EVERY Child
Australia's premier national early childhood magazine
VOL.12 NO. 3 2006

Picture book agenda
Disability or diversity?
Including children with autism
Where are the gifted under fives?
Assisting inclusion through writing

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OUR FAMILY IS STARTING SCHOOL
A Handbook for Parents and Carers
By Bob Perry & Sue Dockett
ISBN: 1-876138-25-4
P/B - 111 pages - $29.95

STARTING SCHOOL
A Handbook for Educators
By Sue Dockett & Bob Perry
ISBN: 1-876138-24-6
P/B - 224 pages - $49.95

Starting School and its companion *Our Family is Starting School* come as as a result of research conducted by the authors. Both books emphasis the importance of relationships and people working together to help create a positive transition to school. *Starting School* gives details on planning effective transition programs and is an essential resource for teachers of both preschool and first year at school teachers as well as students. *Our Family is Starting School* highlights many things families can do to support their child's transistion to school.

TRAINING OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE STAFF
Before School, After School and Vacation Care
By Roberta L Newman
Adapted for Australia by Marli Traill
Community Child Care Assoc. Vic.
ISBN:1-876138-24-6
P/B - 96 pages - $49.95

This book is designed as a tool for school-age co-ordinators who often have limited resources and time to devote to staff training. Some of the topics explored in this handbook include: understanding and respond to children's needs, interests and concerns; building positive relationships with children; providing safe, effective supervision; how to manage conflicts among children; and how to make families feel welcome.

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

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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.

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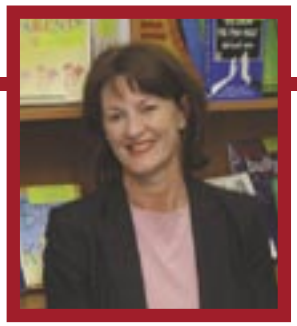

Making inclusion educationally significant

Issues of inclusion and early intervention are critical for the community and for the early childhood sector. High-quality early education and care programs have a positive impact on young children's learning and development; on their adjustment to school; and on longer-term social and academic outcomes. This is especially true for children with extra developmental and learning needs, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Issues of inclusion are more than about integrating students with a disability. Successful inclusion requires educators to implement programs that have educational significance for each and every child. They must ensure that diverse groups of children thrive. Centres require cultures, policies and practices that make a difference.

While research shows the importance of whole-centre policies and leadership on outcomes for children, it also highlights the key role of individual educators' competence in improving practice. Fundamental to successful experiences and outcomes for children is the skill and competence of the practitioners who work with them on a day-to-day basis. Developing practitioner competence requires strong pre-employment education programs and ongoing professional development.

Children with 'special needs' are similar to other children in most ways. 'Disability' is not homogeneous and each child has unique needs. Children with established risks such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy or spina bifida; those with early health risks such as very low birth weight or symptomatic drug withdrawal; and those who are at risk from poverty, abuse or parents' mental illness have unique social and learning needs, although generally within a similar developmental sequence.

Every child's pattern of development has its own personal timetable. Without individually relevant support and curriculum, inclusion is little more than babysitting. Effective inclusion requires skilled educators who are appropriately prepared, funded and supported by specialists, as needed.

This issue of *Every Child* has been rewarding and easy to put together, as much is happening to promote more equitable experiences and outcomes for children, and there are new insights into ways of fostering development through integrated, functional and inclusive settings. The issue focuses on practices that have functional outcomes for children and their families, and that involve parents as collaborators in planning and implementation. But it's not all smooth sailing. Achieving the best fit for children and families is a challenging task.

Tony Shaddock's research shows that educators find inclusion demanding, but the strategies and adaptations that work for children with disabilities tend to be effective for all students. Critically, practitioners need special support in order for inclusion to be effective for children. Similarly, Sue Thomson and Catherine Underwood's early numeracy research shows the importance of practitioner skill in providing that optimal fit between children's needs and their day-to-day realities. My own Telstra Foundation projects—to provide responsive programs for children with challenging behaviours and to optimise learning for those with unique developmental strengths and talents—show that educators often feel alone, isolated, under-prepared, overwhelmed and unsupported in dealing with diversity. Mimi Wellisch has highlighted the special responsibility of educators to identify and then foster knowledge and skills development for children with enhanced learning potential.

