

Should educational leaders be required to upskill to fill in the gaps?

Educational leadership skills in the Early Childhood setting

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Introduction

As an educational leader in the early childhood sector, I am constantly being asked by other educators, 'What is an educational leader?' 'What do you need to have to be an educational leader?' These questions are constant, as we need to have educational leaders in the field; many are put into the role with no or little experience, just to tick a box.

In this report, I will discuss the importance of educational leadership and the role that the Early Childhood Industry and Government legislation require educational leaders to have. In this report, I will highlight the skills gap educational leaders have in all states across Australia in 2018, which poses the question, 'Should educational leaders be required to upskill to fill in the gaps?'

Furthermore, I will analyse qualitative data to identify educational leadership skills, gaps and highlight the importance of upskilling. I will also discuss how *andragogy* – the educational theory progressed by Malcolm Knowles – informed my research on the importance of why I consider upskilling integral to the development of identified leadership skills.

Literature Review

Educational leadership will change from setting to setting so different skills will need to be demonstrated and implemented as these settings change. 'It is important to acknowledge that there are so many ways of seeing things and not one right way to do anything'. (Community Childcare Association, 2008-2012) There is a specific set of rules and compliance educational leaders need to practice and master within the role. (ACECQA, 2018)

When we talk about skills what are we talking about?

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) states that the role of the educational leader is to:

- Collaborate with educators and provide curriculum direction and guidance.
- Support educators to effectively implement the cycle of planning to enhance programs and practices.
- Lead the development and implementation of an effective educational program in the service.
- Ensure children's learning and development are guided by the learning outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and/or the Framework for School Age Care or other approved learning frameworks (ACECQA, 2018, p. 2)

“ It has been suggested that adults need to have their different ways of learning recognised and their unique styles and strengths addressed.

Early Childhood sector providers need to put in place educational leaders that are suitable to lead the development of programs and mentoring of other educators in the service, to comply with National Quality Standards, regulations and laws (ACECQA, 2018).

The article '*How do they manage? A review on the leadership in early childhood*' (Muijs, D., Aubrey, C., Harris, A. & Biggs, M., 2004), explores the skills required for an educational leader, but not the qualifications needed to be an educational leader. In the article, *The Educational Leader Resource*. Cheeseman (2012) notes that there is a range of skills required that is not mentioned in the regulations, such as:

- To have knowledge in different areas about the curriculum.
- Having access to current research.
- Knowledge of individual children and learning styles.
- Being able to mentor educators in the industry through coaching, mentoring, and reflection (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2019, p. 56)

Should then, educational leaders be upgrading their qualifications or upskilling to succeed in their job role?

When educational leaders are upskilling, it is important that they must be motivated to learn about pedagogy (rather than andragogy). Adults learn differently from children and for adults to succeed they need to have the following elements: 'self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, motivation to learn' (Smith, 2020). It has been suggested that adults need to have their different ways of learning recognised and their unique styles and strengths addressed. Pedagogy in the Early Childhood environment is distinct from adult teaching and learning principles (Culatta, 2020).

Methodology

In this qualitative research, I analysed articles, journals, and documents from various Early Childhood industry sources, including the Early Years Learning Framework, National Regulations, and publications from the Australian Children's Education Care Quality Authority. My research was limited by time, and that I did not conduct a survey

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of Early Childhood educators. I used low-risk sources of data and no participants were used.

Discussion

Along with the introduction of the national regulations and the National Quality Standards (NQS) in 2012, were defined requirements

for the new role of 'educational leader', responsible to maintain educational leadership and guide and monitor the educators in the service (ACECQA, 2018).

The educational leader needs to motivate the team and make pedagogical and curriculum decisions (Holland, 2014).

An educational leader needs skills but no formal leadership qualification. All educators in Early Childhood sector are required to have a Certificate III in Early Education and Care as a minimum qualification.

