**The role of the educational leader in supporting equity and diversity in practice**

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| Role of early childhood professionals in promoting equity and diversity |

The [Quality Improvement Research Project](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/quality-improvement-research-project-2019.PDF) identified what many of us know from firsthand experience:

Effective educational leadership is essential to the provision of quality educational programs and practice … Employment of staff who understand pedagogical practice and can enable others to develop their skills and knowledge about play-based learning is highly beneficial in delivering high quality early childhood programs. (2019, p. 4)

The principle of respect for equity and diversity is embedded in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), just as it is in other national approved learning frameworks.

While we all have a responsibility to promote respect for diversity and equity and to embed this value into our teaching practice, educational leaders are uniquely placed to support early childhood professionals in this important aspect of their work.

Early childhood professionals’ respect for, and commitment to, diversity and equity is important in:

* promoting children’s sense of identity and belonging to family, groups and communities
* informing responses to each child’s unique learning and development trajectory
* helping children learn to respect and be comfortable with diversity and difference
* benefiting all children’s learning and development
* promoting inclusion and equity for all children and families
* developing and maintaining partnerships with families, the community and other professionals
* proactively identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion and equity
* challenging assumptions that work against equity, including the ways that practices, language and the environment can reinforce stereotypes or the dominant culture
* reflecting on and challenging your own and others’ views on equity and diversity as well as conscious and unconscious biases
* communicating and interacting respectfully across cultures and supporting multilingualism
* respecting and maintaining the rights and dignity of children, families and colleagues.

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| The educational leader – building capacity, enabling and empowering |

Educational leaders play a critical role in developing and implementing educational programs and practice, and in driving change for the better. The educational leader is intrinsically a capacity builder – building knowledge, skills and capabilities. Capacity building is the process by which individuals and organisations obtain, retain and improve the skills, knowledge, tools and capabilities needed to do their jobs competently and perform at a higher level.

Effective educational leadership also enables and empowers educators by providing them with resources, strategies and practice opportunities, and by building their confidence to be independent thinkers and develop their skills. Perspectives on diversity and difference are complex and influenced by many factors, both personal and professional, and a commitment to equity and respect for diversity requires professionals to actively address issues of inequality and promote the value of diversity and difference.

An important strategy for educational leaders is to promote critical reflection on equity and diversity in all aspects of your service operation. This can enhance clarity about the contexts for your work and how your service’s values, philosophy, policies and procedures affect your beliefs and practices. As a team, it may be helpful to think about and discuss the extent to which equity and diversity are embedded in your service operations, using the following questions as a guide.

*Service philosophy and policies*

* In what ways does the service philosophy acknowledge and respect diversity, promote belonging and foster inclusion?
* How is your service’s [Reconciliation Action Plan](https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/raps/what-is-a-rap) (RAP) and [Strategic Inclusion Plan](https://www.idfm.org.au/strategic-inclusion-plan) (SIP) shaping service values, programs, practices, policies, procedures and priorities?
* How do service policies reflect the rights of each child to access and fully participate in all aspects of the curriculum?

*Physical environments*

* What message does the physical environment send to children, families and visitors?
* What are the visible signs of welcome to families and children, and what evidence is there of connections to people’s cultures, communities and families?
* How does the physical environment support and encourage each child’s participation?

*Routines*

* How are routines (such as arrivals and departures, transitions, meals, sleep and rest times) organised to be flexible and foster children’s sense of security and belonging while respecting diversity and promoting equity?

*Teaching, learning and assessment practices*

* How are educators modelling fairness, inclusion and respect for diversity to promote children’s learning about equity and diversity?
* Are spontaneous opportunities used to teach the value of differences and respect for diversity, and to challenge behaviour that is unfair or indicates bias or stereotyping?
* Is the commitment to equity reflected in assessment practices that are inclusive and promote high expectations for every child and focus on children’s strengths, abilities and interests?

*Partnerships with families*

* What partnership strategies are in place to respectfully support families to:
  + build strong social networks within the community?
  + access local community services that cater for diverse families and offer specialist services when needed (for example, for those who may be experiencing vulnerability or stress)?
  + make informed decisions about appropriate support for their child?
* How will you know if these strategies are culturally appropriate and culturally safe for families?
* How are families’ views used to ensure a welcoming and accessible physical environment for all?

**Additional resources that might be useful**

* Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority’s (ACECQA) [Inclusion Support Program](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/help/inclusion-support-program)
* Early Childhood Australia’s [Code of Ethics](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ECA-COE-Brochure-web-2019.pdf), noting the commitment to ensure that children are not discriminated against
* ACECQA’s [Inclusion Workbook](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-02/Inclusion-workbook-allstates.pdf) is a helpful tool to get the conversation and reflection started, as is the [Quest for Quality Inclusion game](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-03/TheQuestforQuality_Inclusion.pdf) and [The Educational Leader Resource](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/TheEducationalLeaderResource.pdf).

**Additional VCAA resources**

Download copies of [VCAA early years resources](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/ey-curriculum-resources/Pages/Index.aspx).

Order [free hard copies](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/ey-curriculum-resources/Pages/Birth-to-8years.aspx) of VCAA early years resources.

Keep up to date with new resources and professional learning opportunities by subscribing to the [VCAA Early Years Alert](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/veyldf/Pages/Index.aspx#:~:text=For%20news%20about%20VEYLDF%20resources%20and%20professional%20learning%2C%20subscribe%20to%20the%20Early%20Years%20Alert).

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