

# EVERY Child

Australia's premier national early childhood magazine

**VOL.10 NO. 4 2004**

Mini-beasts and secret wildlife

Co-sleeping: Sharing a bed with your baby

Interactive wonders at the museum

Superhero play

Mud pies and daisy chains:

Young children and nature



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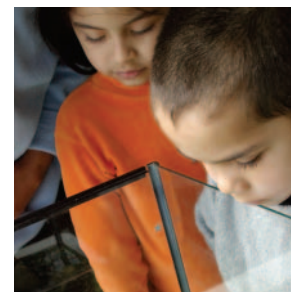
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## An early childhood review?

As a new government settles into place, promises relating to families, children, early childhood education and care, and schooling are being evaluated, scoped and fine-tuned. It will be interesting to see the match between the promise and the reality, the timetable for implementation and real impact and cost of the promises.

Hopefully, the new year will bring a national review of early childhood services. The election campaign highlighted the growing divide between 'care' and 'education' now enshrined in legislation, funding arrangements, staffing practices, program goals and quality. It's time to see if we can streamline and improve early childhood services so that every child has access to the best possible early learning environment.

Such a review should examine supply and demand, funding and affordability and, most importantly, equity issues – including the quality of early learning opportunities and the impact of early experiences on developmental and learning outcomes.

We don't know how children are faring across early childhood services. We need to map experiences and progress, and make judgements on effectiveness. We need greater comparability of input, and outcomes, and a strong focus on optimising early learning opportunities and benefits.

We need a national vision and framework for early childhood services.

Let's hope the election promises encourage our communities to think about how we want to value young children's learning and about the investment we need to make to have a universal entitlement to quality education

and care in the years before school. This includes quality staffing and commensurate remuneration, but also greater uniformity of preschool education and care experiences that boost children's chances for social and academic success.

The challenge for the next four years is to address key issues of quality, staffing shortages and early childhood accessibility. Too many children still miss out on early childhood education. Only 83 per cent of four-year-olds participate in a 'formal' early childhood service, including family day care. We must develop a coherent, national early childhood policy. We must improve and monitor early learning opportunities and outcomes for all young children.

The *Quality Improvement and Accreditation Scheme* in child care has set us on the right track. But we need to strengthen the focus on early learning across *all* services so that outcomes are equitable for all children. Sound early education foundations lead to improved schooling outcomes. Good early childhood programs are especially beneficial for children from vulnerable families.

There is little Australian research about what works for young children – across preschools and kindergartens, child care and family day care. We can't compare approaches, practices, progress or outcomes, so we don't know how children are faring. What works best, for whom and under what conditions? Do staff qualifications and competences impact on children's learning outcomes? What practices and experiences predict smooth transitions to school and early literacy success?

Let's build on the election momentum and do a thorough, independent review of the early childhood sector. Let's look closely at the service mix. Let's develop a plan for a universal system of integrated, quality education and care for all children, one that works for families too.

### Ready for school?

In the new year, about 200,000 children across the country will start school. Many sail through the transition. Lots don't. Many children have difficulty settling in to school and miss important learning. Some children lack focus and motivation. They are attention-seeking and disrupt others. Lots have difficulty managing day-to-day learning activities because they don't know how to start, or follow a plan of action. If your centre or cluster would like to learn more about strengthening children's social and cooperative behaviours and building self-regulatory and school-coping skills, you may like to participate in a professional development program run by the Australian Council for Educational Research and funded by the Telstra Foundation. Check out details and contact me at [www.readyforschool.org](http://www.readyforschool.org) if you'd like to join in.

### Switched on to science

This issue of *Every Child* has been fun and easy to put together. There are so many great scientists about and so much happening in science and technology in early childhood settings. Science is often neglected – but children love it and it gets them thinking in flexible, creative ways about their world: how it is constructed and how it functions. Our science writers are well known for producing great science ideas and materials. Lyn Bower, Sue Elliott, Julie Davis, Marilyn Fleer, Greg Reid, Beverly Jane, and Jill Robbins have a wealth of science and technology experiences to share. They will get you thinking about how to strengthen your science program and why investigating our environment is so important.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison Elliott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath.

Alison Elliott  
Editor

## Guest Statement



# Toward sustainable development

**A**chieving sustainable development is one of the most important and challenging tasks facing all nations. It is an objective that requires a major investment today—one that is not without cost—in the expectation that there will be benefits for our children and for future generations. Educating our children on the challenge and involving them in the debate is a key part of the wider national effort.

The scale of the sustainable development challenge for Australia is substantial, given the diversity of our climates and ecosystems.

As an island nation, Australia has responsibility for a considerable area of the marine environment. Because we have a relatively low, but highly-urbanised population concentrated in the coastal strip, there are inevitably pressures on our oceans. While we are one of the Earth's mega-biodiverse countries, we also have one of the world's highest rates of species extinction.

Three major problem areas are worth highlighting:

**1** First, is the complex set of environmental issues involved in urban areas. We have made some good progress in reducing the total level of some pollutants, but air and water pollution and habitat loss remain serious concerns. The growth in energy-intensive transport has outstripped the development of more fuel-efficient systems. There has been a decline in the use of public transport and private car use has continued to increase. The result has been more congestion in the cities and pressure on urban air quality.

**2** Second, is the issue of biodiversity. Progress has been made in protecting endangered and threatened species in Australia, but land clearing for urban development and agriculture continues to deplete and endanger native species and ecosystems.

**3** Third, is the issue of water quality. Declining water quality due to over-allocation and nutrient and sediment pollution affects inland aquatic biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as marine and estuarine biodiversity. For example, the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon threatens the viability of both the Reef as a functioning ecosystem and the industries that depend on it. We have a national plan on salinity but it will take at least several decades to undo the damage already done.

These problems are significant but they should not be seen as overwhelming. Australia has been a world leader in a range of constructive approaches to promoting sustainable development.

One of the most significant achievements in the past decade has been the growth in the level of engagement of the general community in activities aimed at saving the environment and fostering sustainable development.

Involving everyone who wants to have input is now firmly embedded in the way the government deals with these issues. Australia is now a far more environmentally-conscious country than it was 30 years ago.

Education of our children is a key part of the wider national effort. For environmental solutions to be viable in the long term, and for sustainable development to be genuinely 'mainstreamed', we must ensure that our young people feel a sense of ownership and commitment to environmental solutions, and are included in the debate, the decision-making and the implementation phases.

As parents and guardians, we have a major role to play to ensure the big environmental issues of our day are communicated clearly to our children and that we set a positive example for them.

**Justin Brown**

Ambassador for the Environment to Australia

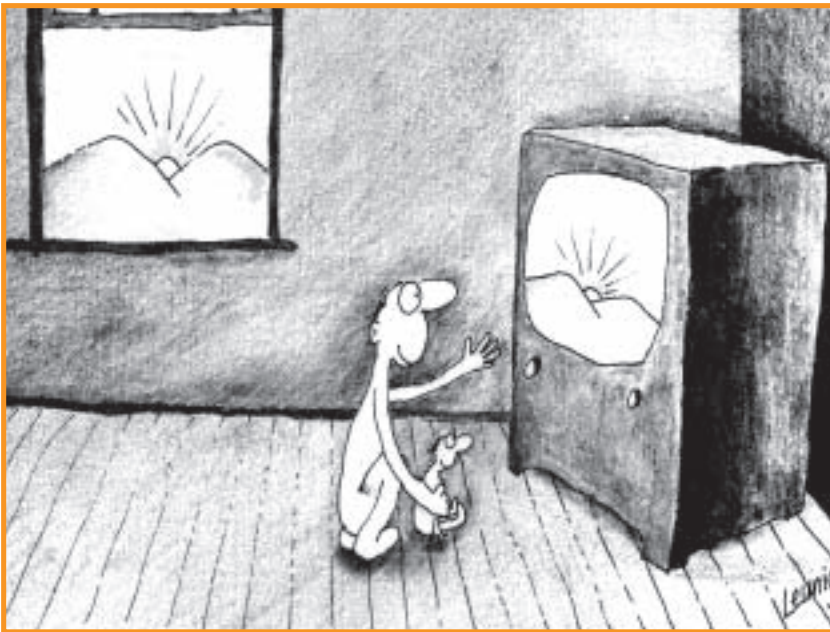
# Mud pies and daisy chains

## Connecting young children and nature



### Can you remember?

Can you remember making mud pies and daisy chains, rolling down grassy hills, drawing with sticks in the dirt, creating fairy perfumes from flowers and building bush cubbies?



'TV Sunset' from *The Penguin Leunig* by Michael Leunig, published by Penguin Group Australia Ltd, 1974.

These are some of the experiences we had as children that connected us with the natural environment. While they may not be part of our conscious thought as adults, they are significant nonetheless in shaping who we are and our values about the natural environment. Chawla (1990, p. 18) poetically describes these experiences as 'radioactive jewels buried within us, emitting energy across the years of our life'. Sebba (1991, p. 395) suggests that the natural landscapes of childhood become the inner landscapes of adulthood. What we explored as children in the natural environment is carried within us throughout life.

If experiences with the natural environment are of such great import in our lives, we must question where these experiences are in the lives of children today. Every Australian early childhood educator has observed the increasing busyness of children's lives and an orientation away from nature towards the latest toy, electronic gadget or tantalising entertainment. According to Brown (2004),

such a focus on technology is not merely an orientation, but an addiction pervading all levels of communities. Children are most vulnerable to this addiction, but at the same time, have an undeniable affinity with nature. If, as Thomas and Thompson (2004, p. 4) claim, 'children's ability to experience the natural environment is under threat' and 'children's access to outdoor play has evaporated like water in sunshine' (Rivkin, 1995 p. 2), what does the future hold?

In light of these statements, can we still just smile when children naively say 'milk comes from milk bars' and 'peas come from the supermarket freezer'? A smile is no longer an appropriate response if sustainability is to be achieved. Both children and adults need to understand that our survival is directly linked to the plants and animals around us and not shops. Early childhood educators have an active and significant role to play ensuring children experience connections with the natural environment in meaningful ways — ways that will assist their understanding of connectedness both with and in the natural environment, and ultimately, promote action for sustainability.

### A biological connection

The earth's human population is increasing exponentially, and humans — as a species — have broken all the biological rules that normally keep populations and species in check. We have been able to do this largely due to our reliance on the energy stored in fossil fuels formed over many millions of years (*The Age*, 11 August, 2004). Each time we turn on a light or drive a car, this connection is realised. Understanding this connection between humans as a species, and the earth that supports our existence, is fundamental and not to be ignored even in early childhood.



The biological connection between humans and the natural environment is described by E. O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis (cited in Rivkin, 1995). He suggests that humans have evolved in the natural environment for many thousands of years and therefore, our connections with the natural environment are innate. It has even been suggested that our connections with water are hard wired into our genetic make up (Deakin University and Parks Victoria, 2002) as a survival mechanism from our hunter-gatherer days. Any early childhood educator who has observed young children spending hours playing with water will attest to this possibility. 'E. O. Wilson and others suggest that since we evolved in natural environments, technology cannot replace but only atrophy the development of our links to nature. If this is the case, children reared apart from nature are necessarily limited' (cited in Rivkin, 1995, p. 6). Early childhood educators have an opportunity to capitalise on these innate connections and build strong foundations for sustainability.

### Early childhood: A window of opportunity

In early childhood, there is a window of opportunity to facilitate the connections with the natural environment that will last a lifetime. To ignore this window is to risk 'generational amnesia' as described by Kahn and Kellert (2003). They propose that with each successive generation, we become more removed from the natural environment. No doubt some of the children in our child care centres, kindergartens and preschools have never been outside a city, negotiated a bumpy bush track or listened to the sound of water cascading over river rocks. Will they ever have these experiences or will they undergo generational amnesia? These experiences cannot be described verbally or portrayed by images in picture storybooks or on television and computer screens; they must be explored up close and personal! One can only hope that the classic Leunig cartoon of the 70s does not become a reality.

Direct experiences with the natural environment are also important for sensory development. It is not beyond the realms of possibility for a baby to experience little more than human-made synthetics from nappies to bottles, toys, pacifiers and pushers. The catch phrase 'babies need books' could be replaced with 'babies need grass'. Sebba (1991) extends this notion beyond babyhood suggesting

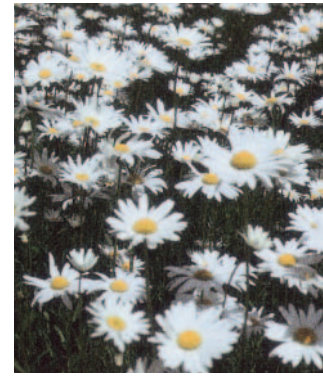
that a process of sensory integration occurs until 10 years of age. How can one be expected to care for, or protect, the natural environment if one has never been immersed in it?

