EVERY Child

Australia's premier national early childhood magazine

Volume 10 No. 2 Autumn 2004

Values in public education

Early childhood under the spotlight: the importance of the early years

The making of Play School

Managing challenging behaviour

Classroom collaboration – teachers and students learning together

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... voice for young children

KALEIDOSCOPE

Changing Images of Childhood

Early Childhood Australia • Biennial Conference • **28 September - 1 October 2005** • Brisbane

The Early Childhood Australia Biennial National Conference has a strong and well-earned reputation as a premier forum where debate is encouraged and professional networking supported. It provides an outstanding opportunity for early childhood practitioners, researchers and academics from Australia and overseas to present papers and seminars. These discussions contribute to the construction of knowledge and ideas and good practice in early childhood.
I urge you to submit an abstract to the program committee, and look forward to meeting you in Brisbane

Popular culture and technologies

The pervasive influence of popular culture and technologies in young children's lives is undeniable, with many young children fascinated with popular culture and the technologies that produce and are used to transmit images of popular culture.
This theme considers implications of the idea that young children are more technologically literate than the adults with whom they share their days. It also examines how popular culture can inspire young children to learn in both before- and in-school contexts.

Cultural diversity

Although cultural and linguistic diversity has been a feature of Australian society for some time, we need to disturb current understandings of diversity to uncover issues that are troubling for individuals, communities and institutions.
This theme pushes the boundaries of thinking about what is possible for cultural recognition and respect, action at individual and community levels, and creating new ways of relating and being in early childhood education.

Changing relationships in early childhood education and young children's health

Society continues to change, as do experiences of childhood, schooling, family life, work orders and the cultural composition of Australian society. Globalisation of capital and culture, the resultant increasing divisions between rich and poor and childhood health issues such as obesity and reduced physical activity all present challenges for those who work in early childhood services.
This theme encourages the exposition of new alliances and research possibilities that feature connections between and among services, and an understanding of how children's different backgrounds and experiences are important in promoting children's health and well being.

Call for Papers

Submissions are invited for presentation in Current Australian Research and Contributed Presentations and Papers sessions.

Current Australian Research Papers will be presented as featured sessions in the conference program and are intended to be of interest to a wide cross section of delegates. These papers will be scheduled so that only two Current Research Papers are being presented at the same time. Preference will be given to proposals that feature contemporary Australian research in early childhood education.

Contributed Presentations and Papers will be presented as concurrent sessions during the conference and may be more specific in their content. These sessions will cater to special interest groups, specific issues and experiences. Contributed Presentations and Papers sessions will be scheduled to enable six sessions to be presented concurrently.

Intending authors/presenters please note:

- your proposal should preferably address one of the conference session themes (refer above).
- you should prepare for a total presentation time of up to 45 minutes, including time for questions and discussion.

Further information

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ISSN 1322-0659 Print Post PP 232100/00035
ABN 44 950 767 752
Printed by: Goanna Print Pty Ltd
Editor: Alison Elliott
Editorial Board: Pam Linke (Chair), Alison Elliott, Lyn Bower, Carmel Richardson Marilyn Fleer
In-house Editor: Rebecca Meston
Graphic Designer: Claire Connelly
Publications Officer: Sue Wales
Communications Coordinator: Ben Galdys
Cover Photograph: Rachael Barry
Photographs: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, R. Barry, Cooloon Children's Centre, C. Connelly, Daily Telegraph, J. Depczynski, K. Hielbron, J. Jankaus, A. Selfridge, Smoosh After School Care, K. Winer, Leah Zen.

Address correspondence and advertising queries to: The Publications Section, PO Box 7105, Watson ACT 2602
Tel: (02) 6242 1800 **Fax**: (02) 6242 1818
Email: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au
Website: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
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Building capacity and strength-

With a Federal election later in the year, issues relating to children's wellbeing are high on the political agenda. Politicians and pundits alike agree that children are the future and that a good start to learning pays off in the long run. Encouragingly, politicians have highlighted families' responsibilities in nurturing children, guiding and supporting their social and academic learning and the need for strong partnerships between home, community and school.

Plans to strengthen parenting skills and foster children's positive attitudes to learning and schooling are welcomed, but can be difficult to achieve without substantial investment and resourcing. Mapping the best way to enhance children's wellbeing and build community capacity is no easy task. My daily scan of newspapers around the world for reports on early childhood education and care show that issues confronting Australians and New Zealanders are mirrored elsewhere. Day after day, there are items about the gaps between recognition of the need for quality early childhood services and the reality of service provision, access, planning and affordability.

The process of developing a National Agenda for Early Childhood has been a good launching pad for refocusing attention on the needs and wellbeing of young children. But with an evaluation project just announced, many are wondering about the real outcomes of this consultative process and whether there have been any tangible gains for children and families.

Today, many young children still miss out on early education opportunities. Thousands of families and children, particularly in isolated and disadvantaged communities, cannot access quality formal early childhood care and education services. Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that only 83% of four-year olds participate in formal early childhood education and care and most for less than ten hours a week.

Yet the evidence is clear - children with limited opportunities for rich social, literacy and thinking experiences in the years before school are the most vulnerable to school adjustment problems, including behavioural difficulties.

Social, emotional and cognitive development are all important to school success. Young children with immature social development and poor social skills have particular difficulty adjusting to school, participate less in classroom activities, and perform poorly academically. As adolescents, they are at greater risk of leaving school early. Equally, early literacy and thinking skills are critical to successful learning in the early years. Knowledge and thinking skills are interdependent and underpin successful academic learning. And they develop slowly with practice, support and maturity.

Gaps that appear in the first year or two of school are difficult to close.

Recent work from the US-based National Centre for Children in Poverty shows it is essential to get young children at risk of school adjustment problems on a positive school trajectory. Investments in children's early social, emotional and cognitive development have long-term benefits in improved behavioural and academic outcomes that promote success in school and social environments. Research has demonstrated the need to make appropriate early intervention strategies and services available for families and children to address the cognitive, emotional, behavioral difficulties that lead to school problems.

But strengthening young children's early social, literacy and thinking skills cannot happen in isolation. Early learning programs must be in partnership with families and communities.

In vulnerable communities, many parents must first realize their own potentials and strengthen their parenting and nurturing skills so they can construct a vision for their children's future that values learning and is optimistic and supportive. Only then will families be able to nurture and encourage development in ways that foster learning opportunities in the school context.

A new report from the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, the Commission for Children and Young People (QLD) and the National Investment for the Early Years (titled *A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework)* is timely in this election year, as it encourages people concerned with young children and their families to 'think outside their area of expertise and take a broader approach' to children's wellbeing.

The NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People, Ms Gillian Calvert, says the report 'sets out a national agenda for all Australians – professionals, business and industry, all levels of government, community groups and families – to work together so our children are happy, healthy, educated and able to participate in and contribute to the community'.

Every Child has a key role in supporting the early childhood field as it negotiates the difficult path to universal quality and creates and embraces care and education futures that include all children. Hopefully, in forming their policies on children, families, and early education and care, politicians, advisors and stakeholders will take on board the accessibility, affordability and quality issues and think 'outside the square' to ensure that every child benefits from early childhood development and education.

Alison Elliott

Early Years Framework - a step forward for Australia's children

Early childhood is currently under the spotlight both in Australia and around the world. The importance of the early years of life is becoming increasingly evident and of concern to most developed countries.

The Queensland and New South Wales Commissions for Children and Young People, with the support of the National Investment for the Early Years (NIFTeY), recently collaborated to produce a document which focuses on what needs to be done to achieve positive outcomes for Australia's children.

Called *A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework,* it provides a framework to support positive outcomes in a range of priority areas, including health, welfare and education, and in other areas often neglected such as social and economic policy.

The nine priorities identified are:

1. Supporting the wellbeing of women of child-bearing age.
2. Promoting child wellbeing.
3. Supporting the choices of families in their parental and working roles.
4. Enriching, safe and supportive environments for children.
5. Improving economic security for families and reducing child poverty.
6. Achieving success in learning and social development.
7. Protecting the safety of children.
8. Promoting connections across generations, families, cultures and communities.
9. Increasing children's participation: policy action, awareness raising and advocacy.

The early years framework goes beyond the usual siloed approach to policy and includes strategies which are essential to improve the wellbeing of Australia's children.

It provides a tool for all levels of government, non-government stakeholders and community members to use when they consider how they can contribute to children's wellbeing.

It also draws attention to the need for national indicators of child wellbeing to act as a warning system and to monitor the effects of policy change and new programs.

The successful implementation of this framework will require cooperation at all levels of government and in the private sector, the not-for-profit sector, industrial organisations, professions and communities.

We hope that by developing and discussing this framework we can assist the process of moving forward to benefit children, families and our whole society.

A copy of the document can be downloaded from: www.childcomm.qld.gov.au/commission/whatsnew.htm.

Gillian Calvert

NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People

Robin Sullivan

Commissioner for Children and Young People (QLD)

Lost and found: values in public education

Recent comment by the Australian Prime Minister indicates that he feels public education is either values neutral at best, or is imbuing negative values in the young citizens of our country. 'Political correctness', in his view, is to blame. Political correctness, according to the Macquarie Dictionary is 'conformity to current beliefs about correctness in language and behaviour with regard to policies on sexism, racism, ageism etc'. In other words, political correctness reflects current values.

The values that underpin the desire to use language that does not denigrate, hurt, insult, humiliate, exclude or give priority to a narrow range of people within the huge diversity of the human condition are based on an ethic of care. Caring for people is a positive value. If the teachers in our public schools are guilty of caring for the children of our nation, of developing responsible contributing citizens, how can that be seen as a bad thing or a value-free way to go about their work?

I invite John Howard to sit in on my class for teacher education students where they learn about values, ethics, professionalism and the law. I invite him to learn alongside the next generation of teachers. He would learn that no educational or caring act happens without values influencing what a teacher, or anyone in fact, says, does, plans, assesses or indeed thinks. He would learn that the values we all absorb from our families, communities (and these include friends, schools, organisations), churches, and the bigger world in general, become so ingrained that we don't sometimes even realise we have them until we analyse our actions.

He would learn that analysing actions is what teachers learn to do and what they base their daily practice on. He would learn that people have values different to each other's. He would learn that professional values, that define the purpose and rationale of our work, differ between professions.

He would learn that teachers have devised and articulated the core values of their profession and that these are based on trust and trustworthiness, truth and honesty, tolerance and respect, integrity, courage, fairness, excellence, diligence, care and support, respect for the environment (NSW DSE, 1991), individual uniqueness, the full potential of each human being, wellbeing and self-esteem, autonomy and self-reliance, confidentiality, holistic learning and development, the interconnectedness of children and families, protection of children's rights, cooperation, appreciation of diversity, rights of families, and professional integrity based on sound knowledge and research (Stonehouse, 1991).

He would learn that sometimes, people's personal values differ from those commonly held within their profession and that those people need to reflect deeply to work out where they stand and how they will act. He may even learn that he needs to gain a little more knowledge about values, because when he draws a line in the sand that strictly divides 'political correctness' and 'values' he is indeed in error.

