buckets’ or being a ‘bucket filler’. They watched the youtube story How full is your bucket? –For kids www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5R6-2m_qHk and then made kind messages or pictures to put in the ‘buckets’ on our tree.

Self-Regulation

The goal was to identify what emotions we can control, and what we can do when we are out of control.

- They looked at an emotional thermometer and discussed what things made them feel
 - Calm
 - Annoyed
 - Grumpy
 - Angry -Out of Control

- They discussed whether it is OK/healthy to feel annoyed or angry –and agreed that it is healthy but not if you are out of control because that’s when you get in trouble.
- They started learning some strategies to help them stay in control of their emotions
 - They learned to ask themselves the question “**How bad is it?**” as they are starting to feel negative thoughts –annoyed, angry, sad...so they can start to choose strategies to help them stay in control and make positive choices.
 - They learned **Balloon breathing** - mindfulness relaxation techniques using www.smilingmind.com.au/ which has a guide voice to follow as they learned to breathe and concentrate on how their body feels as it relaxes.
 - **Happy Thinking** – developing positive self talk by using Strength Cards for Kids where they identified that they all have strengths but not everyone has the same strengths, and watching, listening and singing to Elmo’s Happy Thoughts Song on www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-ob8sr9ZX0 and dancing to ‘Happy’ by Farrell.
 - They learned a great way to solve a small problem is to **Walk Away**. We discussed get a drink of water so we can move away and think more clearly, taking a moment to play with someone else, do some Balloon Breathing, think some Happy Thoughts...
 - They also learned if they have used some of these strategies that they might need to make sure that they tell someone how they are feeling so that person has a chance to stop. They can do this assertively by saying **I feel...when you...**
 - If it really is a problem and they are feeling very upset they might need to **Get Help** by telling someone, and asking for help to solve the problem.

Social Awareness

- They learned about ‘Bucket Dipping’ (making another person’s emotional ‘bucket’ emptied), how that feels when it happens to them and talked about how it would feel for others.
- They reviewed the Feelings cards and discussed the facial features of each feeling, and then they made faces using Kinetic sand showing their ability to recognize how others might be feeling.
- They discussed what can make people feel sad or upset, and how it can be different reasons for different people.
- They discussed what they can do if they see someone who looks sad, confused, upset... by talking about what makes them feel better when they feel that way.
- They shared how they feel when they have helped or been kind to someone else –that filling someone else’s bucket also help to fill their own bucket.

Responsible Decision Making

- They were asked “what is the difference between *Telling on someone who is making you upset* and *Asking for help to deal with someone who is making you upset*” to identify the importance of using strategies to solve their own problems and also start to decide when they need to get help with a problem.

- They played 'What if...' where the 6 strategies were laid out on the floor and they were given a scenario which might challenge their Emotional Thermometer such as "someone calls you a mean name..." or "you see someone being hurt in the playground...". The children decided which strategy they would decide to use first to cope with the problem.

Relationship Skills

- They learned about 'How to be a great friend' by;
 - Asking people to play
 - Smiling, saying Hi, saying nice things
 - Sharing with others
 - Being polite
- They watched 'For the birds' <https://vimeo.com/61971077> and discussed what strategies they would use in different parts of the story.
- They watched Elmo and Mila Kunis talk about how to 'include' others www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTXzYX0rrPE

Findings

At the time of planning this research we were seeking a novel approach to our data collecting methodology. The data analysed from SDQ suggested no effect. The researcher suggested this is likely due to the strengths a difficulties questionnaire not being a relevant measure of the impact of the program as the children sampled with the SDQ presented no significant areas of difficulties, the SDQ was not useful to record movement in this area. The SDQ did suggest improvement in the prosocial behaviours of the children sampled, however the data collected from this subset of the SDQ was not robust enough to inform the research. It was decided, due to the data collected not informing any of the actions taken within the research and the lack of benefit to the research to abandon this measure.

It is the belief of this researcher that the effectiveness of the SEL program is in the increase of prosocial behaviours due to the promotion of empathy training in conjunction with the self-regulation strategies taught. The evidence collected from parents highlighted a noticed change in behaviours outside of the school and OSHC setting. These reflections indicate an increase in emotional vocabulary and also in prosocial behaviours such as increased empathy, an ability to use emotional regulation and problem solving strategies. Examples of parent's observations to the SEL program are outlined in the table below.

Table 1. Parent observations of the OSHC SEL program

"I have noticed a big improvement in this (regulating emotions especially when getting upset). (My child) would previously yell over her siblings during an argument but now waits for them to speak then says her piece"

"(My child) is more vocal about how she feels and what is upsetting her."

"(My child) will seek out help to resolve issues with her siblings rather than continue an argument."

"(My child) now almost always tells me how she is feeling. She is getting really good at naming the emotion too. She is just not sure what to do when feeling a strong emotion."

"She likes to tell us a lot when her bucket is almost 'empty' ...I feel this has really helped (my child) understand more about other peoples' feelings as well as her own. Including how quickly buckets can be emptied and how not to take something mean a friend said so seriously because it could be because they may have had a bad day and most of the bucket had been emptied throughout the day and she might have just been unlucky to empty the last drop from the bucket."

