

VIT Video

THE INQUIRY PROCESS: PRESENTING TO A PANEL

Kindergarten teacher Jessica Ciuciu presents the evidence from her inquiry process to a workplace panel.

In 2017, Jessica Ciuciu, a kindergarten teacher with City of Casey kindergarten programs, completed an inquiry into her practice using the evidence-based approach.

As part of the process of moving to full registration, Jessica makes a presentation to a panel, outlining her inquiry and providing evidence that she has met all the descriptors of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the Proficient Teacher level.

The workplace panel consisted of two Team Leaders with City of Casey Kindergarten Programs: Karen Warrington and Priscilla Boissezon. Both are VIT-trained mentors.

Good morning, my name is Jessica Ciuciu and I'm a kindergarten teacher working for the city of Casey. I'm here today to talk to you about my process of moving to full registration.

Moving to full registration requires me to undertake an inquiry approach as I work alongside a mentor - who in my circumstance was Stephanie Young - in which we conduct professional conversations: I observe her teaching and she observes mine. I also need to illustrate how the snapshot of my teaching meets the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the proficient level as well as evaluating my practice based on an assessment of learning from my focus children.

I'm sure you're already familiar with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, however I'll provide a brief overview. There are three domains including professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement, and within those there are seven standards and across those there are 37 descriptors.

Now throughout my presentation I will have key links to these descriptors on the side panel of each slide to indicate which standard is being shown in that particular slide. But I've also gathered a reference page here that I will share with you, and this indicates which standards are being met on each slide for you to have a quick cross reference if you need to have a further look into those, as well as a copy of my presentation so that you can mark any notes. I also have a copy of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the proficient level in case you wanted to have a view of those as well.

So the inquiry approach requires me to take several steps, the first of which is to look at the context in which I'm teaching and the content that I am to teach. From this context this helps support me in defining my inquiry question, including any professional learning that I might need to undertake to support me through that professional engagement. I then use this to develop an action plan, which includes activities, strategies for engagement and assessment practices and tasks that I will use which I then will implement alongside the support of my mentor. And in the final stage I evaluate the effectiveness of my practice by assessing the learning that has occurred for my learners.

So first looking at my context: I am a teacher within a four-year old funded kindergarten which offers fifteen hours across a week in over three days. We operate a rotational model which has two full-time teachers and a part-time floater who's there for three days of the week and it is an emergent curriculum presented in a play-based program.

The content which we offer children is guided by frameworks such as the Early Years Learning Framework and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and as well as adhering to things such as the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, code of ethics and organisational guidelines and working with families and children to make curriculum meaningful for

them. I can also focus in on those focused children a little bit more and consider their own context and how this would influence the way in which I teach them.

With all that information I was able to define an inquiry question and in this case it was "How do I support my learners to practice being inclusive of others?" The reason for this inquiry question came about after

- observing and listening to the children's interactions with each other and noticing language from the children such as: "this is a boy table" or "that's a girl toy."
- comparing children with additional needs to those who didn't and referring to one as normal or not and
- children also associating other children as being "the naughty child" and sometimes excluding them on the basis of that.

We also observe the friendship dynamics, noticing that they were often a boss or a leader within the friendship groups and they were often seen excluding children as a form of punishment when things didn't go their way. And we also noticed some reactions between friendship groups. So if some bickering is happening and then when an educator steps forward to mediate that situation, eye contact was avoided, bodies were turned away, sometimes children even would run away.

So one on one and in small groups and even whole groups, the children were able to articulate to myself what they believed to be fair or unfair behaviours in regards to an inclusion and exclusion.

However observing their practices and their engagement with each other it was clear that they needed some further support to be able to actually act on their understandings. Furthermore this inquiry and its rationale adheres to my organisational guideline titled 'interactions with children'.

I also conducted some professional conversations with my mentor Stephanie. One of those I've recorded here is regarding reflecting on the group dynamic from throughout the week, reflecting on which days we found to be most challenging with these types of behaviours and reflecting a little bit on Stephanie's previous years of teaching, with her identifying that this is a common theme that needs to be addressed year after year. She did feel that this particular group of children did need a bit more focused support for this area.

