

# School of thought: Case studies of different philosophical approaches

*What do we believe quality child care practice looks like? How can we translate our beliefs into quality practices? These are some of the most exciting yet challenging questions child care services, educators and families should regularly ask. To help answer these questions, services may find it beneficial to research different philosophical approaches to children's learning.*

*Fundamental to the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) standards is the provision for services to develop and demonstrate their philosophies, which should underpin all aspects of the service's operations, practices and programs. CCQA encourages services to reflect their diverse circumstances through their philosophies; and while every philosophy is unique, all should promote respect for children, families and educators; the importance of the childhood years and play in children's lives; the value of collaborative decision making; and a respect for diversity, fairness and social justice.*

*In this article, NCAC talks with a long day care, family day care and outside school hours care service about how their different philosophies influence their practices and programs, and complement the CCQA standards.*

## REGGIO EMILIA

### Como Children

*Como Children is a long day care service in a suburb of Perth. In this case study, owner Katie Pitchford and the service's Atelierista<sup>1</sup>, Linda Richardson, discuss the service's philosophy and approach to children's learning.*

The primary aspect of our philosophy is in its first statement: 'It is our wish for every child that they fulfill their potential today and every day to come'. This challenges us every day to provide a program that honours this intention and, as educators, to seek out alliances with other early childhood educators, artists and appropriate community bodies for both support and provocation to be better.

Our philosophy recognises and respects that every child is capable and competent. We promote and encourage individuality while still emphasising the importance of social cooperation and include opportunities for both in our programs. We support children to build on their ideas, giving them the appropriate assistance and materials so that their explorations and investigations are multifaceted.

We have long been inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. However, our staff include educators who have also been trained in the Montessori and Rudolf Steiner approaches. Our purpose is to provide a creative and intelligent program that is in keeping with the world today, and inspires and nurtures the best in every child.

Some of our educators have also attended the annual early childhood conference in Reggio Emilia, Italy, to witness firsthand and be inspired at how this educational program can be implemented and sustained. In doing this we have been able to lift our overall service to a higher and more balanced standard of education for young children.

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) guides us to examine our everyday practices and support our way of working reflectively – and our approach to children's learning is in keeping with these requirements.

Since Reggio Emilia is embedded with reflective practice and documentation, our educators can also confidently pinpoint in their programs where they are meeting NCAC's standards while also honouring our philosophical approach. For example, when programming for children our philosophy focuses on observing and documenting with photographs to communicate children's learning. This helps educators to answer questions from Validators about programming for children's experiences.

When considering how a philosophy can also work with the QIAS standards, our advice to services is to examine in detail their own intentions, desires and mode of providing an educational program. Services can ask, 'What are our priorities and how is it going to ensure that there is no compromise in the level of both care and education?'; 'How can we do this practice better?' and 'Are we respecting children with what we are providing?'

<sup>1</sup> An Atelierista is an educator trained in art education.

On examining the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) we've found no contradiction with the quality of practices that we already have in place. In fact we are pleased that for the first time an official vision is matching our service's high expectations and standards. We identify with the words 'belonging, being and becoming' and believe our service's philosophical approach can already be summed up in this way (if only we had thought of it first!).

Since receiving the EYLF we have reflected on our own philosophy to determine whether there is either the need or provocation to make changes. The Framework has affirmed our approach and so there was just one change that we felt necessary and very welcomed – the title of 'educator'. This we believe is the appropriate job title for people who work in our centre and the profession ■

**For further information about the service and philosophy addressed in this case study, go to:**

- Como Children  
[www.comochildcare.com](http://www.comochildcare.com)
- Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange's (REAIE) website ([www.reaie.org.au](http://www.reaie.org.au)) provides information about different projects, current news and events, and a list of resources which further explore the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

## MONTESSORI

### Marrickville Family Day Care Scheme

*Some family day care carers may have particular beliefs about how children learn and develop, which supports their scheme's philosophy. Marrickville Family Day Care Scheme, located in Sydney, supports and encourages its carers to implement their own philosophical approach to children's learning.*

The scheme's overall philosophy is to provide a secure and stimulating environment for children. By recognising that each child is unique, carers respect individuality, and program and plan for children's experiences based around their developing interests, strengths and skills. Liz Chellis, Coordinator, explained that families are informed on enrolment that a carer's practices may be framed by a specific philosophy such as Montessori, while other carers may focus on home languages or plan experiences based on an emergent curriculum framework.

Edurne Bengoetxea, one of the scheme's carers, uses a Montessori approach to support children's learning. She believes that this approach fits within the scheme's overall philosophy because of Montessori's educational commitment for children to have a secure and stimulating environment.

