

reflections

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ENGAGING IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: RELATIONSHIPS, CONNECTIONS AND PRACTICE

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As an Inclusion Professional, a key programme objective is to support early childhood services to build their capacity and capability to provide quality, inclusive practices for all children in care (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

It is important to the role, that Inclusion Professional's stay current with their own professional learning and explore pedagogy that support the objectives of the Inclusion Programme.

We were fortunate to attend Marte Meo practitioner training – a six-day program with a focus on relationships, connection, and video analysis of child, peers and adult interactions.

Marte Meo is a film-based interaction analysis program now implemented in 43 countries. Founded by Maria Aarts, Netherlands, Marte Meo derives from Latin, meaning 'one's own strength' (Marte Meo International). The approach is broadly implemented in a variety of professions including teaching, health services, psychology, social services, nursing, and disability services.

The strategies offered just made sense. As participants, we were invited into the child's world at a new level, following the strengths of the child, building on their existing abilities and natural interactions with others. The method encourages social and emotional attachment and supports educators in deepening their understanding of children's development.

ENGAGING IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: RELATIONSHIPS, CONNECTIONS AND PRACTICE (CONTINUED)

The Marte Meo strategies we have used in our Inclusion Support role with services and educators have included:

- supporting educators to develop strong relationships with children using 'following skills'. Following is a fabulous tool for educators to use when developing relationships with children. Following requires an educator to follow a child's lead, waiting and watching to see what they do rather than prompt with questions or make prior predictions as to how they will play with a resource.
- encouraging 'attentive waiting'. Educators simply watch the child and follow their initiatives. Educators use good faces, attractive tones, positive body language and mirror movements of the child allowing them to feel seen and increases connection.
- naming children's initiatives, emotions and actions. This requires educators to 'be' in the moment and say what is happening rather than asking multiple questions of the child. This supports a child to again be seen; building a sense of worth and doesn't disturb the natural rhythm of a child's play. Naming also supports children in their ability to read and acknowledge the emotions of others which helps in the development of social reciprocity which is a life-long skill.
- supporting educators to develop 'linking up' skills. This includes highlighting social information for children; actions, emotions or verbal initiatives and can support a child's entry into play. Linking up skills also promotes empathy in children and supports children who may find social situations challenging and difficult to interpret.

The Marte Meo training is a space for self-reflection and critical reflective practice. Video analysis of our own interactions with children allows for shared conversations on pedagogy and practice and reminds us as adults to stop, watch, reflect and 'be' with children, and just as

importantly allow children to 'be'. Children learn in the moment and need opportunities to focus, wonder and 'be'.

"Childhood is a time to be, to seek and make meaning of the world. Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children's lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life. The early childhood years are not solely preparation for the future but also about the present."

(Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p.7)

Through our own professional development training, we are making a difference as a conduit of new learnings and understandings to create inclusive spaces for all children.

References

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