Through this discussion we also considered factors that might be influencing the children's engagement with each other and things like noise levels, are children actively engaged with an activity or were they running around the room, other disruptions to the routine or what does the routine look like and does it give the children autonomy. This also helped my inquiry by getting me to critically consider who might best benefit from being in my focus group: considering children who may need support in developing empathetic behaviours, developing assertiveness or developing collaborative attitude. It also helped me to reflect on the environment that I do offer my children, which in turn resulted in a complete restructure of the day to allow more children uninterrupted times throughout the day.

The second conversation that I've recorded is in regards to developing and finalising my action plan. So Stephanie reflected with me that it would be important to ensure that I have a variety of experiences to keep the children's engagement while noting that my focus group children were predominately involved in more physical and active play. And so this supports my inquiry by ensuring that in my finalised action plan I do include a variety of experiences to suit their learning styles and that it would be valuable to ensure that each new activity built on one another to eventually lead into a puppet show performance.

Looking a little bit more at my focus children I considered factors that may influence their engagement and the differentiated strategies I could use to help support that engagement. So for example in consideration of Matthew, we had earlier in the year worked with a preschool field officer regarding his emotional and social regulation strategies and I felt that these strategies could again be employed during this inquiry to best support him through it.

What I hope to achieve from my inquiry was the development of learning activities that would support my children to become capable of being more inclusive of each other, as well as strengthening my own understanding of what I can actually expect at this developmental age and how I can support these children.

I hope to establish a common language between the group as well as implement all these new strategies to support my learners. This would be achieved through collaboration with my mentor, by engaging with professional readings, by using resources that I can seek online or through the co-educators that I work with and things that have been successful for them in previous teaching years. This would also be achieved by listening to and responding to my focus children, considering where they're taking the learning and continuing to gauge where their level of understanding is so that I know that I can be sure that they are getting a deep understanding of the topic.

So from this I was able to identify some learning needs, namely looking at the development of children's friendships and empathetic behaviours and what I could expect at that age. There are some links there to those readings as well as looking at children's healthy emotional development, what adults and educators can do to support them through this development and some readings also on the physical environment as a means to foster engagement. I've provided one of those readings for you today if you are interested in having a flick through it or having a read following the presentation.

Previous professional development opportunities that I've been part of have also related to this inquiry. The first is one about the inclusion of children with ASD and the importance that educators have in supporting them in play and social interactions. Another PD titled 'Engaging tricky children' looks at those valuable skills that are developed through play and how educators can support their engagement - which of course includes children's behaviours towards each other, including inclusion. Another was a conference titled 'Breaking through unconscious bias,' which actually challenged us as professionals to consider our own unconscious biases and how they might actually be influencing the way we include others in our work.

So from all this information I was able to collate it into an action plan. My action plan includes the learning resources and activities that I plan to use, strategies I would employ for maintaining engagement, the learning outcomes that I hoped my learners could achieve and the assessment practices and tasks that I would use to assess their learning.

I'll take you briefly through some of those activities. So one that we began with which also was the time which I observed my mentor was through her reading of the storybook 'One' by Kathryn Otoshi, which also incorporated literacy and numeracy into our program. I also read that storybook.

On the following day I worked predominantly with a book called 'Have you filled a bucket today'. This explores the idea that everybody has an invisible bucket and the things that we say and do either fill somebody's bucket or dip into their bucket which consequently helps them to either feel good and happy or maybe sad and lonely. In turn when we fill others buckets we are also doing that to our own bucket.

This story was used throughout the whole inquiry approach and became the grounds for creating that common language with the children. We also worked with a story called 'The Bat Fable' and there's a copy there as well if you're interested in having a read.

The main idea in that fable is that Bat's very eager and excited to be a part of a bird party but is told by the birds that they feel he's an animal and cannot join their party. So Bat then hears about the animals having a party, but the animals feel that Bat's more a bird and cannot join the animal party, which leaves Bat all by himself. I asked my focus children to come up with an alternative ending to this story and they beautifully chose to have Bat throw his own party in which he invited the animals and the birds so they could dance together and be happy.

We later performed this in a puppet show. I also organised being able to use ICT within this inquiry approach by incorporating an audio book of "Have you filled a bucket today" at a listening post alongside some songs that relate to the story.

