

Co-constructing shared meanings: Beginning the collaboration with families of young children with a disability

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Exploring the co-construction of shared meanings and beginning the collaboration with families of young children with a disability:

- Key issues of support and collaboration with families
- Reflecting Australian early years learning frameworks
- Reflecting *Early Childhood Australia* and the *Early Childhood Intervention Australia* Codes of Ethics
- Considering the notions of family choice and control, key policy constructs foundational to the NDIS



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Co-constructing shared meanings...what is it?

Identifying and together building shared meanings - understandings, goals and aspirations:

- To maximise the child's learning and development
- To support both child and family learning, development, needs and aspirations
- To act in accordance with the rights and best interests of the child



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Beginning collaboration with families of young children with a disability rests on:

- building partnerships with families, right from the start
- acknowledging that choice & control for families (a key policy construct of the NDIS) is built on shared construction of meaning by families & early childhood educators



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Setting the context here in Australia

Policy

- COAG National Early Childhood Development Strategy
- Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework
- Aims to improve quality of learning and development of all children
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Biggest social reform in Australia since the introduction of Medicare
- Aims to support people with a disability to take part in the everyday activities of their lives



NQF Principle: Respecting & supporting the role of parents and families

- reflects a strong commitment to family-centred practice
- recognises and builds on family strengths
- supports the family in recognising the positive outcomes ECEC services may bring for their child
- Informed decision-making by families involves consideration of their own needs, preferences and relevant information



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NQF Principle: Recognition of the rights & best interests of the child

- allow extended time to discuss:
 - what the child enjoys,
 - unique qualities that they bring to the family and their community
 - strengths and interests that can be foundations for further engagement & learning
- programs and experiences are planned and provided based on the child's strengths, needs, capabilities, interests and real-life experiences



NQF Principles:

- Children are successful, competent & capable learners
- Equity, inclusion & diversity
- reflects the rights, abilities and aspirations of families and children themselves
- children's development is shaped by the environments in which they live and spend their time growing and learning – home and ECEC



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Both the EYLF and ECA's Code of Ethics affirm the underpinning belief that every child is rich in possibilities and potential

“It was the first time I could see her joining in with other little children in our community... and the first time I could see her beginning to make her own friends... the first time I really had hope for a good future for her.”

Parent Elisa



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Collaborating to co-construct shared meanings

- Sharing of power and responsibility
- Mutuality in relationship
- Shared aims and goals
- Commitment to joint action



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Sharing of power and responsibility

- Acknowledges the family's personalised understanding of their own child
- Considers the constructs inherent in the NDIS – choice and control
- Family choice and control rests on the equal sharing of power and responsibility for children's learning and development
- Considers the specialised knowledge and experience of other professionals



Mutuality in relationship

- Effective collaboration is the practice which supports mutuality
- Development of effective working relationships is an essential attribute and skill for educators (ECA Code of Ethics, 2016)
- Demonstration of positive help-giving behaviours supports mutuality
 - Positive attitudes and high expectations
 - Sharing of information to inform decision-making
 - Expectations of shared responsibility and action



Shared aims and goals

- Rests on a conception of parents as partners, with shared leadership in the relationship
- Early childhood educators must be able to understand and appreciate family needs, aspirations and broader complexities of influence such as impacts of community, government and policy
- Identification of shared understandings and aspirations leads to co-construction of shared goals and steps to support the child's learning



Commitment to joint action

Responsibility for maximising the child's learning and development is shared and becomes the emphasis for collaboration between the parent/s, early childhood educators and any other professionals involved with the child's learning and development



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Co-constructing shared meanings

- self-awareness and commitment to reflective practice
- an ethical commitment to serve the best interests of both child and family is an essential element of professional accountability



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Inner circle:

The child

Interrelating circles:

The family

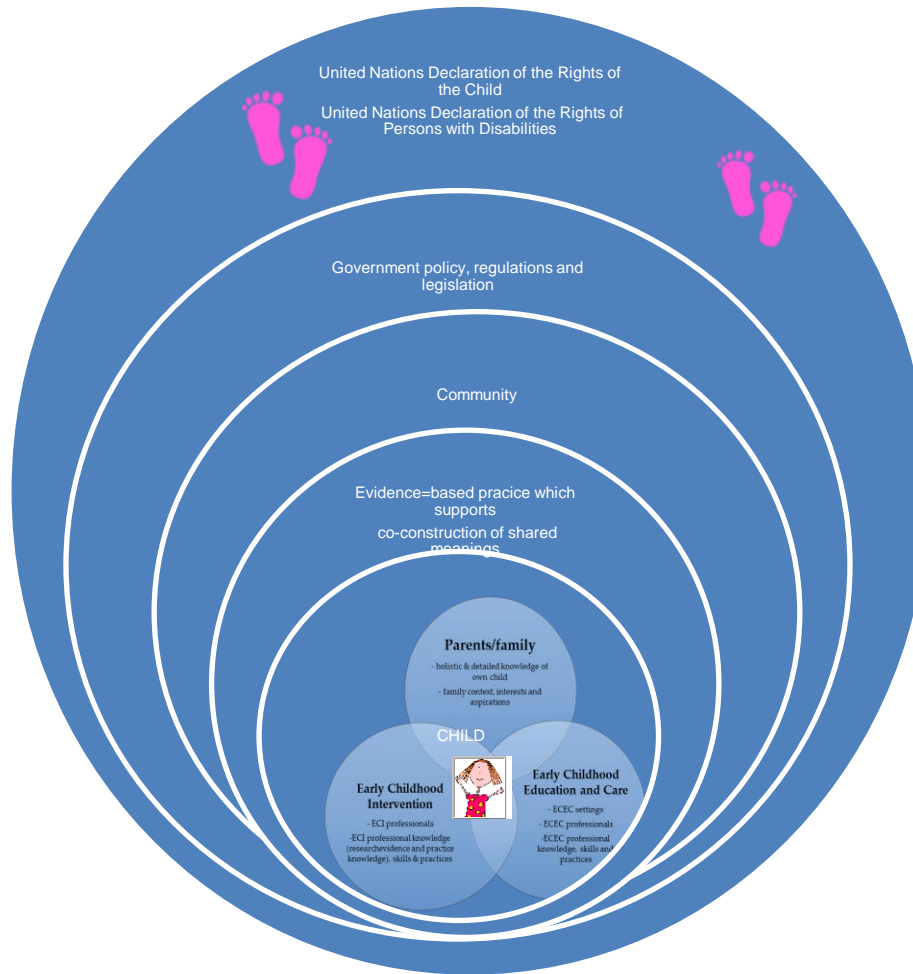
- Holistic and detailed knowledge of their child
- Family context, needs and aspirations

Early childhood education and care

- Professional knowledge
- (research and practice evidence)
- Reflective professional practice and skills

ECI professional

- Professional knowledge
- (research and practice evidence)
- Skills in generalising knowledge and practice to everyday environments



Co-construction of shared meanings model:

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