In Scandinavia, children attending nature nursery schools experience a complete immersion in the forest as their outdoor playspace. Adhemar (2000, p. 44) questions: 'What better way could there be to learn about animals, plants and the changing of the seasons? What more effective way to teach children about basic ecological concerns, when they arise so spontaneously and in such a genuine context?' In Australia, some early childhood centres have recognised the importance of nature for children and created nature-based outdoor playspaces. Such playspaces usually include significant plantings, diverse and natural ground surfaces, flexible equipment and special features such as trickle streams, bush cubbies, vegetable gardens and butterfly houses. These playspaces become a sea of natural sensory stimuli for children. Early childhood educators need to be aware that the potential for sensory experience lies beyond the specific play experiences we set up, and should include the whole outdoor setting.

Direct experience with natural elements is only part of the story. Chawla (1990) researched the significant life experiences that had guided environmentally-active adults and found that significant adults were a primary influence. Such adults are those who model, mentor, share and interpret with children their positive connections with the natural environment. The most inspiring essay about this crucial role of adults is *The sense of wonder* written in 1956 by Rachel Carson. She summarises: 'If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in' (Carson, 1998, first published 1956, p. 55). Her essay has not dated and is more pertinent now than ever before.

This article does not provide a recipe for how to promote connections with the natural environment in early childhood services, but a rationale. With this rationale in mind, we invite early childhood educators to make mud pies and daisy chains with children for a sustainable future.

**Sue Elliott and Julie Davis**



Elliott and Davis are also the authors of *Early childhood environmental education: Making it mainstream*. Published in 2003, this book is available from Early Childhood Australia.

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# Interactive hands-on fun

Science at the museum, with Sharmila Nezovic  
Early Childhood Education Presenter

Singer, painter, performer, mother — Sharmila Nezovic is not your average museum presenter. But then, nor does she present at your average museum. Employed by Queensland Museum South Bank, Nezovic has the valued role of Early Childhood Education Presenter, researching, developing and essentially putting on shows and workshops for four- to six-year-olds. Based around science, culture and history, these programs allow Nezovic to call upon her many skills and talents, and at the same time, support the museum's move towards inspiring (within its audience) lifelong learning.

Not that long ago, museums were equated with ghoulish things behind cabinets, big signs saying 'Don't touch', mustiness and boredom. Or at least, that's what I remember on my early trips to a museum. Thankfully, those days are over. Of course museums still hold precious artefacts that cannot be touched, but in recent times, such as with the National Museum of Australia and certainly, Queensland Museum, there has been a massive injection of innovation, spark and hands-on engagement. 'We aim for a more interactive focus all the time', says Nezovic.

Passionate about young children being heard and taken seriously, Nezovic adapts this hands-on approach to her programming, particularly with her science shows. Not only has she developed programs that incorporate drama and puppets, but she's also introduced poetry and music in to her work — bringing in songs from all over

the world. 'And in my special projects and seasonal programs', adds Nezovic, 'I encourage the children to do movement, drawing and printmaking and have heaps of discussion about their ideas.' So while Nezovic is presenting early childhood programs about aerodynamics, centripetal force or the skin of water (just to name a few), she's making sure it's done creatively, and in a way that has meaning and significance to her audience. 'But utilising their language as well', says Nezovic, '...and in having their opinions and experiences valued and extended, their learning and knowledge is truly enhanced.'

When I spoke to Nezovic, a buzz was in the air. On the eve of the new Queensland Sciencecentre's opening at Queensland Museum South Bank, Nezovic was keen to promote its hands-on exhibits. She tells me that the Sciencecentre will consist of three galleries (Body Zone, Earth Space and Action Stations), plus a Show Zone. Appropriately, Nezovic's science shows will complement many of the exhibits. And there's not just one or two programs designed for early childhood audiences. Fitting in with age-appropriate themes, there's a whole menu of different shows on offer, especially designed for preschool group bookings.

'So there's the *Balloons Show* about air pressure', says Nezovic, 'the *Unexpected Science Show* about surprising science, *Velvet*, the *Gecko* about animal classification, the *Water Show* about water properties, *Sound 'n' Things* which is about making sound sculptures...and the newest one called *Fabulous Flowers* — all about the usefulness of flowers, both from a biological and decorative point of view.'

And if these activities aren't enough to occupy Nezovic's average week, she also researches, develops and presents projects

and events for and in response to special occasions like Queensland's 'Under 8s Week' and 'Universal Children's Day'. For Nezovic, the big emphasis with presenting science for an early childhood audience is making knowledge accessible and engaging. That is, giving her audience the opportunity to explore science by allowing them to ask questions, play games, participate in the creative arts and discuss concepts openly.

The sort of discussions that do arise from her audience at the museum are then productively fed back into her research. Says Nezovic: 'If you can build activities with the whole scaffolding approach, grafting from the children's questions and perspectives, this makes programming relevant and keeps it fresh.'

So what, then, has been the most memorable reaction of her audience, whilst presenting at the Queensland Museum South Bank? 'That is quite a hard question to answer, there's so many', responds Nezovic. 'Every situation is a new situation...but [in general] I love the funny and wise things that children say, sometimes out of the blue. I love it when carers explain that they notice their children responding more openly than usual, and I love being given free reign to be inventive and creative — to be able to extend early childhood learning situations.'

For Nezovic, who always aims to complement curriculum and classroom learning, there is no better satisfaction than facilitating the enjoyment of her young participants. Perhaps there is no better praise, then, when one of the children puts up her hand at the end of a session and says, 'When I grow up I want to be a scientist!' But sometimes, says Nezovic with a chuckle, 'they'll say "I want to be a scientist just like you", and I think, we won't go into that!'

Rebecca Meston



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# Intergenerational science: Grandparents encouraging children's curiosity

Increasingly, grandparents are being recognised as 'vital' to family life and as having a significant influence on young children. 'Grandparents are becoming an integral part of the modern family and their role looks set to grow ever more important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.' (O'Connor, 2002).

Lucy Winter (2003), spokesperson for *Age Concern* in the UK, asserts that 'Grandparents play an important role in Wales; parents have a high regard for their experiences and want their children to benefit from them'. In the popular press in Australia and New Zealand, as in Britain, issues concerning grandparents tend to relate to grandparents who are primary carers of their grandchildren (Houston, 2004; Gorman, 2004; O'Connor, 2002). In addition, a growing body of research, such as that reported by Goodfellow (2003, 2004), highlights the changing demands on the role of grandparents in families. To date there has been little interest in, or recognition of, the value of the 'everyday interactions' between grandparents who are not child care providers and their grandchildren. Perhaps it is because grandparents are often unaware of the important role they play in fostering curiosity and a sense of wonder in preschoolers. Kornhaber (2003) reveals 'Sadly, most people today, including grandparents themselves, vastly underrate their ability to serve as a valuable resource for children'.

In our recent study focusing on the role of grandparents in supporting young children's learning in science and technology (Jane & Robbins, 2004), we found that most grandparents thought they were 'not doing anything special' with their grandchildren. Moreover, some grandparents underestimated their ability to be effective in the grandparenting role. However, Hagestad (cited in Kornhaber 2003) recognises that 'Grandparents can spark a grandchild's imagination, providing motivation and inspiration by just "being there".' Our study certainly supported this notion.

## Ways in which grandparents are supporting children's science learning

Grandparents often support young children's science learning when they show a genuine interest in what the children are doing as they interact with natural materials and scientific phenomena.

In the photographs below, Ethan (aged 3.6 years) engages in science activities in three different contexts. Photo 1 shows Ethan proudly looking at his grandmother as he uses his plastic rake to level the soil in his backyard. He then spent some time exploring the soil by letting it fall through his fingers. In Photo 2 Ethan (with his sister Allison) looks at his grandmother through binoculars he made from cardboard and green cellophane whilst at playgroup. This activity enables Ethan to develop some initial ideas about light. In Photo 3 Ethan uses a fridge magnet to test the oven door to see if it attracts a magnet. This serious exploration continued for some time as he tested a range of materials in his grandmother's kitchen.



Photo 1: Ethan and his rake



Photo 2: Ethan and Allison with binoculars



Photo 3: Ethan experimenting with the fridge magnet

Indeed the kitchen provides many opportunities for exploratory science activities, as is evident from the episode one grandmother relates below:

“While Evie slept, Michael made a chocolate cake. He measured the milk and broke the eggs, then stirred it – we talked about the textures and colours as they changed.’  
She continued:  
‘Later, we looked at a book of lizards and similar creatures. I let Michael tell me about them. We talked about backbones, fins and feet.’ (Eleanor).

Through these simple experiences, Michael is developing understandings and language within the science strands of ‘natural and processed materials’ and ‘life and living’.

Just as significant is the support for the development of children’s curiosity, questioning, observing and hypothesising that grandparents often provide – important science skills and dispositions. These are apparent in the interactions between Michael and his grandmother above, and the following comments of Peter and Kathleen, grandparents of Oliver:

‘We went to the beach with Oliver and he wanted to know why there were dead jellyfish on the beach and why there were bits of glass that were really smooth. He loves asking questions and you often have to think pretty hard to come up with the right answer.’

In this changing world it is often grandparents, rather than parents, who have the time for these rich and supportive interactions and experiences. Interest in a particular phenomenon or topic can last for weeks or even months, to be strengthened with each revisiting.

## Benefits to children

Everyday, spontaneous experiences such as these are vital for children’s learning and help them find relevance and meaning in the scientific concepts they encounter in school and prior-to-school settings. For example, children will not readily understand scientific concepts such as ‘structure and function’ if they do not have the everyday concepts such as ‘backbones’ and ‘feet’. Children also develop strong reciprocal relationships and positive self-esteem through the exchanges (both verbal and nonverbal) that frequently occur between grandparents and grandchild. These benefits are often mirrored in the grandparents.

## Benefits to grandparents

When young children share their curiosity about the natural world with their grandparents, the grandparents benefit in several ways. Firstly, as grandparents take notice of, and become excited about, what the children find interesting in their environment, the quality of the interaction is enhanced. Secondly, as children value their grandparents’ responses to their discoveries, the grandparents’

self-esteem is enhanced. Thirdly, guided by their grandchildren, grandparents revisit and explore scientific phenomena in a new and fresh way. Finally, through these positive and shared activities, the intergenerational relationship is strengthened and becomes more meaningful.

## Stepping back and seeing the bigger picture

Rather than undervaluing and underrating the role of grandparents, seeing them principally as child minders or carers, we need to highlight and acknowledge the importance of these mutually-rewarding intergenerational relationships. Significantly, grandparents bring new perspectives, support and insights to everyday experiences where learning may not otherwise occur. As grandparents Kathleen and Peter state:

‘The big difference with grandchildren is time. There isn’t the same rush to get things done as there is when your own children are young. I think that the older you get, the more you realise that you have to appreciate the time you have with them. It’s great to see Oliver growing up. We can see our daughter in him, but ourselves too. It’s easier to take a step back and see the bigger picture.’

### Beverley Jane and Jill Robbins

Monash University



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## Co-sleeping: Sharing a bed with your baby

**T**hrough most of human evolution, it has been normal for babies and mothers to sleep together (co-sleeping), often with the baby feeding from the breast while the mother hardly wakes. This continues to be the practice in many societies today, with children sleeping with an adult for many years. In the western world this practice has been frowned upon and thought to be dangerous, but in recent years, bed-sharing has again been promoted as good for babies and their parents. Parents worry that it may not be safe, or may be bad for the baby in some way. So, based on research in this area, here are answers to some common questions.

### Is bed-sharing good or bad for the baby?

- It can be seen as the natural thing to do, and many people prefer to raise their children as naturally as possible.
- It may help to establish breastfeeding and promote bonding (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] promotes this).
- Babies may cry less and parents get more sleep.
- It does not lead to the child being 'spoilt'.
- It does not lead to any long-term problems. In a study of children followed up for 18 years, there were no differences between those who slept with parents as babies and those who slept alone.

### Is bed-sharing safe?

- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) research has shown that babies who have their heads covered, whose breathing is blocked in some way, or who become too hot, may be more likely to die suddenly.
- In societies where adults sleep on soft beds with soft pillows, blankets and quilts, babies sleeping in these beds may become covered, find it difficult to breathe and get hot.
- Where beds are firmer and fewer covers are used, there is less of a risk.
- However, if cots can be made safe for babies, so can beds. Studies have shown that babies are not at greater risk (of SIDS or of suffocation) as long as guidelines such as the ones below are followed.

### Smoking

The main factor, which shows up in all the research, is that a baby is more at risk of dying from SIDS if the baby is sharing the bed with an adult who smokes.

- Even if parents never smoke in the bedroom or around the baby, the baby is still at risk if co-sleeping with a parent who is a smoker.
- It is not clear how much of this is due to smoking during the pregnancy and how much to smoking afterwards, but it is strongly recommended that parents do not have their baby in bed with them if they smoke.

### How can beds be made safe for babies?

- The principles are much the same as ensuring a cot is safe. You need a firm, clean surface with a tight-fitting sheet. Keep the coverings fairly light and keep pillows and large stuffed toys away from the baby. Make sure the baby's head does not get covered. Place babies on their back to sleep.
- Do not put babies to sleep on soft surfaces like waterbeds, bean bags or very soft or sagging mattresses.
- Do not have babies near the edge of the bed where they might fall off. (Some people put the mattress on the floor so that a fall does not injure the baby.)
- Also be sure the baby's head cannot get caught between the mattress and the wall.

