EVERY Child

Australia's premier national early childhood magazine

VOL.11 NO. 4 2005

Cultural icons

Scaffolding literacy

The Little Big Book Club

The Sustainable Planet Project

Learning literacy with everyday texts

Early Childhood AUSTRALIA INC. ... voice for young children

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Literacy

Are you from Qld, Vic or ACT?

Early Childhood AUSTRALIA INC. ... voice for young children

HESTA SUPER FUND Specialists for Health & Community Services

Sign up your centre for the

Everyday Points to Learning Competition!

Great prizes to be won! Use our terrific ***Everyday Learning Series*** books to give parents at your service some excellent resources, great for your parent library as well.

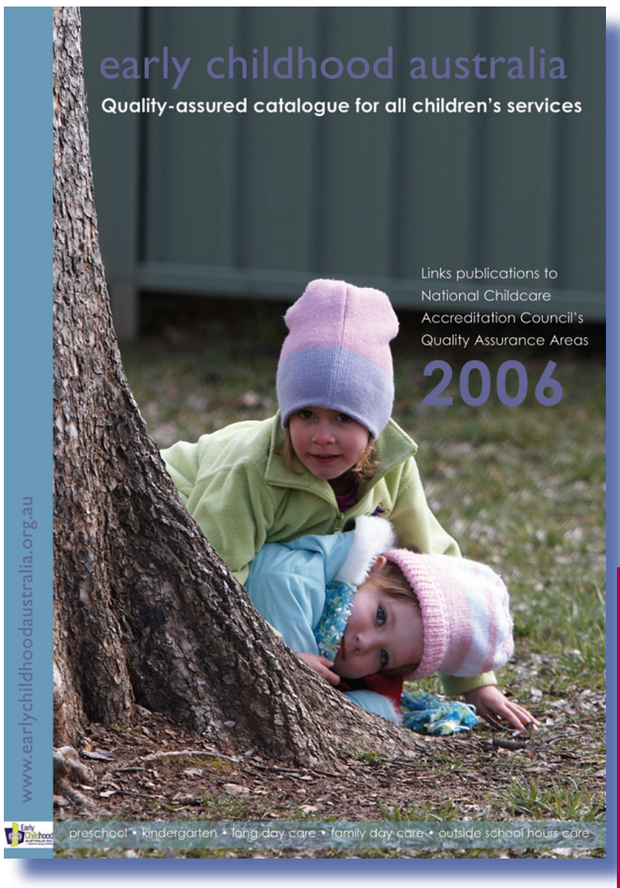
Win a *full set* of our subscription publications and a *$250 voucher* to purchase resources of your choice!

Registration period 3 October to 7 November – register early by 17 October to gain bonus points.

Find the details at
http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/everyday_learning_series/everyday_learning_series.html

ACT Permit # TP05/4031

Phone: 1800 356 900 (freecall) Email: eca@earlychildhood.org.au www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au



Coming soon

New

Quality-assured resources for:
- preschool
- kindergarten
- long day care
- family day care
- outside school hours care
- early years school programs

Early Childhood Australia publications catalogue

To order your free copy call

1800 356 900

Email: eca@earlychildhood.org.au

Visit: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Contents

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

ISSN 1322-0659 Print Post PP 232100/00035
ABN 44 950 767 752

Printed by: Paragon Print, ACT

Editor: Alison Elliott

Editorial Board: Pam Linke (Chair), Alison Elliott, Carmel Richardson and Marilyn Fleer.

In-house Editor: Kipley Nink

Graphic Designer: Claire Connelly

Publishing and Marketing Manager: Sue Wales

Publishing and Marketing Officer: Dave Kingwell

Marketing Assistant: Amanda McDonald

Cover Photograph: Andrew Sikorski

Photographs: F. Lange, A. Sikorski

Advertising Policy:

Early Childhood Australia reserves the right to determine the suitability and quality of any camera-ready artwork supplied by advertisers. No advertisements for products that would be harmful to families, children and their environments will be accepted. Claims made in advertisements are the responsibility of the advertiser.

Early Childhood Australia Disclaimer:

The opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Early Childhood Australia.

By publishing a diversity of opinion, we hope to provide a forum which promotes professional growth, creativity and debate in the early childhood field.

Editorial Policy:

The material published in the magazine will aim to be inclusive of children in Australia wherever they live, regardless of race, gender, class, culture, or disability. The magazine will not publish material which runs counter to the wellbeing and equality of all children and their families, and those who work with them. Early Childhood Australia is a registered commercial publisher with DEST.

Address correspondence and advertising queries to:

The Publishing and Marketing Section
PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602
Tel: (02) 6242 1800 Fax: (02) 6242 1818
Email: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au
Website: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

About Early Childhood Australia:
For further information visit
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Editorial

Can standards and registration improve quality?

With community concerns about the quality of early childhood care and education at an all time high, would it be prudent to investigate a system of regulation and professional standards for early childhood educators?

As this edition of *Every Child* goes to press, the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy is drawing to a close. In our guest statement, Federal Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, points out that the good literacy outcomes for most Australian children are no comfort to those who can't read. And he is right. He also says that good early childhood programs have positive and lasting effects on later learning, and nowhere is this more true than in literacy. Reading has its foundations in language and literacy experiences in the early years.

Early childhood educators in preschools and child care centres have a key role in preparing children for early reading and writing. With so many young children spending so much time in child care centres, it is our responsibility to build rich literacy and numeracy environments that pave the way for school literacy learning.

There is a considerable 'readiness' gap between children with well-developed early literacy skills and those with limited preschool literacy experiences. Central to quality literacy experiences is the quality of early childhood settings and the professionalism of staff.

Part of the quality agenda is a growing interest in professional standards. Registration for early childhood educators is now a reality in parts of Canada and New Zealand.

In Australia, all states except the ACT now have teacher registration and standards legislation. Central to this legislation is the welfare, care and education of children, recognition and enhancement of teacher professionalism, and the advancement of teacher knowledge and practice. While these Acts apply to teachers in preschools that are part of school systems, they don't apply to early childhood services outside the school system. But should they?

Registration schemes can provide a strong qualifications framework that is controlled by the profession. They can ensure quality induction programs for people entering the profession, and provide a gatekeeping and professional learning function that strengthens professionalism – and quality.

However, in an area of strong growth and staff shortages such as early childhood care and education, registration can be a double-edged sword. Increasing the status and professionalism of early childhood education enhances it as an employment option and better ensures quality outcomes for children, *but* it also increases costs to governments and consumers. Employing 'professionals' is expensive. Whether our communities are ready to pay for this is debatable.

Child care and preschools have always had quality carers and educators who have provided sensitive and stimulating environments for young children. But there is much room for improvement and a growing need to ensure that quality is not compromised by rapid expansion of the sector.

Professional standards provide a means to document and benchmark best practice. They make clear statements about standards to parents and the community. They enable the profession to better prepare practitioners and monitor and evaluate practice.

Many early childhood educators who are qualified teachers are eligible for registration with state-based teacher registration authorities. To find out if you are eligible, go to the teacher registration website in your state. Today's teacher registration is based mostly on a 'standards' approach. In Australia, there is a National Framework for Professional Standards agreed to by the ministers of education in 2003 <www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/national_framework.pdf>.

Professional standards are developed and agreed to by the relevant educational communities. They can then be used as a basis for teacher registration. More importantly, they are used to improve, analyse and evaluate practice; plan for professional development; provide a clear public statement about ethics and practice; and to develop, monitor and evaluate pre-employment preparation courses (degrees and diplomas) leading to relevant awards.

Today, early childhood is one of few professional areas – if indeed it is a 'profession' – without registration for practitioners. Yet it is widely agreed that standards-based professional registration helps improve practice, articulate public expectations of practice, and provide a framework for self-regulation.

If we do eventually go down the professional standards and registration track, the standards would likely be used to approve or endorse early childhood education and care courses.

A focus on quality, and strategies to enhance professionalism and provision for young children have been central to many presentations at the recent national Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference in Brisbane.

Over the next two editions of *Every Child* we'll bring you a taste of the issues and research at the national conference.

With nationwide interest in improving literacy for all children, this issue of *Every Child* highlights literacy learning. Each of our writers on literacy has a unique perspective, but all focus on improving literacy learning for all children – especially for the most vulnerable and most at-risk learners.

Alison Elliott

Editor
Every Child

Letters to the Editor

Every Child readers are invited to respond to articles published in the magazine. Publishing a diversity of opinions (which are not necessarily those of Early Childhood Australia) provides a forum which promotes professional growth, creativity and debate in the early childhood field. By encouraging letters, we would like to build a community around *Every Child*, where readers are involved and engaged. *Every Child* is for you – so let us know what you think!

Please send your letters, marked 'Every Child' to either:
PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602 or by email to: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au.

Following the publication of *Every Child*, Volume 11 No. 3, 2005, a reader comments on Mimi Wellisch's piece, 'School readiness: When should we consider early entry?'

Dear *Every Child*

Thanks for the great winter issue.

I really enjoyed the realness of the article about school readiness.

Traditionally we have always believed that later is better than early in regard to school readiness. But as I get older I think there are so many things that are changing in the lives of children and families and that we can't just say one or the other.

School readiness is a really individual thing which has to be assessed in the context of each family or child.

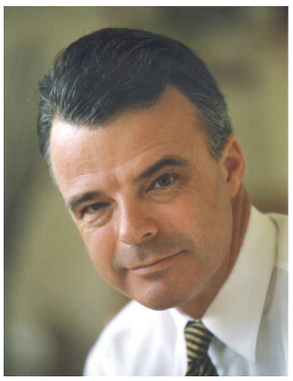
The relationship between gifted and talented children and school readiness is something I have never thought about. Reading this great little article has helped me to better answer that annual question from parents, 'Are they ready?'

Thanks again.
Anthony Body
Director of Orange Preschool Kindergarten

Guest Statement

The early years: Equipping our children for life

We all want what is best for our children, and the Australian Government is committed to supporting the needs of our youngest Australians and ensuring that our children are provided with the skills vital for their successful and happy participation in society.



Every parent knows how important the early years are for a person's ongoing development. As a parent and doctor, I have seen first-hand how important the early years are for a child's healthy development into a capable, confident and resilient young person. A difficult beginning, in contrast, poses multiple risks for a child's overall health and wellbeing, and can have a lasting impact on their chances of reaching their full potential.

The significance of the years prior to school cannot be underestimated in terms of providing early learning experiences, including learning social and pre-literacy and numeracy skills. Poor literacy and numeracy skills are associated with early school-leaving, reduced likelihood of university education, higher levels of longer-term unemployment, and a greater chance of being in lower-paid, less-skilled jobs. It is a key priority for the Australian Government to see that all Australians develop effective literacy and numeracy skills to allow them to achieve their full potential in life.

While most Australian school students are achieving acceptable literacy standards and compare well with their counterparts from other OECD member countries, that is little comfort to those students who have difficulty in learning to read, and it is little comfort to their families. This is why I am determined to ensure all Australian children achieve higher standards of literacy and that they acquire essential reading skills to equip them with the foundation for learning in school and throughout their lives. It is for this reason that I established the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy.

This inquiry is examining the teaching of reading in our schools, the assessment of reading proficiency, including the identification of students with reading difficulties, and the extent to which teacher education prepares teachers to teach their students to read. It is clear that quality teaching is the most important factor in determining whether young people will become confident in all aspects of what it means to be fully literate, and to be able to use all the literacy tools when they emerge from school into their adult lives.

A number of submissions to the inquiry have highlighted the importance of literacy activities prior to school for later reading success. Research shows that early childhood programs can have lasting positive effects by increasing children's chances of continuing education through high school and beyond. High-quality early childhood programs are not only related to better intellectual progress, but also assist social and behavioural development and reduce the likelihood of later substance misuse, mental illness and suicide, domestic violence, child abuse and crime.

