BEYOND REFLECTION: MINDFUL PEDAGOGY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Angie Zerella
IDENTITY

• Identity is the very core of who we are.

• Identity is not fixed but shifts and changes as we experience the world.

• It is dependant upon the time, place and the situation we are in.
IDENTITY

IDENTITY FORMS FROM……..

: ONES OWN VIEW AND UNDERSTANDING OF ONESELF AND THE CONNECTION ONE HAS TO WHERE THEY BELONG

AS WELL AS……..

: THE NARRATIVE AN INDIVIDUAL IS TOLD FROM OTHERS ABOUT WHO THEY ARE AND THE PLACE/ROLE THEY HAVE WITHIN ANY GIVEN COMMUNITY
IDENTITY

- The development of a positive identity therefore relies on being understood, feeling valued and being accepted and celebrated for who one is and what one brings with them to the community they are engaging in.
Our role as educators is therefore vital in ensuring children feel supported, valued, accepted and understood as they come to understand themselves and their place in this world.
REFLECTIVE QUESTION

What is the narrative you are telling each of the children in your setting about who they are, what their role is and how they are valued within your learning community???
THEORETICALLY THIS ALL MAKES SENSE…. BUT WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

What happens when one feels challenged?

RYAN’S STORY
To truly support a positive identity then, educators must be very aware of the relationships they form and the attitudes/views they have about another at any given time.
Reflective practice has been the catalyst in education to promote change, challenging educators to consider one's biases and attitudes and supporting the development of a more equitable and socially just world for all.

THIS LEAD TO MY INTEREST IN REFLECTIVE PRACTICE…….
Driven by the perspectives of Donald Schon, Paulo Freire, John Dewey and others reflective practice is seen as the tool to support transformational change in educators’ views about how the world should be.

Through my work and my study I began to wonder how effective reflective practice is in ensuring this transformation occurs in ECE.
MY INITIAL RESEARCH IDENTIFIED THAT………

• In many cases reflective practice in education is a taken for granted assumption that assumes transformation is occurring.

• It can be a process that ticks the boxes of accountability rather than a conduit for change.
WHY IS THIS THE CASE?

• The busyness of educators work prevents the time needed to reflect, to see and to be with children and in this situation processes become habitual and are no longer questioned or thought about.

• Educators in this situation become reactive rather than responsive

• Reflective practice is not easy and is a learned process
I had developed concern for how the busyness of our everyday work leads to habitual behaviours that may well be taking us away from being, noticing and understanding.
The busy lives people lead in the technologically driven culture that consumes our attention often produce a multitasking frenzy of activity that leaves people constantly doing, with no space to breathe and just be (Siegel, 2007).
Mind Full, or Mindful?
Reflective teaching means looking at what you do in the classroom, thinking about why you do it, and thinking about if it works - a process of self-observation and self-evaluation.

Julie Tice

Post modern perspectives – self governance
Research findings on neuro science, reflection is a difficult process that indeed must be learned

Led to a shift from reflection to mindfulness........
Rather than a questioning of the self, it is an understanding, noticing and acceptance of the self and others that relates to a mindful way of being.
What is mindfulness?

Being attuned to oneself and others in the present moment, using all of one's senses, noticing both the new and the familiar and being open to multiple perspectives and thus new learning.

*The key aspect of mindfulness is awareness of awareness*
‘When we as adults are able to see the children in the process, it’s as if we are opening a window and getting a fresh view of things...this is a self-learning that takes place for the teacher and it enables the teacher to see things that are taking place in children that teachers were not able to see before’ (Malaguzzi, 1993, p. 54)
‘Educators professional judgements are central to their active role in facilitating children’s learning. In making professional judgements they weave together their professional knowledge and skills, knowledge of children, families and communities, awareness of how their beliefs and values impact on children’s learning, personal styles and past experiences’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 11)
RESEARCH QUESTION

What does mindful pedagogy in an early childhood context look like?
Mindfulness in practice: *Meaning of mindfulness in early childhood education*

* Megan - ‘being in the moment, it’s being aware of what is around you, what’s happening, what you’re feeling, what you’re seeing, all your senses at that moment’.

