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I have been an early years teacher for 12 years and have worked in a range of early childhood settings across the Northern Territory. Although I already held a Bachelor of Education (Primary), to meet the new national requirements for early years educators I recently completed post-graduate studies specialising in early childhood.

The introduction of the EYLF and the NQS has really forced myself and other preschool teachers to take a leadership role in shaping what the early childhood reform agenda will mean for preschools in the Northern Territory. Our preschools in the Northern Territory are part of our school system and so we have for many years worked within the hierarchy and expectations of the Northern Territory education system and its requirements, curriculum and otherwise. The introduction of the NQS meant that we needed to make changes and, as it happens, preschool teachers needed to be proactive in ensuring that the intent of the NQS was well understood within the school system. While many preschool teachers have great working relationships with their school executive and principals, the changes affecting the early childhood classes of preschool and transition had the potential to divide. The teachers wanted and needed clarification of the changes and how the NQS would work in a school setting. Principals and executive were busy with a multitude of other imperatives including the introduction of the National School Curriculum. It became clear very quickly that preschool teachers had expertise in early childhood and an understanding of the NQS that could assist school executives to implement the changes that were needed. The most significant factor for me in this change was rethinking the way that we programmed and planned for children. The EYLF required us to plan according to children's interests and use intentional teaching strategies to develop curriculum to contribute to children's learning journeys. In the past we had been required by the school to submit our programs in advance each semester and identify specific learning outcomes for children in the terms ahead. We were unsure how we could meld these two seemingly opposing approaches.

I was fortunate enough to be working in a two teacher preschool. This meant I was able to discuss and bounce ideas off my teaching partner (Kate). After talking it through with each other, we felt we needed to make some changes and required some clarification, so we alerted our assistant principal to our initial concerns. Following discussion with her she suggested that we explore some ideas and possible solutions and come back to talk with her about how a new approach could meet both expectations. From this initial discussion we had a better understanding of the school-based requirements that needed to be met and we went away to work on our ideas. We were fortunate that over the years we had built a good working relationship with the assistant principal based on trust and clear communication.

Initially, we just had informal chats when issues or questions came up for us. We soon realised that we needed a more formal structure of meetings and keeping notes, so we were not wasting time and going back over old conversations, and had documented our agreements. We agreed to meet formally, including all preschool staff, the assistant principal and the principal, at least once each term throughout last year. There were many robust discussions and it was important that we were well

prepared for our meetings and clear in expressing our ideas. I realised through this process that if you want to be taken seriously you have to be convincing but also understand the perspective of the other. While the NQS was dominating our thoughts, we needed to recognise that the school executive staff had many competing agendas. We needed to force the issue to make sure it got the attention it needed, but also had to be mindful of making this as easy as possible for the executive to digest and understand where we were coming from. What resulted was an agreement about a new approach to planning that took account of the school's requirements for forward planning for children's learning and our desire to follow children's interests according to the EYLF. We have begun to work with this new system and it seems at this early stage to be effective in meeting both sets of expectations.

It was good to be working with Kate, who was as enthusiastic as I was to work this out. I believe having her as a professional partner through everything was one of the major reasons we got by; having someone to bounce your ideas and thoughts off was imperative. We tried many different approaches, attended professional learning sessions and used our professional association, the Preschool Teachers' Association of the Northern Territory (PSTANT), to network with others about how they were approaching the changes. Being often the only preschool teacher in a school can be very isolating and makes it difficult to be heard on matters that are important in preschool and transition classes. PSTANT has been able to put teachers in touch with resources that are available through national networks, hold meetings and create working groups to develop ideas and share expertise. Importantly, the association has been able to talk with government officials to clarify concerns or make suggestions where we have identified a potential problem.

I had been involved in PSTANT for two years when the outgoing president approached me last year to take on the role of president. As is my way, I was nervous and a little shocked because I didn't really think of myself as a leader and didn't think that others saw me as an authority figure. I was pleased to be asked and so decided to accept the nomination. Her reasoning was it was time for youth and enthusiasm to reinvigorate PSTANT at this important time for early childhood. I have been lucky that she agreed to stay on as vice president and so has been an important mentor as I get to know what being president really involves. At first I was looking to her for advice on what to do, but now I find myself finding my feet and taking more initiative. As I take on new challenges I gain more confidence. Now I am really enjoying the role and think that I am doing a pretty good job.

I think my experiences over the past few years have made me realise that I do know what I am doing and I do have something to offer. I find myself in a meeting or talking with someone and am often surprised that I know what I know and that they are listening to me. I can use my knowledge wisely to make a positive contribution and know that I do not need to feel powerless with those in higher authority.