Comments made by teachers indicate that the prosocial behaviours from the OSHC SEL program are impacting behaviour at school also. Examples of observations are outlined in the table below.

Table 2. Teacher observations of the OSHC SEL program

"I have noticed improvement in (this child's) behaviour especially in her ability to regulate emotions. She is better able to cope with disappointments and doesn't get upset and withdraw as much."

"(This child's) ability to successfully join in games and interact with a range of children has improved over the last term."

"(This child) seems to have found a new friendship circle which is great."

"This child) used to simply refuse to participate in activities she didn't want to do but now she gives everything a try (occasionally with a roll of eyes –but even this is less often)."

"His ability to share has improved greatly."

"(This child) particularly used to throw little tantrums when he didn't get his way and I haven't seen that this semester."

School AP-RE commented: "Recently I had reason to have a chat with (Year 2) when he was having an issue with throwing rubbers in his classroom. I used a thinking sheet to help (him) reflect on his action and his choices. I was impressed that when I asked him what other options he had to deal with his frustration (rather than throwing rubbers), he immediately listed off the options you'd been working on in OSHC. I was particularly pleased that he was able to explain each option to me when pressed for further details."

To further the evidence of the impact of this SEL program the following two case studies highlight the impact of this SEL program on children. Observations have been included from Educators, Teachers and Parents. Case study details are outlined in the table below.

Table 3. Case Study of SEL program impact

Case Study – Child A

In 2014 Child A, as a Prep, struggled to form friendships. The observed social interactions of Child A at OSHC were seen as controlling - She would try to be the one 'calling the shots' with other children. She was also displaying a lack of resilience, when play did not go the way she had hoped Child A would have a negative interaction with the other child in question.

Despite the support of Educators using techniques such as active listening, and reflective questioning (based on the Method of Shared Concern) and turn taking (based on Restorative Justice) issues continued to present.

Following the introduction of the SEL program there has been an observable change in the behaviour, social interaction and emotional resilience of Child A. Educators, Teachers and Parent have all reported and impact, these are outlined below:

Parent of Child A commented: "Thank you for assisting (my child) in recognizing and using her thought processes and strategies when she interacts with other children. I have noticed she is now able to handle certain situations better than she did previously. She is also proud of herself for using her 'strategies'."

Teachers of Child A have noted an overall improvement in resilience in the classroom, and noticeable reduction in the amount of 'meltdowns' where (Child A) is unable to self-regulate.

Educators noted that Child A is able to calm down and state her feelings clearly to solve social problems. She is more willing to use strategies before seeking help from Educators and responds positively to feedback about her ability to choose combinations of strategies.

Educators have also noticed an increase in social involvement. Child A is able to play with others successfully for longer periods of time, and can negotiate play rather than trying to control it.

Case Study – Child B

Child B in his prep year had formed strong and at times intense social relationship with older children. It was observed that he was being coddled by the older girls to a point where it was impacting his agency. It was recognized by Educators that this was not a healthy relationship and measures were put in place to support Child B to make independent choices however this proved to continue to be a challenging. Child B participated in the SEL program offered in OSHC. In recent times there has been a noted impact on the development of Child B's assertiveness.

The Parents of Child B highlighted this in the following comment: "I don't know what you have been doing lately, but (my child) is so much more assertive. If he doesn't want to do something he now tells us!"

Teachers commented: "(This child) is still only playing within his friendship circle but is able to ask for help to sort out his problems."

Educators have noticed that although Child B is still developing strategies to make independent choices, he is using self-regulation strategies effectively, is more often stating his feelings when he is left out, and is seeking help when he is being dominated in play.

The Educators in the service feel that there was a dramatic improvement in the sharing and problem solving behaviours of the children in Prep and Year One during the time that the lessons were being taught. Over time those behaviours have waned. This is likely due to the increased level of familiarity with the other children at the OSHC. Children at OSHC service tend to develop sibling-like relationships with each other and familiarity can lead to changes in behaviour patterns. The SEL program is designed to build shared language and strategies which once in place are easily referred back to and used as a behaviour guidance strategy for Educators. This has been the case in this service. By the start of Term 3 many of the children were no longer using the language or strategies consistently but a week of fun games and activities to refresh the concepts has quickly improved the tone of the service and the interactions between the children.

Conclusion

It is believed that the development of a SEL program which includes many fun learning-through-play opportunities based on Denham and Brown's Social-Emotional Learning Model creates a strong argument for SEL programs to be included at the beginning of each year. In our OSHC we have been able to build a calm and kind culture where, in our everyday programming, empathy is encouraged and Educators are able to draw children's attention back to the strategies and use them as a reflection tool when there are altercations between children. I suggest other services may also benefit from this level of shared language and understanding.

To extend our research into SEL program in OSHC we are looking at the effectiveness of maintaining the program each year to serve as both an introduction of the concepts and also as a booster for Year One children. In this way knowledge and understanding will build over time, dramatically reducing time Educators spend dealing with negative interactions with children while also building self-belief and self-protection capabilities in all children. In order to gather support of the effectiveness of an OSHC based Social and Emotional Learning program it would be recommended to implement and review this program in more services in 2016 to gather further evidence of this approach.

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