Political correctness embodies a set of values based on social justice. A fair go for all. Giving each person a chance. Isn't this in fact often cited as the most laudable of Australian values? What John Howard may come to understand in my class is that when he is criticising classrooms for being values neutral he is really referring to his concern at not seeing his own values reflected in classrooms.

He would learn that professional values, that define the purpose and rationale of our work, differ between professions.

Ironically, as an Australian, he is concerned that the spirit of a fair go is taking precedence, described by him as political correctness.

I'm left wondering, however, how much time the PM has spent sitting in kindergartens in Cambridge Park, Launceston, or Redfern. How much time sitting in Year 6 in Shalvey, Kingswood, or Cooma. How much time in Year 8 in South Tweed Heads, Picnic Point, Ipswich or Adelaide?

Mr Howard, I invite you again to join my class – sit in on the discussions of teacher education students and become a student teacher for a week in a classroom. I can assure you that you will see the values of respect, care, kindness, commitment, compassion, cooperation, courage, integrity, humour, pride, responsibility and self-reliance, among others, that lead teachers to choose work in our public education systems that do not pay the salaries that their neighbours receive in business, IT or many other enterprises, but is in fact among the most important work in our country: a site for development of responsible citizenry, whose lives centre on the values embodied in a fair go for all, not just the white middle class.

Dr Linda Newman

Senior lecturer in Education
University of Western Sydney

Lost and found: values in public education was previously published in Education Review 7(1), February 2004.

AGGRESSION AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Early Childhood Australia has recently released its latest Research in Practice Series, entitled *Aggression and young children.* Written by Diane Louise Szarkowicz, a psychologist and lecturer in the School of Education at Charles Darwin University, *Aggression and young children* is a comprehensive look at the types, causes and implications of aggression in young children.

Szarkowicz describes aggression as:

'…any behaviour that is attacking and offensive. Aggression can be physical like hitting, and verbal such as gossiping. Most of us experience some type of aggression every day. We see it in the media, when driving on the road, and in the playground or workplace. While many types of aggression are not accepted in our society, many children experience it from an early age. Unfortunately for some children, their experiences of aggression begin soon after birth because they live in an aggressive home. For others, their experiences might not start until they spend time with other children in a setting such as playgroup or school.' (p. 1).

Szarkowicz lists ways that adults can help children develop and use approaches other than aggression to create positive self-esteem in early childhood. The ideas presented will be of value to caregivers and educators of young children, as well as to parents.

'Children do not learn alternatives to aggression on their own. They need adults to teach them. Any response to aggression needs to be consistent and must focus on both the aggressive child and the recipient of the aggression.' (p. 13).

Szarkowicz says that there are many strategies that can be used to reduce aggression in young children, and suggests a number of responses that may be useful for anyone who spends time with children. Szarkowicz writes:

- 'Any response to aggressive behaviour needs to be immediate. If a response is delayed, a young child will not know what behaviour is unacceptable.
- If a child is not in control of herself/himself after an aggressive act, an adult needs to calm the child before they can talk about the aggression. It helps to take the child to a quiet area and calm her/him, possibly by singing, reading, talking quietly, or even hugging. A calm child will be better able to concentrate. When responding to any aggression, always make sure that the recipient of the aggression and the perpetrator feel safe.
- Acts of aggression need to be viewed as opportunities for learning. How adults react to aggression influences what children learn. Adults need to stay calm when they see aggressive behaviour. All children want attention, and some do not worry if it is negative attention. A low-key response that focuses on the aggressive behaviour rather than on the child is important.
- If a child has been aggressive, an adult needs to talk about the aggression with the child and teach her/him alternative ways of reacting. The language you use will need to be adapted to suit the child's language.' (pp. 15-16).

To order your copy of ***Aggression and young children*** ($14.95) or subscribe to the Research in Practice Series for one year and receive four issues ($42.40) telephone: 02 6242 1800 or free call: 1800 356 900.

How **Collaboration** Leads Learning

There is currently much interest in the social and cultural contexts of learning. As cultural research is relatively new to educational settings, the implications of social processes such as collaboration are only just beginning to be explored.

Traditional views of children's learning and development have been dominated by theories of developmental psychology, derived from Piaget's stage theory, which focuses on classifying the individual child in terms of age and stage of development. This led to much concern about children reaching developmental milestones on time, which in turn led to cognitive testing in efforts to determine if children were 'on time' (Rogoff, 2003).

The focus on testing and classifying young children failed to analyse the complex cultural nature of learning, and the powerful role collaboration plays in the learning process. Over 60 years ago, Vygotsky argued for developmental theorists to explore child development in terms of social and cultural conditions. However, dominant developmental theories prevailed and sociocultural contexts of learning and development remain largely ignored.

The assessment of children's learning and thinking through standardised testing does not reflect the complex reality of children's lives. It tells us little about children's theories, ideas or abilities (Dalberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). Indeed, the very way we work with young children often leaves children with few opportunities to reveal their

interests, ideas and abilities to either ourselves as educators and carers, to peers or the general community.

Elliot Eisner (1994) notes that we read the world through sight, sound, smell, touch and taste, and that these senses function as a resource through which experience is transformed into cultural symbols, or forms of representation; such as music, dance, art, drama, poetry, science, maths, technology and language. Vygotsky argues that children learn to use these cultural symbols during the collaborative processes of interacting with more skilled partners, such as peers or adults.

Vygotsky's theory is known as sociocultural theory and identifies a 'zone of proximal development' where children's interactions with more knowledgeable others leads learning. The individual child's development is therefore fostered through social and cultural activities (Rogoff, 2003).

In visits to early childhood classrooms (grades one, two and three) I have often observed learning environments where children's primary interactions have been with the teacher, and opportunities for children to collaborate, share ideas and build on each other's understanding are special occasions. These occasions may be 'group times' or short collaborative projects set by the teacher.

Barbara Rogoff (2003) argues for a move away from the relationship between teacher and students where the adult role is to 'fill' students with knowledge. Rather she advocates for classrooms to become places where adults and children engage in collaborative integrated projects and jointly construct knowledge.

So what might an integrated project look like? And if we don't use standardised testing how do we assess children's learning?

Susan Wright (2003) describes an integrated approach as one where children can depict and describe ideas in multiple ways and from different perspectives, both collaboratively and individually. For example, children could represent their ideas through drawing, clay work, music, dancing, dramatisation or storytelling.

The following drawings demonstrate a collaborative integrated project that was undertaken by students from grades one, two, and three. The project, *Learning to see: Seedpod exploration, an integrated collaborative experience,* was an exercise in seeing with the senses: sight, sound, smell and touch. During this project the children explored seedpods and developed their own theories about seedpods based on their individual and collaborative investigations of the seedpods.

I asked the children what they knew about seedpods. We shared our theories about seedpods. I showed the children a variety of pods. We discussed them and looked at them very closely. I held up a seedpod and asked the children to look at it very carefully, to close their eyes and draw it in the air with a finger.

I asked the children to make the shape of the seedpod with their bodies.

Next the children were asked to choose a partner and take a seedpod. Children explored the pod very carefully with all their senses and discussed the pod with each other. What does it smell like? Describe its texture? What sound does it make when you tap on it? Tell each other a story about the seedpod.

Still with a partner, I then asked the children to make the shape of the seedpod with their bodies. Here these children problem-solved until they were satisfied with their representation of a star anise. Much assessing and self-assessing occurred, as the partners negotiated through taking on suggestions and trying out many possibilities.

Here the children acted out the following seedpod drama. 'Pretend you are a seedpod', I said, 'that has fallen from a rainforest tree. The pod bursts open and the seeds fall out into a flowing stream. The stream carries the seed swirling away. The seed lands on a bank and starts to sprout into a plant'.

Notice how some children spontaneously formed small groups of two or three and acted out the drama as a unit responding to each other in a dance. Other children performed individually but were aware of their peers' movements and took up some of these movements in their own interpretation.

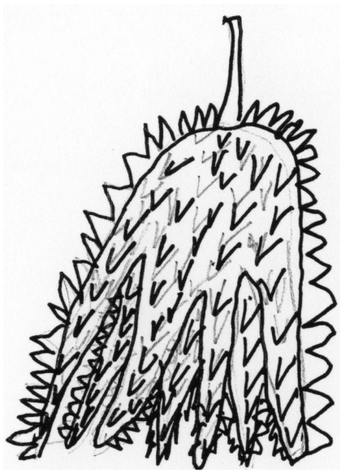
'Take a magnifying glass', I then told the children, 'and look at the textures and patterns of the seedpod. Talk about what you can see with each other'. Here the children formed natural small groups and learning took place as individuals compared theories and challenged each other's theories. Individual children shared thoughts and ideas - which led to group learning.

After the children had explored the seedpods with all their senses and represented their understandings about seedpods through discussion, storytelling and drama, I asked the children to choose some seedpods to draw.

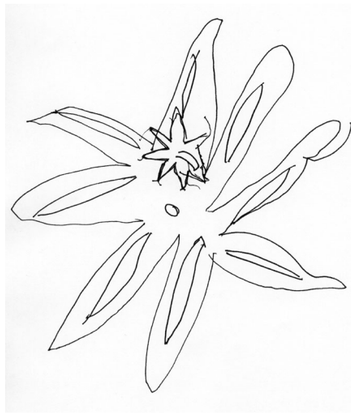
Documenting children's learning

Instead of assessing individual development and maturation, we should offer opportunities for children to reveal their ideas, interests, abilities and meanings. The early childhood institutions of Reggio Emila in Italy have inspired documentation of children's learning. Here the documentation of children's learning through video recordings, photographic images, audio recordings, children's work and written notes makes children's learning visible and enables the educator to reflect critically on their own practice.

Documentation is also seen as an important vehicle from which early childhood educators can make their claims about the importance of early childhood education legitimate and public (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999).



Through these drawings of seedpods, we can see how learning occurs as children actively take part in social processes with peers and teachers. Children have the opportunity to share their own theories with each other and the teacher, and actively build upon this knowledge as they explore the seedpods with all their senses. Children express their understanding through their bodies and minds using various forms of representation including language, drawing, drama and storytelling.



In schools, children and staff are all part of learning communities. Too often we see the learning process as one where the teacher does the teaching and the children do the learning. At the core of collaborative learning is the notion that children are active constructors of knowledge and that learning occurs between and within all members of the group.

Thank you to the students and teachers of Fairholme College, Toowoomba.

Kari Winer

Lecturer
Department of Early Childhood
University of Southern Queensland
In collaboration with Lyn Merry and Karen Cottle, Fairholme Junior School,Toowoomba.

