

Early Childhood teachers' ownership of Self-Regulation enhancing curricula

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Executive functioning (EF) skills are essential for success in school and in life and are central to individuals' ability to self-regulate their behaviours and learning efforts across contexts. Research offers interventions and 'add-ons' to curricula to enhance EF skills in young children, however, it fails to provide early childhood (EC) educators with strategies to support the development of EF in a manner consistent with their pedagogy, context, and their students. Noting the centrality of intentional teaching to quality EC educational practice, the study investigated how three Queensland preschool teachers *intentionally taught* to support the development of EF. The study adopted an embedded mixed methods case study design. Using observations and interviews, including video stimulated recall interviews, a deep understanding of the teachers' observable behaviours and the thinking underlying these behaviours was reached.

The results indicated that, after gaining and deepening their understanding of EF through online readings and collegial discussions, these three teachers adopted an *EF lens* to view: (1) their existing preschool activities, and (2) their student engagement with these activities. Viewing their activities through an EF lens led teachers to believe all preschool activities could be inherently EF demanding. They extended the EF demands within their existing preschool activities, instead of adding EF specific activities to their curriculum. This ensured that while enhancing children's EF development, their specific pedagogical identities, curriculum foci, and contextually driven responses remained present in their every-day interactions with young children and families. Viewing student engagement through an EF lens offered the teachers deep insights into and a positive spin on their students' EF capacities. These insights informed assessment, practice and resulted in the alignment of the teachers' EF enhancing practices with the individual students' abilities.

Empowerment and *Enhanced Efficacy* emerged as two key themes in the analysis. The teachers' believed that knowledge of EF, and intentionally teaching to support EF development, accrued benefits for educators and their EC educational practices. Providing educators with the language to justify a play-based curriculum, reducing teacher stress levels, and streamlining student learning goals were some of the advantages highlighted within these themes. These findings indicate that, instead of an interventional approach, intentionally teaching to support student EF may have greater relevance in EC educational settings, with the adoption of an EF lens being critical to such practice.