### Other 'rules' that help keep babies safer



Babies should not be in the parents' bed if the parents have been drinking or are taking medicines that make them sleep more deeply. They would be less aware of the baby's presence in the bed, and could put the baby at more risk.

- Also avoid co-sleeping if parents are extremely tired, very overweight or are very heavy sleepers.
- Very long hair should be tied back so the baby can't get entangled in it.
- It is particularly dangerous to sleep on a sofa or lounge with babies, as babies can easily get their heads caught between the seat and back of the sofa.
- Babies should not share beds with other children, who cannot be responsible for their safety.

### So, should parents keep their baby in bed with them?

- Whether babies sleep with parents or not, there is still a very small risk that something could go wrong, but many parents find that their bed-sharing time, and the closeness with their baby they in turn experience, is very special.
- Whether parents decide to have their baby sleep with them depends a lot on how both parents feel about it. Both parents are responsible for the safety of the baby in the bed, so both need to agree about this.
- If parents are worried about co-sleeping, or if they find they get less sleep because of the baby's noises and movements, it is probably not right for them. Babies and their parents can bond very closely without sharing their beds.
- If parents feel quite comfortable about it and all the safety rules above are followed, then it is fine to share their bed with their baby or child for as long as all are happy with the arrangement. (Note: sharing the bed with a baby or young child does not mean that the children will be there forever! Most children naturally move to having their own beds before they start school, and many do it younger than that as they get more confidence to sleep alone.)

### What alternatives are there?

- Parents who want to keep their baby near but not actually in the bed, can put the bassinet or cot right next to the bed, so that they can touch their baby without getting up.
- Some parents use a three-sided cot (a cot with one side down) attached to the side of the bed and at the same level, so that the baby has a safe area to sleep but can still be in contact with a parent. It needs to be attached securely to the bed so it cannot shift and let the baby get caught between the cot and the bed. (It is possible to buy co-sleeping side beds specially made for this in the USA but we don't know of any sources in Australia).
- Generally, babies seem to be safer if they sleep in the same room with their parents, however babies can be very noisy sleepers. If their snuffling and snorting keeps you awake, you can put them just outside the door or in another room. Being a parent is very tiring and it is important that you get sleep when you can. Older babies can be disturbed by the movements and noises of parents in their sleep and may sleep better in a room by themselves, or in a room shared with a sister or brother.
- If your baby is going to sleep in a bassinet or cot, see the topic SAFE SLEEP on the Child and Youth Health Website for cot safety information. ([www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)).

Wherever babies sleep, attachment research shows that they do better if they are responded to when they cry in the early months and years. This builds a sense of security that is the foundation for their future social, emotional development and learning skills.

#### Pam Linke and Robyn Leeson

Child and Youth Health, Adelaide

#### References and further reading

The SIDS website has up-to-date information about infant safe sleeping. <http://www.sidsandkids.org/safesleep/faq.htm>

UNICEF: Sharing a bed with your baby. [www.babyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk)

#### Essential connections: A guide to young children's learning

In the last issue of *Every Child* (Volume 10, Number 3), the publication *Essential connections: A guide to young children's learning* was advertised for \$10.00 each. Due to extremely high demand, however, and the increased cost of printing, *Essential connections* will now be sold for **\$15.00**.

For a copy contact Tony Nichols at the Education Division of the Tasmanian Department of Education on: (03) 6233 7207 or fax: (03) 6233 6979 or e-mail: [tony.nichols@education.tas.gov.au](mailto:tony.nichols@education.tas.gov.au).



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# Wearing your **underpants** on the outside: Investigating children's hero play



Many issues arise when professionals discuss children's hero play. Questions about a focus on the physical, gender stereotypes, violence, the lack of models of problem-solving, blurred lines between characters representing good and evil, containment of enthusiasm, play fighting, and the use of toy guns and sticks are but a few raised by teachers who talk about superheroes. Usually questions arise about when and how to intervene and what to lay down as some guidelines for teachers, children and parents.

As a practising non-directive play therapist, working mainly with children, I was intrigued by the variety of arguments raised by teachers concerning this topic, and the strength of opinions voiced. It has been my experience that encouragement of superhero play in therapy is essential. Therapists encourage children to tap into the superheroes inside themselves. Often young children's play is chaotic when children first enter therapy. Battles, violence, death, danger and violent relationships are common metaphors (Pearson & Wilson, 2001). During seemingly violent battle plays, resolution is often through the actions of a superhero figure finding the key, killing the adversary, leading the way or being victorious in battle. It is usually my task to assist the child to experience the qualities within the superhero and to assist the child to find these same qualities within themselves. Finding the hero within often builds a capacity for resilience.

Narrative therapists (people who use story to unlock presenting problems) tell us about their use of hero play. Young clients often develop a sense of being a protagonist (central character) in a narrative of change, challenge and hope. The problem (cancer, disease, grief) may be considered the antagonist.

The child's qualities of 'courage, determination and ingenuity are challenged' to 'test his mettle and challenge this relationship with the problem' (Freeman, Epsom & Lobovits, 1997, p. 51). In the development of narratives, the child is encouraged to externalise the problem and to seek alternatives to passive submission to disease. The rise of the hero figure can be useful in encouraging clients to find similar qualities within self and this in turn helps overcome the feelings that unfairness and disempowerment can bring.

So what's the literature got to say about hero play and how well does it mesh with my own strongly-held belief in the value of superheroes? Similarly, could it be that what is helpful in therapy is also appropriate in early childhood centres and schools?

There has been a general move away from play in some early childhood programs and a growing move towards activities with greater cognitive emphases such as literacy (Ziegler, 2004). This move is happening in spite of research by Smilansky and Shefatya (1990, in Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001) and Australian writer Sue Dockett (1999) that has linked play, school success and ability to interact positively with peers and adults. Isenberg and Jalongo (2001) drew out four ways that pretend play assisted children to construct and understand their world:

1. Play simplified events; for instance, a child who is afraid of the dark will enact play that eliminates darkness.
2. Play compensates for situations and enables children to experiment with forbidden acts such as eating biscuits and ice cream for breakfast.

3. Play enables children to control or make sense of the unusual. A child might enact a road accident after seeing an accident on the highway.
4. Play allows children to avoid unpleasant consequences for they can simply change role, rising from the dead to resume their place in the play. Isenberg and Jalongo add that play allows children to express and cope with their feelings in what is now called their 'pretend reality' (a term coined by Van Horn et al., 2003).

French and Pena (1991) examined the change in children's play patterns across a timeline of 80 years, demonstrating that there had been an increase in children's dramatisations of superhero themes. The study indicated that there had been no difference in pre- and post-television superhero play themes or hero qualities for participants in middle childhood, and that television had not significantly changed the play of children older than seven years. However, the study indicated that for children aged between four and six, there were differences between the pre- and post-television eras. Since the advent of television and the marriage between television heroes and the toy industry, the incidence of adventure play had risen significantly. Secondly, there was a noticeable trend for children to play out the interactions of fantasy heroes and a decline in playing out the adventures of real-life heroes. Pre-television heroes had different qualities to post-television heroes. Post-television heroes emphasise braveness and courage. Pre-television real-life heroes had an emphasis on family values and being helpful, kind and gentle.

*KidSource*, citing an article by the US National Association for the Education of Young Children (1997, p. 1), tells us why adults are concerned about superhero play:

'... adults worry that accidents will happen. Sometimes adults discourage superhero play for fear that it will become too disruptive, or that children will engage in it at inappropriate times.'

Reese (1998) reminded readers of French and Pena's (1991, p. 1) study when she commented

that 'the shift (in young children's play patterns) may be depriving preschool children of the opportunity to act out commonplace, everyday activities that prepare them for interacting fully with other people'. Carlson-Page and Levin (2004, p. 1), proponents of the Reggio Emilia approach, combine the notions of 'high tech war toys with an increasingly violent attitude in society', and encouraged parents and teachers to deal with the issues 'diplomatically, instead of disallowed as forbidden fruit, or shrugged off as natural'. Jones (2002) in his book *Killing Monsters: Why children need fantasy, super heroes and make believe violence* pushed the point that fantasy encourages children to trust their own intuition and follow their emotions and feelings. This, he says, will assist them to build a stronger and a more enduring sense of self. Jones, whose book is still causing controversy, is perhaps closer to a Jungian therapist's belief that there is a necessity for all to investigate the shadow part of self (von Franz, 1980). Jones believes that violence helps children cope with violence and what excites young people could be a sign of what they are lacking emotionally. He believes that violent fantasy is one of the best ways for children to deal with the violence in our society and enables children to realistically live with less fear.

Mayer (1993, in *Child and Family*, Canada) said that it is important for teachers and parents to make a distinction between superhero play and dramatic play and to encourage the latter. She speaks of figurine play and criticises figurine play as unadventurous and too predictable. Like Jones (2002), she accepts the inevitability of superhero play and recommends that:

- adults observe play processes in order to understand what is happening, before intervening;
- superhero environments must be planned to be conducive to excited play;
- teachers have a facilitation role which involves:
  - influencing the creative quality of the superhero experience;
  - concise direction and rule reminders such as 'We love our superhero play and we never get hurt or hurt others' or 'We play safely with our friends'; and
  - helping the players to recognise the humane characteristics of television characters



**there was a noticeable trend for children to play out the interactions of fantasy heroes and a decline in playing out the adventures of real-life heroes.**

while emphasising values of friendship, loyalty, justice and community service. (Emphasising the humane characteristics includes reminding the player of the community values involved in saving the city while encouraging the enactment of humane and gentle parts of the story as well as the action.);

- introduction of real-life heroes throughout the curriculum. Students can be introduced to the Lollypop Lady who is able to stop cars by the lifting of a sign and a blow of a whistle, ensuring everyone is safe. Props could be used including capes with an **LpL** for Lollypop Lady; and
- discussing the actions and alternatives to violent resolution and setting realistic and understandable rules about aggressive behaviour, is also a necessary problem-solving alternative to violent behaviour.

Initially, I set out to investigate the issues around superhero play for teachers. Some of the thinking behind superhero play and violent play promoted a view that children — through their play — were signalling a need to cope with the aggression and violence encountered in their daily lives. An acceptance of a need by children to explore the superhero within, calls for teachers to take Mayer's (1993) advice and intervene in the play, structuring the play situation through rule reminders and guidelines, but also encouraging the re-enactment of more human and value-driven parts of witnessed action by the superhero. The challenge for teachers could be in donning the cape and mask, and exploring the superhero within yourself as you assist children in the construction of a sense of the real and imagined world. You may not have to wear your underpants on the outside, but if you think this may help, feel free.

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## Winners of the 2004 Children's Book of the Year Awards

Organised and presented by the Children's Book Council of Australia, this year's winners were:

### Book of the Year: Older readers

**Melina Marchetta for *Saving Francesca*. Viking, Penguin Books Australia, 2003.**

### Book of the Year: Younger readers

**Carole Wilkinson for *Dragonkeeper*. Black Dog Books, 2003.**

### Book of the Year: Early childhood

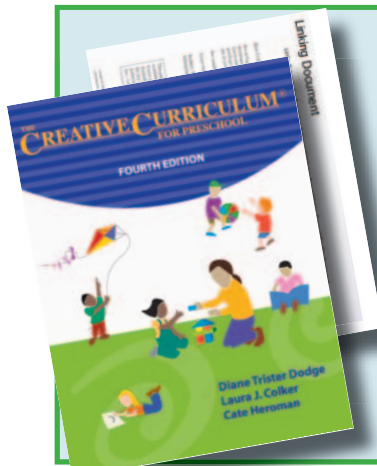
**Pamela Allen for *Grandpa and Thomas*. Viking, Penguin Books Australia, 2003.**

### Picture Book of the Year

**Neil Curtis and Joan Grant for *Cat and Fish*. Lothian Books, 2003.**

### Eve Pownall Award for Information Books

**John Nicholson for *Animal Architects*. Allen & Unwin, 2003.**



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## Regular

# Children's Week 2004 – a cause for celebration

## What is Children's Week?

Children's Week is an annual event celebrated in every state and territory across Australia during the fourth week in October. The United Nations Universal Children's Day is the central focus of Children's Week. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Universal Children's Day by the United Nations General Assembly. In Australia, this day will be celebrated on Wednesday 27 October, 2004.

Each state/territory has a volunteer Children's Week committee whose activities have evolved independently. All are autonomous but share common goals formulated by the Children's Week Council of Australia. The National Patron is the Governor-General of Australia, His Excellency, Major General Michael Jeffery, AC, CVO, MC.

Committees are comprised of community volunteers from organisations, agencies and individuals involved with, and concerned for, the wellbeing of children. Each Children's Week committee seeks to focus attention on the theme of 'A Caring World Shares'.

A diverse range of events and activities is organised at national, state and local levels to focus the attention of the wider community on children, their needs, rights, abilities and achievements.

Organisations involved with all aspects of children's lives are invited to participate in Children's Week to highlight the work they do and to interact with the community.