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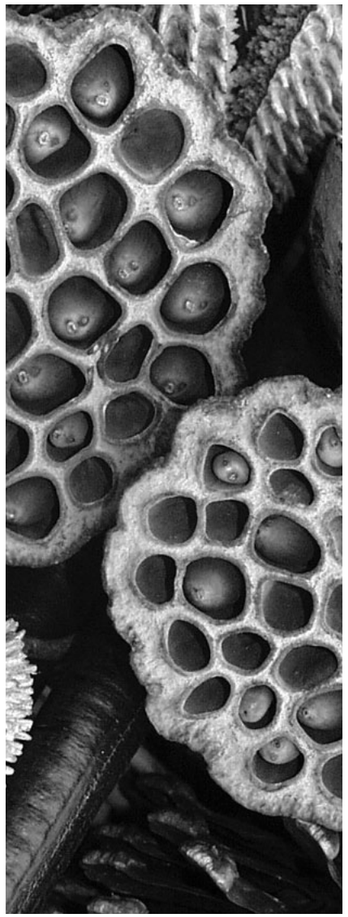

ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards - State Awardees

May 2004 Early Childhood Teachers

Name	Centre	Award for	Date
MS JUINETA KIRBY	Murchison Pre-school, Murchison VIC	excellence in pre-school services in isolated communities	14 May 2004
MRS MIA SILVER	Bayside Special Development School, Moorabbin VIC	excellence in early intervention programs	14 May 2004
MRS PAMELA FINNEY	Lawnton Kindergarten & Preschool, Lawnton QLD	excellence in developing play-based learning	19 May 2004
MISS DIANE GALL	Vienna Woods Preschool Alexandra Hills QLD	excellence in developing 'preparing for school programs'	19 May 2004
MR NEVILLE DWYER	Dorothy Waide Centre for Early Learning Griffith NSW	excellence, innovation, leadership and career contribution to early childhood education	21 May 2004
MRS DENISE MOIR	Wanniassa Preschool Wanniassa ACT	excellence and leadership in providing pre-school learning	21 May 2004
MS JANE MELLOWS	The Briars Special Early Learning Centre Felixstow SA	excellence in developing early childhood education for children with special needs	26 May 2004
MISS HELEN VAN DER KLEY	Wulagi Primary School Wulagi NT	excellence and inspiration in developing early childhood education initiatives	26 May 2004
MISS REBECCA DUNCAN	All Saints College Kindergarten Bull Creek WA	excellence in promoting early literacy practice	28 May 2004
MRS CATHY HOLMAN-MACKEY	Bicton Primary School Kindergarten Bicton WA	excellence, innovation, and commitment	28 May 2004

A sense of belonging

Community spaces building family strengths

Children and Families Everywhere (CAFE) is an initiative of the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, Child and Youth Health and the Federal Department of Family and Community Services. Designed to be an integrated services model - bringing health, education and the community together - it aims to create a 'family friendly centre' that meets the needs of local children and their families.

Based on site at the Enfield Primary School in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, CAFE has been running for eighteen months now and has established a strong community spirit. Parents have created a space of their own which has become the heart of the project, where service providers and families work together.

Children and Families Everywhere (CAFE) has a core group of volunteer parents, who work alongside CAFE staff, local service providers, as well as workers from Child and Youth Health and the Department of Education and Children's Services. This core volunteer group has participated in a range of activities including training (to support the wider community), planning and implementing community activities, assisting in setting up a community space, and helping in the crèche.

Over the past six months the project has engaged over 340 parents and 280 children through a range of early childhood and parenting programs, activities for communities, children's activities, parent volunteer participation and community consultations. CAFE Enfield prides itself on the commitment to building 'family strengths'. Families are involved in all aspects of the centre including decision-making and management groups. This helps to ensure that activities are in response to community need.

CAFE Enfield has become a community hub with high numbers of families involved in activities or just 'dropping-in' daily. The warm, friendly and engaging environment that has been facilitated at CAFE Enfield has not only created learning opportunities for both children and parents, but increased community strengths and relationships that go beyond the centre itself and reach out to the streets and homes of local families.

At *Children and Families Everywhere* (CAFE), activities will often be initiated by parents, rather than service providers. Service providers will then work together to respond to their needs. This encourages parent involvement and ownership and increases word of mouth referrals. It has also meant service providers have had to be creative when working together, looking at their core business whilst responding to the local community need.

CAFE Enfield is a rewarding place to work. On any day of the week I can look around our space, be it the office, family room or crèche, and there are wonderful examples of learning and connections happening everywhere. Children sharing books with their parents, parents learning to play with their children and developing trusting relationships with workers on-site, are all indicators of a positive learning environment.

Parents' increased knowledge of the value of developing strong relationships with their children is evident in their behaviour. Quite recently, for example, a family, Karen and her son Andrew, dropped in to see us. They have been participating in CAFE Enfield for fourteen months. Andrew was two years old when we first met him. During that time Karen had severe emotional issues and regularly suffered from anxiety attacks. Their relationship, then, was intense because Karen was often stressed and angry. Andrew commonly displayed similar behaviours. Yet through spending time at CAFE and gaining the appropriate support, Karen has been able to get in touch with her strengths. She has learnt new ways to communicate with her son, and consequently, their relationship has improved, as have relationships with others around them. Not so long ago, I saw them at CAFE, reading a book together. Andrew was sitting on Karen's lap, stroking her face with one hand and helping her turn the page with the other. His sense of trust and comfort has improved and he is more confident to try new things.

Children and Families Everywhere Enfield offers young children and their families a sense of belonging, whilst at the same time, giving the opportunity to increase skills and develop strong and healthy relationships with others.

Leah De Zen

Enfield Primary School, South Australia

2004 National Awards for Quality Schooling now open

The 2004 National Awards for Quality Schooling are now open, giving schools, principals and teachers the opportunity to showcase their school improvement project and win a share in $1 million prize money.
Established by the Australian Government in 2003, the Awards recognise, reward and encourage exemplary school improvement practices and will be managed by the Australian College of Educators and the Australian Council for Educational Research.
This year applicants are invited to share any school improvement project on any area of schooling; including learning, school management, social outcomes or the curriculum.

For information on how to enter, visit **www.nqsf.edu.au** or call **1800 131 323.**
Applications close 5pm EST 30 July 2004.

Future learning starts here

An Education Queensland-funded study, Preparing for School Trials Progress Report 2, has found that children who were female, who had attended a Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland (C&K) kindergarten, and whose parents were well-educated and had a higher household income, were more likely to do well in their prep year programs.
The report, prepared by the Queensland Early Childhood Consortium, noted that the education a child received was more important than social background in determining schooling success.
C&K general manager affiliated services, Jan Cullen, said the findings confirmed what C&K had long known: the combination of a child focused ethos and a play-based curriculum was unbeatable in preparing children for their formal schooling. 'This report', said Ms Cullen, 'indicates that a play-based C&K kindergarten education flows seamlessly into Education Queensland's new prep year curriculum'.

For more information contact Jan Cullen on **(07) 3552 5333** or **0407 571 464.**

Children ask parents to care for their air

The Asthma Foundation of Western Australia recently teamed up with the state's local children, to launch the campaign Care for my Air! in an attempt to reduce the staggering incidence of childhood asthma in WA.
With one in four Western Australian children developing asthma before their fifth birthday, the campaign encourages pregnant women and new mothers to protect the foetus and newborn baby from exposure to tobacco smoke.
Asthma Foundation of WA Executive Director, John Shave, said asthma was the most prevalent chronic childhood disease and exposure to tobacco smoke was the single most preventable cause of asthma in children.

For more information on Care for my Air!
contact **1800 645 130**
or visit: **www.smokefreebaby.org.au.**

Take a look 'through the windows' at Play

Jan Kingsbury, Lorraine Bayly and John Hamblin with Big Ted, 1980s
Photo: Australian Broadcasting Corporation

The much loved television program ***Play School*** has been produced and televised each weekday morning and afternoon by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) since 1966. ***Play School*** is a shared experience for many young Australian children and has earned intergenerational respect over its long history.

Although retaining many of the traditional program elements such as the personalised interaction style of the presenters, the use of the toys, the 'through the windows' film and 'the clock', *Play School* is also responsive to new directions in early childhood education and to the changing face of the Australian community. Early childhood educators gain many ideas for new songs, stories and games from the program to share with their diverse communities. Parents also report that, although they feel anxious about the content of many television programs for children, they feel it's safe to trust their young children to the presenters of *Play School*. The production team at *Play Schoo*l has a longstanding commitment to excellence in programming for young children and this is reflected in the time spent in the production of each program. So how does *Play School* happen?

Each episode of *Play School* is designed to appear spontaneous and free flowing. The friendly interactions between the presenters and the child viewer, the use of the familiar toys, household and recycled objects in play and story telling, and the consistent elements of the 'day of the week', the useful box and 'through the windows' film contribute to the sense of warmth and familiarity for the child viewer. And while *Play School* may seem an impromptu exploration of play and creative possibilities (by the two presenters), each individual program is the result of a long and thoughtful process.

The development of a *Play School* series involves the collaboration of an experienced team of professionals from different disciplines who come together to produce a program designed to entertain and empower young children, and to provide authentic representation of diversity and difference. This production team meets together to develop five programs which focus on the chosen theme. These overarching themes are selected for their interest to children and for their potential for play and exploration within the framework of the program.

The team involved in program planning includes the executive producer, producer, scriptwriters, an outliner (who is typically an early childhood educator with extensive experience working in the field), and an early childhood advisor who has knowledge of current research and contemporary early childhood perspectives.

The theme selected for the week provides the focus for an initial brainstorming meeting during which members of the team contribute ideas and suggestions for the week of programs. At this stage the major input is provided by the outliner who contributes a broad selection of possible ideas, books and other resources. The other participants develop this further by suggesting additional possibilities for songs, stories, and experiences associated with the particular theme. An overview is then developed for the week – typically including the identification of sub-themes, stories and key experiences for each day.

A series of five meetings is then held for the development of a script, one meeting for each day of the week. The scriptwriter, in response, takes the outline of the day, and writes a draft script. Draft scripts are sent back and forth between the scriptwriter, advisor and producer over a number of weeks until a final script is ready for rehearsal. The development of the script is crucial to the personalised quality of the program. Although the dialogue may appear conversational and spontaneous in its final form, it is carefully scripted to be child friendly and to include encouragement for interaction from the audience. '*Play School* seeks to involve the child in active participation during the program and to encourage and stimulate the exploration and enjoyment of the child's own world as a result of experience and ideas presented on the program' (*Play School*, 1999, p.2). Invitations such as 'you too' and the avoidance of personal pronouns 'I' and 'we' by the presenters, are conscious attempts to include the child viewer in what is happening within the program.

Flower clock, 2002
Photo: George Serras, National Museum of Australia

A half-day rehearsal with actors, musician, props designer, director, series producer and early childhood advisor is then held before each program is recorded. During rehearsal, further refinements are made to scripts, props, music and movement by the various members of the team. Although members of the community frequently offer their services as *Play School* presenters, all the presenters seen on *Play School* are professional actors who also demonstrate the ability to work with the child audience.

Segments such as the 'through the windows' film, and on occasion an animation, are inserted post-production. At the conclusion of the production phase, the early childhood advisor also prepares program notes giving details of the various elements included within the program, such as publication details of the stories and songs included, information about 'the makes' supported with visual images from the program, and 'ideas for later'.