There can be no doubt that the earlier books are introduced into a child's life, the more likely the child will grow up with a love of reading. This was the theme of the highly successful *Whoever You Are, Wherever You Are – You Can Read Aloud* summit which was recently held as part of this year's National Literacy and Numeracy Week. I am very proud that the Australian Government funded this summit, which brought together over 200 representatives and highlighted good practice and innovation in read-aloud programs designed for the years prior to school.

There can be no doubt that the earlier books are introduced into a child's life, the more likely the child will grow up with a love of reading.

This summit is one of a number of ways in which the Australian Government is advancing its commitment to the National Agenda for Early Childhood. The new Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, providing $490 million over five years, has a particular emphasis on early childhood initiatives. The development of the agenda has been strongly informed by state and territory governments, peak bodies and parents.

Within my department, the Australian Government has commissioned a consortium headed by Monash University to create, produce and disseminate high-quality innovative early childhood research materials that support early literacy and numeracy development from birth to five years. A project has also been commissioned to look at career pathways in early childhood education qualifications.

One group of children that clearly need assistance to improve their educational outcomes are Indigenous children. The Australian Government has committed $2.1 billion over the next four years to a number of initiatives and programs to improve and support the educational outcomes of Indigenous people. This will contain an important focus on accelerating literacy outcomes for those Indigenous students in rural and remote areas who currently suffer the greatest disadvantage, as well as developing flexible whole-of-government approaches to education delivery.

It is an exciting and rewarding time to be working in this vital area of public policy. Through the finalisation of the National Agenda for Early Childhood and the findings of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, I look forward to working with others who share responsibility for young children, including Early Childhood Australia, to strive towards better life chances for all our children.

The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP

Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training

The Little Big Book Club

Spreading the word!

For most of us, reading is something we take for granted. We have the necessary literacy skills to read for whatever purpose – pleasure, work, study or just day-to-day living. However, the reality is that a staggering percentage – almost 50 per cent – of Australians aged 15–74 have poor or very poor literacy skills. In other words, in 1996, when the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted its *Aspects of Literacy* survey, approximately six-million people were found to have experienced difficulty reading many of the printed materials they encountered in everyday life.

It's hard to understand why this should be the case. To date, there appears to be more questions than answers. Debate continues about teaching and testing methods, and not just in Australia. Many other countries including Canada, the US and England are all seeking ways to improve literacy levels.

What we do know is that reading difficulties can limit career and education choices and can cause embarrassment and frustration throughout life. We also know that reading regularly with young children is probably the single most important activity that you can undertake to develop a child's ability to read and write. The human brain is most open to environmental influences in the first few years of life, with a major proportion of brain development occurring between birth and the age of three.

By reading aloud to babies, parents and caregivers can make a positive impact on their child's success in school and later in life.

Although the vast majority of parents realise that reading to their children is important, they struggle to find the time on a regular basis. Even those parents who do read regularly to their children don't know at what age they should start, how often, how long for and what they should read to their baby or toddler.

To answer these questions and to support and encourage parents to read to their young children, a number of excellent early childhood literacy programs are already underway in various communities. The most recent program to be announced is The Little Big Book Club.

The Little Big Book Club is the most extensive early childhood literacy program ever conducted in South Australia and has received a four-year funding commitment from the state government. From February 2006, The Little Big Book Club will provide every baby aged between four and six months (over 17,500 babies) with a free reading pack, containing: a reading book; a story-time DVD; a library bag; and information for parents, including reading lists and tips on reading aloud.

Giving away reading packs is a great initiative, but this is not enough on its own. For ongoing support and guidance for families, The Little Big Book Club has established a broad network of partnerships with key organisations such as Child and Youth Health and the state's 139 public libraries. The media also has a key role to play in 'spreading the word' and a unique partnership with the state-wide daily newspaper, *The Advertiser*, will ensure monthly stories, book selections and the promotion of storytelling sessions.

When 'spreading the word' about reading to children, one of the key words is *fun*. Not just for the child, but also for the reader. When asked recently about the importance of reading to children, author Dr Fred Guilhaus responded, 'We are seldom "present" anymore. Life is a revolving door. A young child demands that we are really doing something fully, in the moment. The quality of that interaction becomes almost a meditation for stressed parents. Allowing oneself to become the characters in the book is therapy. We chance upon our child selves again. When the expression is genuine, the story lives, the child reacts with delight, and all is well with the world. Can there be a better reason to read to one's child?'

Fiona Lange

Project Manager
The Advertiser Little Big Book Club

SUPPORTING families, SUPPORTING children

The Early Childhood Learning Resources Project

Mum: ***'We are going to give the baby a bath. Could you fit into that bath Charlotte?'***

Charlotte: ***'No. I am a big girl!'***

Children hear and use words such as 'bigger', 'smaller', 'taller' or 'thinner'. They are important for learning about measurement; but families may not know about the importance of these everyday conversations. The Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training has provided funding for a two-year project to develop resources to support families and educators to enhance young children's literacy and numeracy development. In particular, the project will develop, pilot and distribute a set of high-quality, innovative early childhood materials, such as the literacy and numeracy cards.

The Early Childhood Learning Resources Project is being undertaken by Monash University, University of Melbourne, Early Childhood Australia and the Curriculum Corporation. The project directors are Professors Marilyn Fleer and Bridie Raban.

What are we developing?

One of the outcomes of the project will be a set of 32 cards for families and a set of online cards for early childhood professionals. The cards have on them:

- an everyday interaction (like in the introduction);
- an interpretation of this everyday context for literacy and numeracy development; and
- an explanation of the literacy and numeracy concept.

A further outcome will be a book which provides different ways of looking at practice. New ideas for thinking about children's learning and how early childhood professionals might interact differently with children are given. The book helps professionals to:

- look at what they already do in literacy and numeracy;
- think about their interactions around literacy and numeracy; and
- systematically plan for improvement in literacy and numeracy.

The project has already produced a paper which synthesises the international research literature and provides a discussion of recent theoretical developments in understanding young children's concept formation.

This material and other supporting information on literacy and numeracy will be published on a CD for easy storage, for sharing at professional learning sessions, and for supporting professionals who wish to make their own cards and/or disseminate this information in newsletters. It is the intention that the resources will develop concept formation within a context in which families and other carers know:

- what they do matters;
- what they do is powerful; and
- what they do is rich with meaning for the child.

Figure 1: Example of a literacy card

Why now?

Governments around the world are concerned about the level of literacy and numeracy of young children, particularly those from the hardest to reach families. Early childhood professionals have traditionally concentrated their literacy and numeracy efforts on programming for children's spoken development and focused on the development of number concept. For instance, we often plan to help children learn number concept by doing number rhymes with toddlers. We may plan to develop literacy through talking to infants while changing their nappies. However, more recent research indicates that early understandings of literacy and numeracy are best supported when early childhood professionals:

- have a deeper knowledge of literacy and numeracy;
- deliberately plan for activities which support beginning development in literacy and numeracy;
- have programs which go beyond number and the spoken word;
- have systems for looking at their own professional practices; and
- seek to improve their own understandings of literacy and numeracy.

New thinking

The resources being developed have been designed to help adults (educators and parents) to deliberately bring together everyday learning in the home and concept development planned in early childhood settings. The idea of linking everyday concept development

... learning is located in the social world in which children live.

in the home and educational settings comes from the writings of Lev Vygotsky (1987) and has informed the direction of the project. This sociocultural approach best explains the resource development, as it recognises that learning does not simply reside in the individual, but rather that learning is located in the social world in which children live.

Vygtosky (1987) found that the everyday concepts were embedded in the children's life experiences and natural conversational contexts. They arose or were used without conscious realisation of the concepts. He argued that, on their own, everyday concepts were not enough. On the other hand, concepts that are taught in isolation of children's worlds, as happens in some formal educational settings, do not transform what children can do. Learning concepts in schools and centres is also not enough. Vygotsky argued that the interlacing of everyday concepts with those taught in centres and schools was needed if children's thinking was to grow and be transformed.

When will the resources be ready and how do I get access to these resources?

It is anticipated that the materials will be finalised by the first part of 2006 and be ready for distribution to early childhood settings in the middle of the year. By logging onto the **Early Childhood Learning Resources Project website (www.curriculum.edu.au/eclearning/)** it will be possible to monitor the exact date of the release of the materials and gain electronic access to those resources already completed (including the literature review which is available now). Limited free distribution of hard copies of the materials will also take place in 2006.

Conclusion

We anticipate that the resources will not only be helpful to families, but will provide deeper knowledge and understanding of early literacy and numeracy to early childhood professionals. As Siraj-Blatchford (2004) has argued, 'Effective pedagogues have good curriculum knowledge and child development knowledge' (p. 147). Having more information and tools for supporting early literacy and numeracy will allow early childhood professionals to become more effective pedagogues.

Professor Marilyn Fleer

Foundation Chair for Early Childhood Education

Monash University

Professor Bridie Raban

Mooroolbeek Foundation Chair in Early Childhood Studies

University of Melbourne

References

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2004). Quality teaching in the early years. In A. Anning, J. Cullen & M. Fleer (Eds.), *Early childhood education: Society and culture.* London: Sage.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). Thinking and speech. In L. S. Vygotsky, *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky, Vol. 1, Problems of general psychology* (pp. 39-285) (R. W. Rieber & A. S. Carton, Eds.; N. Minick, Trans.) New York: Plenum Press.

Mapping early literacy concepts

Is there a set of key concepts for literacy learning?

Learning to read and write

We now recognise that learning literacy is a social and cultural process which involves children building understanding about spoken, visual and written language through interactions with their family and cultural group.

Oral language is accepted as a vital foundation for print literacy. Informed adults spend quality time with young children, building vocabulary in the context of interesting experiences; introducing question forms and the language of instruction and classification; and telling and reading stories that enrich language and imagination.

This article however, focuses on written language and the important principles that underpin learning to read and write.

To become literate, children need to learn how language works and how 'texts' work. In this case, 'text' refers to the different kinds of written material we encounter:

- Environmental texts – traffic and street signs, bill-boards, T-shirts, tea towels, taxis, buses, packaging.
- Everyday texts – newspapers, advertising catalogues, cafes, bills, letters, forms.
- Popular and media texts – magazines, TV and film, computer games.
- Literary texts – picture books, fables, folk and fairy tales and nursery rhymes.
- Information texts – including procedural texts such as manuals and recipes and web-based texts.

Key literacy concepts

Current theorists suggest that children need to understand the following concepts before they have 'the keys to unlock the door of literacy':

- Spoken, written and visual forms of language carry meanings/ messages.
- We can use spoken language to talk about what is present, what is not present, what has already happened or what might happen.
- Language is a structured system of communication.
- Once we know how the structure works, we can predict the kind of word and meaning that is likely.
- Written language is not talk written down. It has formality and specific structural features.
- Written language uses a system of symbols to communicate meaning.
- A symbol 'holds' its meaning when written down and can be 'read' by someone else in another time or place (it has permanence and transportability).
- We can use language about language – words can be understood and talked about as 'objects'.
- Written down texts connect with experience.
- Language is used in specific ways for particular purposes.
- There is an explicit relationship between sounds and letters – speech can be 'mapped' to print.
- A word is a unit of meaning with boundaries between it and other units of meaning.
- Concepts about print apply to a range of written texts (left to right/ top to bottom).
- Different texts are created for different purposes and this affects some aspects of their structure and features.
- 'Story' is a particular form of language use with specific structure and features.
- There are many kinds of stories and they each have distinctive features.

What this means for parents, carers and teachers:

We use spoken language in its different ways for different purposes to show children how the system works.

We ask children which word is likely to come next and what action might happen next to build their sense of prediction.

We involve children when we write – making notes and lists, writing letters, filling out forms – so they learn the purposes of written texts.

We get children to contribute to letters and emails – by drawing or scribbling their name – so they learn that the meaning we make has the same meaning when someone reads it.