Alongside my mentor, we organised visits to a meeting room within the service to access a smart board so that ICT could be accessible to the whole group as we watched some Sesame Street videos regarding the word 'inclusion'. This also required me to comply with legislative requirements as I needed to obtain parental permission to do this as well as organise a risk minimisation plan.

Towards the end of this inquiry the children were participating in a puppet show. So following on from our Bat fable, we had our practicing and we rehearsed and performed to the whole group the story of the Bat fable.

For this action plan I developed a brief timeline to help organise my activities and when I could foresee them happening. This did remain flexible and things were pushed forward and back depending on where their children were at.

Some snapshots of some of the teaching activities that were undertaken: so we have the bucket filler dipping and sorting buckets, we have our smart board excursion to see the Sesame Street video. The bucket sorting was also incorporated into a puppet show theatre later on.

We have the listening post with the book and the audio of the story and the first showing of our puppet show to the whole group. So now that I had my action plan all prepared I was able to implement it and during this time I did observe Stephanie's teaching as mentioned earlier by her reading of 'One' by Kathryn Otoshi.

In reflection prior to her reading Stephanie informed me that she's worked with this book before and she does feel that it's often a book that needs to be revisited because there are many concepts explored and it can take a few readings before the children get the bigger picture from the book. So in my observations I saw that Stephanie maintained the children's engagement by asking them questions, by getting them to identify the colors in the book or identifying numbers. She also related the book at the end to the children's own experiences at kinder by asking them what they could do to be like the strong character of number one within that book.

This helped me learn that storybooks are an effective tool to help explore concepts, especially with a whole group, which in turn helps my inquiry because I feel that this would be a valuable tool to help build that common language with the children. I learned that it would be very important for me to maintain expression through my body language, my tone of voice and maybe omitting words and phrases to help the children put into the story and be a part of that experience. Because Stephanie and I work by co-teaching there were many opportunities for her to observe my teaching, so within that time there are many points to reflect on and these are some of those.

The first I'd like to mention is that my original focus for this inquiry was actually to look at how I support my children to participate in sustainable practices. However following the initial activity Stephanie and I found that we were having to mediate a lot of children's engagement with each other in which children were feeling excluded or wanted to be included. And of course we just thought "aha!" naturally this would be a great way for me to use this inquiry approach to focus in on this behavior.

Another point was following a whole group brainstorming session with 29 children. Stephanie and I felt that it might be more valuable to actually split it in two to actually allow children the opportunity to share and be given ample time to share, because once we've had 10 sharing there are another 10 who were kind of over that activity. So breaking it down into smaller groups and giving them more time and space to share their ideas.

In reflection of our storybook, I needed to modify some of the words within that book to help my learners be able to understand the message that I was trying to get across and I also received lots of positive feedback from parents who were saying that their child's coming home and talking about their invisible bucket and how it gets filled and it gets dipped. So it was a great opportunity to actually show them the book to discuss what we've been learning in the kindergarten and many of them express their interest in purchasing the book to reinforce this concept at home.

I ensured throughout my inquiry that many different resources were used including books, ICT and dramatic play, to help maintain their engagement. Informal assessment was used throughout the process so that I could gauge the children's level of understanding so that I could best scaffold and support their learning.

It is acknowledged that not all the descriptors may be met in this inquiry approach and I found that to be true for 1.4 and 2.4. That's because there are no children who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander at my kindergarten. However in reflection I do feel that there are many ways in which these heritages could be included and shared with the group. These include ideas such as incorporating any stories from these cultures into the curriculum that relate to inclusion by using

the local languages to substitute these names of the animals - for instance from the Bat fable - as well as incorporating traditional symbolism from indigenous art alongside the stories we were exploring.

While these descriptors have been shown throughout this presentation, I asked my mentor for some feedback to help strengthen some areas. So for 3.6 Stephanie's reflected that I would use the children's current knowledge and level of understanding to help modify either what I was teaching or the timeline in which I was teaching it.

For 3.7 Stephanie's reflected that earlier in the year I have heard that parents are interested in children's respectful friendships and the development of these and have kept them informed of this process via informal conversations during drop-off and pickup times, but as well as through an online portfolio called "Kept me".

