My Time, Our Place — Framework for School Age Care

My Time, Our Place — Framework for School Age Care will contribute to the emerging profile of school age care services as significant to wellbeing for school age children. The vision within the document is to extend and enrich children’s experiences in school age care settings. Educators encourage children’s engagement in a range of play and leisure experiences that allow them to feel happy, safe and relaxed, interact with friends, practice social skills, solve problems, try new activities and learn life skills.

Around the State and across Australia there has been a flurry of professional learning activities. Nationally there is a website (www.mytimeourplace.com.au) which provides a wealth of information and sharing opportunities. It will contain newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, blogs and some opportunities for real-time conversations about issues impacting on the sector.

One of the other professional learning opportunities has been a partnership between PSCQ, Brisbane South PSN and the School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University. Jennifer Cartmel, Senior Lecturer in Child and Family studies has taught her regular classes for the course 3013HSV Development, Learning and Practice: Children and Youth and included educators from local school age care services. This course contained six modules that will help school age care educators develop an understanding of the unique needs of children (5-16 years) and the roles and responsibilities of staff in school age services. The modules included:

• Building relationships with children
• The middle childhood phase
• Programming in school age care
• Research with children
• Partnerships and school age care Services
• Working with stakeholders

The response by students and educators has been overwhelmingly positive. The educators have found it helpful to explore the theory and research that underpins practice in school age care services.

“It was friendly and comforting in that our opinions were accepted and appreciated, but I also found it challenging with the introduction of new theories.”
— School Age Care Educator

The students also gained from the examples of practice that the educators discussed during class activities.

One of the key processes that school age care educators have been keen to learn more about is reflective practice. Ongoing learning and reflective practice is a core principle mentioned in the Framework. It is the process that educators will use to transform their practice and create high quality services.

Some educators have been concerned by the term “Critical”, thinking that it is a negative approach criticising what other educators are doing. However critically reflective practice requires educators to think deeply about what they are doing. It requires them to think a lot about themselves, what they value about the lives of children and why they do what they are doing. This is a process about self awareness. Ongoing learning and critical reflection involves problem-solving skills and the ability to see things from the perspective of others even if it is different to one’s own current ideas and thoughts.

The education and training of school age educators needs to better prepare them for the responsibility that they have to children and the wider community. They
need to be encouraged to engage in critical thinking so that they are able to be more reflective and enhance the quality of the services they deliver.

School age care educators are also being reminded to focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as the Framework is based on the values laid out in the Convention. It states that all children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. The Convention also recognises children’s rights to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives and respects their familial, cultural and other identities and languages.

The title, “My Time, Our Place”, acknowledges the development of the individual child occurring in a community setting. It highlights the need for children to be able to make choices and become involved in problem solving and decision making while contributing to their school age care community. It emphasises that programs in school age care services compliment rather than duplicate the school day. The Framework will be applicable to services offering recreation, play and leisure-based programs within schools or other venues, including services offered in long day care centres and by family day care providers.

The image of the child and changes in childhood, family structures and increased workforce participation contribute to the context in which the Framework was developed. Children are considered to be fully formed individuals with perspectives of their own. They are viewed as strong, competent, resourceful and developing in their social context. These images shape the community responses to policies and programs that strive to nurture children’s wellbeing, development and learning.

Children are now living in more diverse life circumstances where their activities are increasingly regulated. They are being reared in social circumstances that are different to previous generations of children. These circumstances shape expectations for programs for school age care services. The impact of out of school care provision on children’s lives is dependent upon the quality of the out of school care programs. High quality programs allow children to construct knowledge and help develop their sense of identity, independence and ability to make decisions for themselves.

The Outcomes for Children described in the Framework acknowledge the development of the middle childhood period. Further, the roles and responsibilities of the educators in school age care are described by the principles of school age care pedagogy which underpin practice. The educators draw on a rich repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children’s learning by adopting holistic approaches, collaborating with children and acting with intentionality. They also create physical and social school age care environments that have a positive impact on children’s development, wellbeing and community-building and that value the cultural and social contexts of children and their families.

The Framework will be a foundation document for the National Quality Standard. It provides direction and guidance for each of the Quality Areas and in particular Outcome 1, about the educational program and practice that engages, stimulates and enhances children’s learning and development. My Time Our Place – Framework for School Age Care will provide support and status for school age care services which is the fastest growing child care sector in Australia.

Dr Jennifer Cartmel
Griffith University