When we read stories to children, we talk about objects and events in the story that connect with their experience: 'There's a duck like we saw the other day'; 'this is another book about bears'.

We say rhymes and sing songs and jingles with children from the earliest age so they learn to hear sounds that are the same and how words break into syllables.

As we read with children, we draw attention to the way the print is placed on the page and how the book works from cover to end piece.

As we share stories with children, we focus on words they know and letters that are familiar to them.

When we walk around outside, we point out all the signs, letters, words and symbols around us, and notice how they mean the same thing in different places.

We read many, many, many stories and talk about the different kinds we enjoy.

Jenni Connor is an adviser in the Tasmanian education system.

Leap into life

Celebrate the joy of childhood and the early years

University of Southern Queensland's Under Eights Day 2005 – what an amazing day!

With a magical venue, and the most gorgeous weather we could hope for, the experiences and environment created by a dedicated early childhood team provided more than 400 children and families with the opportunity to interact, play and celebrate the joy of childhood and the early years. The day kicked-off with a short play entitled *Who Stole the Rainbow?* It had children and parents enthralled by the magical characters and catchy tunes. Shortly after, the USQ quadrangle turned into a magical hub of exploration and activities, teeming with children. **Little faces took on the colours of the rainbow at the face-painting stalls, while bubbles floated past and brightly coloured ribbon twirlers sliced up figures in the air.** The once plain calico fence evolved into a multicoloured mural, and even the pavement did not escape the creativity of the youngest attendees – armed with a chalk and a big smile, babies and toddlers scribbled their way around.

An amazing soundscape produced endless banging, striking and shaking of percussion pieces, while busy bodies weaved their way through tunnels, trees and mobiles. The science display provided children with opportunities to view hermit crabs at centre stage, spinning copters, fingerprint animals and the ever popular slime and goop never failed to stimulate the senses of young and old alike.

A wonderful diversity and disability display provided a wide range of resources which allowed children and parents the opportunity to experience how others feel and view the world; and when a quiet time was called for, the cosy literacy area was the place to be. On its menu was an excellent selection of storytelling favourites as well as three jam-packed live shows of a delightful shadow puppet story called *Goanna and the Old Red Sun,* complete with fantastic sound effects. Needless to say, little hands were busy all day: moulding clay dinosaurs and a variety of original creations; threading an assortment of objects that turned a bare tree into a gorgeous mobile display; weaving glittery bits and pieces onto a hessian pyramid; cutting and pasting to make shadow puppets; and with so much energy still left to expend, a wonderful obstacle course challenged active littlies and supported their endless energy to move.

Under Eights Day 2005 served as an avenue to strengthen links with children, families, community organisations and early childhood staff and students. At the end of the day, when all was packed away and tidied, the only remnant left was the colourfully painted calico fence – a simple reminder of the day that was. A symbol of the wonderful way children can leave a mark on all of us.

Alice Brown
Early childhood coordinator,
University of Southern Queensland
Email: browna@usq.edu.au

Bella Santacruz is an undergraduate at University of Southern Queensland

Queensland celebrates Under Eights Week

20–27 May 2005

Under Eights Week is an annual event organised through Early Childhood Australia's Queensland Branch, by the Under Eights Week State Planning Committee. Each year a theme is chosen to help focus on a particular aspect of early childhood. This year's theme, 'Leap into life – children's health and wellbeing', was celebrated by local preschools, child care centres, kindergartens, libraries and many other organisations around Queensland.

Under Eights Week promotes the importance of the early childhood years and highlights the needs of young children. The week also strives to increase public awareness of the issues concerning young children and the range of early childhood services available within the community. **Next year's Under Eights Week will be celebrated from 19–26 May.** The theme has not yet been decided, however it will be a huge event as we will be celebrating 50 years.

For further details and to keep up to date, visit: www.earlychildhood.org.au or email Karen Dungey at: ecaqld@earlychildhood.org.au.

Creating cultural change @ Campus Kindergarten

The Sustainable Planet Project

December 2002 saw the United National General Assembly officially endorse the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), an initiative emphasising the importance of education in achieving sustainable ways of living. To contribute to this important international program, Campus Kindergarten, a community kindergarten, preschool and long day care centre, collaborated with researchers from the School of Early Childhood at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to research and report on their Sustainable Planet Project. An account of this study has just been published in the *Handbook of Sustainability Research*, designed to stimulate further research activity for the decade. This article gives a project snapshot.

The Sustainable Planet Project originated in 1997, the outcome of a staff team-building exercise to encourage home–work linkages. In seeking a shared project, 'the environment' emerged as a common interest. Under the Sustainable Planet Project banner, individual staff members were able to add value to their roles as early childhood educators by including personal interests such as gardening, wildlife conservation and recycling. From the start, the project had an action-oriented focus, encapsulated in its subtitle, 'Saving our planet: Become a conscious part of the solution'.

Initially, staff worked with the children on a number of small-scale, mini-projects allied to their own particular environmental interests. Figure 1 provides an example of these ideas.

At times, there was high energy. At times, individuals lost interest and momentum. There were periods when little was happening as other projects and priorities took precedence. Nevertheless, despite the ups and downs, all these mini-projects have become inculcated into everyday routines and new projects are continually added. It could be said that the centre now has a 'sustainability ethic' where environmentally-friendly thinking and behaviour permeates all aspects of the life of Campus Kindergarten. This ethic supports a view that even young children can be proactive participants in educational and environmental decision making – as initiators, provocateurs, researchers and activists. This is exemplified in the following vignette of a recent sub-project.

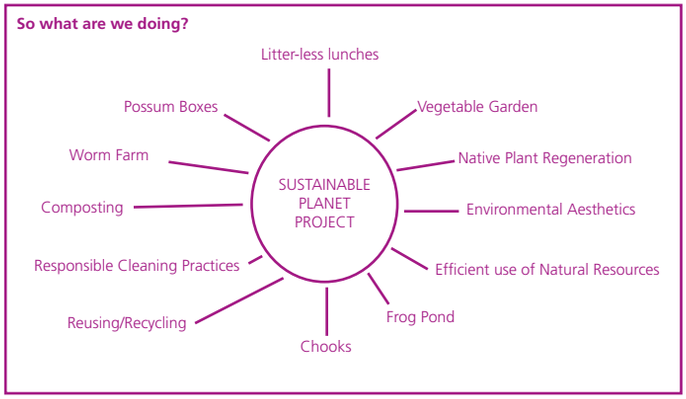


Figure 1. Initial mini-projects in the Sustainable Planet Project (Campus Kindergarten teachers, 1997)

The Shopping Trolley Project

This originated when the children discovered a shopping trolley in the playground, raising questions about why and how it got there. Brainstorming came up with these possibilities:

Ryan: A burglar dressed up as a normal person got the shopping trolley and took it to Campus Kindy.

Emily: He put it in there in the night and quickly ran away.

Teacher: Well what should we do about it?

John: Ring up.

Hamish: Take it back to the shop.

Fizza: Ring them and let them know.

The children were concerned with both the morality of 'stealing' and the impact of dumped trolleys on the local environment. They decided to write a letter to the 'Coles people' informing them that their shopping trolley had been found, along with an offer to return the trolley to the store. They also wanted to communicate directly with 'the burglars' but, not knowing their addresses, decided to write to the local newspaper in the hope that the perpetrators would read of their concerns.

A responsive local newspaper made this front page news, along with a photostory outlining the children's ethical and environmental concerns about stolen trolleys. There was also editorial comment entitled *'Young teach us a worthwhile lesson'*, where the editor praised the children for their social responsibility.

This public attention, adding momentum to the children's interest, led to a supermarket visit. During the car park tour the children

identified that existing signage to discourage customers from removing trolleys from the area could only be read if shoppers actually utilised the car parks. The children, however, had already determined that those who 'borrowed' the trolleys were not car owners. Consequently, they made new signs targeting the 'trolley thieves', which were then posted on the supermarket's main doors. Coles also changed their policy and now include their signage in other locations.

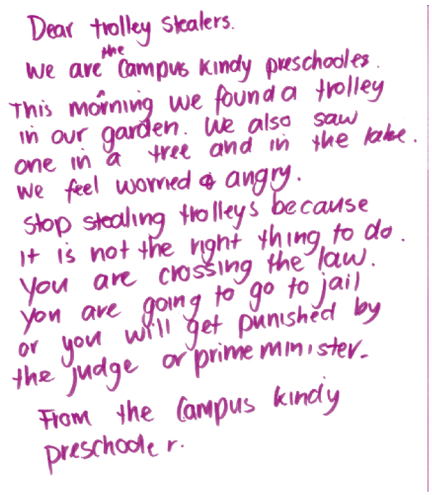

Dear trolley stealers.
We are the Campus kindy preschoolers.
This morning we found a trolley
in our garden. We also saw
one in a tree and in the lake.
We feel worried & angry.
Stop stealing trolleys because
it is not the right thing to do.
You are crossing the law.
You are going to go to jail
or you will get punished by
the judge or prime minister.
From the Campus kindy
preschooler.

Figure 2. Letter to the supermarket (Campus Kindergarten preschoolers)

This vignette illustrates that even very young children can learn to 'make a difference' when teachers create an empowering curriculum that promotes social responsibility and active citizenship. Furthermore, through all the activities in the Sustainable Planet Project over the years, there have been a range of tangible environmental outcomes which have considerably reduced the centre's 'environmental footprint'. These include:

- enhanced natural play spaces and improved biodiversity;
- reductions in environmentally-harmful kitchen and cleaning products;
- water conservation through installation of a sandpit water barrel, filled only once a day;
- introduction of the 'litterless lunch' to minimise packaged foods;
- development of a composting and worm farm system for food scraps; and, overall,
- major reductions in waste from two wheelie bins per day to half a bin per day.

Creating a culture of change

This study illustrates that creating cultural change within an organisation – in this case, a transition to sustainable practices – has been an evolutionary process, advancing incrementally and erratically over almost a decade. Recent organisational change theory (emerging from a branch of chaos theory identified as complexity theory) tells us that this kind of change is typical within a complex organisational system. Change based in complexity does not create order and predictability. Rather, it is more likely to lead to messy, unpredictable, seemingly chaotic conditions. Success precipitates new challenges, new learning, and further change – with instability, rather than stability, being 'normal'. Profound change in an organisation, therefore, is much more likely to be slowly-emerging cultural change coming from within the organisation, than revolutionary change that sweeps away the old and ushers in the new.

According to Fullan (2003) there are just a small number of factors that help an organisation create significant change within their own complex system. These are evident at Campus Kindergarten.

- Start with your own context-specific moral purpose, ethical dilemma or desirable direction. This should not be imposed from outside.
- Create a collaborative learning culture where teamwork and mentoring become normal social practices.
- Ensure that informed, reflective practice infuses interactions and deliberations. Problems are more communicative obstacles to creativity than issues to be overcome in order to re-establish stability and order.
- Consolidate 'small wins' and build on them to scale up their impacts. This is the 'butterfly effect' sometimes associated with chaos theory.

Conclusion

This article snapshots how the Campus Kindergarten community has confronted the challenge of sustainability. It has done this by creating a 'learning organisation' where a culture of sustainability is continuously recreated by taking advantage of, rather than resisting, the natural power of complexity. This centre is a model of quality early childhood education for sustainability, and an exemplar for us all.

Dr Julie Davis, researcher and lecturer in the School of Early Childhood,
Queensland University of Technology.
Email: j.davis@qut.edu.au.

Robert Pratt, teacher,
Campus Kindergarten, Brisbane.

Julie Davis and Robert Pratt spoke at the Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference in Brisbane.

References

Davis, J., Rowntree, N., Gibson, M., Pratt, R., & Eglington, A. (2005). Creating a culture of sustainability: From project to integrated education for sustainability at Campus Kindergarten. In W. L. Filho (Ed.), *Handbook of sustainability research*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Fullan, M. (2003). *Change forces with a vengeance*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Figure 3. Example of children's signage to the 'trolley thieves' (Alexander)

Autism Spectrum Disorder:
Towards best practice in early childhood

What is autism?