The new and sometimes confronting social factors impacting on Australian families and children make strong early childhood care and education programs more important than ever. And if more on-the-ground evidence of the benefits of community partnerships is needed, Maureen Leahy provides it. For some 30 years her playgroup has demonstrated the positive effects of parent, school and community partnerships, especially for children with the highest needs.

All children need growth-focused learning programs to optimise their development, but vulnerable and disadvantaged children benefit most, especially where parenting support is also provided. As highlighted again by the new report, *What about the kids? Policy directions for improving the experiences and young children in a changing world* (www.niftey.cyh.com), quality programs, quality staff and quality experiences and outcomes for children are inextricably linked, but require strong regulatory environments.

Closing the developmental gaps between children with different learning needs is a major challenge for early childhood care and education. Inclusion should be about providing the richest and highest-quality learning environments for all children, especially those with the greatest needs. Poor-quality programs have no benefit or, worse still, can be damaging.

Intuitively we feel that inclusion works, but it's not easy to provide optimum experiences for each child and family when funding and resources are eroding. There is an urgent need for greater comparability of input, experience and outcomes in order to provide targeted programs that meet the needs of each and every child and family. Importantly, as we show in this issue of *Every Child*, boosting equity and inclusion requires increasing support of the education dimension of early childhood programs.

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 publishing@earlychildhood.org.au

Every Child giveaway

Early Childhood Australia is delighted to offer our readers three *Rainbow Week* prize packs. These magnetic calendars are an excellent way to help children grasp the cyclical nature of time, not to mention assist in developing numeracy and literacy skills. The charts are especially good at creating security through knowledge of routine and events.

Win

Each prize includes:

- a *Rainbow Week* preschool pack containing a magnetic rainbow wheel with movable hand, parent instruction booklet, word and picture magnets, blank magnets and a resealable storage envelope
- a school upgrade pack containing extra picture and word magnets, featuring school activities.

Every Child: Have your say

In order to win a pack all you have to do is submit a letter to the editor, voicing your opinion about the latest *Every Child* or any other issue facing the early childhood field. Your name will be placed into a random draw. Entries will be accepted until COB 8 September. The best letters will be published in upcoming issues of *Every Child* and winners announced in our next issue.

Every Child is being received very positively overseas, as Leonardo Yanez discusses:

Every Child seems an excellent tool for continuous learning on early childhood care and development. In a few words, I have found it inspirational. I wish we could count on a publication like this in Spanish and Portuguese.

I have had the chance to show your magazine to my colleagues here in Havana and a few days ago in Brazil and they have agreed with me about the usefulness of the publication, wishing they could count on a similar tool for their respective countries.

Leonardo Yanez

Congratulations to Gnowangerup Family Support Association, Jeanette Harrison, Malak Family Centre, St Stephens Preschool, Carole Ford and Claire Burrows who each receive a Decoré Coles Cares lunchbox, growth chart, fridge magnet and Nourish Whole Kids organic food pack.

Claire Burrows writes about the value of Dr Philip Morgan's article 'Preparing children for positive sporting experiences', published in *Every Child*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2006:

I am the parent of a six-year-old boy who is very enthusiastic about sport but, due to a mild physical disability, can experience some difficulties with gross motor coordination. I applaud any article that emphasises the importance of creating positive sporting experiences over competition, especially for young children.

Because of my son's disability he is not able to run as fast, or throw as well as some of the children in his class, but loves to be part of a team and join in with everyone else. When the emphasis of school sports is wholly on competition and winning, the self-esteem and health of children like my son can suffer. But when sports are about fun, making friends and increasing personal fitness everyone can participate and come away with a sense of achievement.

So thank you again for highlighting this important issue.

Claire Burrows

Inclusion and support in the protection of our children's rights

Robin Sullivan provides insight into her career-long devotion to the education, care and protection of children, and discusses how we must always keep inclusion and support uppermost in our minds.

When I reflect on all of my achievements, the image that connects them all is that of children. As a teacher, Commissioner for Children and Young People and now Director-General of the Department of Child Safety, my concern and interest has always been for children.

Of course, I would not claim—nor would I want to—that my enthusiasm for children is limited to the professional. Over the past two years, we have welcomed three grandchildren into our family and while these little people are a constant source of delight to a proud grandparent, they are also a personal reminder of my work to improve the lives and opportunities of all children.

Having grandchildren has certainly refreshed my understanding of the importance of the early years. I have long been a strong advocate for initiatives which promote the early years as central in establishing healthy foundations for life. My current focus as Director-General of the Department of Child Safety is the impact of child abuse and neglect on children. How can we protect and care for children without considering the importance of inclusion and support?