Where to from here?

Many adults have fond memories of *Play School*, however it is more than that for many young children across the country. *Play School* continues to be an important aspect of each day's experience for young children in both urban and rural contexts around Australia. The unique place of *Play School* within the Australian community is reflected in an exhibition developed by the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, now touring regional areas of the country. This exhibition documents the history of the program and contains special features such as the much-loved toys, Jemima and Big Ted, and historical items such as the Flower Clock. However this exhibition may be a stronger reflection of *Play School's* past than its future.

In early December 2003 the ABC provided a showcase of new and continuing television programs for 2004. In the introduction to the program produced for the event, the Director of Television commented, '2004 offers more diversity, more Australian content, more entertainment, more information programming - in fact more for EVERYONE on ABC TV'. For those who are interested in children's programs there seemed less on offer with very few listings of programs designed for children and the notable omission of *Play School*. As Amanda Meade reported in *The Australian* (2004), what has become an integral part of the early childhood experience for several generations of Australian children may not be retained into the future. Until this year the production team at *Play School* developed nine series (45 programs annually). In 2004 however, only two new series have been developed between January and April. While the program continues to be televised as frequently and no changes may be apparent to the audience, the number of staff allocated to the program and the number of new programs being developed has been drastically reduced. It is ironic that, at a time when the Federal Government is announcing a massive allocation of funds to improve provisions for children and families during the first five years of life, the national broadcaster appears less forthcoming about its commitment to this long running program for young children.

Humpty and Little Ted in a cubby house
Photo: Australian Broadcasting Corporation

The ongoing commitment of ABC management to *Play School* is a reflection of the degree of importance placed on the youngest members of our community. The ABC claims to be 'everyone's ABC!' The strengths of *Play School* built over 38 years provide a strong foundation for ongoing production throughout 2004 and well into the future. However, the early childhood community: educators, carers, parents and grandparents, are encouraged to speak out for young children and support the children who love *Play School*. They should write, email, draw, and have their voices heard – all so that children's television will continue to be fostered and strengthened by the ABC.

Cathie Harrison

SDN Children's Services

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Profile: Catherine Fullerton

Principal of the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children

Roll up roll up, the sideshow alley has come to town! Just picture it. The twinkling lights, the dodgem cars, the kewpie dolls on sticks high up in the air. For many of us, it's easy to imagine being a child wandering through the sideshow alley of a metropolitan or regional show. But what about being the child of one of the alley's many vendors who operate the rides, the food stalls, the games? Is it never-ending fun, with never-ending fairy floss? And do you still have to go to school?

If you're lucky enough to attend the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children, then yes, you certainly do. But according to its dynamic Principal, Catherine Fullerton, '..romance doesn't come into it at all! There might be paradise outside the caravan window each night the show's on', she says, 'but underneath that are some very, very hardworking families who have values for education, and who want their children to have choices that perhaps they didn't quite have.'

Funded by the Federal and Queensland governments, the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children was established in 2000 after years of lobbying by parents in the Showmen's Guild of Australasia, eager to provide their children with educational consistency and continuity. Importantly for Fullerton, while the school is on wheels (towed by a Mack truck), the emphasis should be on its similarity with stationary schools, not its difference. 'The daily life of the children now in terms of access to education', she says, 'isn't any different than any other residential setting.'

As the show must always go on, the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children is on the road 52 weeks of the year, travelling through both the big cities and regional towns. When I speak to Fullerton, they've just pulled up in Sydney for the Royal Easter Show: 'life is never dull', she chuckles. No arguments there – the school provides an excursion program to die for. But how, I ask Fullerton, is the curriculum adapted to fit in with the children's adventure prone lives?

'Well it's that core statement', Fullerton says, 'that we know in our hearts and souls as teachers – that every opportunity is a learning opportunity. So, whilst the stability of curriculum is there in that we're an Education Queensland state primary school, and therefore implementing the full range of curricula, we're also able to link in with various places, and use those opportunities from our travels to complement the teaching curriculum.'

On a typical week during show time, when the parents go off to work, the Mack truck parks at the grounds of the respective local school and lessons resume inside the mobile classroom. Then, at recess and lunch, the show children go out into the playground to meet with the children of the host school. 'Like all children there are a range of levels of confidence', Fullerton says, when I question the children's adaptability in doing this, week after week. 'And so you're (as a teacher) creating opportunities for the children to develop their confidences and what better way to do it than through play and sport and social settings.'

Catherine Fullerton's passion as teacher and Principal is infectious. Her key message, she explains, is that progress doesn't happen 'unless you've got heart and soul commitment to your craft as a teacher. And to your belief that you can make a difference to the children.' However it becomes apparent, during our conversation, that Fullerton's vision stretches further than the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children.

'As Australians', says Fullerton, 'we should be putting our hands up and saying to the rest of the world - like in countries where there is severe disadvantage, that the design of these classrooms [i.e. of the travelling school], with satellite technology and internet connection, could actually work in Afghanistan or Iraq or Africa or outback Australia; or anywhere that we could eliminate the tyranny of distance and the tyranny of marginalisation. We can't allow the children in any society not to achieve what they're capable of.'

Rebecca Meston

Moving children ahead

A new report has been released that challenges child-focused professionals to work with others to help give children – and Australia – a great 'head start'.

A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework encourages people whose work involves young children and their families to 'think outside their area of expertise and take a broader approach to growing up kids', said the NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People, Ms Gillian Calvert.

'This report sets out a national agenda for all Australians – professionals, business and industry, all levels of government, community groups and families – to work together so our children are happy, healthy, educated and able to participate in and contribute to the community', Ms Calvert said.

The report was produced by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People in partnership with the Commission for Children and Young People (QLD) and the National Investment for the Early Years.

The framework identifies nine key areas where action can be taken that will have immediate and long-term benefits for children. For example, in the outcome area of helping children achieve success in learning and social development, suggested actions include making child care more affordable through tax incentives, and using the opportunity provided by child care and early childhood education to engage families and link them to a range of other groups and services.

Supporting families to care for kids; optimising children's health and well-being; promoting better connections across generations, families, cultures and communities; and increasing children's opportunity to participate in decision-making are all highlighted in the report.

Importantly, the report recognises that significant headway will only be made in any of the key areas if action is taken that addresses all areas of a child's life.

'We'll be able to make a greater difference to a child's life if we look at ways the different areas of their lives interact to affect the whole person – such as their education, health or welfare – rather than focusing on one area of their lives in isolation', Ms Calvert said.

'The framework covers the "why, who, what, how and where" issues, in the way children's lives can be improved and the only thing missing from building a solid foundation for our children – and Australia's future – is the "when".

'Professionals who work with young children play a key role, and are in an ideal position to get behind this agenda and really move it forward', said Ms Calvert.

A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework can be downloaded in PDF format from **www.kids.nsw.gov.au** or contact the NSW Commission for Children and Young People for a printed copy on: **02 9286 7276**.

Nine key outcome areas:

1. Supporting the wellbeing of women of child-bearing age.
2. Promoting child wellbeing.
3. Supporting the choices of families in their parental and working roles.
4. Enriching, safe and supportive environments for children.
5. Improving economic security for families and reducing child poverty.
6. Achieving success in learning and social development.
7. Protecting the safety of children.
8. Promoting connections across generations, families, cultures and communities.
9. Increasing children's participation: policy action, awareness-raising and advocacy.

Risk-taking behaviours

We probably all know of someone who has had an accident that could have been prevented. Some of these accidents happen because the victim engages in risk-taking behaviour. Normally when we think of risk-taking behaviours, we associate them with adolescents who often drive too fast, drink too much and experiment with drugs. But young children also can – and do – engage in such behaviours.

Causes

Some children with certain disabilities, for instance children with Downs Syndrome or Autism, are more prone to be compulsive climbers and may be oblivious to risks to their own safety. There are other children, however, where the behaviour is less expected and may be caused by other factors. For instance, studies show that there is a connection between violent behaviour and some inherited traits, and that they may be triggered by the biochemistry of the brain. Psychologists argue that risk-taking could have a number of possible causes. For instance, children may focus on only selected information, dismissing other relevant information (including risks) as insignificant, with the result that they are unable to connect cause with effect. Another reason for risk-taking behaviour has been attributed to the child's motivation for controlling events, regardless of the risk, rather than let adults maintain control.

Signs

Some, or all of the following signs or characteristics, are likely to be found in a child who engages in risk-taking behaviour:

- Impulsivity;

—underestimating uncertainties

—overestimating the probability of a successful outcome

—seeking excitement and novelty;

- learning difficulties;
- low IQ; and
- fearlessness.

Anecdote

A four-year-old child was playing at preschool, spending short periods of time exploring the various activities. Suddenly he ran over to the animal enclosure, opened the gate and lay down in front of the rabbit's water container, slurping up its contents.

Both risk-taking and aggressive behaviours are more commonly found in males. At the same time, a child who takes risks or who acts violently is likely to have learnt this behaviour by watching others. Risk-taking behaviour has been connected to aggression, and in the case of a child who is also violent, he or she may be acting out behaviour observed at home or on television, or on video or computer games that he or she may have played.

Viewing either real or 'pretend' violence, as well as actions without consequences, increases copycat behaviour. As a recent study of children's television programs found, there was at least one instance of unsafe, imitable behaviour without consequences (i.e. without the person being hurt) in 47 per cent of these programs. It has similarly been found that viewing violent behaviour on the screen increases:

- self-protective behaviours;
- mistrust of others;
- desensitisation to violence, resulting in a callous attitude to hurting others;
- appetite for violence;
- the use of violence to obtain a desired object; and
- conversely, decreases the likelihood of helping someone being hurt by others.

Anecdote

A three-year-old boy in a child care centre climbed up to the top of a stack of 20 stackable beds, and bounced around up there, taunting his teachers: 'You can't get me, you can't get me!' A group of children gathered around the teacher, who had hurried over to the stacked beds. The teacher was encouraging the boy, who was squashing himself against the wall, to come over to her waiting arms. He avoided her, calling out to one of his friends, 'Come up here Joe, I'll let you come up!' Joe looked pleased at being singled out, and prepared to join his friend.

Solutions

The American Psychological Association urges us to identify children who exhibit risk-taking behaviour early, and engage them in preventative programs, which should be continued through to adolescence in order to have the best chances of a successful outcome. A meeting with parents is recommended as a first step to ascertain the amount of media violence the child is exposed to (including computer games). Parents can be encouraged to put away all violent-type toys such as guns and superhero figures for a while, and to substitute children's risk-taking/violent media viewing with more pro-social games and programs. In the child care setting an *Individual Management Plan* should be developed once observations have been completed. *The Individual Management Plan* would aim to teach:

- impulse control (e.g. taking a little time to think before acting);
- problem solving;
- anger control (e.g. identifying and expressing feelings rather than acting out);
- exploration of the difference between socially constructive and destructive risk-taking (for instance, being heroic without causing risk to self or others); and
- decision making techniques (for instance, weighing up 'fors' and 'againsts' in taking an action).