Autism or, more correctly, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurological disorder in which a person's ability to interact socially, communicate and use imagination is markedly delayed. The term 'autism spectrum disorder' is used because there is a range of disorders that share characteristics, including autism and Asperger Syndrome. ASD may affect as many as one in 150 people, and it affects them throughout their lives. However, the extent to which functioning is impaired, and the kind and level of support needed, varies greatly from person to person.

Typically, developing children interact with their families and friends, participating in their activities, and play, in the process developing essential social skills, and language. Children with ASD appear not to engage with their social environment and often do not utilise the natural learning opportunities that occur throughout their day. As a result these children often present particular challenges to those who care for them, whether parents or teachers. Working with them can sometimes feel counter-intuitive and therefore requires specific knowledge and understanding.

There is now clear evidence that children with autism can be taught to interact socially, both with peers and adults, to engage in more adaptive play behaviour, to learn via modelling, imitation, and observation.

While the causes are still poorly understood, there is increasing evidence of a biological basis for ASD. It is less clear which of the observed impairments are core deficiencies of the disorder, or competencies that fail to develop as a result of the inadequate social and play experiences of these children.

Effective interventions

Whatever the cause of ASD, two things are clear:

- early intervention is critical; and
- educational interventions are currently the most effective when working with these children.

Intensive behavioural programming is widely acknowledged to be best practice in teaching children with ASD. One of the best-known procedures, discrete trial training, is criticised however because such programming is:

- costly (both time and money);
- very teacher directed; and
- skills learned often fail to generalise and maintain.

More recently, researchers and teachers have developed behaviourally-based approaches with consideration for children's developmental needs. This ensures the relevance of instruction, through functional assessment and incidental learning procedures. One such approach is Pivotal Response instruction, developed by Bob Koegel and colleagues. This approach focuses on teaching children with ASD 'pivotal' skills – e.g. functional communication including initiating interactions, self-management, and play. These skills enable children to access learning opportunities occurring naturally in their everyday lives, and give them greater control of their own learning. There is now clear evidence that children with autism can be taught to interact socially, both with peers and adults, to engage in more adaptive play behaviour, to learn via modelling, imitation, and observation.

Supporting children with ASD

A common strategy for providing support for children with special needs in mainstream environments is to employ paraprofessionals. Given the special challenges associated with autism, relatively unskilled personnel are unlikely to be able to facilitate adaptive social functioning and the successful integration of a child with autism. Indeed, the constant close proximity of paraprofessionals to a child with special needs in a regular class has been shown to have detrimental effects. Researchers have observed that the risk of such negative outcomes is particularly high for children with ASD. Compensatory interaction patterns with adults have been shown to create a barrier between children with ASD and their peers. Both parents and professionals working with children with ASD need to develop facilitative strategies aimed at supporting more typical peer interactions in children with ASD, thus promoting more typical development (Anderson, Moore, Godfrey & Fletcher-Flinn, 2004).

Effective inclusive educational settings should provide children with ASD with the opportunities they need to develop social, language and play skills. Research has shown that increased opportunity for social interaction and play with typically-developing peers can promote the development of more appropriate behaviour and adaptive social functioning, provided teachers actively promote social integration. Parents' involvement is also critical so that parents are able to reinforce learning, continue stimulating interactions with their children at home, and provide the required consistency.

Dennis W. Moore and Angelika Anderson

Monash University

Reference

Anderson, A., Moore, D. W., Godfrey, R. & Fletcher-Finn, C. (2004). Social skills assessment of some children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in free-play situations. *Autism, 8*(4), 369–385.

Scaffolding literacy

A text-based literate language program for young children

You mean reading a story?

I mean reading a story, and doing it deep.

Early childhood literacy education, in particular scaffolding the ability of children to engage effectively in literate discourse, is the focus of research being conducted at the University of Canberra. The research aims to investigate and articulate an effective way for teachers to assist young children to learn about literate language. That is, the tuning-in of young children to the way the language of books constructs meaning; to the ways written language is different from oral language; and to the way that meaning is constructed in written language through its structure, vocabulary and layers of complexity.

An initial phase of the research involved implementing a narrative literacy program (using *Belinda*, by Pamela Allen) with children at a preschool/long day care centre. The research program began the process of articulating the principles underpinning 'scaffolding literacy', an innovative pedagogy developed through the Parents as Tutors Program at the University of Canberra, and exploring the possibility and implications of applying scaffolding literacy in an early childhood context.

Scaffolding literacy makes strategies and processes of decoding and meaning prediction explicit, and addresses the system of everyday interactions and experiences that maintain and support children's educational failure. It aims to teach children effective engagement in literate discourse by developing children's understanding of how language works and how to effectively use strategies in order to become increasingly independent readers, writers and spellers. The transcript below, of two four-year-old children reading *Belinda* together, shows the way they are negotiating meaning and graphophonics:

Sofiya: He gives some to the dog.

Zeke: She.

Sofiya: He gives some to the cat.

Zeke: No. She.

Sofiya: He puts some aside...

Zeke: No. She. It's a girl. It has to be she. And it's got 'sh'.

Sofiya: She puts some aside, and with the cream she makes the butter for their bread.

In general, children who are struggling in literacy have poor self-esteem and self-concepts, not just about literacy, but about themselves as learners, and this puts great stress on families. Our aim, as teachers of young children, is for children to avoid becoming stressed about literacy in the first place. If we can achieve that, we don't have the terribly difficult task of rescuing and attempting to teach children with deeply-embedded, poor self-concepts as learners. This aim can be realised by providing high levels of challenge in our early (and continuing) literacy education, combined with high levels of support and explicit teaching.

In the scaffolding literacy pedagogy, we are teaching our readers (or 'learner–readers') from the earliest stages to think critically about texts and to think like writers. In this way, they begin to understand not only what language choices mean, but also why they might be made in the first instance. This is illustrated by the transcript below:

Teacher: Pamela Allen chose to tell us, on this very first page, where Bessie and Old Tom live. She wrote that because it's important in understanding the story. She told us that they live in the country because...

Child: A cow won't fit in the city! The story wouldn't make sense.

In this way we are building a shared understanding of why and how the writer used language in the way that they did, and how the children can do it too.

Jane Stirling
Schools & Community Centre
University of Canberra

References

Allen, P. (1992). *Belinda*. Ringwood, Victoria: Viking.
More information on Scaffolding Literacy may be found online at:
www.canberra.edu.au/scaffolding_literacy/index.htm

There is a new toy which is currently being hyped-up, ready to appear on the Christmas-present wish-lists of children across the UK. Robosapien V2™ robot, 61cm high, is able to move, pick up and throw objects, track movement, speak, and recognise colours and skin tone. On many of the same lists might also appear EyeToy: Play2™, the latest version of PlayStation2 software which places players inside games through the projection of their images on the screen. One of the games enables players to make a 3D rendering of their own head which can then be placed on characters in other games, enabling children to become footballers in an on-screen game. Children's cultural worlds are certainly changing. Even old toys are being adapted to fit into new trends. 'Pimp My Ride' is a program on MTV which features car owners who aim to change their 'rusty mingers into metal blingers', as the producers claim, with in-car jacuzzis, bars and ipod systems. At a recent talk I gave, the mother of a young boy described how her child was now busily 'pimping up' his old Matchbox cars. These are small examples of how popular culture, media and technology influence the cultural lives of many children and, in this article, I will discuss what these changes mean for early childhood educators.

Cultural icons

Popular culture, media and new technologies in early childhood

The home and community worlds of many children appear to provide more opportunities for encounters with some digital literacy practices than the settings they attend.

The digital lives of children

In a recent survey of 1,852 parents and carers of children aged birth to six years in England, parents were asked to identify their children's popular cultural, media and digital literacy practices in the home. The findings of the survey suggest that children are immersed in a wide range of practices. For example:

- Children spent, on a 'typical' day, an average of two hours and six minutes engaged with a screen – that is, watching or using any, or all, of the following: television, videos, DVDs, computers, games consoles, and hand-held computers.
- 22 per cent of children were able to turn on the television themselves by the age of one, 49 per cent by the age of two.
- 53 per cent of children were reported to have used a computer at home on a 'typical' day – 45 per cent of children spent less than an hour on a typical day using a computer; eight per cent, one or more hours.
- 27 per cent of children below four years of age had used a computer independently at home, 47 per cent were able to use a mouse to point and click by this age.
- 27 per cent of all children surveyed had used a digital camera to take a photograph, 15 per cent had used a video camera.

Five hundred and twenty four staff in the early years settings these children attended also completed a survey which asked them to outline their attitudes towards, and experiences of, the use of popular culture, media and technologies in the curriculum. While a large number of practitioners (67 per cent) had incorporated

popular culture into their planning in order to promote oracy and literacy at least occasionally, fewer appeared to be comfortable with the role of media and new technologies. For example, 25 per cent of practitioners stated that they never planned for the use of computers in the setting; 74 per cent indicated that they had never planned for children to use digital cameras. Only four per cent of practitioners stated that children used video cameras at least occasionally, seven per cent said they were rarely used and 81 per cent had never planned for their use. While 68 per cent of parents stated that their children rarely or never visited a website at home, 83 per cent of practitioners suggested that this activity was rarely or never planned for in the setting.

Implications

There are, of course, many reasons for this situation, including limitations with regard to resources, lack of training and so on, but the fact remains: the home and community worlds of many children appear to provide more opportunities for encounters with some digital literacy practices than the settings they attend. What are the implications of this gap in experiences? The key consequences lie in two areas: orientation to schooling; and development of the skills, knowledge and understanding which will be central to work and leisure pursuits of the twenty-first century. In relation to the first area – orientation to schooling – there are important questions to be raised about what happens when a child who has experience of creating multimedia stories on a home computer, or is able to use independently a children's website or digital camera from a young age, attends an early years setting or school in which opportunities for building on these skills is limited. We now have much evidence that the development of curricula which draw from the cultural experience of children and their families is important in enhancing motivation and ensuring relevance. Reflecting on the second consideration – the need to develop children's skills for societies which will require flexible workers who are able to navigate complex, multimodal textual worlds and manage information from a range of sources – it is clear that building the foundations for this should start as early as possible.

Digital literacies in early childhood settings

There are a number of ways in which this could be developed in relation to the communication, language and literacy curriculum. For example, the development of activities which relate to moving images would be an important step in recognising the wealth of knowledge of films, cartoons and videos that children bring into settings. There are materials emerging which can help practitioners in this regard (see references below), but much can also be done with a television and video/DVD player to promote understanding of film. Early years settings in England, involved in the project outlined above, have engaged in a wide range of moving-image activities. For example, examining short extracts of films and discussing camera angles, sound, setting and lighting; watching film extracts with the sound turned down and encouraging children to develop a soundtrack; watching the beginning of a film and then stopping it in order that children could predict what might occur next; and asking children to produce a storyboard which outlines the beginning, middle and end of a film narrative they have watched (Figures 1 and 2).

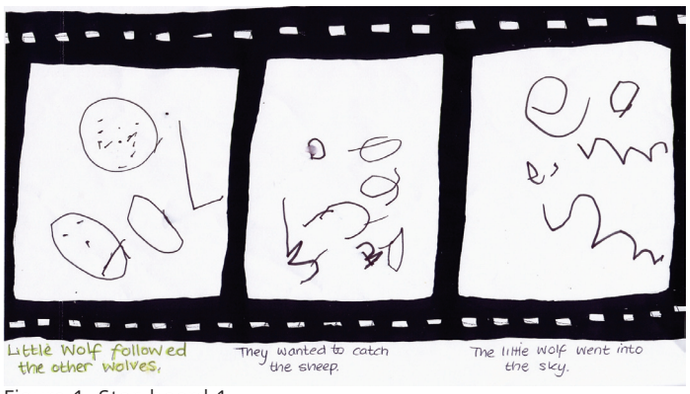


Figure 1. Storyboard 1.