## History

In 1954 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed Universal Children's Day, the fourth Wednesday in October, as a day to promote friendship and understanding among children of the world. From this beginning it developed into a day that focused attention on the issues and needs of children and their families. Prior to 1977, Child Care Week was held in a number of states and territories with a focus on children in care and was held at different times depending on local preferences. In 1985 it was proposed that a National Children's Week coordinating committee be formed and that Children's Week



be held at the same time throughout Australia. Universal Children's Day is now the central focus upon which Children's Week revolves in each state and territory.

## Aims of Children's Week

Each committee aims to support and encourage local communities to celebrate Children's Week and to assist in the organisation of local activities and events that support and involve children and their families by:

- raising awareness within the community of the needs and rights of children;
- promoting organisations that provide services to children and their families by publishing a Children's Week program of events;
- supporting organisations with special activities for children and families through small grants;
- recognising the importance of the work of parents, carers, teachers and volunteer workers through Children's Week Awards;
- celebrating childhood and the potential of children; and
- promoting initiatives to provide and improve services for children.

Suggested activity ideas include: invitations for guest speakers/workshops/discussion groups to be held on issues related to children's needs; displays of children's work; Internet discussions; open days; adventure trails; health activities; design of posters; international food days; story time; hospital visits; 'make a difference day'; excursions; grandparents day; 'tree of caring'; photographic displays; mini-Olympics etc.

Children's Week is a time for children to demonstrate their talents, skills and abilities. Let us all celebrate the joys of childhood and thank everyone, especially those volunteers who join together with great enthusiasm to make Children's Week in Australia so special and such a rewarding experience.

## Narelle Hargreaves

President  
Children's Week Council of Australia

## Letters to Santa

Each year, Australia Post processes more than 120,000 letters for Santa, and for the last 10 years has provided a unique service by responding to the children on behalf of Santa, to let them know that their wishes have been heard.

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Children can also visit the Australia Post website at [www.auspost.com.au/education](http://www.auspost.com.au/education) to download a fun, festive letterhead to use for writing their letters to Santa.



## Mini-beasts & secret wildlife

Facilitating local environmental learning experiences for children



Hardly a week passes without the media spotlight focusing on the environment. Typically, the issues that receive airplay are natural disasters, climate change, pollution, El Niño, endangered species and plant and animal extinctions. These doom-and-gloom stories undoubtedly colour the view many children have of the world. Parents, teachers and caregivers have a responsibility to redress the media's negative exposure and stimulate the natural curiosity and sense of wonder that children have towards the environment. There are several ways to provide a positive counterbalance to the media's treatment of the environment.

### Wildlife documentaries

One of the most accessible ways to give children a positive environmental experience is to expose them to wildlife documentaries. Who hasn't been spellbound with some of David Attenborough's nature documentaries? For minimal cost and effort, they bring the stunning beauty of nature into the lounge room and stimulate the child's imagination. However, while they are beneficial in widening experiences, their relevance to the child's world is often limited. Many focus on creatures only seen in zoos or exotic locations. They provide a remote, second-hand and passive experience of the

world. What is needed is a first-hand, active and local environmental experience that is meaningful to the child. There are several positive ways of doing this:

### Field experiences

Field study centres, zoos, sanctuaries, aquariums, museums, botanical gardens, national parks and marine parks provide ideal opportunities for experiences rich in local content. These places often have detailed environmental information and children can interact, ask questions and receive responses. An additional benefit is that these activities are multiple sensory experiences that lock in stronger memories than passive activities, such as watching television.

Some of the best environmental experiences for children are those offered by some local Indigenous people, especially if the topic of bush tucker happens to emerge. Children love learning about and trying foods that aren't found in supermarkets. However, as valuable as these field experiences are, they aren't always relevant to the child's immediate local environment. For the organiser of the experience, there are logistical difficulties as well, which may limit their practicality and effectiveness.

### Visiting wildlife experts

An excellent way of giving children first-hand experience is to ask wildlife experts to come and talk with them and show them their creatures. There are many educational resource people who have shows with live reptiles, birds and mammals. An unusual example in the Sydney area is the Bug Man — Stephen Fellenberg, who runs Insektus, an educational consultancy specializing in insects and spiders. His speciality is phasmatids (stick insects), which children love.

Presentations by wildlife experts can be valuable and informative. They often give children tactile experiences with some creatures and these are useful in helping to conquer fears. However, like field experiences, they are not always practical or logistically possible.

### Using the backyard as a resource

Probably the best (and often most overlooked) way of providing positive environmental experiences is to use the child's immediate environment as a resource. In cities, this could be their backyards, balconies or the local parks. In rural

areas, the options could extend to wider spaces, including paddocks, dams, rivers and wetlands. Familiar places have many advantages over wildlife documentaries and field excursions. The main advantage is their relevance to the child's world. The challenge for the parent, educator or caregiver, is to turn this accessible resource into an asset, rather than something taken for granted. The backyard resource needs to be unlocked by stimulating the world of the imagination. The key is to transform the mundane into the magical.

To someone from overseas, Australian backyards can seem like wild places with exotic creatures. In *The Future Eaters*, Dr Tim Flannery states that there are more species of ants on Black Mountain, Canberra, than in the entire British Isles. Australia teems with unusual and unique creatures and some of them live closer to us than we know.

## Mini-beasts

Mini-beasts are found virtually everywhere. They include creatures that live in the soil, slugs, snails, slaters, insects, spiders and smaller reptiles, such as skinks. Children are usually fascinated (and sometimes frightened) by mini-beasts, even if most of them are harmless. Be aware that there are some nasty mini-beasts, such as spiders, scorpions, centipedes, leeches, bees and wasps. These dangerous mini-beasts represent an opportunity for children to learn to recognise them and how to avoid them. This is an important life skill in a country with so many venomous creatures.

Once children learn to identify the safe mini-beasts, they can catch them and handle them carefully in simple bug catchers. These are available from many toy stores. Most children think mini-beasts are lots of fun, especially when viewed under a large magnifying glass. These creatures are also excellent subjects for teaching simple environmental concepts, such as animal names, classification groups, food webs, adaptations and life cycle changes. Follow-up discussions and activities should ideally involve the use of music, art and dance to enrich these experiences.

## Secret wildlife

Children love secrets and intrigue, so this concept is a novel way of focusing their attention on what is in their backyards. Secret wildlife refers to those animals that are nocturnal, well-camouflaged, secretive or very shy. Often, they live right beside us and we are unaware of it. Nocturnal creatures include bandicoots, wombats, possums, pythons, mopokes, owls, curlews and fruit bats. Diurnal animals with secretive habits include blue-tongue lizards, snakes, stick and leaf insects, big-footed brush turkeys and some tiny birds, such as the forty-spotted pardalote of Tasmania.

The idea of hidden wildlife will appeal to most children. Tell them this is nature's hide-and-seek game, a *Where's Wally?* with creatures in their own backyard. Children will enjoy playing detectives and finding out which secret creatures share their backyards. Clues might include scratch marks on trees, screeching noises high in the trees or the sky, hidden nests and scats (animal droppings) under large trees. Investigations will stimulate problem-solving and observational skills and satisfaction when the animals are located and identified.

Most secret wildlife is best observed at a distance and not touched. Warn children about dangerous creatures, such as snakes and goannas, and use these as



opportunities to teach about danger and safety. Environmental concepts with secret wildlife include nocturnal/diurnal habits and adaptations, camouflage and food webs.

## Resource people

The best way to find out about mini-beasts and secret wildlife is to use local resource people, such as national parks officers, zookeepers, bird-watching clubs, reptile clubs, wildlife rescue organisations, bushwalking clubs and museums. These experts are usually willing to tell you about their passion. They will help you to unravel the secrets of local backyards. You can then follow up with further information from reference books and the Internet to complete the picture.

Helping children find inspiration from the environment is best done in their own backyard. Mini-beasts and secret wildlife provide a conceptual framework for a practical, first-hand examination of the local environment that is relevant to children. It is fun and will result in a greater appreciation for the immediate environment. If this translates to a love of creatures found elsewhere and a recognition of the need to protect them as integral parts of our environment, then you will be instilling important values for the future.

### Greg Reid

Greg Reid is the author of more than 30 educational books with environmental themes, including a series on Antarctica, Australian Wildlife, Ecosystems, and Australia's National and Marine Parks. They are published by Macmillan Education Australia. Greg is working on a book on secret wildlife in the backyard.

N.B. A useful resource for discovering the wonders of the backyard is Lyn Bower's 2004 publication *Everyday learning in the backyard*. This book is available from Early Childhood Australia.

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## Book Reviews



# Taming Butterflies

Sue Whiting and Mini Goss

New Frontier Publishing (2004)

ISBN 975090755

RRP: \$24.95

This is a story about Tilly and her feelings. When she feels nervous, frightened or shy she gets butterflies in her tummy. That is until Marjory-

Anne (a friend of her mother's) comes to visit. In the beginning Tilly is shy around Marjory-Anne. She doesn't like the 'clonk, clonk' sound that comes from her walking frame. One day Marjory-Anne tells Tilly that she used to have butterflies when she was a little girl and teaches her how to tame them. The main message of the book is that children can try different ways to control their feelings. The illustrations have lots of bright, happy colours. I like the way they sparkle on the cover. They also help you to understand how Tilly feels. I like the way the author describes Marjory-Anne's face because it helps children to imagine what she looks like. If you ever have butterflies, you should read this book.

### Laura Marshall

6 years and 10 months old

*Taming Butterflies* centres on the emotional life of a young girl Tilly. It shows her in a number of different contexts – reading a book, playing ball, swinging, swimming, and in bed on her own – and explores how she feels through the metaphor of butterflies. When the butterflies are still (such as when Tilly is reading a book or lying with her mother in bed), Tilly is relaxed and happy. Yet when Tilly is placed in more confronting situations, the butterflies soar and swirl to indicate that she is scared or nervous. Tilly learns to tame the butterflies when an older friend of her mother's empathises with Tilly, and shows her how she learned to control them when she was a child. The story ends with Tilly exploring this strategy and feeling empowered by her newfound ability to control her different emotions.

Written from the child's perspective, this book would appeal to four- to five-year-old children as it validates a range of emotions that are experienced in the early years of life and shows the child taking control. The illustrations further assist the main storyline as the butterflies literally scatter and fly off the pages. This book would make a welcome addition to an early childhood library.

### Jane Page

Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood

Faculty of Education

The University of Melbourne

# Baby on board: Understanding what your baby needs

Howard Chilton

Finch Publishing (2003)

ISBN 1876451394

RRP: \$22.95

I read *Baby on board* from two perspectives: as an academic whose research is concerned with parental wellbeing and children's development, and as the mother of three young children. From both perspectives, I would recommend this book. Its achievement is that it provides accurate and understandable information based on quality research, and also trusts mothers to make use of this knowledge and make decisions suitable for their own family situation. The information is reassuring and the approach, free of the patronising tone that's so often found in baby advice books. The subtitle of the book: *Understanding what your baby needs*, reflects the focus on knowledge.

The section on sleep provides a good example of this approach. Loss of sleep is a major concern for parents of young babies, and in recent times, the recommendation of behavioural techniques (controlled crying) - even for very young infants - has become part of practice. Parents are often disappointed to find that such techniques are not so easy to implement with young children, while those concerned with children's development and wellbeing have expressed alarm at the use of such techniques with young infants. The treatment of sleep in this book is quite different and, in my view, handled exceptionally well. By providing information on the normality of short sleep cycles in young babies, it makes clear that waking and night feeding is not a 'problem behaviour' and that parents have a range of options, when they recognise this as normal. These include co-bedding, finding time for themselves to rest in the day and finding help from others to allow rest. The emphasis here is on attachment – with reassurance given to parents who choose to co-bed. Not only will parents not spoil their child by providing their young infant with contact, says author Howard Chilton, they are providing something which is normal and positive for their child's wellbeing.

As a researcher who is concerned with the wellbeing of parents with multiple birth children, I would perhaps have liked to see a little more on this topic and inclusion of details of support groups in the listings at the back of the book. The frequency of multiple births in Western countries like Australia is high and increasing each year. I

would also have liked a little more on the experience of neonatal intensive care, as Howard Chilton is clearly an authority in this area. These, however, are minor criticisms, and I would certainly recommend this book to expectant mothers and practitioners, such as family doctors, midwives and child health nurses.

### Associate Professor Karen Thorpe

School of Early Childhood

Queensland University of Technology



# Fed Up with ADHD

– How food affects children and what you can do about it

Sue Dengate

Random House (2004)

ISBN 1740512308

RRP: \$24.95

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a topical children's health issue. *Fed Up with ADHD* begins with 'the story' of the author's (Sue Dengate's) journey of discovery about the relationship between natural and added food chemicals and the behaviour and learning difficulties experienced by her family members. It is an easy-reading revelation for parents seeking solutions to their child's behaviour pattern and discusses the potential benefits of the Elimination Diet, as prescribed by the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's Allergy Unit, in conjunction with other therapies.