The acquisition of the above skills can be broken down into teachable units, and child care staff can monitor improvements in the frequency of the child's risk-taking behaviours. If the risk-taking behaviours continue or even escalate despite these measures, parents should be encouraged to consult with a paediatrician and a child psychologist.

Mimi Wellisch

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Refugees

David Miller

Lothian Books (2004)
ISBN 734406339 **RRP: $26.95**

While many children's picture books deal with contemporary social and political issues - John Burningham's *Courtney* (1996) and John Heffernan's *My Dog* (2000) are two examples - it is rare for the subject matter to be presented as overtly as it is in David Miller's *Refugees.* Miller's particular focus is given even more definition on the cover, where two ducks are shown huddled together in an open boat under which the single word title is written in large white letters.

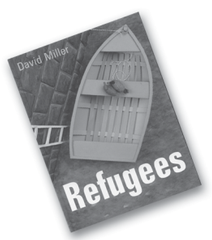
Refugees is a simply told story of two ducks driven from their natural habitat by potentially destructive elements of the modern world. On their journey to find a new home, they experience a series of terrifying encounters in the forms of 'huge rumbling, grumbling machines, frightening waves, grumpy seagulls, hidden hunters' and a large, menacing hunter's dog. The language leaves the reader in no doubt where their sympathies should lie. Each obstacle drives the refugee ducks further from their idyllic home until, aided by kind, but faceless and nameless humans, they find a safe place to live.

The paper sculpture illustrations are striking and Miller's bold use of colour contrast draws the reader's attention to several points of reference on a single page. There is much to be admired here from the image of the group of squawking seagulls to the hunter's dog peering out of the reeds. A double page spread worth noting is the depiction of four white-faced, open-mouthed clowns in the fairground. It is an illustration that could invite extensive discussion and interpretation.

The book resonates with meaning on several levels and is accessible to a wide age range. Because of its lack of subtlety, younger children would understand the message that is at the heart of *Refugees.* Older children would see beyond the obvious and would be able to explore more complex dimensions of the verbal and visual texts.

KATHY GRIFFITH

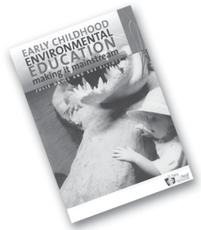
Lecturer
Institute of Early Childhood
Macquarie University



Early Childhood Environmental Education: making it mainstream

Julie Davis and Sue Elliott

Early Childhood Australia (2003)
ISBN 1875890688 **RRP: $14.95**



I don't recall who it was that posed the question 'Who is the Australian child?' I do remember the response – 'The Australian child is an outdoor child, soaking up the delights of our climate and lifestyle'. What better learning environment for our children than the great outdoors!

Julie Davis and Sue Elliott are to be congratulated for their insight and research in the production of this book. They highlight the very real deficit in research and everyday understanding about the tenuous battle for sustainability. While today may be rather late to start educating large corporations and businesses, today is ideal for our small children. If their attitudes are directed towards 'feeling' and 'caring', if a love of nature is fostered early, maybe planet Earth has a chance.

By describing projects currently running in a variety of centres, Davis and Elliott show that 'where there's a will there's a way'. These case studies cover variety and possibility, with involvement throughout the management and parent bodies, and with the impetus coming from committed staff. Incidents though, are cited, which cause concern that some environmental education initiatives are not run as play-based and child-centred opportunities, and as such reach an older audience. As with so many areas in early childhood science, opportunities for the very young are limited. Perhaps the problem is with pedagogical appropriateness – the subject is outside the reach of these small children. Or is it? Davis and Elliott highlight numerous ways for the environment to feature strongly in quality education of the very young child and for children themselves to 'make a difference'.

It seems however, that there is reason for hope, for despite the absence of a national preschool curriculum, initiatives in four states indicate an awareness of the need for environmental education to begin with the very young.

Thank you to Julie Davis and Sue Elliott!

A suggestion for further reading:
David Suzuki's *The Sacred Balance: rediscovering our place in nature* (2002) is a critically bare and honest account of where the arrogance and greed of the human race is leading the planet. Its impact is profound. It can be purchased from any good bookseller.

CAMILLA GORDON

Lecturer, Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University.

Mr Moo

Margaret Wild and Jonathan Bentley

ABC Books (2002)
ISBN 0733307833 **RRP: $25.95**

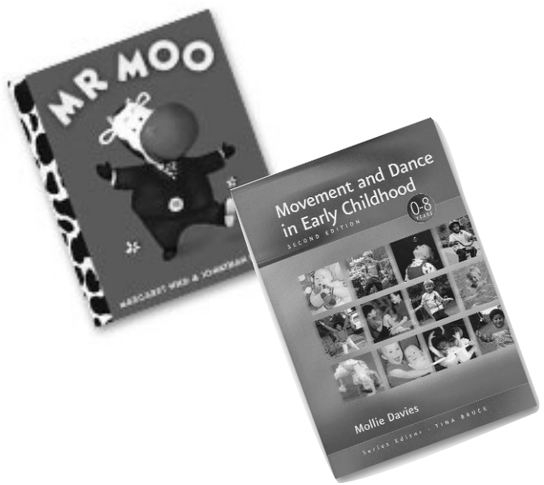
Mr Moo is one of the more recent publications by the well-known and prolific children's author Margaret Wild. The story's central character, Mr Moo, lives, on the surface, a contented life in the country surrounded by his house and garden, complete with a shed and a river with its own island. While Mr Moo has many friends, deep down he yearns for someone special in his life, that is, until one day he is joined by the adventurous and outgoing character Jimmy Johnson. Despite Mr Moo and Jimmy Johnson seeming to have quite different personalities, we soon learn that their outlook on life is very similar.

As the story unfolds, we discover the things Mr Moo and Jimmy Johnson share in common: a sense of fun, a love for making things and a creative imagination. Together they fulfil Mr Moo's lifelong ambition to build and row a boat to his island.

Jonathan Bentley's luminous illustrations boldly highlight these different points in the narrative and bring to life the world these characters share. Written for the four- to five-year-old age group, this book explores the underlying features of friendship and highlights how people can touch our lives in different ways. *Mr Moo* will appeal to children with a sense of fun and adventure, and would make a colourful addition to a library.

JANE PAGE

Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood
University of Melbourne



Movement and Dance in Early Childhood 2nd Edition

Mollie Davies

Paul Chapman Publishing – Footprint Books (2003)
ISBN 0761940545 **RRP: $63.00**

This is the second edition of Mollie Davies' exposition on movement and dance in the first eight years of life. Originally published as *Helping children learn through a movement perspective,* this revised edition offers a stronger emphasis on how movement and dance are linked to key theories of child development and learning and includes practical strategies for working with children as they explore these vehicles of expression.

Mollie Davies' love for her topic is clearly evident throughout the text. She offers a convincing argument for the importance of movement and dance in young children's lives and highlights the role it can play in educational settings. She draws on key theories of development as a means of emphasising their relevance to children's lives and then demonstrates how these theoretical frameworks can be used to identify and interpret children's movement and dance. Davies builds her argument throughout a series of inter-related chapters that include: What is movement; learning to move; moving to learn; the learning teaching environment; supporting; extending and enriching movement; a matter of expression; creating; performing and appreciating dance; and dance in statutory education.

Davies has been careful to ensure she has achieved a 'trans-global' emphasis and includes images of children from Finland, Puerto Rico, France, Taiwan and Germany. Another effective strategy she employs is the use of observations of children to provide an active demonstration of the nexus between child developmental theory and children's movement and dance qualities. A practical emphasis is also maintained through examples of sample activity sessions and reviews. These not only offer the reader tangible, practical applications of theory, but also serve to highlight the key elements that contribute to the successful translation of preparing, implementing, observing and evaluating learning activities. The perspectives of children remain central throughout the text.

Davies offers a strong case for the neglected area of movement and dance education. Intended for teachers, students and parents, *Movement and Dance in Early Childhood* offers a clear and accessible entry into the world of movement and dance and the possibilities that exist for children, their families, and the wider educational community.

JANE PAGE
Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood
University of Melbourne

MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

In understanding children, particularly those whose behaviour is negative and disruptive, it is necessary that early childhood educators have some knowledge of the psychological principles behind behaviour. Alfred Adler (1957), whose theories of personality development are the basis of *Individual Psychology,* stated that the basic motivation behind all social behaviour is the desire to belong; to be accepted and to contribute. *Individual Psychology* recognises people as active decision makers, as purposeful and goal-oriented individuals, relatively free to determine their own behaviour. Rudolf Dreikurs (1985) suggests that behaviour is best understood from this teleological approach. Children have a need for recognition, a need to be noticed. Challenging and disruptive behaviour is often an attempt to meet this subconscious need.

Influences on behaviour

Children do not grow up in isolation - all behaviour such as language, play, emotion and skills are learnt and developed in social situations such as the home, early childhood centre and school. Beginning at birth, as they seek to understand and respond to the environment around them, children develop a unique pattern of behaviour which becomes their personality and part of their lifestyle. Young children operate on a trial and error basis, evaluating each experience in terms of their own perceptions of its consequences. This is referred to as the child's 'private logic' because, even though the interpretation may be inaccurate, their perceptions make sense to them. By the time children are about five or six years old, this lifestyle perception becomes stable.

Understanding behaviour

Early childhood practioners can best understand behaviour by using a holistic approach within each social setting, rather than looking at misbehaviour as a series of isolated incidents. Children perceive themselves as 'belonging' according to the responses that they have gained from significant people at home, day care, family day care, kindergarten or school. Disruptive behaviour can be attention seeking, or it may be a means of challenging, or seeking to get back at an adult. As stated earlier, even young children are purposeful and goal-oriented individuals. Antisocial behaviour is often their way of seeking a place in the classroom, based on the mistaken perception (private logic) that they cannot belong through constructive, co-operative or acceptable means.

Not all 'difficult' behaviour is intentional however, as certain negative behaviours are developmentally appropriate, even though non-acceptable. For example, a two-year-old child will be likely to physically push another child wanting to use his or her toys, because most two-year olds are in a developmental stage of egocentricity and autonomy. This does not mean that adults accept pushing and hitting behaviour, rather that they respond to it in a calm, well thought-out manner such as redirection. If adults respond firmly yet calmly, then children receive minimal or no reinforcement for their negative behaviour.

Challenging behaviours may also be brought on through inappropriate planning or thoughtless room set up. Rather than simply blaming the misbehaving child, it is also important to examine ourselves, our planning and our own responses to the behaviour.

Associated problems

Although they are usually unaware of their goals, children will continue to repeat behaviours which are reinforced, or given recognition. Thus, if they believe that they only receive acknowledgement or 'belong' to the group when behaving in this manner, then these inappropriate behaviours will continue. The chart below illustrates children's inappropriate goal-directed behaviour. Adults can learn to recognise these mistaken goals by examining their own feelings (see chart) when the behaviour occurs. It is only when children with difficult behaviours receive different responses from those around them that their behaviour will change.