At times I am concerned that we may overlook some forms of harm by placing most of our attention on the shock of sexual abuse. When we consider the impact of harm—not only to our children but also to families and communities—we must always bear in mind the effect of neglect, as well as physical and emotional abuse.

In our department the importance of the early years is acknowledged through our practice, and our case plans for children under the age of three are reviewed every three months. This reflects how much children grow and develop during those years and how quickly their needs change.

One of our initiatives is the Referral for Active Intervention, which aims to support families with children from birth to eight years before they enter the child protection system. This is one way we can assist families and communities to enhance the skills and resources they need to meet the challenging job of nurturing children.

As Director-General I hold the privilege and responsibility of being guardian for children in care in Queensland. As guardian, I am focused on their rights and opportunities, and am concerned with how children in care are supported and included within their communities. It is my aspiration that they should be permitted to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as every child in Queensland.

To ensure that children in care have the best possible start in life, we have established education support plans to meet their individual learning and development needs. With health colleagues we have also developed the Child Health Passport to make certain that all children who enter care have their individual health needs assessed and met.

Some children—for example, those with disabilities—need even more encouragement to ensure they meet their potential. I find it staggering that some studies suggest children with disabilities may be several times more likely to be at risk of abuse and neglect.

To support children with disabilities and others with complex and extreme needs, we have worked with Education Queensland, Queensland Health and Disability Services Queensland to establish teams to deliver therapeutic and behaviour support services across the state.

The success of these initiatives brings me to one of my passions: engaging the community in addressing harm. I believe that it is only through a collective effort that we can truly and meaningfully address the needs of children at risk of harm and make a lasting difference in the lives of children, families and communities.

One of Queensland's enduring and most-damaging legacies is the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection system. As Government Champion of the Indigenous community of Cherbourg, it has been my privilege to be part of their response to the harm experienced by their children. The strong and inspirational women of Cherbourg were not prepared to condone child abuse in their community, and their passion and energy has inspired the men to come on board. It is one example of an Indigenous community addressing issues of child protection and making a difference.

My thoughts often turn to the timeless adage 'it takes a village to raise a child'. I also believe it takes a child to raise a community, and I constantly marvel at how vulnerable children can be a rallying point for communities to come together and make a difference.

Robin Sullivan
Director-General
Queensland Department of Child Safety

Inclusion in Early Childhood Australia's code of ethics



Viewing the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) code of ethics through an inclusive lens is a problematic but vital task in order to construct an inspirational document that assists ECA members in their work with young children and families. It is problematic because, as soon as you include one person or group, you may exclude another. But it is vital because we want our code of ethics to be relevant to all of ECA's members, fulfilling all of their individual requirements for guidance.

In October 2005, ECA distributed a survey that asked members and interested parties to comment on a number of points:

- Who uses the code of ethics?
- When, how and why?
- What do people like about the code and what do they think is missing?
- Which format do they prefer? In what other useful ways could the code be presented?
- Are there parties that are not represented in the code that should be?

Survey results

We received over 200 replies and this information was analysed by the working party. Generally, the results showed that ECA members held the code of ethics in high esteem and while it was not always used formally when making ethical decisions, it was still a useful touchstone. The participants also overwhelmingly agreed with the need to make changes which would not affect the integrity of the original code, but would make it more relevant for the next decade.

The issues most prominent in responses can be broadly clustered around the theme of inclusion: participants acknowledged that there were certain stakeholders missing and silences on important matters. The survey indicated that members did not want to see the format dramatically changed, although new support materials to assist its use would be welcomed.

The new draft

Once this information was synthesised by the working party, a small group met in Melbourne in May and drafted a revised code of ethics—an experience that stimulated much debate. The revised version contains new sections concerned with commitments to tertiary students, employers and research. New issues include the notion of children as active citizens living in a global community; the impact of media and information communication technologies; health issues; different family contexts; and the importance of conservation and sustainability.

The survey also indicated that people wanted the code to reflect different cultural, ethnic and kinship contexts wherever possible and, thus, we needed to write the code using broader terms or principles, so that people working with children and families in diverse communities throughout Australia would be able to relate their professional and local contexts to the document. A further feature in the revision was to make explicit the values held by ECA.

Further development

The next stage of the agenda is for members (and other interested parties) to examine the new draft. The working party does not 'own' the document and looks forward to feedback and debates within branches. ECA members will differ on certain issues and this is very healthy, as a profession is only as robust as the considered debate it permits.