Part Two of *Fed Up with ADHD* explores in detail Dengate's 'Failsafe Diet' – called this because it is 'Free of Additives and Low in Salicylates, Amines and Flavour Enhancers'. The dietary regime also includes instructions on how to challenge children with each chemical to gain an understanding of which specific chemical could be causing a reaction. A recipe section and shopping guide complement the practical nature of this book and will assist parents in their attempt to follow what can be quite a difficult and restrictive elimination diet. The author regularly reminds readers to also include other programs such as behaviour management, to achieve greatest benefit.

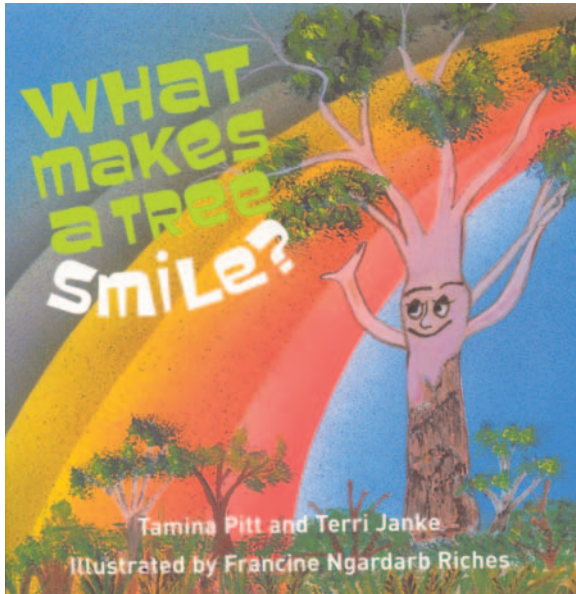
The benefit of dietary treatment is subject to a wide range of opinions among professionals involved in the treatment of ADHD. A child's diet should not be restricted unnecessarily and it is unwise practice to introduce such a restrictive diet in children unless closely supervised by a dietary professional. On the other hand, families desperate for solutions to behaviour problems will seek help from all possible avenues, of which dietary modification is relatively safe. Behaviour problems are rarely induced by a single cause, however diet could be a catalyst for some children, in which case closer attention to their dietary intake and a trial of this elimination diet may be warranted.

An Australian publication packed with practical advice, *Fed Up with ADHD* is a useful reference book for parents seeking solutions for behaviour problems in children, although it may not be the complete answer for all families.

**Ruth Logan**

Dietitian

Nutrition Vision



## WhaT makes a Tree smile?

**Tamina Pitt, Terri Janke and Francine Ngardarb Riches**

Magabala Books (2003)

ISBN 1875641807

RRP: \$5.45

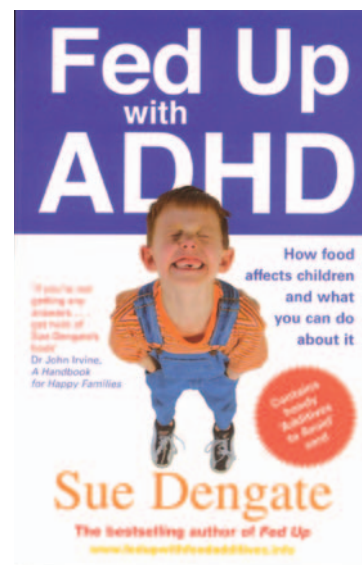
One of the most interesting aspects of this children's book is that it originates in the thoughts of a five-year-old child sitting under a tree with her mother. It is a delightful example of adults listening to children, taking them and their questions seriously and working with them to put their ideas into practice. One of the many discussion topics this book should generate with young children is their own competence as authors, and ways in which adults can collaborate with children to publish their own material.

*What makes a tree smile?* is a picture book with a small format (in size it is about 15 cm square) utilising a simple idea. The text revolves around the question: 'What makes a tree smile?' and a series of short answers. The repetition of the question throughout the text offers a predictable pattern and rhythm to the book, while the answers are less predictable. The simple format does not mean that the book itself is simple. Rather, the book has the potential to introduce a wide range of concepts and issues related to the environment and connections with the environment. This is enhanced through the illustrations, which reflect a series of sympathetic depictions of trees in a range of environments.

**Sue Dockett**

School of Education and Early Childhood Studies

University of Western Sydney



# Caught in the closet:

## The silencing of sexuality in early childhood education

In June 2004, the ABC's *Playschool* featured footage of two mothers, Vicki Harding and her partner Jackie Braw with their daughter Brenna, enjoying a day's outing at a Sydney amusement park, in their well-loved 'through the window' segment. This footage caused national media coverage and prompted a flurry of letters to newspaper editors across the country. Both political ends fought to make their personal views known to the wider public, as federal politicians provided their fair share of input and raised concerns about children's exposure to same sex families in the media and the use of tax payers' money to fund such program segments. Such reactions demonstrate the ongoing scrutiny and discrimination lesbian women and gay men face; scrutiny and discrimination which is rarely faced by heterosexuals.

### Equity within education

As an early childhood practitioner committed to ensuring that the experience of equality is available to all individuals, such homophobic commentary was extremely concerning and highlighted the need to ensure that educational institutions continue to explore diverse ways of combatting discrimination through the development of inclusive curriculum and teaching practices.

For years, educationalists have been investigating varied ways of ensuring that issues of diversity and democracy are inserted into curriculum which is offered to children, in the hope that biases, stereotypes and discriminatory ideas are challenged and combatted at an early age. So, of all the areas of human diversity, sexuality has experienced the least coverage and the most resistance within curriculum and teaching. Two possible reasons for this resistance are: one, within the public sphere homophobia and heterosexism continue to be widespread



and actions which discriminate against homosexuals are still reasonably acceptable; and two, issues relating to sexuality are seen as irrelevant to the lives of young children (Robinson, 2002).

### The harsh reality

An issue that is very rarely acknowledged within educational institutions is the effect homophobia has on the lives of lesbian women, gay men and their children. Full participation within society for lesbian women and gay men has been hindered due to ongoing institutional and societal discrimination. It is useful to place the discrimination faced by lesbian and gay people within an historical context in order to understand their lives today.

It was not until 1973 that homosexuality was withdrawn as a disease from the American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorder listing (LeVay, 1996). Its listing as a psychiatric disorder allowed for an onslaught of experiments to 'cure' homosexuals of their 'disease'. To aid in the 'curing' of an individual's homosexuality, behaviorist, psychoanalytical and aversion therapies were used. LeVay (1996) describes the use of experiments such as electric shock treatment to bring about epileptic seizures, and the administration of medication to induce vomiting and nausea as common strategies dispensed in the hope of altering an individual's sexuality. Even though these approaches had little or no long-term success rates, these practices were used extensively across the globe. Although such experiments do not exist today, it is still common to view homosexuality as abnormal and immoral,

and in doing so, discrimination is as prominent today as it ever has been. Within an Australian context, lesbian and gay families continue to experience difficulties as a result of the denial of their basic rights. Legal rights currently denied to lesbian and gay people include:

- gay and lesbian couples cannot both be legally recognised as parents;
- the non-biological parent cannot adopt the child without the birth parent giving up all parental rights;
- access to donor insemination is not universally available from health clinics;
- *The Human Tissue Act 1983 (NSW)* prevents most gay men from legally donating sperm;
- adoption is not an option for lesbian and gay couples; and
- laws covering superannuation do not recognise the dependency of a child of a lesbian and gay couple when a contributor is a non-biological parent. (Millbank, 2002).

### Same sex families

A useful starting point in the debate as to the relevance or irrelevance of combatting homophobia in the early years is to begin by exploring the idea of what constitutes 'normal' (Robinson, 2004). Within society, the language we adopt in naming things, the legislation that governs rules and regulations, and the images that appear around us, continue to add to the classification of what is perceived to be normal. The idea of something being 'normal' acts as a tool of measurement, whereby things that are not seen as 'normal' can be constructed as 'abnormal'.

“ it is still common to view homosexuality as abnormal and immoral, and in doing so, discrimination is as prominent today as it ever has been.

This process of 'othering' forms the basis for much of the discrimination faced by lesbian and gay people and their children. Images portraying families and relationships displayed in the media and in educational institutions continue to reaffirm the idea that 'normal' families and relationships are those constructed purely as heterosexual. Over the past 25 years, there has been a growth in the number of same sex families choosing to have children, and consequently there has been considerable research undertaken by social scientists and psychologists to find out if there are any effects on a child's development as a consequence of a parent's sexual orientation (Millbank, 2002). This research has found that there was little or no difference in the children of heterosexual or homosexual parents regarding:

- children's sex role identification;
- levels of happiness;
- level of social adjustment;
- sexual orientation;
- satisfaction with life; and
- moral and cognitive development (Millbank, 2002).

International research, such as that carried out by Charlotte Patterson, has demonstrated that in fact what is of importance to a child's wellbeing is family process and not family structure (Millbank, 2002). Therefore, given the same opportunities, lesbian and gay parents can be just as successful at parenting their children as heterosexual parents.

Estimates of the number of children living in same sex families are difficult to gather and in part are dependent on the proportion of adults who identify as lesbian or gay. Millbank reported that 'a Sydney-based magazine in 1995 found that 19 per cent of lesbian respondents had or lived with children, and a further 14.5 per cent planned to have children in the next five years' (2002, p. 20). Although the gathering of statistics about the numbers of same sex families requires further investigation, this preliminary data highlights the need for early childhood educators to explore ways of ensuring that same sex families are treated with equality and respect, and have the same rights to access educational settings for their children as other families.

### Early childhood practices and sexuality

Research in the area of sexuality and early childhood is limited within Australia, however, a research project carried out in Sydney by Robinson and Jones Diaz (2000), attempted to explore the relevance or irrelevance of addressing a number of diversity areas with young children. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2000) explored diversity areas including multiculturalism, gender, special needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, and bilingualism. Of the eight areas of diversity identified, lesbian and gay issues were rated as the least relevant to the lives of young children and early childhood education. It can be argued that educational institutions can no

longer ignore the fact that lesbian and gay families exist. To proclaim a commitment to social justice and equity requires services to examine their attitudes and practices which have a direct or indirect impact on same sex families and their children. An inclusive early childhood environment is one that supports the diversity of its citizens and users, as well as ensuring that individuals, regardless of their identity, have the right to be accepted and welcomed into all aspects of society. It is timely that practitioners acknowledge that family diversity is a part of everyday life, and that the practice of teaching should ensure that students are well-equipped to embrace diversity when faced with it, and to rise to the challenge of discrimination when identified.

**Anthony Semann**

Semann & Slattery Training Consultants

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# Magazine

Family Day Care's national magazine, JiGSAW, is a high quality, full colour early childhood publication available via subscription.

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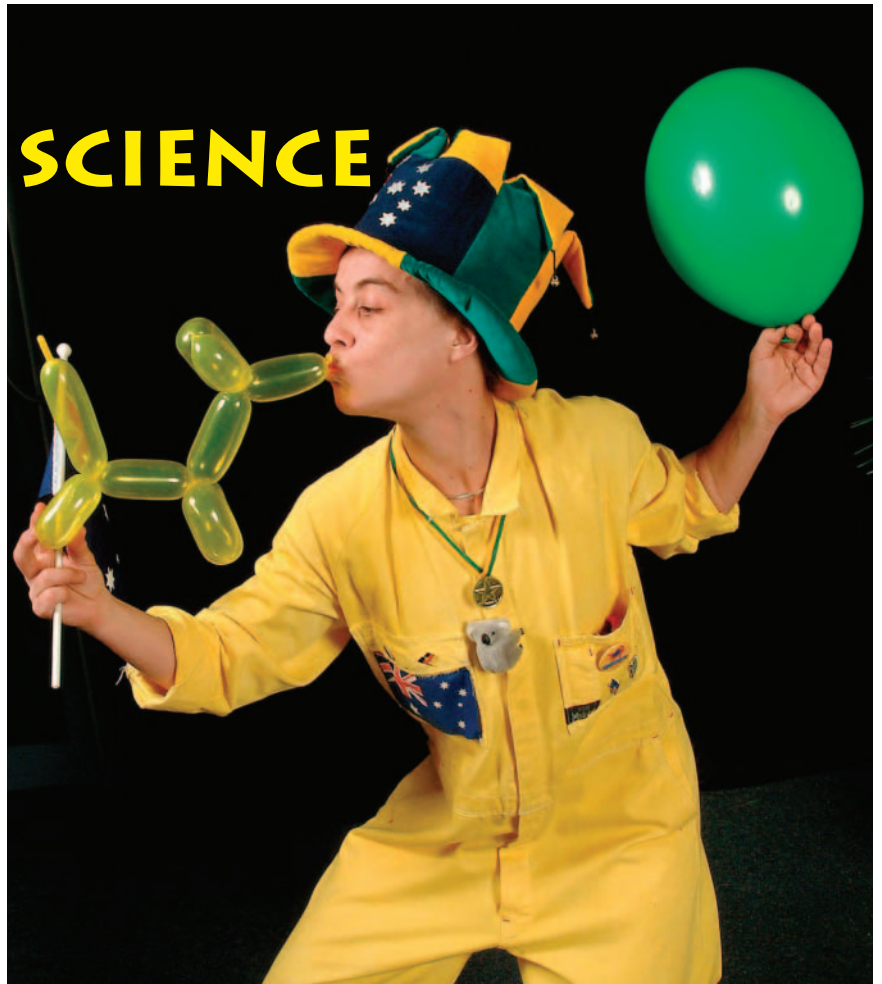


## ■ Feature

# ON A QUEST FOR SCIENCE

Early childhood exhibits at  
Questacon:  
The National Science and  
Technology Centre

**With learning as a major ingredient in any child's life, it is important to keep her entertained when arousing curiosity and encouraging the absorption of new concepts. In the case of learning about science, at Questacon this can be as easy and fun as walking through a life-size kaleidoscope or playing a harp with beams of light instead of strings.**



Canberra's most exciting place to visit for young and old, Questacon — the National Science and Technology Centre, embraces a hands-on, minds-on approach with a range of exhibits and activities.