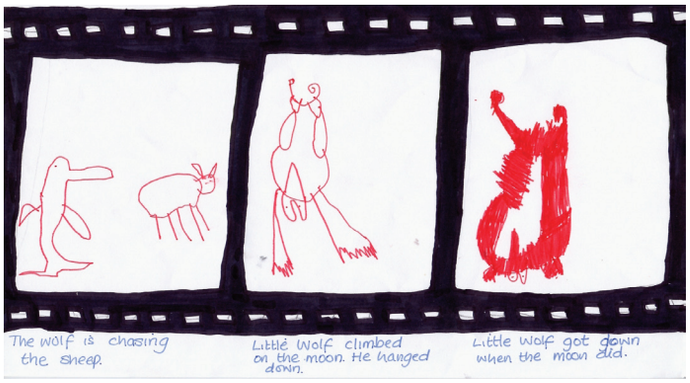


Figure 2. Storyboard 2.

With the development of film-editing software such as imovie, which is relatively easy to use, very young children in other settings have produced short films and animations. Live-action sequences have been filmed by simply linking a video camera to a computer which is then projected onto a screen or interactive whiteboard, enabling children to create a television studio in the setting. These activities have not only had a very positive impact on the children's engagement in the communication, language and literacy curriculum, but have also helped them to build on their considerable knowledge of moving image and develop new skills and understanding which will be essential in this increasingly multimodal world. When the parents were asked if media activities such as this should occur in nurseries, the majority suggested they should, with the words of one parent echoing others:

Well, rather than just being a box that's in front of them, at least they know what is happening and where it is coming from.

This parent is obviously aware of the value of work on media and technologies in early childhood settings. Now it is up to us, as informed and responsive educators, to heed such calls to action!

Jackie Marsh
University of Sheffield, UK
Jackie was a keynote speaker at the Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference.

References

Marsh, J., Brooks, G., Ritchie, L., Roberts, S., & Wright, K. (2005). *Digital beginnings: Young children's use of popular culture, media and new technologies.* Sheffield: University of Sheffield. Final report for project funded by BBC Worldwide/The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The British Film Institute website contains details of resources, e.g. *Look Again* and *Starting Stories,* which have been used successfully in early years settings in England. www.bfi.org.uk/education/teaching/primary.html.

Phonemic awareness

Helping young children become sensitive to sounds in words

'Phonemic awareness' is about noticing the sounds of language and different aspects of the sounds such as words, rhymes and syllables. Gradually, children become aware that words are made of sequences of sound which can be represented in print by letters.

Young children are fascinated by rhymes, jingles, songs and rhyming stories, and from an early age they play with parts of the language they are hearing. When children chant a rhyme, clap the rhythm (syllables *Ju-lie*) of their name, or hear that their name starts like another word, they are developing sensitivity to the sounds of the language.

Playing with rhymes

Sharing lots of rhymes with children helps tune their ear to the sounds of language. Children also love to listen to stories that rhyme. A popular rhyming book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*, by Eric Carle is a fun place to start. The basic structure of the text is 'Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? I see a ____ looking at me.' The sentence structure remains the same with a different animal appearing on each new page. This book can be read and reread to children encouraging them to join in with the name of the animal on the next page. Children love changing the words in the book to make their own story. Adults can create a book with the children called *I went walking, what did I see? I saw a _____ looking at me*. Looking at the book and reading it, children begin to notice similarities in the pattern of language and enjoy the rhythm and rhyme.

The same idea of changing words in texts can be used with any rhyme. Ask the children to replace the words that rhyme in nursery rhymes. For example:

Humpty dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty dumpty had a great fall

becomes:

Humpty dumpty sat on a rock
Humpty dumpty lost his sock

or:

Humpty dumpty sat on a pin
Humpty dumpty jumped in the bin

Children's names are golden opportunities to play with rhyme.

Children's names are golden opportunities to play with rhyme. Ask children to think of other names or words that rhyme with their name, such as Ella/Isabella or Madison/Harrison. Have children's names written on cards so they can be sorted according to the letters that appear in the names or the sounds that they can hear in the names.

Learning about sounds and letters

It is important for young children to practise listening to sounds in words and learning the letters which represent these sounds. Familiar texts such as nursery rhymes or well-known finger rhymes, can be used to introduce a specific letter. The rhyme should be read frequently until the children can say it by heart. Teachers can then ask the children to search for a specific letter within the rhyme as it is read aloud. Every time a child hears a particular sound they can place a sticky note strip on the letter.

Experiment with creating a rhyme or a sentence with the children using their names and other words that start with the same sound and follow the same process with sticky notes. As these texts are created electronically they can be easily printed and children can take them home with sticky notes attached, providing an excellent opportunity for home, school and centre to have conversations about letters and sounds.

Letter focus table

Establishing a letter focus table provides further opportunities for talking about letters and sounds in words. Ask parents to help children find items or texts around the home to bring for the display, include different-size letters or letters made from different materials with a variety of textures. Add rhymes and big books that have the letter in the title, and include lots of alphabet books.

During shared reading, have children find the focus letter in the book being read. The children take great delight in finding the focus letter on the second and subsequent readings.

Sounds alive

Young children enjoy action. Once they have experience with a particular letter and sound, make it come alive. If exploring the letter 'j', get children to pretend to be jack-in-the-boxes or jump over a rope and sing 'Jack be nimble, Jack be quick', and make jelly while singing the rhyme 'Jelly on a plate'.

Popular songs provide opportunities to develop young children's sensitivity to the sound structures in spoken words. Choose a song that is well known through popular media and which has lyrics that are catchy and appropriate for your group of children. The lyrics become material for the children to 'read'.

The following example describes the use of the popular song by Shannon Noll, 'What about me?' The lyrics were obtained from the Internet and a CD was purchased so that the song could be listened to on many occasions. Familiarity with the words was developed through repeated listening to the song.

The lyrics were typed on an A3 page so the words could be easily seen by all children. The meaning of the lyrics was discussed and the children were each given a page of the big book to illustrate, thus promoting ownership of the activity. One copy of the big book was produced and put in an A3-size display book.

This book became a popular reading tool in the classroom. It provided many opportunities for children to learn about how print works and to listen for rhyming words and initial sounds of words.

'Phonemic awareness' is the single biggest predictor of children learning to read and write successfully (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000).

Raising children's sensitivity to the sounds in language should be a major focus of early years programs. The key is to make the activities fun, embedded in the rich context of jingles, rhymes, stories and songs which are familiar to the children.

Christine Topfer is the National Vice-President of Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA).

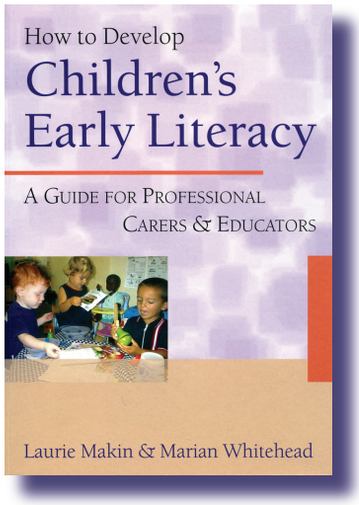
Bev Moir and **Carolynn Dilger** are early childhood teachers in the Tasmanian education system.

Reference

Barratt-Pugh, C., & Rohl, M. (Eds). (2000). *Literacy learning in the early years*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Book Reviews

How to Develop Children's Early Literacy: A Guide for Professional Carers & Educators



By Laurie Makin and Marian Whitehead

Paul Chapman (2004)
ISBN 0761943331
Available from Early Childhood Australia for $60.95

How to Develop Children's Early Literacy is a very user-friendly book and is ideal for busy carers and professionals. It combines good ideas with an overview of the development of literacy in young children. Each chapter is clear, concise and broken into sub-headings.

Chapters 2 to 6 are devoted to literacy learning in young children. Each chapter discusses the language and literacy development that occurs at various ages, while it emphasises individual differences in all learning. There are also suggestions on how to construct a learning environment to enhance further learning of literacy at each stage.

The chapter on preschool literacy poses many of the questions a carer may be asked by parents. For example:

Shouldn't they be sitting down and learning their letters and their sounds?
When will they be ready for proper reading books?

The book gives practical and commonsense replies to these questions.

Chapter 6 discusses topics which may occur at any age, for example: special needs and literacy; bilingualism and literacy; and play and literacy. There is a very helpful segment in this chapter which deals with assessment of children's literacy in the year prior to school entry and in the transition to school.

The book is co-written by an Australian academic at the University of Newcastle, Laurie Makin, and by a British academic, Marian Whitehead, from the University of London. For this reason, the resources, professional associations and assessment provision are from both countries. One small criticism is that the resources which are listed, in particular the *Useful Addresses,* have a bias towards British-based sources.

However, in general, this is an excellent book and very topical. It will not only assist carers and educators, but will also give parents some commonsense guidelines on the very important, and little understood, issue of early literacy.

Gerrie Mackey

In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia

By Lella Gandini, Lynn Hill, Louise Cadwell and Charles Schwall

Teachers College Press (2005)
ISBN 080774591X
Available from Early Childhood Australia for $88.95

In the Spirit of the Studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia gives a factual account of the history and development of the *atelier* (art studio) and *atelierista* (artist/teacher) within Italy and its influences on North America.

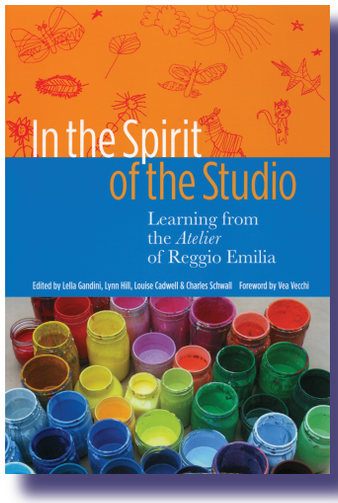
The book offers lots of examples of early childhood programs, having been influenced by the *atelier* in the infant–toddler centres and preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. It also offers practical solutions for end-users on setting up their own studios and incorporating an art program within the confines of a school environment.

New schools or early childhood programs will find this book particularly useful, but all teachers working with young children will be able to extract a great deal from it. There are many ideas, backed up with lots of photographs of children's work, and a positive slant on working collaboratively is underlined by the authors.

The importance of documentation is stressed and the book outlines many examples of different ways to achieve it. From simple documentation using digital cameras to detailed note-taking, the book highlights this vital component in understanding how children think and learn.

Set out under clearly defined and well-referenced chapters and headings, one can easily just read a section at a time, however the structure of the book is such that it flows between concepts beautifully.

After reading this book the artist at my centre said, 'I am constantly astounded by the abilities of even my youngest students, and to read a book penned by others similarly inspired is fantastic. I loved the book as it validates what I do in the studio everyday, and offers a great deal of scope to extend the work I do with the children'.



Sarah White

Director
Deakin School for Early Learning and
The Park School for Early Learning

The Sing! Collectors' Edition 1975-1984

ABC Books (2005)
2-CD set $39.95
Paperback book $13.95

This book is a collection of songs that comes with two CDs. One has people singing the words and you can sing with them. The other is just the musical instruments playing the tunes so that you can sing by yourself to it or play a recorder or keyboard with it. I like this one because it makes you want to learn the songs on a musical instrument.

There are many songs in this book. Some of them are traditional, some are funny and some are sad. Many songs come from different countries. The activities that are written next to the songs are fun and enjoyable. I like the blurbs for the teacher or children to read because you learn about the people who wrote the songs and the stories behind the songs. They also teach you about different types of music. The illustrations are colourful and help you to understand the story behind each song. We have a collection of *SING* books at school and we have fun with our teachers when we use them.