If you would like to comment individually—rather than through your branch—you can find the new daft and contact details on the Early Childhood Australia website www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code_of_ethics/early_childhood_australias_code_of_ethics.html

We would like to thank the original code of ethics working party. Every time we sat down to work on the code we are amazed at how 'cutting edge' the original document was. The current party hopes that they have captured the views of our members and synthesised this data from the literature review in ways that will match the aspirations of all those who work with young children and their families.

Lennie Barblett and Anne Kennedy

Ethics Working Party

In recent times the term 'inclusion', which was traditionally used to ensure that children with a disability were included in services, has taken on a wider meaning to include children with other needs such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Government departments, community groups and individuals now widely use the term, although often in contradictory and possibly misleading ways.

Inclusion and inclusive practice: Meeting the diverse needs of our children

Supporting inclusion

The Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs recently introduced the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP). IPSP is a new integrated and consolidated approach to meeting the professional and inclusion support requirements of childcare services. The aim of the IPSP is to 'promote and maintain high quality care and inclusion for all children in eligible childcare services, by increasing the skill level of carers and service staff in line with nationally consistent principles' (FaCSIA, 2006). The philosophy of inclusion and the implementation of inclusive practices are intrinsic to this program.

Broadly speaking, inclusion is about creating a sense of belonging for all children, families and staff in which diverse identities, languages, values, experiences, skills and interests can be expressed and given the opportunity to develop. Inclusion takes into consideration the needs and interests of a diverse range of individuals and, so, it is necessarily a very general term employed in a variety of ways.

Inclusive practices ensure that the diversity of individual and group needs within different situations are met. While the goal of the service is to develop an inclusive program, the paths that lead to this will vary according to the needs of the child and the family. Inclusion must not be seen as 'one size fits all' approach.

Multiculturalism and inclusion

In accordance with the basic principles and philosophy of multiculturalism in Australia, childcare staff are encouraged to develop programs that support children in exploring similarity and difference, fostering pride in their cultural and linguistic heritage. Through this exploration, children begin to understand concepts such as empathy, respect and tolerance.

Inclusive practices are not about getting children to 'fit in', or to participate in the same way as everybody else: they are about acknowledging that there is no 'right way'. The things that make children different—their cultural and linguistic backgrounds—are identified as a strength, and staff are encouraged to develop programs which focus and build on their strength.

Disability and inclusion

Inclusive practices to care for children with disabilities focus on similarities rather than differences. By providing a worker to care not solely for a child with a disability, but for the needs of a whole group, inclusion becomes associated with equal participation. Outside workers support staff by giving them the freedom to develop ways to help children with disabilities participate as equal members of a group:

'The philosophy of inclusion recognises the diversity that is part of our society and promotes equal rights for all individuals to participate in the activities and services provided by our community.' (Playworks, 2000)

Inclusion support facilitators

The inclusive practices which underpin the notion of inclusion are quite complex and inclusion support facilitators (ISFs) play a key role. ISFs are predominantly specialists in inclusive support practice and modeling. They work directly with childcare services to support staff in a variety of ways such as linking professionals, community groups and organisations; facilitating skills development; helping services to access specialised equipment; assisting inclusion readiness planning; and developing service support plans.

Daniel attends a centre-based long day care service. He has significant delays in motor development and is vision impaired. Inclusion support facilitators helped staff to develop a program to ensure that the needs of Daniel and other children were met. For example, supportive seating was provided to enable Daniel to participate in table-top activities with his peers.

Timothy has Down Syndrome, is non verbal and displays challenging behaviours. An ISF facilitated visits from Timothy's therapists and early intervention teachers, which enabled staff to gather relevant information that would encourage social interaction with his peers. Makaton (keyword signing) is now an integral part of the room's program for all children.

ISFs focus on the following priority groups:

- Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Children with ongoing high-support needs, including children with a disability.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

(FaCSIA, 2006)

FKA Children's Services has been funded under the new program to support ISFs with professional development and mentoring.

Suk Kwan had been living in China with her grandparents for the previous 18 months. She recently returned to Australia and started family day care (FDC). Here she only spoke Mandarin and became very distressed during routine times, often to the degree that she would vomit at meal times. ISFs were able to work with the FDC fieldworker and carer to create a plan and identify the requirements for bicultural support. This led to the carer developing a culturally responsive routine, the requisite skills to communicate with Suk Kwan and obtaining recipes from her mother, to ensure that meal times were more inclusive.

