FDCAQ: Promoting leading practice in achieving excellence through people in education and care.

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Background

This Family Day Care (FDC) Coordinator Position Paper continues Family Day Care Association Queensland’s (FDCAQ) commitment to promoting leading practice in achieving excellence through people in FDC. This commitment has included developing the following:

- Recruiting high quality educators: A workbook for Family Day Care Services (2014).

FDCAQ promotes leading people processes within the context of the FDC learning community as illustrated in two diagrams – Leading People Processes in FDC and The FDC Learning Community (see Appendixes A and B). These processes are grounded in broader contemporary thinking and embedded within the spirit, philosophy and values of belonging, being and becoming as we negotiate how we can most effectively work, relate and learn together in the pursuit of excellence in education and care.

FDCAQ is also committed to providing leadership in stepping up to grapple the 21st Century challenges and opportunities facing family day care. Presenting a new and transformational vision for the coordinator role is part of demonstrating that the sector can lead from within and can define itself rather than waiting for others to do it for us. FDC is capable of initiating sector level change, lifting its own benchmarks, challenging within and externally, and boldly setting a vision for the future. We are so much more than ‘nice ladies playing with children’. We are professionals taking responsibility for providing the best possible education and care to children - children who like us are facing an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world.

This position paper concerns the FDC coordinator role as it is a unique and complex one that is vital to achieving excellence in education and care. The role is unique and complex for a range of reasons including:

- It does not exist in other education and care service types.
- It works with educators who are independent business operators working in the community in a unique type of workplace/work environment – their own home. Each of these workplaces is different.
- For the most part, educators work in isolated environments. They generally do not work with adult colleagues physically present and therefore do not have ready access to discussion of ideas, reflection with others, support, debriefing and so on.
- Educators are a highly diverse group in terms of background, culture, skills and abilities, values, beliefs, qualifications, confidence, home environments and household makeup.
- In small services, coordinators may be sole operators where their role is incorporated within

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the service manager role, and in larger services they may be part of a team of coordinators.
• The role shoulders significant responsibility in leading and managing the transition to delivering education and care services according to the new learning frameworks (i.e. the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care documents).

In preparing this position paper about the role it is not proposed that there is one ‘right way’ to look at the coordinator role or to dictate how the position should work in individual services. Coordinators are a diverse group of individuals and each service and team of educators is distinct and unique, as is the local context in which they operate. It is however hoped that this position paper will:
• Provide a forum for much needed focus on the coordinator role.
• Provoke, inspire and challenge. The paper deliberately pushes the boundaries of thinking about the role, and the FDC context or system within which it operates.
• Contribute to a shared language and understanding of the role, and in doing so set a high benchmark for considering the complex reality of the role and its requirements.
• Serve as a basis for greater recognition of the role within government and the sector, and promotion of and advocacy for its important role in facilitating quality in education and care practice.
• Increase intentionality of practice within services and the broader FDC community, particularly concerning the key areas of leadership and professionalism.
Why is a Position Paper Necessary?

Currently the dominant constructions of the coordinator role are too narrow. They tend to lie on a continuum from ‘coordinator as expert/monitor’, to ‘coordinator as friend/confidant’, and they are focused too narrowly on the educator as the primary emphasis of the role. Most importantly, they are incongruent with the transformational spirit and agenda of the Early Years Learning Framework and the Framework for School Age Care documents which now guide the way for 21st Century education and care. They are also significantly out of step with broader contemporary perspectives on leadership, professionalism, and adult learning and development.

The time is overdue to review, broaden, and deepen understanding of the role of the coordinator in present day family day care, and to examine how the position can best operate in ways that facilitate transformative learning both for coordinators themselves and others, and that ultimately deliver excellent education and care practice and outcomes.