Questacon offers visitors opportunities to explore scientific ideas and ways of thinking through interactive science exhibits. More than 200 displays are spread across the foyer, science court and seven gallery spaces. Some of the more popular exhibits include a whole body experience of a free-fall drop of six metres, a 3D shark encounter and the *Lightning Cage* — where visitors can observe... well... lightning in a cage!

General exhibitions are aimed at audiences aged between eight and 14 years old. But Questacon also has plenty of exhibits, or *Tot Spots*, that are suitable for children aged six and under. Says Exhibition Education Officer, Cindy Chambers: 'Within our *Side Show* gallery we have an exhibit called *Pluck-a-Duck*, which not only allows toddlers to play with the exhibit, but also encourages adults to read out things with the kids, in turn providing social interaction. And in our current travelling exhibition, *Eaten Alive*, we have two *Tot Spots*, one of which is *Predator's Picnic*. This allows children to sit on animal seats such as a kookaburra, a snake or an octopus, and they can look into a lunch box on the table to see what that predator would eat.'

Chambers says that another upcoming exhibit is aimed specifically at early childhood audiences. '*Strike a Chord* is an exhibition including instruments mounted on a touch wall. Kids can play these and have fun making their own noise.'

But how much science are the kids actually learning from these exhibits? 'We try to restrict the accompanying text — so adults can read it out to the kids', says Chambers. 'We still do a lot of research so the concepts are scientifically correct. For example, *What's For Dinner* is based on a real food web. We had to find the pictures and scientific names to go with this and took great care in trying to get it right.'

She also says that certain exhibits, aimed at those younger than six years old, are not designed to communicate any specific scientific concept, but tend to focus more on encouraging development and social engagement. Chambers says that this is most apparent in an exhibition opening at Questacon in December 2004: *Mini-Q — Fun for 0-6 year-olds*, which includes a water play zone.

'The whole of *Mini Q* is designed to encourage young children to engage in different types of play. In *Water Play*, kids can experiment with conservation of volume and the properties of water, or work together as a team to move water and create a spectacular splash. We try to incorporate these themes through discovery and exploration.'



'Exhibits are also built so that they're open-ended — there's no right or wrong answer. Coordination, confidence and different types of play are other areas we concentrate on. Certain age groups are good at playing together and the younger ones tend to be on their own, so each area concentrates on different types of play: solitary, parallel and co-operative.'

But as well as housing interactive exhibits for different audiences, Questacon offers daily science shows, taking visitors on journeys based on the concepts behind things such as balloons, predators and rockets. Although injected with humour suitable for all, these shows are tailored mostly to younger school-aged children.

A particular speciality, at Questacon, is the puppet shows, performed by Questacon's very own theatre group: The Excited Particles. A special spring puppet show will be unveiled this season, entitled *The Little Flower Bulb*, which concentrates on the seasons and what plants need to grow. The show covers what effect the sun setting and rising has on plants, which predators eat flowers and the lifecycle of the bee.

Assistant to the Particles, Barbara Setnicar, says puppet shows are extremely popular with toddlers and early childhood age groups, but older audiences enjoy the shows as well. 'You can see how much the kids enjoy the shows, even the babies. They react to the bright colours, funny voices and singing,' she says.

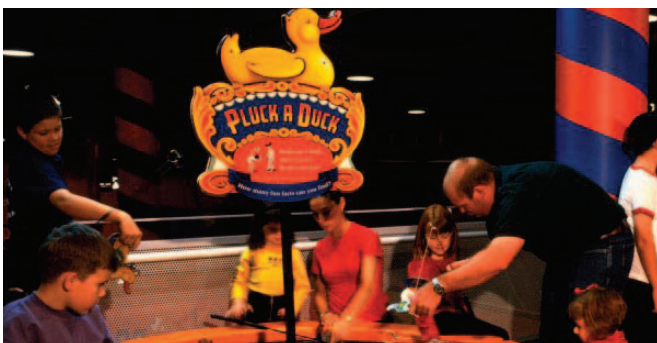
'We have a puppet show series called *Dinostory*, currently up to its third instalment — *Allosaur in Wonderland*. This is very fun to watch,' Setnicar says.

The *Dinostory* puppet series examines the features of particular dinosaurs and where they're found. The stories typically centre on the character Mutty the Muttaborrasaurus, the only dinosaur native to Australia.

Hands-on, minds-on, fun and educational, Questacon offers early childhood audiences, their parents, grandparents, carers and older siblings, quite a dynamic experience. Who said science was boring?

**Melissa Lyne**

Questacon  
www.questacon.edu.au



## MINI-Q – COMING SOON

Questacon's aim is to make science fun and relevant to everyone, however, this may seem a difficult feat to achieve for babies and toddlers.

*Mini-Q – Fun for 0-6 year-olds* is an upcoming exhibition at Questacon, specifically designed for the early childhood age group. It is Questacon's first exhibition aimed at this age group and, with its unveiling planned for December this year, *Mini-Q* aims to provide a stimulating environment for babies, toddlers, preschoolers and young school-aged children.

Built in consultation with early childhood educators, the exhibition has an Australian theme and contains different play zones such as water, sensory, active play and a baby space.

Each zone will also provide the opportunity to enhance social and gross motor skills, while inspiring those under the age of six to see, hear, feel and do amazing things.

'*Mini-Q* will encourage active play', says Jenny Dettrick, Project Manager for Questacon's Exhibition Management Team. 'For example, there's an obstacle course and indoor play equipment. There will also be a sensory cave with different lights, things to feel, fibre optics, a water mattress, bubble tubes and stepping stones that light up when you step on them.'

Similarly, each zone will feature explanations for parents and carers on what is suitable for their babies, toddlers, preschoolers or young school-aged children and what they can expect to see them doing depending on their age.

Questacon will also cater for young children and their carers with new facilities including a baby change room, toilets that can be used by people of all ages and heights, a breast/bottle feeding area, and secure storage for change bags.

The exhibition teams for *Mini-Q* have researched extensively the best practice in museums for early childhood centres all around the world, and all potential possible health and safety issues.

## Health

**Every woman who has had a child can relate to days of feeling tired, irritable and wondering if it was all worth it. But for a significant number of women, this is more than just a bad day that they can 'pull themselves out of'. Thirty per cent of women have adjustment difficulties lasting weeks or months after having a baby, and 14 per cent suffer a significant depression where, in addition to the symptoms above, they have a lowered mood, tearfulness and anxiety and feel that they cannot cope with even simple tasks.**

Motherhood is so shrouded in sacred mythology that many women do not recognise they are ill, but rather attribute their difficulties to other factors; the most common their child. According to a survey done across Australia by the beyondblue National Postnatal Depression (PND) Program (Buist et al., 2002), some 70 per cent of women seek help and support postnatally – and 50 per cent of them are unhappy with what they receive (Brown et al., 2001). Only a small per cent actually seek help for themselves, a majority citing baby sleep and feeding difficulties as being the problem.

## Maternal depression – does it matter to the kids?

A number of factors contribute to the low recognition of depression. For many women, it is their first experience of both motherhood and depression; and they don't want to admit to having failed or to being a bad mother, which both depression and the stigmatisation of the disorder often implies. In addition, there has been an historically-low recognition by health professionals. Many maternal child health nurses and some obstetric hospitals routinely screen – one of the beyondblue program's initiatives – but if they do not, some 50 per cent are missed. These women are often masters of disguise, as they are desperate to be seen to be coping and to be good mothers.

Whilst a vast majority of women with postnatal depression love their infant and do their very best, mothering with depression is hard; these women are feeling anxious and often empty, with little to give. Just the tasks of daily care can drain all their energy, so there is often no capacity to engage with the infant in a relaxed and joyful manner, important for child development and attachment. Studies of the infants of depressed women suggest that they are at higher risk of cognitive delays and behavioural disorder, with differences depending on the gender of the infant. Infants as young as three months have been noted to be affected, with less affect range and ability to engage – little girls being more withdrawn and boys more irritable (Murray & Cooper, 1997a). Studies of these children as they age suggest the boys are at risk of behavioural problems and possibly Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and the girls of anxiety disorders and depression (Murray & Cooper, 1997b).

What then can we do? There is little work on prevention or on intervention in the mother-child relationship. We do know that depression treatment works – so the first logical step is early identification. This needs a two-pronged approach – increasing awareness and education for health professionals, as well as decreasing stigma. Both have been a priority of the beyondblue program over the last three years across all states and territories. This has included booklets for women in pregnancy and pamphlets available in early childhood centres. The approach is



currently being evaluated. The problems, particularly of stigma, are unlikely to be resolved and need ongoing work to encourage women to seek treatment not just for their baby but for themselves. If they, and their health professionals, are aware of the problem, then they can be treated. Telltale signs are frequent doctor or maternal child health nurse appointments for baby-related issues, or often looking worn out or anxious. If you are concerned about a mother's wellbeing, ask how she is feeling and suggest sources of support if needed.

It is also crucial to remember that the needs of the child – emotional and developmental – are important at all times. Whilst the child's relationship with the mother is important, a baby's stimulation and nurturing can also come from other important family members – such as the father and grandparents – as well as from those involved in child care. This would happen automatically in most cases if the mother was confined to bed with a broken leg, or in hospital with a heart condition. Older children may need extra help and support; sometimes they will have internalised negative ways of thinking, so working with them to help them deal with anxiety better and increasing their sense of mastery and self-esteem could be particularly beneficial. Working with the mother and child, to help her see her child's strengths and deal differently with stress, might also be a positive way forward.

Depression is every bit as serious and because of its potential chronicity and long-term negative effects on the next generation, needs to be viewed as such, and not a 'weakness of character'. There is hope, and a future, and early childhood professionals can work in conjunction with health professionals to support mothers and children through difficult times.

For more information on the beyondblue PND program or other beyondblue initiatives visit: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au).

### Anne Buist

Director

beyondblue National Postnatal Depression Program

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# Food for thought:

## Promoting healthy eating and healthy weight in early childhood



### Eat well and be active for a healthy weight

There is currently strong community interest in the prevention of childhood obesity in order to safeguard the health of future generations. Ostensibly this is simple: eat less and move more. In practice there are many difficulties to be overcome, including road safety and community safety, high levels of TV food advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods to children, the cost of healthy foods and the overabundance of high-fat, high-sugar processed foods.

Early childhood is an ideal time to address and prevent being overweight. Overweight children can maintain and grow into their weight more easily than adolescents or adults can lose weight, when it becomes more difficult to change habits and attitudes (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003a).

Increasing the prevalence of healthy weight in the community requires a strong and concerted community effort, from politicians and business leaders, through town planners and transport planners to food manufacturers and supermarkets. Schools and child care services also have a strong role to play in children's health.

Research evidence supports recommendations that children eat more fruit, vegetables, bread, pasta, rice and cereals and less soft drinks, lollies, chips, crisps and takeaways to support general health and healthy weight. Adequate amounts of milk, cheese and yoghurt and lean meats, poultry, fish, nuts and seeds are also necessary for good health and wellbeing.

### Eating well in child care services

National accreditation standards for long day care, family day care and out of school hours care all require services to provide healthy, safe food (National Child Care Accreditation Council). Most standards refer to the Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003b). However, the guidelines contain no specific information for child care services. Work by health sector nutritionists, in collaboration with the child care sectors in South Australia and other states, has resulted in a number of guidelines and policy documents supporting healthy eating in long day care, out of school hours care and family day care.

But how good or bad are child care food services? A survey of South Australian long day care services in 2001 (Statewide Child Care Nutrition Survey, 2002), showed that more than 70 per cent of centres met healthy eating recommendations regarding the provision of white meat, low fat meals, fruit and nutritious snacks. Most centres met the recommendations for number and quality of vegetarian meals and meals containing vegetables and cereal foods (like bread, noodles, rice and pasta).

However, less than 40 per cent of centres appeared to provide adequate numbers of meals containing red meat, white meat in combination with iron-rich foods, dairy foods, and high-fibre cereal foods. Centre menus often did not state whether and what snacks and drinks were served and the ingredients of the meals offered.

The survey found that there was room for improvement, but how does this compare with what children eat generally? Comparison with national survey data shows that the foods lacking in child care are the same foods lacking in children's total diets, so what happens in child care reflects the practices of the broader community. However, the accreditation standards suggest that child care services should provide a high standard of food quality.