Tamarah and her family are Karen and had been living in a refugee camp on the Thai/Burmese border for the previous nine years, where Tamarah was born. The family arrived in Australia 3 months ago and Tamarah had been attending child care for 2 weeks. She was distressed on arrival and spends most of her day crying in the corner. Staff tried to develop a relationship with Tamarah's mother but this was difficult because she spoke limited English and there were no other Karen families at the centre. ISFs were able to support the staff by developing a service support plan which identified the need for training about caring for refugee children. This enabled staff to communicate with Tamarah and her family, learn about the Karen culture and develop culturally responsive play environments.

The following principles are used by inclusion support facilitators to support services in their inclusive practices:

- Inclusive practice ensures that the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society is reflected in the service.
- All children and families are able to participate equally in the service.
- The delivery of the service meets the needs of all children and families.
- The individual's self-esteem and his/her respect for, and understanding of, others is enhanced.
- Staff are supported to develop and provide culturally and linguistically responsive services.
- Communities can participate in the development and delivery of services.

conclusion

The concept of 'inclusive practices' provides a framework for ensuring access and participation of children with additional needs. While the broad goal of inclusion is shared by each of the identified priority groups, there are many approaches to inclusion. Focusing on the uniqueness of each group will ensure that the development of programs and practices are developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate, respectful and relevant.

Melinda Chapman

FKA Children's Services Inc.

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Redefining 'inclusion'

The term 'inclusion' has traditionally been used to describe bringing children with disabilities into regular settings, rather than placing them in 'special' facilities. The 1992 *Disability Discrimination Act* confirmed that public institutions are legally obliged to provide services for all members of the community. The Tasmanian Department of Education also feels an ethical obligation to give all young people 'a fair go'. We believe that every child benefits from the experience of 'difference', which encourages tolerance, kindness and understanding.

Marnie is a little girl who wins hearts with her big smile. She has a number of disabilities and communicates through a machine. All the other children love Marnie and they wait politely for her to respond when her name is called. Jake, who is a tough little boy, becomes a different person when he helps Marnie: gentle, sensitive and caring.

Changing the way we include

Recently, the Department developed professional learning materials for schools and childcare practitioners. They decided it was time to redefine inclusion. In doing so, they recognised that schools and services deal on a daily basis with children who have a wide range of strengths and needs, such as:

- Indigenous children
- young people who come from other countries and/or speak a language other than English at home
- children with disabilities or diagnosed disorders
- children who are gifted
- those from families struggling with poverty or mental health problems.

Schools and children's services are microcosms of society and are constantly faced with the challenge of providing for all. The level of access, participation and success available to the most vulnerable children is the true measure of quality provision.

Maria recently arrived from Africa. She had been living with her family in a refugee camp from birth. When she first started child care she screamed when anyone touched her. Her carers found an interpreter who spoke Maria's dialect and talked to her Auntie who explained that she 'thought the bad men had come to take her away'. The Inclusion Support Team worked with the staff to develop ways to communicate with Maria and her family.

Sam is a little boy with sight and hearing impairment. His teacher moved groups of children to Sam's table so that he can use his special equipment in the company of his friends. The other children try to keep the noise down because they know Sam has problems discerning speech from other sounds.

Jason loves football, but often gets very angry. His teacher said she 'realised Jason was a distressed little boy, with a lot of hurtful things happening in his life'. She believes that everyone is capable of change and so persisted with continuous acts of kindness. Now the team celebrates with Jason when he gets through a match without 'losing it'.

A package of materials on inclusion is being distributed to schools and children's services locations. It includes:

- a book exploring ideas about difference and discrimination
- a DVD containing personal stories of children and families
- descriptions of Inclusive Practice Teaching Standards
- a set of workshops about personalising learning
- a DVD showcasing quality inclusive practice
- a pamphlet for parents called *A Fair Go for All*.

The value of inclusion

Schools and services that work hard to include children who are different become thoughtful, caring places in which everyone benefits. They look closely at the beliefs, behaviours and ways of operating in their setting to make sure there are no unnecessary barriers to children's learning. They work with families to support all children. By making changes to be more inclusive they become better places. By creating welcoming communities, they are building a more inclusive society.

