Partnerships with Colleagues and Other Services

What is a ‘partnership’ with a colleague or another service?
For much of the last century, especially those in primary schools, did not work closely with others. Early childhood teachers have often had assistants and workers in child care sometimes have worked in pairs or even bigger teams. Today, in any week, an educator might work with other specialist educators (e.g. in music, sport or drama, librarians, school chaplains), education assistants (e.g. for children with special needs or in general classroom duties), health specialists (e.g. speech pathologists, occupational therapists, community nurses), community service workers (e.g. social workers) and government officials (e.g. police, Centrelink staff) – and many others, all of whom are there to support the children and their families.

The essence of a partnership is that it is a collaboration amongst equals, with the recognition that by working together the outcome will be better than it would otherwise have been with any one party working alone.

Effective partnerships require:
- Active involvement of all parties
- A sharing of decision making powers
- Recognition of complementary expertise and roles
- Sharing and agreeing on the aims and processes of what is to be achieved
- Negotiation of disagreements (acknowledging that these will probably occur)
- Mutual trust and respect
- Openness and honesty
- Clear communication

Educators have a unique set of knowledge, understandings and skills that enable them to meet the needs of individual children in an educational environment. Other professionals, with their own set of knowledge, understandings and skills can support educators, children and their families thereby enabling educators to do their job more effectively. This is not about educators relinquishing their professional judgement. Rather it is about knowing and using what other professionals can provide.

Why are partnerships with colleagues and other services important?
Children’s needs are not just educational. Families’ needs cannot be met by the school or care centre only. Schools and care centres can’t do it all by themselves – yet children and families have needs which impact on the school’s or care centre’s capacity to enable the children to learn effectively. Used well, partnerships enhance the well-being of children and their families. They make the work that educators do in schools or care centres easier and more focused. They allow educators to do the work that they are best able to do.

What do partnerships with colleagues and other services look like?
With more people in schools and care settings, educators need to manage partnerships. It should not be left to individual children and families. It is the educators who need to take responsibility for building the relationships with other professionals. This requires them finding out what the other professionals do, and how what they do relates to their own role as educators.
Specialist educators (e.g. music, drama, physical education) will provide specialist input into the larger program – and not just provide an educator with relief for their DOTT (duties other that teaching) time. Other community professionals (e.g. in health, community, police and justice) will work with individual children and/or their families, sometimes outside of the school or care setting. Other professionals such as teaching assistants will contribute to children’s learning by actively participating in the educational program, working with small groups or individual children. It is up to the educator to plan for and integrate these other contributions to children’s learning and to ensure that the additional input does actually enhance the children’s learning, not interrupt it.

**What you will not see**
- Little, or only trivial communication between educators and other professionals
- Lack of respect for others knowledge and expertise
- Visiting professional treated as ‘outsiders’ ad not made to feel welcome

**Some Questions to Think About**
- Who are the other professionals in your school or centre? How do they contribute to children’s learning and to meeting families needs?
- How can your planning include these professionals?
- What other professionals could help you to do your job more effectively?

**Some things to Do**
- Systematically interview the professionals who are working with your children and families to find out how they are supporting children’s learning and meeting families’ needs.
- As a school or centre, investigate the different services offered in your local area that could contribute to you doing your job more effectively.

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