Help is available. For instance, menu development information for long day care and the *Food Matters* newsletters for child care workers and pamphlets for parents are available on the web (at [www.chdf.org.au/childcarenutrition](http://www.chdf.org.au/childcarenutrition), SA Child Care Nutrition Partnership, 2003). Similarly, activity and menu information has been developed for out of school hours care services (National Heart Foundation, 2002) and (Central Coast and South East Health, NSW). And finally, policy and healthy eating information resources have been developed by the SA Department of Education and Children's Services for their Family Day Care services. Other state health departments have also developed resources and information.

### Practical tips for child care services

- Provide water freely.
- Provide milk once or twice throughout the day. Full fat milk is recommended for children under two years, while low fat milk can be offered to children two years and over.
- Snacks should be based on fruit, vegetables, breads and dairy foods.
- Provide plenty of opportunities for active play.

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# SWITCHED ON TO SCIENCE



Is science a problem area for you? Do you feel uncomfortable about teaching science to young children? Then you're not alone. There are a number of teachers who feel uncomfortable, or lacking in confidence in exploring science experiences with children. How do you overcome this and become excited or switched on to science? The first place to start is to look at your beliefs and understandings of science. What experiences have you had with science? What do you see science as being? If you examine your beliefs you might find that you, as others, perceive science as a rather narrow area and certainly not as children see it.

Children are born scientists — they observe, explore, experiment, make discoveries and communicate these discoveries as they try to make sense of the world around them. They see science everywhere and are keen to explore and discover. If you take time to view science differently, then teaching science may not be as hard as it may first appear.

## The approach

Colker & Koralek (2003) suggest that we should try to see science as an ongoing part of the curriculum, rather than the narrow view of doing science activities. We should take time to explore the science opportunities that pop up during the day in our discussions and interactions with children. Perhaps we should try and see science through a different lens; that lens being the eyes of children. Take the lead from the children. Watch carefully to see the

things that they are interested in. Listen to the questions they ask and the theories they create about the world around them. From those observations and questions, you can explore more meaningful experiences with the children.

Science in the early years should not be the learning of scientific facts, but rather, the development of a sense of wonder and curiosity, a time to explore and discover, a time to learn how to solve problems, sort and classify. How do we do this? How do we re-discover the things we see everyday and generate that excitement? Adults don't necessarily have to set up these experiences, but they can set up the environment in such a way that it stimulates this excitement and opens up a world of discovery for both children and adults.

One of the best places to do this is in the outdoor environment. Young and Elliott (2003) and Bower (2004) suggest a number of experiences for children using the everyday things you find in the backyard, using materials and equipment you find in all centres. These experiences allow children to explore nature, patterns in nature and life cycles. Young and Elliott (2003) also encourage teachers to explore other areas of science that fascinate young children. Technology is not beyond our reach and yet some teachers feel great inadequacy just thinking about it. Simple machines and everyday objects can teach so much, if only we allow children the opportunity to play with these things.

Children learn best when they are personally involved and construct their own meaning and understanding. They need to be able to manipulate their environment and use concrete materials to understand what they are trying to do. Children need adults who are supportive of experimentation; adults who are willing to share their knowledge, or even lack of knowledge, whilst being respectful of children, their interactions, and their investigations of the world around them.

Time is another important aspect of science. Children need time to try out their ideas and theories. They need time to develop their interests and time to share what they have learnt. Adults need to make sure children have plenty of focused time to engage in these experiences and time to communicate their discoveries. They need time to reflect on what is happening around them and someone to show them how to reflect and document their learning or understanding. Part of this reflection requires adults to allow children time to re-visit the experiences, time to represent what they have seen or done and time to discuss their ideas or discoveries with others.

It is also important for adults to ask questions that encourage children to think about science concepts or ideas. Often adults ask 'testing' or closed questions — questions which require a short answer or a yes/no answer, rather than open-ended questions. Children often ask very good questions if only we would take the time to

listen carefully and elicit more information when needed. Use these questions as a basis of your science program. Fler & Cahill (2001) suggest keeping lists of children's questions, by setting up areas for writing these questions and children's ideas.

## Science resources

Science resources support the program in a centre, and are best when they have a variety of different usages. The resources do not have to be resources specifically for science, in fact, some of the best resources are bits and pieces found in the centre or are recycled. Similarly, you can start your own collections. You can collect shells, rocks, leaves, seed pods and other natural materials. These can be used for maths, art, storytelling and music.

One of the best 'finds' I've discovered is a photographer's loupe. Loupes are available at camera shops or science suppliers. They are usually plastic and have a magnification range of 8 or 10. Using loupes is fairly easy for children (easier to use than magnifying glasses), and they can use them to discover patterns in nature, what things look like close up, etc. It's amazing what everyday things look like when magnified.

Plastic tubing and PVC pipes are also valuable resources for science. They can be used in endless ways and provide children with lots of opportunities for problem-solving, understanding concepts such as syphoning, water pressure, air pressure, colour mixing as well as their own reaction times.

Batteries, torches and electric circuits are similarly useful resources and will provide children with hours of discovery and investigation. Not sure how a circuit works? With some investigation and exploring, it's easy to soon find the answers.

Don't be afraid to use tools and mechanical items. Most of these are easily available and reasonably priced. Pulleys are intriguing and can be used outside in the sandpit area or in other outdoor structures or trees. They do take a little more effort to use effectively,



but are good problem-solving experiences for all concerned.

Books are always a good resource, often helping children to understand some of the more complex science concepts. Books are also useful for teachers to stimulate their ideas and can add richness to the program. A useful book for starting discussions about science is Daniel Jacobs' *What do scientists do?*

The list of science resources is only limited by your imagination. The hard part is finding a teacher with the confidence to take up the challenge; to rediscover their sense of wonder and be excited about what they may learn. I often think about quotes from Rachel Carson (1965), such as:

'A child's world is fresh and beautiful, full of wonders and excitement. It is our misfortune

that for most of us, that clear-eyed vision is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood.'

And from one of the world's best-known scientists:

'Always be in awe of the mysterious... Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed'. Albert Einstein (1949) from Rosenkranz (1998).

Do not miss that wonder that surrounds us everyday. Leonardo da Vinci (1580) frequently used the term 'Saper vedere', meaning: to know how to look. Try it, you might be surprised by what you can discover.

## Lyn Bower

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# 'Thinking and play' in a new way: *play* Ideas technology in early childhood

In early childhood centres, playgroups, schools and family day care, we see children engaged in many technological activities, such as designing a vegetable garden, making boats out of cardboard boxes and helping to sew dolls' clothes. These are all technological experiences because children are planning or designing with materials or tools to intentionally create something new.

Sometimes, early childhood professionals specifically organise technological learning, and at other times, there are other outcomes in mind. For example, an early childhood professional may:

- re-design fruit time with the children into a restaurant, with menus, seating arrangements, decorations, and a system of workers (waiters, chefs, cleaners, etc).
- display children's work through inviting them to become a curator of an art gallery, planning the displays, organising a catalogue, and creating an opening ceremony.

A family day care carer may:

- re-design the garden with the children, creating a 'secret place', or 'quiet area' or 'challenge space'.
- plan a birthday party with the children, considering the room layout, the order of events/games, and designing party hats and lolly bags.

A teacher in a school may ask the children to:

- design a new lunch ordering system.
- re-design the classroom layout.
- write, plan and create a play with costumes, sets and scripts.

However, unintentional technological activities happen all the time. For example, when using the construction kits, or when moving play equipment around in the outdoor area or playground. But how do we know it is supporting young children's technological thinking? Children may be creating a new structure with wooden blocks, but it becomes technological when the children draw pictures of their ideas. Drawing, in this example, becomes a tool for technological thinking.

Talking about the design (either after, during or before construction work) with children supports them to think about:

- what materials they may need (in advance);
- their own goals prior to constructing;
- comparing their drawing ideas with what they have made;

- reflecting upon their own learning needs – such as, 'I need to know how to join this curved surface to this straight surface';
- considering the relationship between what they have drawn and what they have made; and
- how they can work with others to achieve their goal.

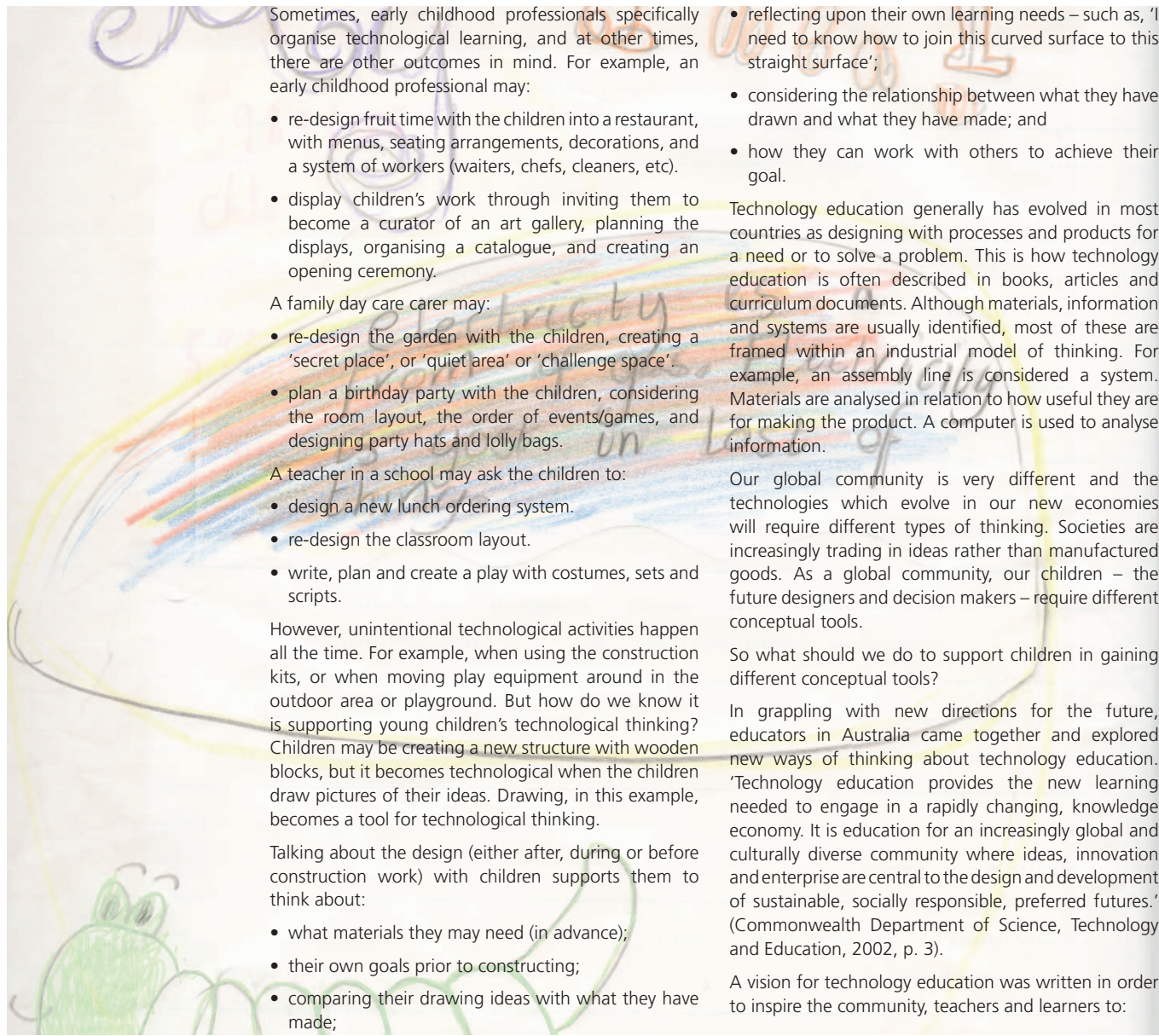
Technology education generally has evolved in most countries as designing with processes and products for a need or to solve a problem. This is how technology education is often described in books, articles and curriculum documents. Although materials, information and systems are usually identified, most of these are framed within an industrial model of thinking. For example, an assembly line is considered a system. Materials are analysed in relation to how useful they are for making the product. A computer is used to analyse information.

Our global community is very different and the technologies which evolve in our new economies will require different types of thinking. Societies are increasingly trading in ideas rather than manufactured goods. As a global community, our children – the future designers and decision makers – require different conceptual tools.

So what should we do to support children in gaining different conceptual tools?

In grappling with new directions for the future, educators in Australia came together and explored new ways of thinking about technology education. 'Technology education provides the new learning needed to engage in a rapidly changing, knowledge economy. It is education for an increasingly global and culturally diverse community where ideas, innovation and enterprise are central to the design and development of sustainable, socially responsible, preferred futures.' (Commonwealth Department of Science, Technology and Education, 2002, p. 3).

A vision for technology education was written in order to inspire the community, teachers and learners to:





1. recognise and create opportunities for innovation in diverse and rapid-change settings;
2. foster creativity and the power of ideas;
3. design, develop and communicate holistic solutions;
4. enhance practical knowledge and capabilities;
5. critique past, present and emerging technologies;
6. apply new, different and appropriate technologies and mental tools; and
7. evaluate and embed values to promote environmental and social sustainability (Commonwealth Department of Science, Technology and Education, 2002, p. 3).