Known as 'Little School' Edurne's home suits children aged from two to six years. "I have a special room with a prepared environment that stimulates children's learning. I also use Montessori materials that are designed for specific learning goals. The child is free to choose any material after learning how to use them. I follow the majority of the Montessori curriculum which focuses on using practical and everyday material to develop sensory awareness education, language, the arts, mathematics and cultural subjects".

Throughout the day children have time to play alone or in groups. Books are read and discussed in story time to give children a clear understanding of the world around them, and to help them build their own identity. There are other educational and outdoor play activities, and Edurne and the children go on monthly excursions to museums.

Edurne explained that Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) complements her Montessori philosophy. "I think that not only does my service meet the requirements but I can excel in Quality Area 3 – Children's Experiences, Learning and Development. The learning experiences are individual to the children, they are planned and provided in a prepared environment, using selective materials and with myself as guide, provide children with learning opportunities and preparation to later overall success in school and in life".

In integrating the scheme's philosophical approach with FDCQA, Liz explained that training is integral to staff and carers' professional development. Sometimes there are challenges, especially as many of the carers have languages other than English, and working with the FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* has required a lot of additional support. However, Liz advised that there are many different ways of delivering programs that are consistent with the standards and the most important aspect is that carers should be able to articulate their philosophies.

Eduerne explained that as a carer her advice would be that with a good planned program, it is possible to offer an excellent service in which children can reach their highest potential. As a scheme, Marrickville Family Day Care has yet to review its philosophy following the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework. However, Eduerne has reviewed her philosophy and practice within the Framework and her Montessori approach, and says, "It suits perfectly the program I have and the active learning environment I offer to the children in my service" ■

**For further information about the service and philosophy addressed in this case study, go to:**

- **Marrickville Family Day Care Scheme**  
[www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au](http://www.marrickville.nsw.gov.au)
- **Montessori Australia Foundation's website** ([www.montessori.org.au](http://www.montessori.org.au)) provides information and resources to schools, child care services, educators and families who use the Montessori approach to support children's play and learning.

## RUDOLF STEINER

### Orana After School Care

*This outside school hours care service is located in the Australian Capital Territory and attached to a Steiner school comprising from Pre-school to Year 12. Jennifer Simmich, the Director, talks about the service's Steiner approach to children's learning.*

Orana After School Care aims to provide a warm, caring and inclusive environment that caters to the needs of each child. We do this in a way that is compatible with, and supportive of, the child's development in accordance with the Rudolf Steiner philosophy. The core principles of this approach to children's learning aim to understand and foster the unique gifts of the individual. The Steiner approach encourages children to pursue their creative instincts, inspires them to learn from their strengths, and nurtures their imagination. These values inspire every level of learning and education, which also helps children to be responsible for their own behaviour.

Our service strives towards respectful relationships that build trust. We deliver a child-centred and play-based program. We value open communication with the children, their families, staff and community members. Where required, Orana After School Care adopts a creative

yet firm approach to behaviour guidance. Our daily routines unfold in a rhythmic way within a beautiful, natural environment. There are opportunities for purposeful activity, rest, exploration and free play at the end of a busy day.

The children are offered plenty to do through artistic-creative activities, quality materials, imaginative experiences and wholesome nutrition. You will often see young children using their imagination to create anything from a car, house, flute or whole village using baskets of natural materials such as shells, rocks, pine cones and branches. This appreciation of children's imagination is one reason why television and computers are not used in our service.

Orana After School Care's philosophical approach aims to address the needs of the child in a holistic way that acknowledges the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, environmental and spiritual aspects of their growth. Our service seeks to deliver the highest quality care for each child.

The Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) standards have provided us with an opportunity to reflect upon our practices and have our efforts rewarded with high quality outcomes. In our experience the OSHCQA process viewed our practices through a lens acknowledging, and being sensitive to, our particular philosophy.

The OSHCQA system has also reminded us that 'quality' is a living and breathing process which helps to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our children. In many ways this mirrors the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as we feel that the Steiner approach reflects those concepts of 'being, belonging and becoming'. We have reviewed our philosophy against the EYLF, and we have not seen a need to make specific adjustments at this stage as we are constantly reviewing our practices and processes ■

**For further information about the service and philosophy addressed in this case study, go to:**

- **Orana After School Care**  
[www.oranaschool.com](http://www.oranaschool.com)
- **Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia's (RSSA) website** ([www.steineroz.com](http://www.steineroz.com)) represents member schools throughout Australia. RSSA facilitates the exchange of Steiner education and provides support and services to its member schools.