‘Peeling back the layers’
the art of practitioner inquiry in an early childhood setting

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Our agenda...

- Context
- Inquiry Approaches and why do they matter to ECEC.
- Undertaking an inquiry process – how does it work.
- What happened.
- What we learnt.
Context

The Kindergarten in Kempsey (Mid North Coast NSW)
Pedagogy and Inquiry

What matters just as much is the longing and the capacity to think differently, to listen and to work with different stories; and the passion, commitment, collaboration and sheer hard work of individuals and groups of individuals who want to tell a different story and who desire to gain and maintain movement to achieve transformational change.

(Moss, 2014, p. 169)
Inquiry is Educators Research

Educator ‘research is important because it repositions the meaning of [educator] from one who simply performs or acts to someone who generates and contributes to the knowledge on which [our] practice is based and how decisions are made. [Educator] research is liberating and empowering inquiry that allows ... [educators] to take their lives as teachers seriously, to generate knowledge and understanding that can improve teaching and potentially create a more democratic and equitable learning community.

(Perry 2012 p114)
Rhizomatics eliminates ‘roots and foundations, to thwart unities and break dichotomies, and to spread out roots and branches, thereby pluralizing and disseminating, producing differences and multiplicities, making new connections.

(Best and Douglas 1991, 99)
The educators in Reggio Emilia describe their planning for children as progettazione, a flexible approach which hypothesises many possible ways to work (in the classroom, promoting staff development and in relationship with the parents) towards particular intentions which, wherever possible, are shared by both children and teachers.
The approach

- Statement
- Rationale
- Guiding Dimensions
- Data collection
- Curriculum decisions
- Interpretation/analysis
- Discovery
What happened

Statement of Intent

2013  How do children learn who they are?
2014  Is curiosity innate or learned?
2015  How do children connect – actually what?
2016  How children connect revisited (verb)?
What happened...

How do children make connections? (Collecting the data)

Child's Name: Eli

Date of observation: 12.5.16

Eli threw rocks from the fence into the reservoir. Each rock fell into the reservoir. Initially, the rocks were not too big for Eli. However, when finding rocks, Eli started to choose larger rocks. Each time Eli picked up a rock, he'd place it on the fence next to him. I asked him why he was doing it, and he replied, "I'm stacking them."

Further reflections and curriculum decisions:

Eli demonstrates a strong connection to his environment. He connects to the rocks through planning and language. Eli's actions show a strong connection to his environment. His actions demonstrate a pattern of creating and organizing objects. Over time, Eli may develop his own system of categorization. He may learn to count and classify objects based on their characteristics. This is an important step in developing mathematical skills.
The Story: When we listened we heard engagements/interactions/connections/knowledge/sharing/imaginative, creative play/role play/time frame.

This morning I noticed that Noah was having trouble connecting to an activity so I intentionally intervened and lead him to the light table where I offered him an opportunity to explore the shapes and we studied the different items and colours. Slowly I started to build a tower using the different shapes and Noah started to copy. We both started to build our towers and then they would fall. We built again and again and finally they balanced until we had no coloured wheels left.

Interpretation/evaluation of play; What is happening? What learning and teaching is happening here? What did you learn? What could you change? How are the children making connections in relation to Observation, Planning, Provocation, Language and Spontaneous? What are the children connecting with in relation to People, Place, Things, Themselves and Nature? What are we seeing in relation to EYLF/NQF/QIP?

For a number of weeks I have been observing Noah and have noticed his reluctance to engage in a commitment to draw so I have intentionally taken him into my circle of security as I could see his self confidence needed a boost. Earlier in the morning he had ‘melt down’ and as I have a good repour with him I knew I would be able to reassure him and encourage his self confidence to have a great day at preschool. As we sat together his body language told me he was engaging even though he had no words. Noah is a little overwhelmed by the other children's confidence in the room.

Opportunities and Possibilities; Where to from here? How can we strengthen, support and extend the children’s learning?

As we engage over the next few weeks together I am sure Noah's confidence will strengthen and he will be more comfortable around his fellow students.
What we learnt...

• More complex and interconnected than we first imagined.
• Once you start there is no going back - the depth of the approach to understanding teaching and learning is addictive.
• Take your time – it is not an art learnt quickly.
• It takes persistent and committed leadership.
• Its not about proving something – the theory that we seek is the foundation that you work from.
• Much of the success of a process like this depends on the stability and capability of staff team.

WARNING
An approach like this it altruistic, it will take time – and requires of educators a commitment to think beyond their paid hours...
Our new normal....

Learning and innovation go hand in hand.
The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.

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