For 4.5 Stephanie's reflected that before showing any footage on our tablets or laptops or smart board I have viewed or listened to the content to ensure that it's appropriate, as well as having it set up and ready to go to avoid any inappropriate information or footage being displayed.

For 5.3 Stephanie has reflected that as on a daily basis we would sit down together and reflect on our observations from the day to ensure that our observations and judgments were consistent and these would help inform what our individual objectives for the children would become.

Following the implementation of my action plan I was able to then evaluate my teaching practice. On the following slides I have some annotated drawings from the children who reflected on something that they had gained or learned through our inquiry and I recorded what they articulated to me onto their drawing.

Keeping this in mind that feedback was given throughout the inquiry and that my assessment is not solely from this one particular piece on this one particular drawing, but as a summative assessment of things I have observed and noted throughout the process.

I've also kept family engagement, the "Kept me" and sharing their children's drawings as well as giving them feedback about their child's participation in the puppet show following its performance. I've mentioned "Kept me" a few times now: so this is an example of what a parent might receive via "Kept me" or in their email.

And so this is for our Sesame Street video viewing which includes our observation links to frameworks and analysis and reflection of that learning and where to next as well as some nice visuals.

The first drawing I have here is from Edmund. Edmund was able to make a connection between the bucket filling dipping concept and our Bat fable. He was able to articulate to me that Bat's exclusion from the parties made him feel sad and he linked that to bucket dipping. But when I asked Edmund what could be done differently to help Bat feel good, he was unsure so this tells me that it would be important to reinforce with Edmund behaviours that do promote positive feelings.

The second drawing is from Kevin. As you can see Kevin's provided me with lots of detail and information as he was able to retell me every activity that we did, as well as some several key learning points from each of those activities. This indicates to me that he has a strong memory of the understanding of our topic and what it means to be inclusive.

The third drawing is from Leo who reflected with me that being a bucket dipper makes you feel sad and a bucket filler makes you feel happy which does reflect his engagement with the story "Have you filled a bucket today". However when I asked Leo what actions and what words contribute to people feeling happy or sad he again just referred to them as either feeling happy or sad which tells me that it's important for me to revisit with Leo what actions and words can do to others and impacts the way that they feel.

My fourth drawing is from James. Like Kevin, James was able to articulate several key learning points. He chose to focus on the Bat fable for which he had a major role within so it was really nice to see him being very proud of his work. James' drawing reflected the new knowledge that they created in which Bat threw his own party for the birds and animals. This indicates to me that James has grasped the topic of inclusion quite strongly.

The final drawing is from Matthew. Matthew was very quick to tell me that sharing is a bucket filler behaviour and this was really interesting because sharing was a key skill that we were working with Matthew in regards to so it was great to see that he'd linked our learning with his own experiences and this just reinforces to me the importance of connecting learning with Matthew's own personal experiences in the future to really help him gain a solid understanding.

Based on the learning that has occurred and the teaching resources, strategies and activities that were used I feel that the children's knowledge and understanding of what inclusivity looks like has been developed and therefore the teaching has been effective. Each child was able to articulate key learning goals and were observed throughout the inquiry to be able to reflect back to me key learning, both in conclusion of an activity and when revisiting it at the start of the next activity.

The intentional introduction and focus of this topic has strengthened the children's understanding of fair and unfair behaviours as it relates to inclusion and exclusion. This is also evidenced among the common language that's now being shared between teachers and children and between the children themselves as they remind each other to reflect on their actions when necessary.

This inquiry process has encouraged me to be more active in my research and thoughtful in my teaching intentions to ensure that it meets the needs of my learners. I will continue to become more intentional in my teaching actions and considerate of the strategies I employ while I remain flexible and responsive to the needs of my learners.

I really have valued creating that common language amongst the group. It's something that's been ongoing and has been great way to effectively communicate a message with the children and it avoids any potential misunderstandings, so this is something that I intend to use yearly in my future teaching years. Furthermore it's also strengthened my self-efficacy as a teacher and my confidence to work collaboratively with my co-educators.

It's influenced my teaching identity by giving me the confidence to engage with deliberate reflection research in action and to really utilise the strengths and skills of my colleagues and all those around me.

That concludes the formal part of my presentation but if you have any questions I'm here to answer them, but otherwise I'd just like to say thank you for your time.