The technology for the future is about 'ideas'. Ideas technology has many possibilities. So what could this mean for early childhood professionals? Two case studies of Clare and Kate, illustrate two different ways that children can experience ideas technology (Fleer & Jane, 2004).

### Clare's ideas technology

Clare began with an 'ideas book'. Each child had a copy. In this book, the children recorded their thinking and their technological ideas:

Freya: I think of a picture that I might be able to do. You be creative in your mind. Thinking of things you might have seen in books, shopping centres, places you might have been. Find the pictures in your head that you might want to use, and put them all together.

Clare invited the children to begin with something they were familiar with – their environment – and encouraged them to draw, sing, write or perform what they already knew. She then encouraged them to ask questions – what they wanted to know more about. The children then took their ideas books home and interviewed their families. What did they know? The children recorded these ideas into their books, and then phoned each other – to discuss what they had found out. This ideas technology framework generated many different ways of thinking:

- imaginary ideas;
- searching the web with their family;
- drawing microscopic things – imagining molecules;
- recording everyday things;
- documenting technical things;
- drawing the inside of a meter box;
- writing a story;
- writing the history of an idea – real and imaginary;
- creating a 'questions page' – things I want to know; and
- sharing their feelings.

The children drew lots of things they knew about, and they considered many things that did not exist – ideas they had created.

### Kate's ideas technology

Kate began exploring ideas technology with her children by asking them to think about designing a new school. The children formed teams and set about generating as many ideas as they could about their future school. The teams were:

- the Detective Services Unit;
- the Hysterical Historical Society;
- the Greenies Gang;
- the Political Party Room; and
- the Analytical Group.

The different groups worked on different dimensions of designing a new school. The Greenies Gang investigated all the options for designing a sustainable school – they considered all alternative energy sources. The Hysterical Historical Society looked over all the school records – floor plans, garden design records, construction techniques and materials. The Political Party Room interviewed members of the community, School Council, school principal and wrote a letter to the State Premier – asking about his Green Policy on Schools. The Detective Services Unit and the Analytical Group took photographs, surveyed the youngest children in the school, met with local Indigenous groups and organised a questionnaire for families, in order to seek more views on what was important to consider in designing a new school for the future. Each group brought their design dimensions to the whole group, and collectively they created a model of their new school. Along the way, they played with many new ideas.

Ideas and supporting different ways of thinking were fostered by both Kate and Clare. Ideas technology provides a new framework for professionals as they help children to foster creativity and see the power of ideas. It also provides a mechanism for critiquing past, present and emerging technologies, and to design with more holistic, cultural, social and ecological solutions in mind. Our previous industrial society supported the need for designing tools, systems and materials to produce objects. However, the future society that our children will manage, requires ideas rather than artefacts. Explicitly encouraging children to 'play with ideas' as a powerful way of thinking and planning, is what ideas technology is all about.

### Marilyn Fleer

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## The Australian Early Development Index: Building better communities for children

Over the next three years, the *Australian Early Development Index: Building Better Communities for Children* project will enable up to 60 communities throughout Australia to better understand how their children are developing by the time they reach school age. The project is conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health in partnership with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. It is an initiative of the Australian Government's National Agenda for Early Childhood and is supported by Shell Australia.

### What is the Australian Early Development Index?

The *Australian Early Development Index* (AEDI) is a community-level measure of young children's development based on a teacher-completed checklist (the AEDI checklist). The checklist consists of over 100 questions measuring five developmental domains: language and cognitive skills; emotional maturity; physical health and wellbeing; communication skills and general knowledge; and social competence. Teachers complete the checklists on children in the first year of school, at a time when they have had a chance to observe their development.

The AEDI is designed for use with whole populations of children identified only by suburb or postcode, and cannot be interpreted at an individual level for diagnostic purposes. After the AEDI checklists have been completed on children in an area, an index is created for each of the five developmental domains.

The Early Development Index (EDI) checklist was originally developed in Canada and has proven to be a reliable and valid measure of children's development. In Australia, it was first successfully used in the northern metropolitan area of Perth in 2003, involving around 4,300 children. The EDI has been further adapted and validated for use in Australia as part of the AEDI project.

### What will be involved for communities who join the project?

Ten communities have been selected for the AEDI this year. There will be further 'expression of interest' rounds in February 2005 and 2006. Participants receive a detailed Community Preparation Guide to assist them with engaging key stakeholders and schools in their area.

Once the AEDI checklists have been completed, communities will receive a detailed report with the results geographically mapped along with Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data

and guidance on how to utilise the results. The data can be used to: monitor early childhood development; create effective community-based responses; prompt new policies and programs; and explore new ways of working together to ensure children get the best possible start.

### What are the short term aims for community use of the AEDI?

- To provide the community with base-line data about how children are faring on each of the AEDI developmental domains and assist in understanding the needs of the community;
- to assist in the development and strengthening of relationships between key agencies and stakeholders in the community; and
- to help create and implement a Community Action Plan based on the evidence of the AEDI.

### The long-term aim is that it will assist communities to improve the health and wellbeing of young children.

Adopting a 'community' approach enables communities to examine the broader social and environmental influences on child development and moves the focus from the individual to the community.

### Why do we need to rethink the way we support families with young children?

There have been significant changes in families and family circumstances. Families are becoming more diverse in their structure and there are more families with multiple needs. Many services are having difficulties in meeting all the needs of all families. These difficulties include services with long waiting lists, families' difficulties in finding out about and accessing services they need, and services not well integrated with one another (Moore, 2004).

Across a wide range of health and wellbeing indicators, the rates of poor developmental outcomes for adolescents and young adults have risen or are unacceptably high. The developmental pathways that lead to these poor outcomes can be traced back to early childhood. Recent research findings have indicated the risk and protective factors in early childhood, including child factors, family factors and community and social factors. Examples of family protective factors are a warm and supportive relationship with the

child; strong family norms; and secure, stable care. Examples of family risk factors include social isolation, family violence and substance abuse (Cashmore, 2001). Interventions that address only one risk factor are likely to be short-term for families with complex needs. Sustained change can only be achieved when the service system as a whole coordinates its efforts and addresses multiple risks at different levels simultaneously (Moore, 2004).

### What to change?

- The evidence about the importance of social support and social connectedness strongly suggests that one way to address this problem is by providing families of young children with multiple opportunities to meet other families with young children.
- Better integration of the service system, to meet the multiple needs of families in a more seamless way.
- A service system that is more responsive to the emerging needs of young children and families, requires communication at all levels, involving service providers in their dealings with individual families, agencies with client groups, and service systems with community (Moore, 2004).

In Canada, where the EDI has been completed on over 150,000 children, and in Perth in 2003, the implementation process and results have provided a strong catalyst for community mobilisation around early childhood.

### Evaluation of the project

Each community that becomes part of the project will become part of the national evaluation and will be followed over the period of the project, thus enabling the investigation of a medium-term and sustainable community-level response to the AEDI.

### More information

Visit our website at [www.australianedi.org.au](http://www.australianedi.org.au) or contact the Australian EDI National Support Centre on (03) 9345 6530 or email [australian.edi@rch.org.au](mailto:australian.edi@rch.org.au).

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## Nurofen for children

2004 Grant Program — open for applications

A leading children's pain and fever reliever, Nurofen for Children has launched a grant program for child care services.

The Nurofen for Children 2004 Grant Program invites child care groups to apply for grants of \$500. The theme for this year's program is 'Make the switch', with the grants being offered to help make a key improvement or upgrade.

To apply, go to the Nurofen website: [www.nurofen.com.au](http://www.nurofen.com.au), click on the link for the Nurofen for Children 2004 Grant Program application form, and explain in no more than 50 words how you would use a \$500 Nurofen for Children Grant to 'Make the switch' and invest in a newer or better version of something for the children in your group.

Entries close 5pm Tuesday, 30 November 2004.

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\*Donations over \$2 are tax deductible

### A little less conversation a bit more....

# music

## The value of music in early childhood education

Elvis has re-entered the building armed with calculator, pencil case and his trusty guitar. Decibels have reached new heights as music therapists, politicians and children sing the praises of music in early childhood settings. There is, it seems, every reason for day care centres, schools and homes to be alive with the sound of music.

As part of National Literacy and Numeracy week, running from 30 August to 5 September, Music Therapist and educator, Anja Tait, accepted the Minister's Excellence Award for outstanding contribution to improving literacy and numeracy.

Dr Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training presented the award and \$10,000 prize money to Tait for her research project *Music for Learning for Life*. The prize money will allow her to build on the outcomes of her current research funded by the Australia Council for the Arts.

The project, based in two Northern Territory schools, explores the effect of an arts-based curriculum on fostering Indigenous children's literacy and numeracy skills. The project challenges the traditional place of music in schools and promotes a place for music therapy in early education and care.

English was often a second language and a barrier to educational outcomes in the project schools. Music provided an unrestricted learning medium for all students to participate in equally. 'Arts-based learning experiences do not necessarily demand high-level oral English to participate authentically, yet still demand a high degree of conceptual understanding and intellectual rigor', said Tait.

Music was much more than a tune to carry the alphabet or a chant to help ingrain 'i before e except after c'. Students used music to understand concepts of maths, the nature of language and the way it communicates different meanings. They became composers, critics, songwriters, instrument builders and musicians, whilst improving their literacy and numeracy up to 1.8 and 2.1 years respectively over the nine months. 'And they started to ask for help', said Tait, 'to attempt unknown tasks. Previously some students would not put pen to paper for fear of failure.'

Throughout her project Tait received positive feedback from the community and students alike. More parents came to sports days and assemblies, staying through the afternoon classes and praising the relevance of music for Indigenous people. 'Music, art, song, dance, and story is a part of life and a part of each person', an Indigenous parent and tutor at one of the schools said.

One of the tasks students were asked to complete was to pick an instrument that described their experiences in the music-maths classroom. Tait remembers an Indigenous student, requiring both intensive ESL (English as a second language) and special education support, picking the cabasa. 'I'm feeling like I'm breaking up, not able to put the pieces back together again. Not a negative feeling, just uncomfortable, all the thoughts are jumbled up. But in the maths-music class I can put the thoughts back together in a new way, it makes sense', Tait recalls the student as saying.

Achievements such as this ensured that the project schools adopted music into their whole school literacy and numeracy plans. A teachers' group called *ArtsConnect* also emerged from the project to promote the program to other schools.

Helen Shoemark, Music Therapist at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, also promotes music's versatile benefits in academic and emotional development. She uses music therapy with hospitalised children and helps carers use music therapy at home, in the car, the shopping centre and the child care centre. 'It is a very portable tool – people use particular songs at particular times of the day for particular situations. People are very busy every day and pushed for time. This just builds tools that will help along the way each day', she says.

At the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, the music therapy unit helps children to cope with their time in the hospital in a positive way. 'In the hospital we play with substituting the lyrics to familiar songs. We help the children write new lyrics to songs that they know, so that they own that song. It still has the same predictable melody, but it captures their own experience of hospital, it gives them back control of their hospital experience. At the hospital they are at the mercy of doctors and nurses, here they are able to control the experience, owning the experience', Shoemark said.

Both Shoemark and Tait see a larger place for music in child care centres where group environments could become creative pockets for children to learn to love music and how it makes them feel. 'You could take music to the child care centre to help the transition from home', said Shoemark. 'It provides continuity, a constant when the environment has changed. They could think, "Oh where am I, but hang on that's my music".'

Tait describes music as the medium of relationships and sees it as a versatile tool that could be of great benefit in child care centres and across the board of educational settings. 'One of the things I'd like to do is utilise some of the funding [from the award] to investigate the role of music in family literacies, across generations and culture.'

In fact, Tait describes music therapy's expanding boundaries as being 'like a spider web' where 'we will reach out and grow.' If the web grows with the confidence of children participating in music therapy, it looks as though a large web is emerging where children and carers will sing with delight at their sticky situation.

Jen Reid

### Expressions of Interest – Publications Committee member

The Early Childhood Australia Publications Standing Committee is seeking to fill a vacancy for an ordinary member with early childhood expertise. The position will be for a period of four years from early 2005.

#### Essential Criteria

- A member of Early Childhood Australia
- A willingness to commit time to the committee membership role
- A broadly-based knowledge of early childhood and expert knowledge of a particular field or developmental area of early childhood
- Ability to work effectively in a team
- Experience and knowledge in writing for publication
- Familiarity with the use of the World Wide Web
- Ability to build links with writers in different areas of early childhood

#### Desirable Criteria

- Experience in marketing of publications
- Experience in publishing
- Skills and experience in publishing on the World Wide Web

Expressions of interest addressing the above criteria and including details of two referees should be sent to:

Ms Pam Linke, Chair of the Publications Committee

C/o Early Childhood Australia, PO Box 7105, Watson ACT 2602

or by email to [pcahir@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:pcahir@earlychildhood.org.au) by 30 November 2004.

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