Jenni Connor

Department of Education
Tasmania

Growing Up in Australia:

Researching the early development of our children

In 2004, over 10,000 children and families around Australia agreed to take part in *Growing Up in Australia*, a landmark national study that is recording the development of children every two years. The study is designed to identify policy opportunities for improving support for children and their families, and for early intervention and prevention strategies. *Growing Up in Australia* is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs through the Government's *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*. It is being conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and a group of leading researchers from around Australia.

Focus of the study

The 5000 infants and 5000 four- to five-year-olds who participated in 2004 are now two years older and, in 2006, *Growing Up in Australia* is returning to these children and their families to develop our understanding of the pathways that lead to various outcomes for children.

Children's early education and care experiences are a vital part of their lives and substantially influence their development. In the early years, children need to develop positive attitudes to learning and have experiences that promote academic, emotional and social competence. Early learning is a complex process, dependent on children's experiences within their family, social and cultural contexts, as well as on their physical health and wellbeing, temperamental factors such as attention and persistence, and cognitive and language skills.

Growing Up in Australia provides a unique opportunity to examine these issues with a nationally representative sample of Australian children. Two of the many questions being addressed about children's development and educational outcomes are:

1. what experiences support children's emerging literacy and numeracy? For example, what is the impact of factors such as exposure to books, storytelling and other literacy-related activities in the home and in care and education settings?
2. which early childhood experiences promote a good start in learning? For example, does attendance at preschool and/or other early childhood services affect the transition to school, and the outcomes for children at school?

Past results

In 2004, over 5000 educators and carers of the children participating in the study were approached to provide information about their early learning experience.

Through information obtained from them and parents of the study children, it was established that:

- almost all of the four- to five-year-old children were interested in books, with over 60 per cent of the children interested in reading and 30 per cent being at the stage where they were reading simple words
- 30 per cent of children appeared to be upset or angry when their parent left them in care or school, however 96 per cent of children were involved in an activity within three minutes of the parent leaving
- 97 per cent of parents were satisfied or very satisfied with the care their child received.

What to expect

The second stage will follow the same process as the initial study. Interviewers will seek parental permission to approach the child's carer/educator to take part in the study and will encourage parents to discuss the study with them. Following this, a short questionnaire will be sent to the child's carer/educator. As previously, the interviewers and personnel involved will be subject to the provisions of *Commonwealth Crimes Act 1914*, Section 70, 'Disclosure of information by Commonwealth officers'. Information provided will also be protected under the *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Privacy Amendments Act 2001*.

This information is vital to the success of the study, so it is hoped that all professionals approached will participate by completing the brief questionnaire.

Siobhan O'Halloran

Graduate Survey Officer
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Contact details

For further information about *Growing Up in Australia* visit **www.aifs.gov.au/growingup**, email **growingup@aifs.gov.au** or phone the Australian Institute of Family Studies on **03 9214 7888**.

The new playground safety standards

The design and installation of fixed playequipment is prescribed by safety standards. These standards are engineering-based, concentrating on the materials used and the designed structure. The ones which will probably most affect your playground are:

- *AS/NZS4422:1996 Playground surfacing: Specifications, requirements and test method*
- *AS/4585:2004 Fixed play equipment*

In terms of responsibility, management and staff are required to ensure:

1. a safe area (which relates to fencing, equipment structure etc.)
2. safe learning-through-play.

The safety standards are only capable of addressing the first objective and, even then, are set out in such technical terms that they are difficult for a non-engineer to know whether a piece of fixed equipment or playground surfacing complies.

The role of standards

Standards do not claim to deliver safe playgrounds, even though some stakeholders think they do. The intent of these documents is to 'minimise the risk of injury occurring and the severity of any injury which may occur'. Generally, standards do provide vital information, but only in limited areas. They are endorsed by governments, even though most Australian ones are intended for guidance and are voluntary in nature (Graham, 2002).

That said, in the context of Australian playgrounds, compliance with *AS/NZS4422:1996 Playground surfacing* has become mandatory in NSW and Queensland, as part of the licensing requirements for childcare facilities (not however, you will notice, for public parks or schools). In other states, this document has become a benchmark reference in court of law proceedings related to playground injuries. As an expert witness in such cases, I can tell you that its legal imperative is very great.

Although *AS/4585:2004 Fixed play equipment* has not yet, to my knowledge, been tested in a court of law, it is expected that the precedent will be followed and those who do not attempt to comply with its provisions will find themselves at risk of litigation.