Children are sometimes (inadvertently) categorised as difficult, and everyone - teachers and other children - expects them to misbehave. Consequently their behaviour may become more and more challenging, as they feel themselves being increasingly excluded and rejected. Unfortunately, their inappropriate behaviour can make providing inclusive activities more difficult for teachers and caregivers.

When adults accept that anti-social behaviour and misbehaviour are children's expressions of belonging, based on their mistaken private logic, or faulty belief, that they cannot belong through constructive, co-operative or acceptable means, then steps can be taken to plan for changed responses. It is this mistaken belief that adults will be attempting to change, in order to deal with children's challenging behaviour. To change a child's behaviour, it is necessary to firstly change adults' customary way of responding.

With this understanding, and in light of the framework below, teachers and caregivers can learn to respond appropriately in order to guide children in a co-operative, respectful manner.

Step by step management of challenging behaviour

1. Promoting self-esteem

Plan for a relationship with children that shows they are valued and trusted. Acknowledge each child, making him or her feel welcome, assist children in developing friendships and encourage co-operative play together. Children are less likely to misbehave when they feel worthwhile and competent.

2. Focus on positive behaviours

Ensure the focus is on positive behaviours and attitudes more than inappropriate behaviours, without comparing children or inadvertently encouraging competition. This may require the adult to 'redirect' a misbehaving child to another activity where he or she can legitimately let out angry or frustrated feelings. It is inappropriate to simply direct a child elsewhere without taking into account the feelings that the behaviour exhibits.

3. Set limits. Use choices and consequences

Make sure all children, but particularly the challenging child, have the opportunity to be involved in decisions about limits. If necessary, redirect them as a consequence of inappropriate behaviour. Consequences should be directly linked to the behaviour, and time-out as a rejection should never be used. However some children do need 'space alone' play experiences, where they can be at an activity without having to be close to others.

4. Be firm but fair

As the adult, it is your responsibility to ensure a safe environment, so you need to make sure your limits are clear. Use a pleasant, but firm, voice and respect the child's needs whilst maintaining consequences as described above.

Make sure you have planned for the challenging child's needs, particularly identifying their need to 'belong'. (2004).

The following chart can be used to provide a framework for managing challenging behaviours across a range of ages and behaviours.

Jeannette Harrison

Director of Melbourne-based training and consultancy organisation, Corporate & Family Care Australia.

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The information in this article, *Managing challenging behaviour,* is further elaborated in Jeannette Harrison's latest book, *Understanding children: foundations for quality* (2004).

MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR – STEP BY STEP CHART

Child's mistaken or faulty belief	Child's Goal	Adult's Feeling & Reaction	Alternative Response for Adult
I belong only when I am noticed or being served.	Attention (Demanding).	Feeling: annoyed, frustrated. Typical Reaction: remind & coax.	Ignore misbehaviour when possible and give attention and encouragement for positive behaviour. Set and maintain limits without giving undue attention.
I belong only when I am in control or I am boss.	Power (Controlling)	Feeling: angry, provoked, threatened. Typical Reaction: fight with child or give in.	Withdraw from the conflict - set and maintain limits using consequences. Help child use power in a constructive and co-operative way. Fighting or giving in only increases child's goal.
I belong only by hurting others as I feel hurt.	Revenge (Hurting)	Feeling: deeply hurt, humiliation Typical Reaction: retaliate and 'get even' or use sarcasm.	Avoid feeling hurt. Accept encouragement from other adults to build up your self-esteem. Build a trusting relationship and encourage the child. Avoid punishment but use consequences.
I belong only by convincing others not to expect anything from me I am unable to give.	Assumed Inadequacy (Giving up)	Feeling: despair, helplessness, giving up. Typical Reaction: go along with child's behaviour.	Stop all criticism Encourage positive attempts - no matter how small. Use encouragement, not praise. Be careful not to pity the child and give up.

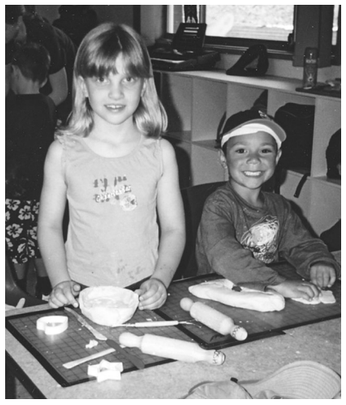
Cooking with kids:
inclusive and creative fun at after school care

No activity in an after school care program can benefit all developmental areas of a school-age child more than cookery.

School-age children absolutely adore organised sport and games, where they have the opportunity to practise and perfect their physical skill levels. School-age children also love to quietly participate in a craft activity after an intellectually and socially rigorous day at school. However, an emphasis on craft and sport at after school care, limits the potential for programs to cater for the majority of attending children.

Cooking is the poor cousin to sport and craft in after school care, yet it has the same potential benefits.

School-age children will, because of their willingness to participate and be involved, naturally initiate sports and games *with or without* a staff member's presence. Sport should – and does – occur every afternoon at after school care programs in Australia, through the children's intrinsic motivation levels, not an adult's prompting.



At the same time, craft allows school-age children to be creative and to discover new talents and abilities. However, craft has been emphasised and promoted for far too long in the majority of after school care programs; and from my experience in Victorian after school care, can directly compete with a school's art curriculum. Craft is also always in danger of becoming adult-centred and not child-centred when the creative ideas emanate from the program's staff and not the children. That is, when the activity is required to follow an adult's instruction, or a prescriptive template, which should remain the domain of the classroom.

Moderation is required in any after school care framework when implementing a program. A strong emphasis on sport and craft limits the time and energy children have for other beneficial activities including music, homework, self-directed play, self-initiated games, projects, drama, clubs and *cooking*.

Cooking is the poor cousin to sport and craft in after school care, yet it has the same potential benefits. Most children love to cook at after school care, or help to cook; and most children love to eat the end product.

(This does not include my experience at an after school care program with *Lizzie,* who spent an hour helping me make asparagus soup, but then refused to eat it, because she said it looked like 'vomit soup').

Cooking has the potential to concretely exhibit the integration of the social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language development of school-age children. It also has an educational aspect imbued within every component of its implementation. Cooking may complement the classroom's educational outcomes, without ever being a threat to them.

Cooking produces food at the end of the afternoon to proudly show parents (if it lasts that long), if staff are concerned about the need to display an end-product. Cookery is also a very effective tool to subtly increase children's self-confidence levels. The smallest input into a cooking activity has the potential to make each child feel (quite rightly) that they have contributed effectively to the end-product. Better than this, the end-product never has any pre-determined design: *as long as it tastes good, it has been produced correctly.*

An activity involving the preparation of food educates in the science, mathematics, nutrition and language it initiates. Cooking does not require an initial highly evolved skill, only enthusiasm and the ability to follow a recipe. If the creation does not work out, blame the recipe!

Cooking has a homely quality and surrounds centres with the aroma of freshly baked and/or prepared food, instead of the pungent smell of glue, paints, socks and school bags. Furthermore, any cooking activity with the use of wholesome ingredients has the positive by-product of healthy food.

Good out-of-school care activities do not always require specific skills and training. What they do require is skill in nurturing children and knowledge of the school-age child's development. These are far greater skills to grasp than those relating to rules of a game or how to make a plait out of wool.

After school care programs need to remain dynamic to cater for the needs of all children over time. Programs that remain steadfastly loyal to sport and craft as staple activities are determined to remain below the *high quality marker.*

Alan Ironside

Alan Ironside has been working in out-of-school-hours care for 15 years. He has recently completed a Master of Education degree at RMIT University, specifically researching the after school care environment.

Respectful relationships:
Listening to the voices of infants and toddlers in care

Children's right to be heard

In keeping with Australia's ratification of *The Convention on the Rights of the Child,* we have professional, ethical and legal obligations to give young children a genuine opportunity to have their views heard and considered respectfully. With infants and toddlers, this means being acutely aware of and looking for meaning in their vocal and body language.

Why listen?

The infants and toddlers in our care are in the process of forming their sense of identity. This is shaped within meaningful relationships. Paying attention to young children shows them that we care about and respect them, giving rise to a sense that they can contribute to ideas, events and relationships in their environment. This positions children to embrace life and learning enthusiastically, to persist and bounce back while navigating their way through the challenges they face every day, and to take increasing responsibility.

Another reason for really listening is to learn about each child's interests and capabilities in order to plan for them as individuals. Listening carefully to children and their families enriches what we know about each child, helping us to create experiences that are neither too easy nor too challenging and promote wellbeing and engagement.

How do we listen? What gets in the way?

Listening to children's voices involves all our senses, not just our ears. It's about picking up on all the cues that infants and toddlers use to express their pleasure, contentment, surprise, sadness, anxiety, annoyance, frustration, wonder and trust. Listening is often as much about waiting as it is about reacting. Young children need time and support to make themselves understood. Genuinely listening is also about being aware that our own dispositions and experiences affect how and what we hear.

Why do we do what we do?

Our intentions and ethics drive us to act in the best interests of children but sometimes there is a gap between our intentions and our practices. How does this happen? Personal experience is powerful and can override understandings developed through formal education, especially if what we learned in 'class' is inconsistent with some of the views we have grown up with. Some views result in adults making the majority of decisions for children without considering the fine balance between young children's vulnerability and their competence. If we concentrate on children's vulnerability, our focus will be on safety and protection, which may lead us to interrupt and control their learning. Young children are extremely competent, curious and motivated to learn. To be effective partners in children's learning, educators need to find ways to support children to increase their competence and minimise their vulnerability (Lally, 2004).

Ways of working that are not always in the best interests of children can creep into our practices. When we try something and it 'works', we tend to repeat it in similar situations and soon the practice can become habitual without thinking about why we do it.

Voices and choices

Whose voices are heard? Who is making the choices? As educators, we are constantly making choices about what we want and what we do for children. These choices are powerful determinants of children's present emotional and intellectual experiences as well as longer-term outcomes.

Think about some of the decisions that might have been made for children today; such as scheduling, room set-up, toys, food and drink, play and sleep times. In whose interests were the decisions made? Did the decisions reflect the views of the young children affected by them?

Who knows we're listening? How do we know?

Laevers (1999) has cited wellbeing and involvement as two of the most important and reliable indicators of quality for educational settings and processes. If children's levels of wellbeing and involvement are consistently low, there is a fair indication that their voices haven't been heard, and the environment is not meeting their needs.

In my recent doctoral study conducted in 10 child care centres in South Australia, I found that, where educators moved towards a more constructivist learning environment and enhanced the quality of their relationships with children, there were higher levels of children's wellbeing and involvement. I also found that a number of factors in their environment compromised educators' concerted efforts to attend to the responsiveness of their relationships with children. This resulted more often in detached, controlling and functional interactions than responsive, reciprocal interactions with listening as a significant feature.

What impacts on our listening?

It was a challenge for educators to maintain a balance between administrative, care and safety tasks and the provision of rich and intentional learning and development opportunities. Structural factors such as ratios, documentation time, group size, and working conditions affecting morale were cited as significant limiting factors. These factors are internationally recognised as affecting the quality of care.