The Certificate III level qualification requirements for educators are:

- for children preschool age or under all other educators required to meet the relevant educator to child ratios must hold, or be actively working towards, an approved certificate III level education and care qualification. The qualification requirements do not apply to an educator who has been employed on a probationary basis for not more than 3 months (regulation 126)
- for children over preschool age all other educators required to meet the relevant educator to child ratios must hold, or be actively working towards, an approved certificate III level education and care qualification or commence obtaining that qualification within six months of commencing to educate and care for children (regulation 356(3))

Diploma level qualification requirements for educators are:

- for children preschool age or under at least 50 percent of required educators must hold, or be actively working towards, at least an approved diploma level education and care qualification (regulation 126(1))
- for children over preschool age at least 50 per cent of required educators must hold, or be enrolled in and studying for, at least a diploma level qualification approved for educators working with children over preschool age in Victoria (regulation 356(2))

(NSW Government, 2011)

“ The educational leader needs to motivate the team and make pedagogical and curriculum decisions.

While not a formal requirement, educational leaders are generally expected to be Diploma qualified. The units of competency in the CHC50908 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care that focus on leadership skills are:

CHCMGT003 – Lead the Work Team

BSBLED401 – Develop teams and individuals

BSBMGT605 – Provide leadership across the organisation

CHCPRP003 – Reflect on and improve own professional practice

(Australian Government, 2020)

These units support the educational leader to provide the leadership required, it should be noted that these are all elective units, not core to the qualification requirements.

Given that the CHC50908 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care is the industry recognised standard for senior educators in the Early Childhood sector, reform of this qualification to meet new regulatory standards for educational leaders is required. Alternatively, educational leaders could also study a supplementary course on leadership.

Conclusion

A desktop review of the literature makes clear that educational leaders in Early Childhood Education and Care need certain skills to be successful in their job role.

However, evaluation of this information leaves unanswered questions and gaps in the research, for example:

- Do educational leaders need a higher qualification to play out their job role? and
- Is there a need for a review of the Early Childhood Education and Care (CHC) Training Package, higher qualifications, or incremented leadership courses?

In an industry constantly evolving to meet the needs of early learners, regular adaptation of the tools required to develop future generations of educational leaders will ensure ongoing, high quality education and care for children. ■

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What is the relationship between mentoring a graduate trainer and the quality of the initial training delivery?

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Abstract

The research project idea 'What is the relationship between mentoring a graduate trainer and the quality of the initial training delivery?' came from my own initial teaching experience as a newly graduated trainer and assessor. My induction at TAFE was thorough and I felt supported and welcomed. However, I felt that having a firsthand teaching experience might have supported me to be a more confident, self-assured, and possibly less stressed novice trainer. I would have welcomed an induction process that had included a mentoring and/or peer review process prior to teaching delivery.

The purpose of this research is to find out if there indeed is a need for a mentoring program to support novice trainers and if this has been a previous conundrum. Accessing secondary qualitative data, low risk methodologies, valid/current articles, library, internet, and documents relating to VET teacher training, my desktop research recognised the need for a mentoring program and/or a novice VET teacher support program.

This research report deliberately only uses Australian articles and data.

I discovered, that for some TAFE institutes there is no novice teacher mentoring program/s included in the initial induction. Moving forward this is something that Institutes could investigate to further improve their induction process and to ensure the students will receive the best possible outcomes, having confident and competent trainers/teachers.

Introduction

Investigating options for TAFE teacher quality development, it became apparent that novice trainers would benefit from mentoring and/or peer review during initial induction. This need is recognised in Francisco (2016), and Moodie (2012) further explores VET teaching support for new trainers and the importance of an induction program before starting teaching and training.

Throughout my research I came across the need for further research. As Francisco, (2016) argues, many novice VET teachers begin teaching without any prior experience or qualifications related to teaching.

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As teachers, their own experience of learning in the workplace (where they were employed) becomes an important component shaping their own methods as a teacher to develop the skills, knowledge, and understanding of skills and knowledge in students.

This research recognises the pressing need for graduate VET teacher/trainer support, especially in early years.