History of the standards

By way of an historical note, the 'new' standards revision was driven by indicative data on serious injury compiled by the National Injury Surveillance Unit. At the same time, playground safety regulations were being reviewed overseas, mainly along European or American lines—whereas the Australian Standards Committee took elements of both and modified them for Australian conditions. There is surprisingly little basic research into the causes of playground injuries particularly in the early childhood services.

Assessing your practice

Are you aware that *AS/4585:2004 Fixed play equipment* covers both general fixed equipment and specifically swings, slides, runways, carousels and rocking equipment? Or that *AS/NZS4422:1996 Playground surfacing* covers fall heights, soft fall materials and freefall zones? If not, then what is your position?

Legally, ignorance is no defence. It is almost a decade since *AS/NZS4422:1996 Playground surfacing* was released and yet, every week, I deal with centres who cannot understand how to comply with a 'freefall zone'. The fixed equipment standards are far more technical, which is a real cause for worry.

The role of design

While the standards do discuss elements of playground design, such as material used (e.g. strength and OH&S) and scale (e.g. grip surfaces and fall height) it is necessary to take into account how this equipment is used. For example:

- vertical falls are minimised on a slide built into a mound as opposed to one which is free standing, even though both utilise the same slide material
- a deck of 0.5 square metres is not as safe as one of 25 square metres even if the structural parameters are the same, because any bumping or pushing on the smaller deck is more likely to result in a fall.

In other words, standards are a good start, but you cannot rely on them to deliver a safe playground to you.

Moving towards guidelines

It is prudent to maximise the benefits of the standards, while understanding that they will not provide you with a 'one-stop shop'. At the October 2005 conference, Early Childhood Australia endorsed, in principle, the development of guidelines to address the unique and specialised needs of supervised early childhood playgrounds. It is envisaged that these guidelines will be diagram-rich and targeted at supervised playgrounds for children from birth to five years and, while there is no single formula for compliance (any more than there is a single site or that every child is predictable), they are intended to assist you in sorting out prescriptive requirements.

Ideally they will be capable of being endorsed by both State and Federal Governments, so as to minimise inter-state variation. Although any person or organisation could theoretically write such guidelines, there are not many writers with the specialised early childhood expertise to undertake this task and so the question has to be asked: how great must the catalyst be to complete the development of easy-to-use guidelines? How many injuries resulting in lawsuits?

Your responsibilities

As a professional impacted on by a set of Australian safety standards, do not rely on a developer/landscaper to interpret technicalities for you—seek definitive advice. Remember, informed implementation of these safety provisions is your guard against litigation—ignorance is no defence.

Prue Walsh

Play Environment Consulting

Reference

Graham, I. (2002). TAS March 2002: Forum. *The Global Standard Magazine*, (3), 4–5.

Editor's note

The various Playground Standards documents can be purchased on-line from Standards Australia (**www.standards.org.au**) in either hardcopy or PDF form.

Titles include:

- *AS/NZS4422:1996 Playground surfacing: Specifications, requirements and test method* (free)
- *AS/NZS 4486.1:1997 Playgrounds and playground equipment: Development, installation, inspection, maintenance and operation*
- *AS 4685.1–2004 Playground equipment: General safety requirements and test methods*

There is also a Playground Equipment CD.

Generally, the Standards are quite complex and technical and cover all playgrounds. There is an urgent need for interpretative guidelines, specifically for the early childhood field. To date, however, efforts to obtain funding to write such guidelines have not been successful.

Alison Elliott

Tessa Rose

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Disability or diversity?

Encouraging true inclusion

The problem

Many mainstream teachers are apprehensive when they first have a student with a disability in their class, particularly if they have had limited personal or professional experience with disability. Teachers also do it tough when they are not given information about a student's needs and learning style.

Some Australian education authorities require teachers to have done study about students with disabilities, and this certainly helps. However, even with this additional training, many teachers find it challenging to respond to the diversity of contemporary classrooms.

Using parents as resources

Although teachers teach students and not disabilities, it is important for legal and pedagogical reasons that teachers understand how a child experiences disability and how it may affect learning and teaching. Personal observation and reports from other teachers and specialists are useful but parents are often overlooked as a resource. Many have an encyclopaedic knowledge of syndromes, supports and child-centred information that will help teachers to be more effective with their child.

Supporting teachers

Research has shown that school culture, policies and organisation have a huge impact on the quality of teaching and learning in mainstream schools. In situations where a principal models an inclusive approach it is more likely that teachers will be supported, and that resources will be found or reorganised. With appropriate levels of support, students with a disability get a fair go and the opportunity to participate 'on the same basis' as other students. This term—'on the same basis'—is used 27 times in the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005). It means that opportunities for students with disabilities must be comparable to (but not necessarily the same as) those enjoyed by other students.