Here, the challenges come both from without and within - the coordinator role has received little attention or recognition as evidenced by its neglect both in terms of public policy and appropriate remuneration. It is largely invisible to those outside the sector and it is unusual for the role to be promoted within the sector (e.g. by educators to parents) or to be recognised for its demanding, diverse and complex nature. In addition, perspectives on the role are impacted by the broader culture within FDC that exhibits a reluctance and/or a level of uncertainty and discomfort about embracing notions such as leadership and advocacy as part of professional identity. Such notions are seen by many as incongruent with education and care’s traditional focus on relationships and care for children (e.g. by being equated with being aggressive, forthright and/or demanding) and are complicated by traditional gendered identities in this largely female workforce. The leadership and advocacy aspects of the role tend to be implicit rather than explicit, a factor that inhibits discussion and learning, and broader recognition.

And yet the coordinator role is now more demanding and complex than it has ever been, and to be practiced well it requires an overwhelming array of skills and expertise beyond that in education and care for children (the sole regulator-mandated educational qualification requirement for the role). These skill and knowledge requirements encompass a range of diverse areas and disciplines from leadership and management to adult learning, coaching and mentoring, counselling, human resource management, business management, information technology, change management, marketing, collaboration and networking, and so on. Further, all of these need to be found in a person of high emotional intelligence with excellent interpersonal relationship and communication skills.

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The Problem with Published Regulator Descriptions of the Coordinator Role

It is instructive to note that in the documentation of relevant education and care regulatory agencies the roles and responsibilities of the FDC coordinator are described in the following terms:

1. **Family Day Care Coordinator** - “Manages the standard of service delivery in a family day care service through monitoring, supporting and developing family day care educators.” (Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training website description of roles and responsibilities of the Early Childhood Education and Care workforce, accessed June 2015)

2. “A FDC service must have one or more coordinators who are engaged by the approved provider of the service to support, monitor and train the service’s educators.” (National Quality Framework Fact Sheet for Services – Regulatory Requirements for a FDC Educator, February 2015.)

3. “Co-ordinator...means a person employed or engaged by an approved provider of a family day care service to monitor and support the family day care educators who are part of the service (National Law).” (Guide to the National Quality Standard, 2013, p.197.)

The quotes above uniformly emphasise monitoring, supporting and developing/training educators. Whilst it is acknowledged that the regulatory agencies have undertaken important work in attempting to focus the sector on quality through the introduction of increased regulation and standards, these statements are problematic in their use of outdated language and implicit assumptions of authority over others.

A further issue is, in itself, the naming of the role as ‘coordinator’. This title is a legacy of past conceptions of FDC that are out of touch with present reality of increased demands upon the role and the sector. This has led to the role being subject to a diversity of interpretations and understandings across Australia as the sector has struggled to keep pace with the seismic changes brought about by the learning frameworks and other government mandated change (as well as the broader societal changes impacting on the sector). Much of this change has been focused at the educator level but with little attention to or guidance about the implications for the broader system of services and governance within FDC. Instead those within individual services and governance roles have largely had to make their own way in interpreting the requirements into the everyday practice of coordinators, service managers and other staff, and in attempting to provide the necessary leadership to make implementation a reality.
The name ‘coordinator’ has been rebadged by some services across Australia and a number of other job titles are in use for the role (e.g. Field Worker, Field Officer, Quality Support Officer, Educator Support Officer, and Resource Officer). Such titles emphasise the place in which the position works (in the field), and/or its role in supporting and resourcing, but again do not do full justice to the spirit of the role in contemporary FDC or what the role entails. They also either explicitly or implicitly make the educator the focus of the role.

Language is important and the naming of roles influences how practitioners view themselves, how others view them, and who is attracted to the role. Professional standing and status continue to be issues for the sector and it is vital that a more coherent attribution of titles to roles is established that reflect the realities of FDC in the 21st Century.