Literature review

This project sought the latest research into initial VET teacher/trainer supports.

Francisco challenged the relationship between mentoring a graduate trainer and the quality of the initial training delivery (2016) in contrast to Moodie (2012) who discusses VET teaching support for new trainers and the importance of an induction program before starting teaching and training. Walls, (2014) uses data gained through organisational interviews and document analysis to try and identify the best ways to support an entry level trainer in a TAFE system. As the author (Walls) identified, there is a gap in the initial induction process and its presence in the VET industry.

Throughout my research I came across the need for further investigation. Francisco (2016) argues that many novice VET teachers begin teaching without any prior experience or qualifications related to teaching, their learning in the workplace where they are employed as teachers becomes an important component of the development of their skills, knowledge, and understanding about teaching and their role as a teacher.

Furthermore, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) documented in the case study - 'Supervising and mentoring new trainers' PQR Education example in the 'Users' guide to Standards for RTO's 2015' (Australian Government Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2015) that entry level trainers and assessors will benefit from a mentoring program.

Discussion

The current induction program at one TAFE Institute gives an overview of online induction and workplace orientation requirements. The online induction introduces new trainer/s to the key aspects of the Institute's operations, and of course, addresses some compliance requirements and workplace orientation to ensure they are familiar with the team, workstation, and local amenities. On reflection on my own novice trainer journey, from where the research idea came from, together with the research findings, I believe there is a need for VET teaching support for new trainers.

Furthermore, as I believe and during my research, the problem became apparent that novice trainers would benefit from mentoring and/or peer review during initial

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induction, as it would help with Vocational Education and Training (VET) teacher preparation and this way ensuring the quality of student experience and outcomes.

As Francisco S. L. (Francisco, 2016) questioned in her research paper 'How novice vocational education and training teachers learn to become teachers' and as Gavin Moodie's (Moodie, n.d.), research paper discusses VET teaching support for new trainers and the importance of an induction program before starting teaching and training. By adding a mentoring program to the induction process, it would benefit the novice trainers and perhaps help trainers with more experience to refresh their training processes and this way keep on trend and current in the VET training industry, whilst mentoring the new trainer.

Throughout my research I came across the need for further research as (Francisco, 2016) argues that many novice VET teachers begin teaching without any prior experience or qualifications related to teaching, their learning in the workplace where they are employed as teachers becomes an important component of the development of their skills, knowledge, and understanding about teaching and their role as a teacher.

A mentoring program would eliminate the guesswork of their role as a trainer and would give them current experience and strategies to support the diverse individual learner needs and styles. The review of the research, we can conclude that there is a need to begin addressing graduate trainer support.

Additionally, the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) Standards Guide (Australian Government Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2015) indicated in the Case study -Supervising and mentoring new trainers for PQR Education Company, that entry level trainers and assessors will benefit from a mentoring program.

The oldest recording of the existing problem I came across, was from the author Sandra Walls (Walls, April 2014) who used data gained through organizational interviews, document analysis to try and identify the best ways to support an entry level trainer in a TAFE system. As the author identified the existing gap and the need for a mentoring program during the initial induction. I can only assume that this problem has existed as long as VET delivery has been in TAFE's. This should be addressed, and mentoring programs should be a part of the initial induction processes.

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Throughout the research and by investigating the data from it, it is evident that adding a mentoring program to the induction process will not only benefit the trainers but the students by ensuring they will have the best possible training delivery and a trainer who is confident and knowledgeable in their industry. It will enhance and enrich our TAFE's quality of student outcomes. Furthermore, this will support BHI strategic plan and themes.

The research told the story properly and fairly, as the research idea and question were based on my own experience as a novice trainer. The research messages were very valid and presented with integrity, particularly as the focus for the research was an issue that Saini (researcher) has experienced firsthand.

Therefore I feel comfortable with the conclusion and I believe further research is needed, as it became apparent during my research that there is a need for a mentoring program for novice trainers. ■

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