I also deduced in my study that many children were experiencing educators having power over them in an environment where compliance was implicitly valued. In our attempts to be very objective in our assessment and documentation of young children's learning and development, we risk creating a power imbalance and a potential for seeing children as objects that are 'done to'. On the other hand, when we are more subjective and include our voices and children's, we have a greater chance to design a meaningful program for each child.

How can we create more opportunities for infants and toddlers to have their voices heard?

We can reflect on our beliefs, actions and interactions and ask ourselves questions such as:

- Why and how did I/we make that decision?
- For whose benefit?
- Is it fair?
- If I/we were a baby affected by the decision, is it what we would want? Would we see it as fair? In what other ways could I/we understand it?
- Is there anything that prevents me/us from seeing it from an infant's point of view?
- Does my/our understanding limit possibilities and choices for children or families?
- Have I/we considered children's/families' perspectives?
- How could I/we bring new insights to my/our understandings?
- What would I/we risk if we change things?

Adapted from UniSA (2003) and MacNaughton (2003).

Do I/we optimise opportunities for children to be heard and make choices in relation to our daily structures, processes and interactions? Primary caregiving practices, where each child and their family is assigned to a particular carer, is the most effective strategy we have to ensure that each child's voice is heard.

Listening or not?

Larry (26 months) persists in taking the truck from Sean. His educator picks up Larry saying 'Oh Larry, I've told you heaps to leave it. You'll just have to sit here for a while.' She straps Larry into a highchair nearby, puts a pop-up toy on the tray of the chair and walks away. Larry pushes the toy over the tray. He follows it with his gaze, whimpering quietly for a short period. Larry remains in the chair with no interactions for 25 minutes, whimpering quietly each time an educator walks by. Eventually his voice becomes constant and loud. As an educator returns from an extended break she asks: 'Larry what are you doing there?' She picks him up, comforts him and puts him down on the mat with a small group of children and some biscuits.

Mandy, an educator of Mia (18 months), is sitting on the floor. Mia toddles up to her holding out a plastic tube. Mandy takes the end of the tube and plays an interactive game of peek-a-boo, taking turns of spying through the ends of the tube. There is happy chatter and giggles between them. Rosie, with book in hand, approaches, plonking herself down on Mandy's legs.

Mandy – 'Oh, you'd like me to read the book? Okay, let's see. How about you Mia?' She gently settles Rosie on her lap and Mia under her arm where they can all see the book. Liam, a crawling baby comes by, touching the legs of Rosie. Rosie tries to shift away from Liam's touch with an irritated look. Mandy – 'He's touching your legs is he and you don't like it? We might move away a bit.' They slide themselves away from the crawling baby and Mandy reads. At the end Rosie says 'Gain' with which Mandy responds, 'You'd like the book again would you? Okay.' and they read the book together again.

Primary caregiving, to be most effective, requires a whole centre approach, with the support of management, staff and families. Primary caregiving creates possibilities for genuine interaction and individual response (Lally, 2004).

It's not always easy to listen to children's voices. There are so many pressures on our day. However, if we are truly committed to the importance of listening and honouring children's rights, we will find ways to genuinely hear and respond to each child's voice and understand each child's unique cognitive, social and communication ways.

Pam Winter

Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia

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Germ Busters – making handwash-

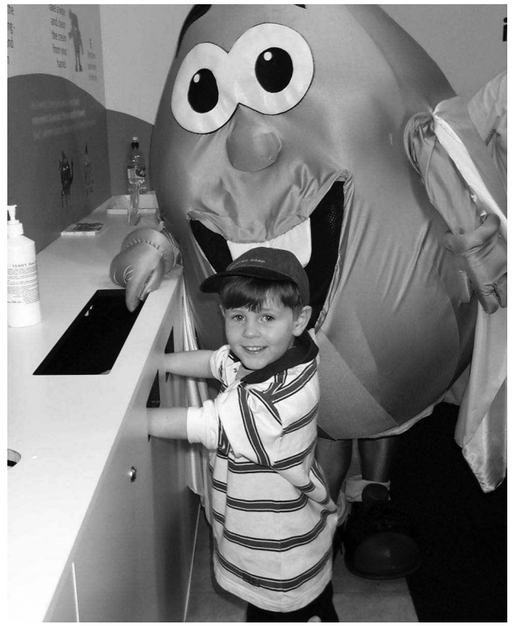
Germ Busters Early Childhood is a comprehensive hygiene improvement program that includes colourful, glossy resources and engaging activities for children, parents and child care staff. The program is fun to use and is easily incorporated into a child care facility's daily routine. *Germ Busters* is also an ideal tool for child care facilities undergoing accreditation.

Why Germ Busters?

The most effective way to stop germs from spreading is to wash hands correctly (World Health Organisation, 2003). The common cold, chickenpox, diarrhoea and vomiting are frequently the result of germs passed from one person to another. Germs passed between people also contribute to the spread of more serious infections such as hepatitis A and meningitis (Chin, 2000). Whilst stopping germs from being spread within child care facilities is a shared priority for staff and parents, Queensland Health has worked with child care facilities to develop a program that can reduce these health risks by preventing the spread of infection.

Program outline

The *Germ Busters* program endeavours to change behaviour by resourcing and empowering children, parents/carers, and staff within the child care setting to make positive and informed changes with regard to hygiene practice and behaviour. *Germ Busters* skills adults in correct hygiene and handwashing behaviour, so that they may act as role models to reinforce and maintain children's correct hygiene practice within the child care setting and in the home. The purpose of *Germ Busters* is to ensure positive changes in hygiene behaviour are sustained and become habit in the longer term.



Evidence

Germ Busters is based on international research which proves the links between effective handwashing and infection control in early childhood settings. Commitment to hand hygiene and related guidelines by care givers has been identified as a crucial means of infection control in child care environments (Miller and Patrick, 2001), and through training child care staff in infection control behaviour, the hygiene practices of both staff and children are notably improved. This training, and subsequent improvements in infection control practice, reduces episodes of acute respiratory and diarrhoeal infection (Roberts, et al.,1999).

Feedback from *Germ Busters* users has reinforced this evidence and highlighted the program's effectiveness. Bonnie Fraser of Bonny Babes Child Care Centre, for example, says, '*Germ Busters* has become an integral part of life at our centre. The program has greatly increased hygiene awareness and reduced the amount of illness and cross infection between children. It has been great to have tools and knowledge at our finger tips.'

Program evaluation

Germ Busters has been thoroughly evaluated by Queensland Health in a study of 38 child care facilities. The evaluation showed a significant increase in the number of children washing their hands at appropriate times, for the recommended duration, whilst using a better technique (Queensland Health, 2000). The program was found to be an effective and universally popular resource in producing sustained behaviour change in children.

How Germ Busters supports key child care policies

Germ Busters is based on the best available infection control guidelines and supports existing licensing policies for child care facilities. The *Germ Busters* program aligns with the National Childcare Accreditation Council's (NCAC) Principle Standards relating to hygiene and infection control. The program has been described by the NCAC's Chief Executive Officer as 'a beneficial tool for child care services seeking to implement quality health and hygiene practices.' The Queensland Creche and Kindergarten Association has also acknowledged Germ Busters through incorporation of the program into their Hygiene Policy.

How to become a Germ Buster

Germ Busters Early Childhood is available on a cost recovery basis and can be obtained for a fee of $55.00 from the Gold Coast Public Health Unit on **(07) 5509 7222.**

Amanda Selfridge

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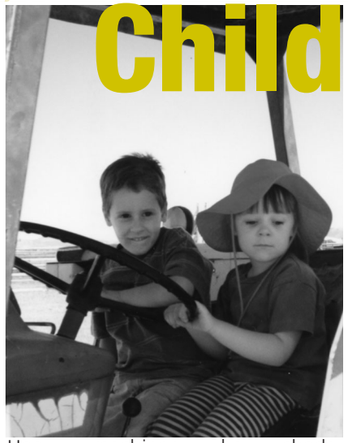
Child safety on farms



Heavy machinery, hay sheds, motorbikes and quad bikes, waterways, horses: the average Australian farm would be lost without them. For children they can be secret hiding places, imaginary worlds, makeshift play equipment, calls to adventure. But while central to every day farming, these work items can be accidents waiting to happen. The reality is that, on average, 30 children aged 0 to14 years die on Australian farms every year as a result of injury - a third of these being visitors to the farm. In addition, around 600 children are admitted to hospital annually for farm-related injuries.

Fuelled by these horror statistics, Farmsafe Australia has recently developed the *Child Safety on Farms* program. Funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, *Child Safety on Farms* aims to bring to the fore issues of child safety, identifying toddlers as a particularly high-risk group.

Whilst small children are typically mobile, curious and keen to explore, they are also unable to foresee hazardous, or even life-threatening consequences. This is especially relevant for farm environments. One of Farmsafe's specific objectives with *Child Safety on Farms,* therefore, is to promote the creation of safe play areas.

What is a safe play area?

According to Farmsafe, a safe play area, such as a securely fenced house yard, is a place where children's social and developmental needs can be met away from the dangers of the farm workplace. This is certainly not about keeping farm children wrapped in 'cotton-wool', or imprisoning them from the many freedoms and opportunities that farm life offers. Rather, it is a list of precautionary measures to keep children away from the hazards that could harm them – at least until they are a bit older, and are aware of the environment's implications.

The physical separation of the small child and the farm workplace acts the same way as a swimming pool fence by reducing the risk of a child getting into dangerous areas unsupervised. As identified by Farmsafe, safe play areas are ideally:

- located where children can be easily observed (for example, a verandah or kitchen);
- completely surrounded by an effective fence with a suitable gate;
- free of movable structures which can be stacked to climb over the fence;
- filled with safe and interesting play equipment such as sandpits, swings, bikes – but also potential hiding places and running spaces; and
- without any drowning hazards, vehicles, machinery, work sheds and chemicals.

What are the benefits?

A safe play area defines the boundary between the 'home' and the 'workplace' where different standards and rules can apply. It recognises that the farm workplace contains dangers that generally don't exist in the home and that the distractions for adults (as they go about their work) are greater. Safe play areas also make the supervision of children at play more manageable, and assists in looking after child visitors who may not understand farm hazards so well.

Ultimately, a safe play area creates a space where adults and children can relax together - where imaginary worlds and secret hiding places can still exist, but where a short diversion or lapse in supervision is not critical to a child's precious wellbeing.

Where can I go for more information?