Laura Marshall

(7 years 11 months)

As the title suggests, this volume is made up of a collection of 40 songs used in the *SING* primary school music program from 1975 to 1984. Rhonda Macken (*SING* music coordinator) and John Kane (*SING* music producer) have collated a number of tunes from this period. These tunes range from *Waltzing Matilda, Aquarius, Never Bath in an Irish Stew* to the *Purple People Eater*. This collection is made up of one Indigenous Australian tune (*Taba Naba Norem*), several Anglo-Australian tunes (*The Wild Colonial Boy, It's a Long Way to Tipperary, Bound for South Australia*), as well as Hebrew (*Havah Nagilah*), Maori (*Pokare Kare Ana*), South American (*Cielito Lindo*), Japanese (*Kojo No Tsuki*), African American (*Rock My Soul* and *We Shall Overcome*), Jamaican (*Mango Walk*), Spanish (*La Cucaracha*), Yorkshire (*On Illka Moor Baht'at*) and Irish (*Macnamara's Band*) songs.

Each page is linked to the tracks on the CDs (and to the original *SING*! edition in which they were published) which can be played instrumentally or with vocals. They come with a brief summary of each song and with an activity (and in some instances translations) and illustrations. As such they could provide a useful resource for both early childhood and early primary settings. Many teachers will remember the songs from their own schooling experience.

Jane Page

Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne

The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley

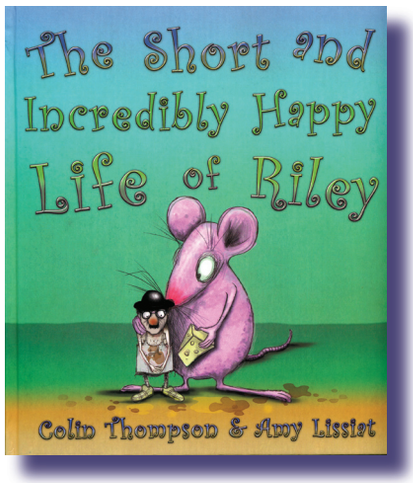
By Colin Thompson and Amy Lissiet

Lothian Books (2005)
ISBN 0734408064
RRP $27.95

This is a gorgeous book, classified by the National Library as junior fiction, but, as with most truly good picture books, it can be read on many levels, by many ages. I'm thinking I might use it as daily meditation myself! As the title signals, the book refers to that old saying 'the life of Riley', and is a story of a delightful rat named Riley (yes, I said delightful rat!) who lives a simple, happy life that I find myself envying.

The book is playful and profound at the same time. Children smile as you read the words to them, notice new little jokes in the illustrations with each reading, and at the end, you find yourself pondering on important issues ... life, love, desires, happiness, death. The pen and ink illustrations provide the visual language, and tell many funny little stories. The authors play with written text, and have just as much fun with words as they do with the pictures. Riley lives a simple life – he fell in love with the first girl he met, and they lived happily ever after! – and this is contrasted with all the clutter of human lives.

The book achieves that fine and clever balance – it addresses issues of philosophy, sustainability, morality and health, without becoming one of those off-putting 'teaching tools' for literacy. My favourite bit is the irreverent take on some of the classic artists (e.g. Munsch, Botticelli, da Vinci) which, by the way, provides a great introduction to the postmodernists and their appropriations. In the same way, children are introduced to critical literacy (ignoring the ridiculousness of recent discussions in the daily newspapers) in an engaging and connected way.



In short, Riley is a great character and his story works as a fun picture book, while providing opportunities for enriching children's thinking and learning about words, pictures, life and death! This is one of those books I wouldn't mind being requested by the children to read again and again. And Riley's message about life? Keep it simple!

Felicity McArdle
School of Early Childhood
Queensland University of Technology

Learning to read

by Leonie Arthur

A guide on how young children learn and how best to help them at the different stages of early childhood.

What is reading?

Reading is about making meaning. As we read we draw on what we know about the world to make sense of the words and pictures that we see. From a very young age children are able to make sense of the print, pictures and symbols that they experience with their families and friends.

In these situations children learn that reading is relevant to their lives and can be used for a number of different purposes. And, when encouraged to read from the beginning, children also develop positive attitudes toward reading for the future.

What you can do when you are out and about:

- Talk about objects that you see when you are out walking or at the park.
- Sing songs and recite rhymes as you are driving in the car or walking along.
- Involve your child in using print in everyday situations – for example ticking off things on the shopping list at the supermarket, reading the sign at the station to check where the next train is going, and reading the score at the football.
- Point out and talk about print in the environment, for example signs in the shopping centre, symbols and words on buses, or print on food packaging.

What you can do at home:

- Have conversations with your baby.
- Play interactive games such as peek-a-boo.
- Let your child see and hear you reading.
- Provide your child with access to a range of texts – for example books, magazines, advertising flyers, menus and so on.
- Use your first language if you are bilingual.

Books to read with children:

Wild, Margaret, & James, Ann (2003). *Little Humpty.* Surry Hills, NSW: Little Hare.

Inkpen, Mick (2004). *Is it bedtime Wibbly Pig?* London: Hodder Children's.

Millard, Glenda, & Axelsen, Stephen (2004). *Mrs Wiggins' wartymelons.* Sydney: ABC Books.

Dodd, Lynley (2005). *Zachary Quack Minimonster.* Sydney: ABC Books.

Waddell, Martin, & Barton, Jill (2005). *It's quacking time!* London: Walker.

Scieszka, J. (1989). *The true story of the three little pigs*. London: Puffin Books.

Every Child surveys – thank you!

The publishing and marketing team at Early Childhood Australia would like to thank readers for the tremendous response to our *Every Child* survey. Your responses will assist us in the future development of the magazine.

The results in brief

The overwhelming majority of readers are satisfied with contributors' writing styles (95 per cent). The majority of readers mentioned articles of a practical nature as being most useful (45 per cent), followed by coverage of up-to-date issues and resources (22 per cent).

We look forward to producing a publication which continues to meet your professional and personal needs. Please feel free to continue to send your valuable feedback and suggestions to the *Every Child* in-house editor,

by post: PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602 or
by email: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au.

Engaging with literacy

Supporting literacy learning through building social competence

Aggressive behaviours such as hitting, biting and bullying make news. Less newsworthy, but equally educationally damaging, are constantly disruptive behaviours, attention-seeking or inattention. Poorly developed self-regulatory skills such as planning, goal-setting, monitoring and evaluating are part and parcel of poor concentration and lack of focus. In many cases, these non-aggressive, but damaging, behaviours underpin a range of classroom learning difficulties, including reading problems.

Building literacy skills requires good listening and language, concentration and focus. Children who miss literacy experiences at preschool and child care and then don't engage with structured literacy experiences in the first years of school – because of poor and off-task behaviours – fail to build the early cognitive skills needed for reading.

As research shows, learning gaps evident at school entry tend to widen rather than narrow for many children as they progress through school. Already limited early literacy experiences are compounded by lack of attention and participation in classroom learning. Children who are engaged with learning or who have targeted intervention programs stream further ahead. Ultimately, poor reading and writing result in longer-term academic difficulties that can translate into serious behaviour problems and early school drop-out.

Helping teachers understand and deal with challenging behaviours, build social competence and boost children's engagement with learning are the main goals of the Ready for School program developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research and funded by the Telstra Foundation.

Chairman of the Telstra Foundation, Herb Elliott AC, MBE said Australia's most pressing problems have their beginnings in early childhood.

'Children's early experiences determine their later development and can have lasting impacts on their chance of reaching their full potential', says Mr Elliott. 'There is growing interest in the importance of the early years, with research suggesting that supporting children in their early years can yield lasting results for the children themselves, their families and society as a whole.'

Over the past year, Ready for School workshops have helped hundreds of early childhood educators around the country. After participating in a workshop,

early childhood educators have a clearer understanding of challenging behaviours and how to adapt their programs to build more positive behaviours. They are then better able to develop individual and whole group strategies to build social competence and learning skills and support colleagues to do the same.

Dr June Slee, a noted behaviour specialist and author of *Managing Difficult Behaviour in Young Children,* has delivered many of the Ready for School workshops.

Over some 30 years, June Slee has developed a range of multi-disciplinary intervention programs for children and adolescents and for families struggling to deal with children's developmental and learning disabilities, attention deficits, behaviour disorders, and other social skill difficulties.

Dr Slee says that even young children's misbehaviour usually has one or more of four sources – a quest for power or attention, feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, or revenge.

Educators are urged to first look for the purpose of the behaviour and identify its function for the child.

She says that 'all behaviours are learned, and can therefore be unlearned'.

Dr Slee helps participants see that, 'for each undesirable behaviour exhibited, there is a more socially acceptable alternative', and that children, 'must be taught to use that behaviour'. But this re-learning takes time and requires specific strategies including shaping, positive reinforcement, modelling, token economies, and contingency contracting (if you finish this, then you can have or do this).

Patience and consistency are the keys to changing behaviours, she says.

She also cautions never 'to assume that the young child knows (or has seen modelled) the socially acceptable behaviour, knows *how* to use the acceptable behaviour, knows *where* to use that behaviour, or knows *when* to use the acceptable behaviour'.

'In fact', she says, 'we might assume the very opposite – that the child has observed undesirable behaviour being used across a variety of settings and with a frequency and outcome that indicates it is indeed the correct way to behave'.

Dr Slee says that 'early childhood professionals and parents are becoming increasingly aware of the need to help young children develop the social and emotional skills that enable them to interact positively with others'.

'One key skill is empathic awareness – the ability to identify with and understand another's feelings, situation and motives. Empathy has a strong association with other social competencies and is fundamental to a child interacting positively. The more children understand others' situations and feelings, the less likely they are to hurt others both verbally and physically', she says.

'Children's early experiences determine their later development and can have lasting impacts on their chance of reaching their full potential'

Dr Slee's workshops focus on understanding the social and learning needs of individual children, supporting practitioners to engage all children with learning, and fostering strong partnerships with families to support development of social competence.

They advocate designing consistent and targeted supports for children with challenging behaviours, establishing routines and setting limits, specifying desired levels of accomplishment, and specifying time-limits within which outcomes must be achieved.

Practitioners are also encouraged to develop formal intervention plans where necessary. These are helpful to ensure consistency and evaluate outcomes. They also provide useful guides when collaborating with parents, other centre staff and outside support personnel to facilitate development and implementation of targeted strategies. Family support, continuity and consistency between home and school, is critical to successful long-term outcomes for children.

Alison Elliott

Research Director, Early Childhood Education
Australian Council for Educational Research

Alison Elliott presented a paper about building social competence at the Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference in Brisbane.

Reference

Slee, J. (2003). *Managing difficult behaviour in young children.* Research in Practice Series, Vol.10 No.3. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.

Duty of care

Are we liable just because a child is injured at the centre?

As ordinary citizens, we owe a duty of care to anyone who enters our home to keep them free from foreseeable injuries that may occur because of our negligence. Despite the fact that each year people are sued for injuries occurring in the home, many people never think about this legal obligation. The lack of concern shown about the duty owed to people entering the home is quite different to the concerns shown about child care centre liability.

A persistent and recurring concern expressed in child care is the issue of personal liability for injuries that may occur to the children while in the care of the centre or to people who enter the centre grounds. Over the years, I have observed a trend that indicates fear of litigation is causing so much distress in the child care environment that carers and parents fear any form of activity. Often this fear of being sued is not justified and has developed because of a poor understanding of the duty of care or over-zealousness on behalf of a few individuals.

What is the legal obligation owed to the people that enter its gates?

The licensee and any employee (whose duties include child care) are required to exercise a duty of care to take reasonable care to protect a child in their care from foreseeable risk or harm or injury.