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The lack of guidance from government and lack of leadership capacity within the sector in the struggle to come to terms with the complexity of government mandated change has led to a tendency within the sector to interpret the coordinator role along a narrow binary continuum - at one end sits an emphasis on regulation (monitoring and compliance focus) and at the other end sits an emphasis that fits more comfortably with the relational culture of FDC (relationship/support focus). Unfortunately when operating at its worst, the monitoring/compliance focus can involve the exercise of an expert ‘power over’ approach (‘coordinator as policer’), where the coordinator’s focus is to look for what is wrong with educator practice. On the other hand, the relationship/support focus at its worst can lead to avoidance of conflict, rescuing, and/or tacit collusion with less than optimal practice by educators (‘coordinator as friend/confidant’). Whilst both approaches highlight relevant and important aspects of the coordinator role, neither one nor both together encompass the breadth and complexity of what the role actually now demands in today’s changing and challenging world.

Educators themselves are also uncertain about what being monitored, supported and developed/trained by coordinators means. On the face of it, it implies that the coordinator is a technical expert whose knowledge flows from coordinator to educator, rather than a partnership where both parties learn from and with each other, as needs to occur in a contemporary learning development culture. With respect to support, rather than more intentional, process oriented, and proactive interpretations of support there tends to be heavy reliance (by educators and coordinators) on task and event based support, that is, ‘the visit’ to the educator’s workplace/home, and responding to crises. Within this approach educators may say, for example, that they don’t need a coordinator visit because they don’t have any problems. There is also a general failure to recognise and appreciate the knowledge and skills requirements of the coordinator role in both adult learning (andragogy) and children’s learning (pedagogy).

Further issues have emerged as educators have become more empowered through the increased focus on the educator role. In some instances this has led to concerning educator interpretations/expectations of the role of coordinators, and educator questioning of coordinator status and expertise. Such issues are not surprising however given the narrow interpretations of the role that are prominent in the sector. For example, some

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educators perceive that coordinator’s primary role is solely to meet their needs. In addition as the educator workforce has become more academically qualified in childhood education and care, some educators have begun to question the level of such qualifications held by coordinators. Here educators are seeing coordinators as essentially more senior versions of an educator who should therefore be more academically qualified in childhood education and care. There can also be status differences in earnings. As educators are essentially small business people, their earnings can be much higher than coordinators who are generally on a fixed remuneration.

The impact of the focus on educators over recent years is also borne out by the findings of a 2015 FDCAQ national survey of services which showed that the majority of coordinators, educators and service managers regard the educator as the primary client of the coordinator (rather than children or families). Unfortunately, perceiving the role through this lens can lead to priorities being swayed and the voices of children (and families) becoming secondary to educator or broader service interests. At worst the rights and interests of children can be overlooked or forgotten.

In summary, by narrowly focusing on the educator role and its requirements rather than adopting a more systemic view, government mandated change and its implementation has led to unexpected/unforeseen consequences in terms of coordinator role perceptions and questions about the credibility and expertise of coordinators.

### Primary Purpose of Role Coordinator
(coordinator response to survey question)

- **70%** Support
- **22%** Monitoring and compliance
- **15%** Providing guidance
- **15%** Partnership and collaboration
- **13%** Mentoring

Note: The totals in each column do not add to 100% as some responses emphasised more than one theme.
A New Vision for Coordinators

The learning frameworks have presented the sector with a transformational agenda representing a paradigm shift in thinking and acting. They set out “a new vision for educators” (Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2010, p.4; Educators My Time, Our Place: Educators’ Guide to the Framework for School Age Care in Australia, 2012, p.4). However a more nuanced position is required in which this focus on “a new vision for educators” is extended to a more complex, organic perspective that encompasses not just educators, but FDC as a whole, and for the purposes of this paper, coordinators in particular. This way of looking at the learning frameworks’ agenda shifts the emphasis from individuals (e.g. educators) towards the reciprocal relationships between the various individuals and their roles within the FDC context or environment. It recognises the complexity of FDC and that ensuring high quality practice is more than a matter for the individual practitioner but also involves the collective of individuals/roles involved, the organisation, and indeed children, parents and the broader community.