* Susan - ‘being aware, being aware of everything’.

* Leanne - ‘using all of your senses.....using your eyes to listen and your ears to listen and your heart to listen and I don’t think you can or should use one over another one. They need to coordinate and blend and marry and weave together’.
ASPECTS OF MINDFULNESS

- Mindful Interactions
- Behind the Scenes Mindfulness
- Overall Mindfulness
Mindfulness as pedagogy

* Relationships and learning
* Listening
* Co-habitation
* We all matter
* Meaningful encounters
Skills and attitudes to mindfulness

* Remembering and revisiting
* Knowing and understanding
* Seriousness and responsibility
* Responsiveness and intent
* Believing and collaborating
* Passion and commitment
THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT – ENHANCEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS TO MINDFUL PEDAGOGY

* Leadership and context

* Power and agency

* Attitudes

* Reflective practice

* Constraints to mindfulness
‘It’s being in tune with what is happening, being in tune with children individually, in relationships with them, in tune with the whole room as well as interacting one on one, in tune with other staff, being able to catch their eye, and knowing that they are looking to catch mine......I think the big thing in the way I would relate it to how we work here is the listening, the listening to children, that’s not just listening with your ears but listening with your eyes, your heart, your whole self and trying to understand and make meaning out of what you are seeing’
(Megan – research participant)
PRACTICE
Holistic approaches
Responsiveness to children
Learning through play
Intentional teaching
Learning environments
Cultural competence
Continuity of learning and transitions
Assessment for learning

PRINCIPLES
Secure respectful and reciprocal relationships
Partnerships with families
High expectations and equity
Respect for diversity
Ongoing learning and reflective practice

Mindful Pedagogy relates to all aspects of the EYLF and VEYLD/DF practice/principles and learning outcomes

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Identity
Community
Wellbeing
Learning
Communication
1. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AND PRACTICE – ‘Children learn best when the experiences they have are meaningful to them and are focused on the here and now....Educators observe, listen and talk with children for sustained periods of time and pay close attention to what they are saying thinking and doing’ ‘Educators and coordinators are intentional, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions...they are aware of their own beliefs and values and how this impacts on children’s learning and wellbeing
5. **RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN** – ‘all children need to know that others care about them, **know them well** and are interested in what they **do, think and feel**…..educators who are **attuned** to children’s thoughts and feelings support the development of a strong sense of **wellbeing**’
Key finding in the study

Unless mindfulness in practice realised then the process of reflection has not been effective.

A mindful pedagogy is therefore the result of effective reflection

Angie Zerella, 2012
Mindful pedagogy involves awareness and presence in the here and now. It includes being attuned to and focused on the novel and affective aspects of being with children, to listen intently, to notice children’s actions and reactions and to notice oneself and oneself in relation to the reactions of others. It ensures an intentional, holistic and responsive teaching approach, where open-mindedness through a multiple perspectives lens allows for engagement with different understandings and possibilities, opening the space for new learning and connected and meaningful relationships.

Angie Zerella, 2012

Summary
It is through a mindful pedagogy that children's voices are heard and the very heart of who they are accepted, celebrated and understood.

It is through a mindful pedagogy that transformation occurs for both children and educators and for the families with whom we work.

It is through a mindful pedagogy that educators come to see themselves and their role in the lived lives of others and act to ensure that safe, secure and supportive environments prevail and educational environments are equitable for all.

It is through a mindful pedagogy that positive identities flourish as communities learn to “be” in the moment and grow together through acceptance, trust and respect.

Angie Zerella, 2014
‘When I look upon these children coming here....it’s like they are coming to our home, not ours as in the teachers, ours as in them and us....we are going to spend the day here together, inside and outside, and together and separate at different times, and we are going to learn to live together.....what that means is we are going to live and co-habitate effectively, respectfully, mindfully of one another, we are going to be here in this space with an awareness of ourselves but at the same time balanced nicely with an awareness of the rights of the others’.

Leanne Mits, Pope Road Kindergarten – research participant
‘In today’s rush we all think too much – seek too much – want too much – and forget about the joy of just being’

Eckhart Tolle
QUESTIONS
AND
REFLECTIONS