The mere fact that a child is injured in the absence of any failure of care or conduct on behalf of the centre or the carers will not lead to a successful legal action. There is no legal obligation to ensure that a child is never, ever injured or harmed. The test is whether the harm was foreseeable and whether the standard of care shown was reasonable in terms of how others would have acted to avoid, prevent or minimise the risk of the harm occurring. 'Others' will usually be your peers in the child care industry. The standard of care expected at a centre, especially in terms of supervision, will always be high because the children are so young.

When assessing the standard of care, the courts give particular thought to the licensing regulations because staffing ratios, qualifications and various other safety-based regulations have been set as a means of reducing the risk of injury and accident. If a child is injured because the regulations were not followed, the defence of a legal action will be very difficult.

The centre licensee, as the occupier of the premises, owes a common law duty of care to anyone (including trespassers) who enters the premises. In most circumstances, the concept of vicarious liability will mean the licensee will be held legally responsible for the actions of its employees. An employee may be held personally responsible where he or she is negligent but it will usually be the licensee (who is insured) who will be responsible for the payment of any damages. If an employee acts in a grossly negligent or reckless way or where the injury did not arise out of the employment of the employee, then the employee may be required to pay the claim. This is not the usual situation but it can occur. An occupational health and safety prosecution can also be brought against the individual if his or her action breaches the safety laws.

The best defence to personal injury litigation is commonsense and careful planning. I have been amazed at some of the things that happen in centres where a little commonsense could have avoided so much in the way of pain to the children, distress to the parents and to the carers. Knowing what the regulations and the law require will help. There are always people who are willing to express an opinion but finding out what the requirements really are, as opposed to someone's personal unqualified opinion, will often make the job much easier for all.

Marianne Robinson
Compliance Consultant

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 three years to end 2008.

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 by **30 November 2005.**

Footcare

You worry about your children's teeth, their eyes and other parts of their bodies. But what about their feet, those still-developing feet that have to carry the weight of the body over a lifetime?

Children are not born with perfect feet and their feet should not simply be viewed as a smaller version of an adult foot. The foot of a newborn contains within its structure all the inherited and evolutionary features which may produce a disability in the adult foot. Proper care of the foot initiated in childhood can prevent, in large part, many of the problems seen in the adult foot.

The bones in the feet of young children are still forming; therefore the foot is pliable – allowing abnormal pressure to cause deformities. Normally the most serious foot deformities are picked up soon after a baby is born, however many problems only become apparent as a child starts walking. Neglecting foot health at this time may cause problems in other parts of the body, such as the legs and back. Things to look for in your child include:

- limping;
- lack of participation, or a decrease in the amount of participation, because their legs get tired;
- differences between the feet, such as one foot turning out more than the other;
- complaints of pain in the legs or back; and
- clumsiness.

Babies' feet

Some suggestions to help assure that development proceeds normally include:

- Cover babies' feet loosely. Tight covers restrict movement and can retard normal development.
- Provide an opportunity for exercising the feet. Lying uncovered enables the baby to kick and perform other related motions which prepare the feet for walking.
- Change the baby's position several times a day. Lying too long in one spot, especially on the stomach, can put excessive strain on the feet and legs.

Starting to Walk

A child should never be forced to walk. The average age for a child to begin walking is 12 to 14 months, but it is normal for a child to begin as early as 10 months, while for others it may take up to 18 months.

As a child begins to walk, it is helpful for normal growth and development to use bare feet or socks indoors. This will allow the foot to develop correct musculature and strength, as well as allowing the toes to enhance the grasping action. Outdoors, however, young children's feet should be covered in lightweight, flexible shoes.

Getting older

As a child's feet continue to develop, it may be necessary to change shoe and sock size every few months to allow room for the feet to grow. Shoes or other footwear should never be handed down. As children continue to grow it is important for parents to look out for the following:

- Flat feet
- In-toeing or pigeon-toed gait
- Out-toeing
- Toe-walking or walking on tip-toes

Most of these conditions are a normal part of growth and, left alone, will self-correct by the time your child is about seven years of age. However, if your child is still suffering from any of these conditions at this age or is in pain at any age, professional assessment should be sought. Foot conditions that do not resolve with growth may lead to foot, leg, knee, hip and back pain and may cause a child to alter their gait, leading to further problems.

In most cases these misalignment problems can be simply treated by a podiatrist via footwear and exercises. In more extreme cases, foot orthoses or arch supports may be used. Ideally, to keep your child's feet healthy and pain-free, assessment by a podiatrist should begin soon after your child starts walking and continue on an annual check-up basis. You should not wait until your child experiences pain to act on suspicions of foot problems you had been aware of earlier.

Kylie Endres

Podiatrist

James Street Footcare Centre, Toowoomba

Learning literacy with everyday texts

Children learn best when activities and materials connect to their personal lives and the world they live in. One way to make such connections is to value and use everyday texts from the community and home. This provides opportunities for all children to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do as literacy learners.

For example:

Everyday texts from 'real life' situations can be brought into dramatic play settings in the home, child care and school.

The following story shows the way a kindergarten class established a 'Shoe and Sock' shop in their play corner.

Parents were asked to collect unwanted shoes and shoe boxes for the 'Shoe Shop'. Once these had been brought to the kinder, children used the shoes to play a matching game. Each child was given one shoe and asked to find the person with the matching shoe. In pairs, the children talked about what they knew about shoes and classified the shoes according to styles. The pairs of children then had to find an appropriate size box for their shoes.

To gain a sense of what children knew about buying shoes, the teacher got children to talk about the process of purchasing a pair of shoes. Children mentioned payment – using credit cards or cash and receiving a docket after the purchase.

For their 'Shoe Shop', children priced the shoes with the support of a number chart. Together they put a cash register, a roll of register paper, pencils and paper, a telephone, shopping bags of various sizes, an authentic foot measurer (later the children made their own) and the 'dress up' clothes in the shoe shop.

Making signs

The teacher asked questions to prompt the development of signs for the shop.

- What name could we give to the shop?
- How do we know when the shop is open?
- How do we know where to get out?

In groups the children suggested answers. One child quickly said, 'It is open when it's our school days – Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday.' She then went to the chart displaying the days and took the appropriate days off.

Another child said, 'We need a closed sign too.' After discussing how to get out of the shop, they mentioned the word EXIT and the group excitedly went in search of an EXIT sign.

Operating 'our shop'

The shop was now ready for use and in groups the children played with the process of trying on and buying shoes. The children took on the roles of customer, shop assistant or register operator.

Some children were at the 'scribble stage' of early writing, others used their print environment to support them with words they wanted to write, for example days of the week, 'open', 'closed', or names of children for receipts. Children brought in pictures of different types of shoes to add to the posters for the shop.

By creating the play environment with the children and including signs, texts and real life resources, children experimented with literacy in meaningful play contexts.

Wrapped in Reading

Collecting texts from home and keeping them in a *Wrapped in Reading* folder gives parents, carers and or teachers a way to work together to use 'literacy materials' that are around us all the time.

The following gives an example of how to create a *Wrapped in Reading* folder:

The idea of the *Wrapped in Reading* folders was introduced to parents at a parent information session. It was explained to parents that before an item, such as a cereal box, could go into a folder there should be a conversation between parent and child. The child should recognise the item, with the help of a picture or logo. Items could include food wrappers, newspaper extracts, gift wrap, cards, signs, emails or any other written materials used in the community. Each parent was given a display folder to store the printed text in and an explanatory letter. Children brought their folders and discussed the contents.

The material in the *Wrapped in Reading* folder was used in many ways, including:

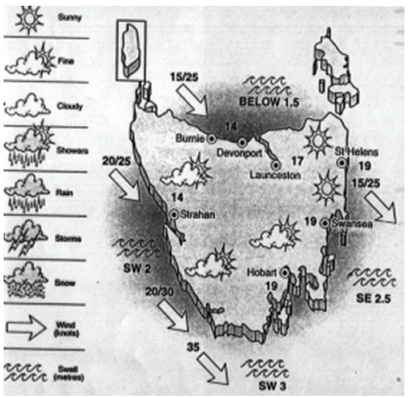
- To find and highlight a specific letter.
- In conjunction with a learning focus, for example children find and sort healthy foods and not healthy foods.
- To sort and graph favourite cereals.

- As a resource in the dramatic play area for children to create their own shopping lists.

The *Wrapped in Reading* folders made the children more aware of the print that surrounds them. Whether the print was on packages in the kitchen, on signs in the supermarkets or on the streets, they were gaining an awareness that there is writing everywhere. Parents shared their children's discoveries with print at home. Ella told her dad that she could see her friend's name 'Rose' on the sauce bottle. Then with much delight her dad covered the word Rose and Ella could read 'ella' in the word 'Rosella' on the sauce bottle.

Using the newspaper

Exploring the weather map from the local newspaper makes a rich learning experience. Children often begin to notice the icons for the types of weather, and these provide a supportive visual for the words that describe the weather conditions. Children like to flip through the pages of the newspaper to locate the daily map and see what the predicted weather details are. They can use the icons to help them 'read' the words and numbers that describe the weather. The icons from the map can be enlarged for use on a class weather map.



Everyday texts

As is evident from the classroom examples, everyday texts can be brought into many learning experiences.

The following is an example in which a prep (five-year-old) class undertook a role play flight to a holiday destination. The role play followed an excursion to the airport and discussion about the travel experiences of the class.

The children chose the destination and set chairs in rows, as if on a plane. They numbered the chairs, organised morning tea on trays – ready to serve during the 'flight', and made boarding passes. They modelled the passes on one child's *Wrapped in Reading* folder. Parents helped the children make name labels for their bags, and weigh them at the check-in centre.

Children assumed their roles and flight numbers were called for boarding. The children checked that they had the right number, and security officers checked the passengers with metal detectors as they boarded the plane. The flight attendants checked each child's boarding pass as they went to their seat on the plane.

During the flight, safety instructions were given and morning tea was served by the flight attendants. When the destination was reached, the children watched a video of one of the children's real holidays at Movie World, Queensland, and everyone wrote a postcard home.

The learning experience involved the use of everyday texts in meaningful situations. After the role play, a class book was made using digital photos. Postcards, airline tickets, and baggage tags were added to the children's *Wrapped in Reading* folders to enhance the collection of environmental print.

Using everyday texts in ways described in this article actively engages children in learning about texts used in their local environment. Providing children with such learning opportunities assists the development of their emerging understandings about literacy.

Christine Topfer is the National Vice-President of Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA).

Bev Moir and **Carolynn Dilger** are early childhood teachers in the Tasmanian education system.

By creating the play environment with the children and including signs, texts and real-life resources, children experimented with literacy in meaningful play contexts.

What's happening

2005 BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The Children's Book Council of Australia announced the winners on 19 August 2005.

The winners for the early childhood and picture book sections are:

Book of the Year: Early Childhood – Mem Fox and Judy Horacek; *Where is the Green Sheep?* (Viking, Penguin Books Australia).

Picture Book of the Year – Alison Lester; *Are We There Yet?* (Viking, Penguin Books Australia).

The honour books for both categories are:

Early Childhood – Stephen Michael King, *Mutt Dog* (Scholastic Press, Scholastic Australia); Margaret Wild and Donna Rawlins, *Seven More Sleeps* (Working Title Press).

Picture Book of the Year – Jeannie Baker, *Belonging* (Walker Books); David Miller, *Refugees* (Lothian Books).

Winners' details kindly supplied by the Children's Book Council of Australia.
For more information on Book Week and the Children's Book Council, visit: **www.cbc.org.au.**

Harmony Day

Put Harmony Day 2006 on the Calendar!

Early childhood professionals across Australia are being encouraged to bring out their 2006 calendars and mark down 21 March as Harmony Day. In 2005, teachers and students in around 2000 schools used Harmony Day to celebrate the cultural diversity of their communities and say 'no' to racism. In 2006, special efforts are being made for early childhood organisations to become involved. The 2006 Harmony Day website will feature a special section with suggestions for classroom and early childhood activities and snapshots of how others across Australia celebrate the day.