Within this vision coordinators and educators, although having different roles, work alongside each other in partnership to achieve excellence in education and care. The child is always at the centre. The coordinator-educator relationship is mutually respectful and non-hierarchical.

Implications –

This vision necessitates discussion and reflection across many areas – for the purposes of this paper however the most important areas requiring attention are professionalism and leadership. This is because these are the areas requiring significant attention and development both within FDC more broadly, and in relation to the present day coordinator role and its capacity to operate intentionally within 21st Century education and care. A further important implication is a change of name to better reflect the new vision for coordinators.


In discussing these areas of professionalism and leadership this paper brings to bear contemporary perspectives that are also highly congruent with the principles of the learning frameworks. Indeed, this position paper mirrors and extends principles and approaches from the learning frameworks beyond a focus on educator practice to the way services and the people within them operate, learn and grow. Services are responsible for recreating those principles in everything that they do. For example:

• The principles that underpin an environment in which children flourish through belonging, being and becoming apply equally to creating environments that enable adults to have a sense of belonging, encourage them to be at their best in the here and now, and foster a desire for them to be better tomorrow than they are today.

• Processes that aim to achieve high quality outcomes for children are more likely to be successful if they are mirrored in processes that underpin how adults in FDC services engage with and relate to each other.

With respect to the coordinator role in particular, the leadership that this role provides in enacting and mirroring the learning frameworks’ concepts influences relationships and service delivery throughout the entire extended service of educators, children, families, and community. Therefore concepts such as intentionality, reflective practice, partnerships, learning and growth, and mutuality are at the forefront of the operationalisation of this role. Ultimately it is about developing cultures and environments in which both children and adults can flourish.
This is a long way from the type of one way ‘expert doing to others’ approach that is implicit in statements that coordinators “monitor, support and develop/train educators” - however well-intentioned such statements may be. It is also a long way from an over-reliance on friendship and conflict avoidance as a basis for working together. Coordinators are in a powerful position to assist educators to align service philosophy and learning frameworks with practice, and to enable and empower educators in their practice.

2. Embracing a broad conceptualisation of professionalism.

There is a need for broad conceptualisations of professionalism that encompass not only the caring/relational core or the monitoring/compliance aspects of education and care but also important leadership, managerial, supervisory and advocacy functions. Indeed Rodd (2013) notes that without such broad conceptualisations the sector will not be able to meet the increasing need for competent personnel with skills in areas such as leadership, education, supervision, mentoring, administration, research and advocacy.

The coordinator role encompasses all of these functions. Thus, to be a professional FDC coordinator involves a professional identity that encompasses not only a core focus on relationships and caring but also an identity that embraces a broad array of other skills and expertise. Building the professional identity of coordinators is part of a broader process of professional identity formation that is ongoing within FDC but requires greater focus and attention.

3. Grasping the leadership challenge.

What leadership means in education and care has only relatively recently begun to receive attention. Many within the largely female education and care workforce have not had the opportunity to develop skills in this area or to reflect upon their own frameworks for leadership. And yet effective leadership is central to achieving and sustaining quality practice and quality outcomes for children. Successfully responding to the demands of rapid change in the sector and the implementation and ongoing support of government initiatives and frameworks depends on skilled leadership. This is particularly the case given that government mandated change typically provides little guidance as to implementation (Rodd, 2013).