For more information on *Child Safety on Farms,* and for a copy of a comprehensive resource package, contact Farmsafe Australia on: **(02) 6752 8218.**

Alternatively, visit Farmsafe's website at: **www.farmsafe.org.au.**

Around the Globe

Useful early childhood Web sites and Online material from overseas

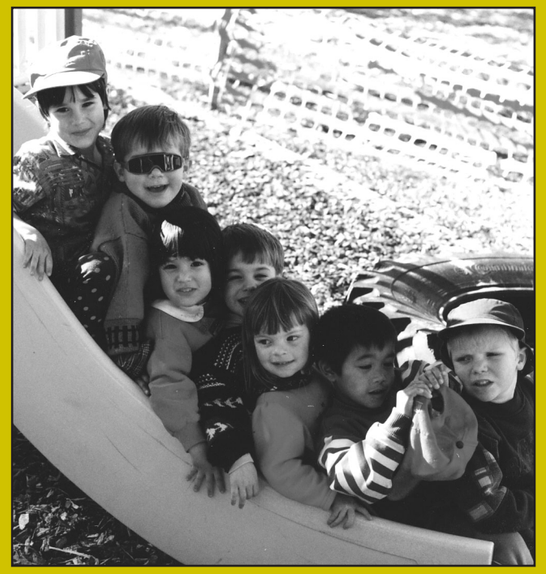
The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development

The Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) is a valuable resource, based in Montreal, Canada. With its mission statement being: 'to improve our knowledge of the social and emotional development of young children', CEECD is located at: **http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca.**

The site provides links to newsletters, a directory of researchers, press releases, and an encyclopaedia that includes detailed information on such issues as aggression, autism, crying behaviour and prematurity.

CEECD also presents a useful bulletin, focusing on child care quality. The bulletin can be downloaded from:

http://www.excellenceearlychildhood.ca/bulletins.asp?lang=EN.



Voices for children

The Voices for Children Web site **(http://www.voicesforchildren.ca)** is an Ontario, Canada-based site, promoting the wellbeing of children and youth in Ontario through public education. This is an informative Web site and their electronic bulletin, which allows subscribers to stay up-to-date on the latest issues, initiatives and research findings affecting children and youth in Canada, is excellent. Every time a new report is added to the Voices for Children Web site, an e-bulletin is sent out, by way of announcing it.

Ensuring the rights of Indigenous children

A new Digest, produced by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre, states that Indigenous children are among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in the world, and that the rights of these children in both rural and urban areas are often compromised or denied. However Indigenous children, states the Digest, also possess very special resources: they are the custodians of a multitude of cultures, languages, beliefs and knowledge systems, each of which is a precious element of our collective heritage.

As this Digest discusses, the most effective initiatives to promote the rights of Indigenous children build upon these very elements. Such initiatives recognize the inherent strength of Indigenous communities, families and children, respect their dignity and give them full voice in all matters that affect them.

The UNICEF Digest is available for free download at:

http://www.uniceficdc.org/publications/index.html.

It's about more than pre-

Early Childhood Australia's submission to the Australian Education Union's Preschool Education Inquiry (Report released 25 May)

The Australian Education Union's Preschool Education Inquiry looked into the provision of universal access to free, high-quality preschool education. Early Childhood Australia's contribution to this Inquiry focused on three issues:

- The nature of the preschool experience;
- who is an early childhood teacher; and
- the need for a strategic vision for early childhood services for children from birth to eight years of age.

The nature of the preschool experience

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) believes that an important task of this Inquiry is to be clear about the nature of the preschool experience, where and how it can be delivered, and about the qualifications that are necessary to ensure that the outcomes of a quality preschool experience are achieved. It is also important that the Inquiry acknowledge, explicitly, that the outcomes of the preschool experience are dependent on the experience of the child's very early years; that is, prior to preschool.

What is preschool?

Is it about a particular sessional approach to programming or is it about the achievement of particular outcomes for children?

The focus must be on outcomes for children and what is essential to ensure the delivery of these outcomes. A quality preschool experience can be delivered in a range of different settings:

- Integrated into the program of a long day care service
- In a free-standing sessional program
- In a sessional program in a long day care centre. ECA, however, would be concerned if such sessions were the only times in which these children interact with an early childhood teacher.

What is essential to the delivery of a high quality preschool experience?

For the desired outcomes to be achieved, the preschool program (in whatever setting) must be delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher. Qualifications do make a difference. There is specialised knowledge of children and how they develop, grow and learn that underwrites the delivery of a high-quality preschool experience.

Who is an early childhood teacher? Is it about qualifications and/or the educational setting in which they work?

An early childhood teacher is someone with a specialist early childhood teaching degree. A person with this qualification is a teacher irrespective of the setting in which they deliver their programs.

What is a specialist early childhood teaching degree and in what setting is it necessary?

It is important in this Inquiry to address the issue of what constitutes a specialist early childhood teaching degree and in what setting such a degree is necessary. Early Childhood Australia (ECA) sees this issue as fundamental to the development of the strategic vision for early childhood services, in which we believe the findings of this Inquiry should be located.

The need for a strategic vision for early childhood services for children from birth to eight years of age

The Australian Education Union Inquiry must be explicitly framed by the knowledge that the early years, defined as birth to eight years, are important. Early experiences matter and crucially, early relationships are formative, not peripheral, to outcomes for young children. It follows then that all who are involved directly in their care and development should be valued and all the early childhood services attended by young children should be of the highest quality. Importantly, the essential components of high quality early childhood programs are the same regardless of setting. At the same time, children's experience is cumulative and so outcomes are, to some extent, dependent on what has gone before. The mantra that 'we can fix it at preschool' is problematic and this needs to be acknowledged.

The essential components of all early childhood programs, including those in preschools and schools, are set out

in the Tasmanian Essential Learning Document, that says that early childhood programs should:

- be a 'rewarding and enjoyable experience for young children in which they play, explore, discover, rehearse, practice, build positive dispositions and revise concepts as they consolidate and adjust their understandings';
- involve a strong relationship and professional partnership with the children's families in which knowledge of the children is shared;
- foster relationships between adults and children that are warm and which nurture positive, learning experiences for the child, whilst protecting them from physical danger; and
- acknowledge, respect and take into account the diversity that exists amongst children.

The characteristics of early childhood services that are necessary to deliver such programs are:

- adult-child ratios that support the development of strong, stable, sensitive and responsive relationships;
- total group sizes that allow children and staff to work effectively;
- staff with appropriate qualities and qualifications. In a long day care service, ECA believes that both the person teaching the preschool-aged children and the Director of the service, should be early childhood teachers; and
- conditions and wages that acknowledge the expertise, significance, and worth of work with young children and so ensure staff turnover is low and that people with early childhood teaching qualifications will choose to work in early childhood settings in the before-school years.

The separation of a campaign for universal access to a free, high-quality preschool experience from an overall strategic vision for early childhood services for children birth to eight years of age:

- would be divisive and further disadvantage child care services in relation to wages and conditions;
- would mitigate against the development of an integrated early childhood profession in this country;
- would undermine the argument for early childhood teachers with high level specialist degrees in all services and primary schools; and
- would further undermine the provision of specialist early childhood teacher education courses by universities.

Early Childhood Australia believes that the Inquiry should recommend the development of a strategic approach which covers the birth to eight experience, and which outlines an approach to:

- the need for a mix of specialist early childhood teacher and other qualifications in all early childhood services/schools;
- ensuring that proper wages and conditions exist in all early childhood services;
- ratios and total group size which allows for the adult-child relationships so essential for good outcomes for children;
- a funding regime which ensures that early childhood services are affordable for families;
- the provision of a range of services to meet the differing needs of parents and children;
- the development of a unified early childhood profession; and
- the creation of a career path for early childhood professionals which clearly values work with children from birth to eight equally, and which does not see progress as moving from centre-based early childhood services into preschools, then schools and ultimately, out of early childhood settings altogether.

For more information on the Inquiry visit:

A funding win for the

On 7 April 2004, the Federal Government gave Australian children, families and the early childhood sector a vital helping hand - $365.8 million to be precise. Announced by Prime Minister John Howard, this unprecedented level of funding is part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, which, over the next four years, will be integral in supporting innovative and grassroots projects for the early childhood and parenting community.

As stated by John Howard, the strategy will principally support early intervention to assist children and families where there is a strong likelihood that those children would not otherwise grow up in a stable and supportive environment. 'This approach', said Mr Howard, 'is based on evidence that effective intervention in the early childhood years leads to better life chances for vulnerable children, including better education and employment outcomes.'

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the Honourable Larry Anthony MP, went further, 'Getting it right in the early years can help avoid future reliance on welfare, substance misuse and becoming entangled in the criminal justice system.'

According to the Australian Department of Family and Community Services, strong families with healthy, well-balanced children, require stable communities in which to grow. Given this, the strategy will continue to support communities and initiatives building capacity, leadership and mentoring - all geared towards empowering communities to develop local solutions to local problems.

'Our approach to helping local communities address their complex social problems', said Larry Anthony, 'has involved taking advice from and working with community organisations, business, academics and families. These stakeholders have unrivalled knowledge and understanding of local problems and we will continue to involve them at the highest level of social policy development.'

Funding will be available through four funding streams:

- Communities for Children ($110 million over four years) will target up to 35 disadvantaged communities providing funding of up to $4 million for local early childhood initiatives.
- Early Childhood – Invest to Grow ($70.5 million over four years) will provide funding for national early childhood programs and resources.
- Local Answers ($60 million over four years) gives communities the power to develop their own solutions and help them help themselves by supporting locally developed and implemented projects.
- Choice and Flexibility in Child Care ($125.3 million over four years) will continue the in-home care program, extend incentives for all long day care providers to set up in areas of high need, and continue the quality assurance systems for family day care and outside school hours care.

According to Judy Radich, President of Early Childhood Australia, this announcement is 'a testament to the many organisations and individuals who have worked tirelessly to convince the Government, and other political parties, that an investment in children's early years will pay dividends; both in the short- and long-term for the child and for society. There is now no argument that early childhood matters.'

For more information on the strategy, go to the Australian Department of Family and Community Services website at: **www.facs.gov.au/sfcs.**

Families and children win in the budget

As a result of the Australian Government's 2004-05 budget maternity payment, parents of young children will have a considerable option to stay at home with their baby in the early weeks of its life.

Entitled the *More Help for Families* package, the Government's allocation of funds in the latest budget - towards the family sector - is significant. Most families will receive an immediate one off payment of $600 for each child. In addition, the basic family tax benefit will increase by $600, which will be paid at the end of each financial year. This will be used to offset debts some families accrue because of failure to accurately predict their incomes.

'All families benefit from these measures', said Judy Radich, President of Early Childhood Australia. 'The only downside is that there is no tax relief for low-income families'.

The *More Help for Families* package also includes the introduction, from 1 July 2004, of a new maternity payment, paid as a lump sum of $3000 for each newborn child. This will be a universal payment to all families (usually the mother).

Also established in the 04-05 budget is the creation of 30,000 outside-school-hours care places and 1500 family day care places, for new and existing services. Similarly, an additional $16.4 million (over four years) has been allocated towards the Child Care Support Program.

'We know there are still enormous issues to be resolved in the child care sector', said Ms Radich, 'regarding the payment of proper wages and better conditions for the people who everyday are responsible for the care and development of the young children in these services. Nevertheless, taken together: the maternity payment, the changes to other family payments and the gains in child care places, make this budget the best one for children and families in many, many years.'

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Judy Radich - President, Early Childhood Australia

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