Harmony Day is part of the Australian Government's Living in Harmony initiative.

For further details, please contact:

Internet: www.harmony.gov.au

Tel: 1800 331 100

Email: harmonyday@immi.gov.au

Bushells fundraising initiative – Community Cash

What: A national initiative giving 546 Australian community groups a share in $500,000 in cash grants.
Bushells Community Cash is giving amounts from $250 – $25,000, and it's as simple as having a cup of tea! There will be quarterly random draws, and at the end of the year-long competition many groups will be flush with funds to spend on essential items such as equipment for the band, sporting goods and computers.

How: register your community group (whether it be a school, sporting club, child care centre or scout group) online at: www.bushellscommunitycash.com.au, and start collecting tokens from Bushells and Lan-Choo tea.

When: start collecting today, as just 50 tokens puts you in the running – the program finishes in July 2006.

NIFTeY Conference

National Investment for the Early Years

Conference dates: 8–9 February 2006

Location: Sydney, Australia

Keynote Speakers: Professors Richard Tremblay and Jim Heckman

Theme: Prevention: Invest now or pay later

For further details please contact:

NIFTeY Conference Secretariat
c/o Conference Action Pty Ltd
PO Box 576 Crows Nest NSW 1585
Tel: (02) 9437 9333 Fax: (02) 9901 4586
Email: louise@conferenceaction.com.au

National Recycling Week 7-13th November 2005

A number of recycling campaigns are underway. For more information, visit: www.planetark.com/nrw

For information on what can be recycled in your area, visit: www.RecyclingNearYou.com.au and enter your postcode or suburb.

NATIONAL RECYCLING WEEK
PLANET ARK

Updated Child Safety & Education Chart Released!

Released for 2005/06, the *National Guide to Child Safety & Education* chart covers all the latest safety information and products available to childcare professionals and parents.

For your free chart, please call Pro-Visual Publishing on (02) 8272 2611 or email enquiries@provisual.com.au.

Reconsidering social justice or just social considerations?

The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics

In this article Karen Martin reflects on her time as an early childhood practitioner, and encourages the current review of the Early Childhood of Australia Code of Ethics to recognise that similar values can be experienced and carried out in a plurality of ways.

Considerations

There are times in our lives, as individuals and professionals, when we come to reflect on and perhaps reconsider the many things we are doing, how we are doing these and most importantly, why we are doing them. Due to a recent change of job, I found myself thinking this would mean moving on from early childhood education and I wasn't sure how I felt about this; since I would not be working with children or families directly, nor would I be working closely with an early childhood organisation. This proved somewhat premature, because I came to realise that early childhood education hadn't yet finished with me. Being asked to write this article is a case in point. Another is in being aware of the review of the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics.

Some 15 years ago, the then Australian Early Childhood Association presented us with a set of key statements in the form of a Code of Ethics that underpin the core values, beliefs and practices we share as early childhood educators. This has been a key point in our development, and an important milestone. I know where I was and what I was doing then, but I'd like to pose two questions for you: 'Where were you then?' and 'What were you doing: professionally and personally?'

Considerations of social justice

At the time the Code of Ethics was presented, matters of social justice were gaining momentum at the national and state government levels to bring about changes to increase the life chances of individuals and groups and for their fuller participation in society. In this time the Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples had just begun and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation began a decade of programs, debates and discussions. But in thinking back, it's inevitable to think of this now, when the term social justice is still not understood and is rarely mentioned. Perhaps it is has slipped away from our conversations and our consciousness and is therefore no longer relevant.

Social justice goals as just social behaviours

So, with this change of job, I thought about the professional roles I once held and the children and adults I worked with over the last 15 or so years. In this case I am talking mostly about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, but I am also referring to the many, many people (teachers, individuals, professionals etc.) who I met, worked with or alongside in bringing about stronger experiences, realities and outcomes for all children, their families and communities. This is social justice in action at the professional and personal levels. So it is multi-layered and there are multiple points at which you can take part. These relationships are multiple, dynamic and complex.

However, inevitably I thought further about the children I taught and one particular group of children came to the fore, because teaching them was indeed multi-layered. In other words, this group was very demanding to teach and, in saying this, my mind clasped onto those moments when the choices I made now caused me some discomfort to think about. But I somehow couldn't totally agree with this statement and after a while I reconsidered my role with the children. I then began to see the power of what was really happening, particularly to me. I came to see how this group were in reality instrumental in teaching me to be stronger in my commitment to the Code. So I felt a need to express this in a way to show what I had learned. The following points are part of this reconsideration of what these children had taught me:

- I learned to laugh because it's a good way to connect and it's a good leveller in times of confusion, stress or tension;
- I learned about courage because I had very good role models (23 in fact) who let me experience my own courage in a safe and trusting environment;

- I learned about resilience because they never gave up on me;
- I learned to be a stronger learner and to relish this role;
- I learned how to mediate: mostly my own role – so it was a process of empowerment and not one of overpowering the children;
- I learned that children are not useless, powerless, hopeless or helpless but sometimes teachers are;
- I learned that I'm not perfect – ouch! Or have I ever been, nor will I ever be, nor do I need to be; and
- I learned that to act just socially is to also be socially just.

Reconsidering social justice in just social ways

So, social justice is not something that happens 'out there' or because governments allocate resources for social justice programs. It happens as we enact those core values stated within our Code of Ethics. It happens every moment we make a decision not to judge a child because his or her parent doesn't pay their fees in advance or on time. It happens every moment when we choose not to judge our peers because they do things a little differently or they don't dress in similar ways. It happens every moment when we do those things we expect of children, like being polite and friendly; saying 'hello'; helping to tidy-up and to look after one another.

But even though we might share the same values, how we experience these or get to live them out is not the same. In much the same way, it is socially unjust to have one's values, beliefs and ethics measured against a resourceful majority or powerful minority. Just as the earlier examples provide, we really come to acknowledge how complex but necessary this is to understand, so that it is a conscious part of our roles and our profession.

So now that the Code of Ethics is undergoing a review, or being considered for it's relevance in these more current contexts, perhaps it could also give more emphasis to what it is children seek from us, and what we have learned from them. Likewise, this could also include a reconsideration of what we have learned from their families, our peers and colleagues. Perhaps then the Code would be even more valuable and stand as strongly as it has in these previous 15 years, and serve us well for the next 15 years.

In closing, however, the message I want to leave you with is that most of the time, the simple, time-tested actions and beliefs we know as early childhood professionals are those through which, being just and social, can achieve social justice. And it begins and continues with the actions of individuals, who are parts of groups such as families or professional bodies like ours that then make up our society. In this way, whatever considerations and reconsiderations are given in reviewing the Code of Ethics, it is built on a framework that aligns with and makes social justice goals achievable and this can only strengthen our relatedness to children, to families, to our peers and to ourselves.

Karen Martin presented the Barbara Creaser Memorial Lecture at the Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference in Brisbane.

Ready set read

I often wonder in the literacy debate whether many of the 'experts' have actually taught young children to read. If they had, they would know that teaching reading is a complex and multidimensional process.

Most experienced teachers focus on a combination of four main areas: word recognition; phonemic skills; writing; and reading for fluency and meaning. They use a range of strategies simultaneously to 'immerse' children in literacy. They encourage families to read with their children. By the end of the first year of school, depending on children's 'readiness' at school entry, many – if not most – children will be well on the way to independent reading.

'Readiness' – the concept, if not the term – is central to reading. Reading requires a repertoire of prerequisite understandings, skills and attitudes, including: confidence with spoken English (in most cases); following instructions; enjoying books and 'reading'; drawing and describing drawings; differentiating between shapes, colours, letters and words; classifying objects; and hearing rhyming words and beginning- and ending-sounds in words.

Development of the linguistic, auditory, visual and perceptual skills needed for reading tends to happen in the preschool years. But many children will not build these experiences until the first year or two of school.

There is a substantial 'achievement' or 'developmental' range in the first year of school. This is related to a combination of chronological age, social and cognitive maturity, and experience. Some children are already reading at school entry, so the teacher's task is to develop reading independence, fluency and comprehension. Many children have the social and cognitive prerequisite experiences to begin a formal reading program right away. Other children need rich and focused language, literacy, play, painting and drawing, and construction activities to build the prerequisite 'readiness' skills and understandings.

Importantly, experienced teachers plan a literacy program based on children's individual needs. 'One-size-fit-all' programs result in some children being labelled as problem readers by the second or third year of school. Other children are bored by a repeat of preschool play and literacy activities.

Experienced teachers accommodate children's social and cognitive maturity in their pedagogy. They do *all* of the following:

Language activities – talk with children; model mature language; involve children in singing, rhymes and poems; play word and sound games; have children tell stories; and discuss what they are doing and why.

Read – read and read ... to the whole class, to groups and individually; include books with rhythm and predictability – such as books with rhyming words – to build fluency with the process and structure of reading; have children 'read' and make 'experience' books using everyday experiences in their own words and sentences; focus on the structure of books and text; actively engage families in reading activities; 'connect' with the home.

Teach whole words – teach children familiar words such as 'mum', 'dad', 'car', 'television', 'cat', 'dog', 'house', and so on. Children use these words and concepts in drawings, sentences and stories. Children must build up a large 'sight' vocabulary.

Teach 'word attack' or 'decoding' skills – we only learn to read once. Once we can read or 'decode' in our first language, the skills can be applied to similar languages. We mightn't understand what we're reading, and pronunciation might be funny, but we know how to 'crack the code'. Single sounds and sound combinations are taught through games and activities and recognising and writing letters and words in context. Contextual cues, guessing and pictures also help with decoding text.

Written language has a phonemic structure that children must learn in order to read and write. In English, every phoneme (or sound) has a corresponding grapheme (a letter or combination of letters). If we don't teach these explicitly, many children will struggle with reading and writing.

The key to an effective reading program in the early years is a combination of strategies – strengthening spoken vocabulary; listening to, reading and telling stories; learning whole words; using decoding skills or phonemic skills; writing words, sentences and stories; and learning about meaning (comprehension). Experience, practice and reinforcement in familiar real-life contexts are at the heart of an experienced teacher's program.

Alison Elliott

Have you joined Early Childhood Australia?

Membership enables you to:

- be a voice for young children
- receive discounted access to our subscriptions and conferences
- be kept abreast of early childhood news and happenings
- network with others in the field through your local branch
- receive all of this and it's tax deductible for early childhood professionals!

Become a member now!

Standard annual memberships from $85. Discounts are available for students and health care cardholders.

Subscribe to our great publications & SAVE!

Research in Practice Series
Practical approaches for those challenging issues that arise in the care and education of young children
$42.40 (4 issues)

Every Child magazine
Full of informative articles on diverse issues and engaging interviews with respected experts and practitioners
$47.20 (4 issues)

Australian Journal of Early Childhood
All the essential research and debates in contemporary early childhood education
$70.00 (4 issues)

and for the parents that you know:
Everyday Learning Series
Simple, creative ideas to enhance children's interactions with the world around them
$40.00 (4 issues)

Tax deductible for early childhood professionals

To subscribe or become a member call toll free 1800 356 900
Email: eca@earlychildhood.org.au
Visit: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Visit Early Childhood Australia's NEW website

- Access free quality-assured information
- Be an advocate for children – become a member
- Explore our early childhood online catalogue
- ECA WebWatch – your free monthly e-newsletter

We've done the searching for you – save time and access hundreds of quality-assured resources!

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

- Supporting best practice
  Access relevant, quality-assured information to help you in your work with children and families

  Hundreds of free fact sheets, articles and papers
- Innovative navigation
  move easily around the site and find what you need
- Keep up to date
  Stay informed about latest news and events
- Secure ecommerce
  Australia's largest online catalogue of early childhood quality-assured books

Early Childhood Australia welcomes your feedback
call 1800 356 900 (freecall) or email eca@earlychildhood.org.au

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au