The need for leadership development has been acknowledged within the sector. For example, the Queensland regulator noted in a review of the 2011-2014 Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Action Plan (Department of Education, Training and Employment, October 2014) that in consultations: “The specific leadership role of FDC coordinators was raised, and it was suggested that existing qualifications inadequately prepare staff for the management aspects of the role” (p.8), and “The consultation process clearly confirmed that leadership skills are (amongst the) key priorities for professional development” (p.10). This latter comment related not only to coordinators but more broadly within the sector.
At the same time it is widely recognised that traditional approaches to leadership do not meet the needs of the education and care workforce or culture. In particular there are moves away from the traditional sole leadership role to a more distributed, holistic and collaborative model that reflects an emphasis on communication, relationships, trust, inclusion, and empowerment (e.g. see Cornish, 2012; Rodd, 2013). In addition Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley & Shepherd (2012) call for intentional leadership (mirroring the concept of intentional teaching from the learning frameworks) highlighting the need to act positively, purposefully and ethically as leaders. Importantly, the leadership being referred to is more than pedagogical leadership but rather encompasses the full extent of leadership roles and responsibilities that are now expected. This necessitates a good understanding of contemporary leadership theories and concepts.

By way of illustration of the discussion to date, the table below contrasts some of the ways in which leadership and professional identity may be enacted within FDC.

Whilst the position presented here does not represent any type of quick formula or recipe for action, it provides a foundation for reflection and intentional discussion by services, coordinators and educators (and others) about the role of leadership in education and care, and their own identity as leaders. Building, valuing and embedding leadership culture and enhancing leadership capacity is a critical process for FDC to undertake. This also makes it less likely that a lack of examination can lead to problematic behaviours in terms of how leadership is enacted.


Mentoring is a leadership skill that supports the learning and development of individuals and teams. It is particularly suited to the culture of FDC where learning from each other is highly valued. Indeed, mentoring, both formal and informal, has been endorsed as a key leadership strategy in the education and care sector because of its focus on assisting others to realise their personal and professional potential, and because of the shift towards a culture of distributed leadership (Rodd, 2013). Practice mentors have a rich and influential role in leading through empathy and example, communication, guidance and advocacy with educators, team members, children, families and others.

This vision for mentoring is not one of a top-down, unequal power relationship between an expert and a novice, rather it is a mutual process of skill and knowledge sharing involving benefits and learning for all involved. It is characterised by mutual valuing, trust, support, respect and openness to learning. Practice mentors are critical to the fostering of a culture of learning and development, and enhancing service capacity to deliver excellent education and care practice.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Leader as Expert</th>
<th>Leader as Friend</th>
<th>Distributed Leadership</th>
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| Leaders as experts  
Hierarchy, power, authority  
Positional or formal leadership | Leader as friend  
Direction low  
Giving over of power and authority  
Role defined to suit personal needs for approval and avoidance of conflict | Leadership as both individual and collective endeavour  
Leadership is everyone’s business  
Empowerment, development, enablement  
Leaders are learners and learners are leaders |
| Professionalism based on status and expertise, academic qualifications  
Learning as a product | Professionalism focused on caring and service  
Little questioning of practice  
Learning likely to be incidental rather than planned | A relational, systemic professionalism  
Embracing openness and uncertainty  
Expertise constantly being developed and redefined  
Co-construction of knowledge and practice – openness to learning - learning from, learning about, and learning with others |
| Doing things the way they always have been done | Change attempted however lacks intentionality  
Unclear direction  
Unclear boundaries and limits | Intentional practice  
Inquiry and reflection. Engagement with new ideas, multiple ways of seeing and doing |
| Emphasis on management at the expense of leadership | Discomfort with managerial and supervisory aspects of working with adults | Leadership, management and supervisory aspects embraced |
| Coordination, monitoring, control. Focus on ensuring regulations/standards met  
Emphasis on accountability, performance and measurement, documentation  
Critiquing practice – looking at what’s wrong  
Learning as a product  
One size fits all approach to support | Priority given to caring and support of others  
Accountability and learning secondary  
Low emphasis on structure and adherence to roles and responsibilities  
Approach to support emphasises positive relationship maintenance rather than learning and development/practice improvement | Concern with maximising the full potential of people – transformational  
Relational. core  
Learning as a process (lifelong)  
Focus on quality  
Positive, strengths focus  
Proactive, tailored, partnership approach to support – planned and goal focused |
| Focus on task (e.g. educator visits; checklists)  
High expectations of conformity with standards and regulations  
Low relationship focus | Focus on supportive interactions and good relationships – can compromise practice  
Low challenge, high support  
Unclear rules and expectations | Focus on process (e.g. coaching and mentoring)  
High expectations of quality practice  
Good balance between task and relationship  
Collaborative approach |
| Day to day issues/focus  
Culture of acceptance and conformity | Day to day issues/focus  
Culture of relationship | Strategic focus  
Culture of inquiry and reflection |
| Status quo/continuity/stability  
Transactional, routine, present-focus  
Smooth operation prioritised  
Reactive, can be punitive  
Risk averse | Stability of relationships, caring prioritised  
Present-focus  
Reactive, can be crisis/rescue oriented  
Can lead to over involvement and dependency | Dynamic, transformational, visionary, future oriented Innovation, change and uncertainty, risk taking  
Complexity recognised and managed  
Building, inspiring, collaborating  
Proactive, challenging (personally & professionally) |
FDCAQ’s position is that the FDC coordinator role should not be one that is focused on a managerialist agenda (i.e. monitoring compliance with regulations, standards etc.) characterised by the exercise of hierarchical power and control, or one that is focused on being an educator’s friend or confidant.

