

ISSUE 110

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in Family Day
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Launch**

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FROM MONITORING TO MENTORING:

How Coordinator Relationships Shape Educator Identity

The advert in the newspaper said, “Do you love working with children? No qualifications necessary! Contact us.”

Written by Jo Georgiou

It was 2004, and this is where my family day care journey began.

I had no qualifications, but I absolutely loved working with children. My one-year-old son would have little friends to grow up with and I would be self-employed. Families were going to trust me with the most precious people in their lives. That felt exciting... and terrifying.

How did I know if I would be any good at this? What if I got something wrong without even realising it?

Enter Sandra, Lynn and Ellen — the coordinators who shaped my career.

They were there from the beginning, sitting on my couch, chatting to me and my husband, making my son giggle and play with them. They were excited for me. They asked thoughtful questions, listened carefully, and guided me without

making me feel “managed.” I would share my ideas about how I wanted to set up my environment, and instead of telling me what to do, they helped me think it through. Through very clever questions, I slowly realised where a few changes were needed — changes I felt I had identified myself. They made me feel heard, capable and confident.

They didn’t just help me set up a service; they helped me start seeing myself as someone who *could* do this work well.

And that is where professional identity begins.

Their regular visits were never something I dreaded. They were a welcome breath of fresh air. Somehow, they always seemed to arrive at the right time — ready for a cuppa, a chat, and sometimes even lunch with the children. We would talk about what had been happening since the last

visit, the challenges I was facing, and the things I was proud of. They celebrated my wins and gave thoughtful input into my programming.

The visits left me feeling like I was on the right track.

As an Educator, that kind of support shapes everything. It builds confidence. It reduces isolation. It reminds you that you are not doing this alone.

In 2006, I was fortunate enough to attend the FDCA Conference in Alice Springs. As we all know, family day care can be an isolating profession, so the chance to connect with other Educators was invaluable. What surprised me most, though, was hearing how many educators spoke about their coordinator visits with dread.

They talked about “spot checks.”

They described feeling nervous, on edge and defensive. I was genuinely shocked. I remember telling them how wonderful my coordinators were — how they would just pop in for a coffee and a chat. Someone asked if I was told they were coming, and when I said no, one educator rolled her eyes and said, “Jo... *that’s a spot check.*”

That moment stayed with me.

Because while technically the visit may have been the same, the experience of it was completely different.

That is the power of relationship.

The way a coordinator shows up can shape whether an educator feels judged or supported, scrutinised or strengthened. Over those few days, I heard stories from educators who felt empowered by their coordinators, and others who felt micromanaged by them. It made me realise how lucky I had been — and how influential that support had been in keeping me in the sector.

My coordinators didn’t just make sure I met requirements. They mentored me. They encouraged me to study further. They helped me build a professional service. They showed me that family day care was not “just babysitting” — it was meaningful, intentional, professional work.

That identity matters deeply in our sector.

When the National Quality Framework arrived, that message became even clearer. We were no longer seen as “carers”; we were recognised as *educators*. I felt strongly that this mattered. Family day care has always delivered extraordinary outcomes for children and families, and it deserved to be recognised as the professional, valuable form of education and care that it is.

But with that recognition came change. And with change came pressure.

By 2010, I had stepped into the role of coordinator myself and began visiting educators in their own homes. Very quickly, I realised that every educator was different. Every service was different. Many had been operating for years and understandably felt confident in their own ways of working. At the same

time, the sector was shifting rapidly. educators were trying to make sense of the EYLF in their daily practice, while services were grappling with growing regulatory expectations and increasing accountability.

That is where the tension sits.

How do we support educators while also monitoring compliance? Which hat are we wearing when we walk through the door — support, or compliance? And how do we get the balance right?

For me, the answer has always come back to one thing: respectful relationships.

Compliance matters. It has to. Children’s safety, quality practice and professional accountability are non-negotiable. But when visits become purely about boxes, breaches and evidence, something important gets lost. Educators can begin to feel unseen, unsupported and reduced to paperwork. Over time, that erodes confidence, identity and wellbeing.

We talk a lot about recruitment in family day care, but not enough about retention. People stay where they feel valued. They stay where they feel capable. They stay where someone sees their strengths, helps them reflect, and reminds them that they are doing important work.

That is the difference between monitoring and mentoring.

Mentoring does not mean ignoring non-compliance or avoiding difficult conversations. It means approaching those conversations through relationship, curiosity and respect. It means knowing your educators well enough to read the room. It means recognising when they need challenge, when they need encouragement, and when they simply need someone to say, “*You’re doing better than you think.*”

It means asking reflective questions instead of delivering constant correction. It means helping educators identify their own strengths and build on them. It means spending enough time in their environments to understand the context of their practice — not just the paperwork attached to it.

Strong coordinator relationships can directly influence educator wellbeing, confidence and professional identity. They can reduce burnout. They can create a culture where educators feel safe to ask questions, admit uncertainty and keep growing. And when educators feel supported to grow, quality practice strengthens across the whole sector.

Of course, the reality is that coordinators are under pressure too. We are expected to support, guide, monitor, document, evidence, follow up, and prove — constantly.

If something goes wrong, there must be a paper trail showing what was communicated, taught and checked. That pressure is real, and it can be exhausting.

But perhaps that is exactly why relationships matter so much.

Because both coordinators and educators are carrying a lot. We are all trying to stay afloat in a sector that often feels like it is drowning in documentation. We are all trying to do the right thing for children while navigating endless expectations behind the scenes.

So maybe the invitation is this: put the checklist down for a minute and talk.

Get to know each other. Build trust. Communicate openly. Lead with respect. Support with intention. Challenge with care.

Because when coordinators move from simply monitoring practice to genuinely mentoring the person behind the practice, something powerful happens: educators don’t just comply — they grow.