Rather the coordinator role is one of practice mentorship. The focus of the role is facilitating quality education and care practice within a relationship based learning culture (congruent with the spirit of the learning frameworks). This is not to deny the importance of accountability (which must be present) but rather to shift the emphasis to one where the culture found at the educator-child interface is modelled in the culture found at the educator-practice mentor interface and across the FDC environment. Within this perspective the FDC practice mentor role is focused on the following:

- Building educator capacity (abilities, skills and expertise) through high quality coaching and mentoring processes.
- Developing and maintaining high quality collaborative relationships with service staff, educators, children, families and other stakeholders.
- Fostering a learning and development culture characterised by active and reflective learning and a democratic and inclusive environment.
- Leading and guiding pedagogical processes and practice.
- Advocating for children, educators, families and the broader sector.
- Leading and managing reform and change.
- Developing and implementing systems and policy.
- Facilitating efficient, effective and competitive business processes.

The practice mentor operates at all times with children (rather than educators) as their primary client. This is an important distinction and a break away from the dominant current thinking and practice in the sector. The practice mentor works through the educator (and others) to ensure that children’s voices are always heard – to ensure that children and their rights and interests always come first.

The refocusing of the coordinator role to that of practice mentor as outlined above carries with it a much stronger, more active and more personal identification with the learning frameworks, with leadership, and with what it is to be an education and care professional than many within FDC have embraced to date.

To assist services in transitioning to a practice mentor perspective, a separate document, the FDC Practice Mentor Capability Framework, has been developed by FDCAQ. This capability framework builds on the position taken in this paper. It articulates the knowledge, skills and attributes of a high quality practice mentor and will assist in the ongoing development of appropriate high level capabilities within the sector to meet both the opportunities, and the demands and challenges it faces.
Recognition of the FDC coordinator role’s breadth, depth and complexity is long overdue. Interpretations of the role – both in government documentation and within the FDC sector – need to be broadened to encompass the spirit, principles and values of the learning frameworks along with a wider view of professionalism and an urgently needed embracing and enacting of leadership. The role also requires renaming to reflect this new reality. All of this needs to occur within the context of a holistic, systemic view of FDC. The coordinator role cannot be considered in isolation. It is likely that the sector will need to drive this change from within. However change needs to be accompanied by guidance, resources, support and space for those working in coordinator and other roles to come to terms with the implications of this thinking, and to work through the complexities that it entails in shaping practice and developing their own capabilities.
References


LEADING PEOPLE PROCESSES
IN FAMILY DAY CARE
Achieving Excellence through People in Education and Care

Fundamentally Linked to the Growth and Sustainability of Family Day Care
Agility and Continuous Adaption to Complex and Changing Environments and Circumstances