Although the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005)—as subordinate legislation to the Disability Discrimination Act (1992)—are couched in legal terms, they contain many excellent pointers for teachers on how to include students with a disability. The standards can be found at **www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/programmes_funding/forms_guidelines/disability_standards_for_education.htm**

Most teachers prefer to make adaptations that suit the whole class, and many are reluctant to individualise programs or significantly reorganise how they teach. Teachers are also less inclined to change the curriculum content to suit individual students, preferring to assist *all* children to participate.

Although some students require an alternative curriculum, great care should be taken. While adapting the curriculum is an appropriate response in some situations, it may mean that a student is not challenged and/or becomes marginalised in class. Furthermore, *unnecessary* adaptation of curriculum may deprive a student of important learning opportunities.

What makes a great teacher?

Teachers who are good at including students with a disability in mainstream schools:

- focus on helping every student to 'belong', to have friends and to be involved in the life of the class
- use a wide range of strategies and teach in ways that are known to be effective for *all* students
- do not operate as 'sole traders' but involve other teachers, students, parents, volunteers and the whole school community in providing learning experiences
- systematically monitor the progress of all of their students
- plan thoroughly and are prepared to adapt to changing circumstances
- try different approaches and reflect on the results
- involve teaching assistants, mainly in indirect roles, and direct and monitor their work.

Perhaps the most striking feature of good teachers is that they view each of their students as having individual needs and teach accordingly: i.e. they provide support for all students, including those with a disability.

Tony Shaddock

School of Education & Community Services
University of Canberra

Further reading

Early Childhood Australia sells several quality assured titles on caring for children with disabilities in school, in particular *The ECE inclusion handbook*, available for $54.95 from www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au or freecall 1800 356 900.

Early Years Parents and Friends: A safety net for the 'baby bounce'?

Madeleine Ogilvie discusses an innovative new group that is strengthening the links between Tasmanian parents and the childcare sector.

Early Years Parents and Friends (EYPF) is an innovative new organisation focused on representing the interests of children in the early years. Like much of Australia, Tasmania is experiencing a mini baby boom, perhaps better referred to as a 'baby bounce'. EYPF responds to this by providing a forum for parents interested in childcare issues and by building community interest about the early years.

Making choice simpler

With many parents juggling work and family life, childcare choices are becoming increasingly complex. A need was identified to better coordinate information about parental perspectives, so a group of parents set about establishing EYPF as a not-for-profit, sustainable and independent organisation. Membership will be open to all parents, regardless of their choice of childcare arrangements.

EYPF will represent the interests of the 'demand' side of the childcare equation and will be uniquely placed to improve knowledge and information regarding children's and parents' needs. Better knowledge and information will help to develop the potential of Tasmania's childcare sector, particularly in connection to education.

We understand that the sector is complex and respect all parents' choices: centre-based, family day care or other arrangements.

Speaking up for kids

Our motto is 'speaking up for kids', as we feel parents are in the best position to speak about the interests of their children. A key challenge for EYPF is to engage in the development of a strategic vision for child care in Tasmania.

Our aim is to promote and protect the provision of child care and to increase cooperation between all organisations pursuing objectives that are in the interest of children in their early years.

We will engage with parents on a statewide basis, via direct communication and close cooperation with childcare providers. By facilitating a constructive dialogue we can draw on relevant information to influence public and private institutions' approach to child care, particularly in relation to education and quality.

Building social capital

EYPF promotes engagement with childcare providers through collaborative, community-building projects. EYPF has developed its own community project methodology through which we are able to coordinate innovative and collaborative projects. This 'social capital development' approach includes establishing a database of projects, initiatives and people prepared to donate time and expertise for community work.

We have a number of innovative projects in the pipeline. For example, EYPF is currently working with Kidsafe Tasmania Inc. and Lady Gowrie Child Services on the 'Safe vs. Challenging Playground' project, which breaks new ground in collaboration between organisations.

Parent and grandparent care

Parents will be offered opportunities to work on community building projects, to engage in discussion forums and join local groups. Members will also have the opportunity to extend social and community networks, to meet other parents and people who care about childcare experiences and to link with strong information networks.

We recognise that Tasmanian grandparents have a strong role to play in childcare discussion. Grandparents have experience that can be harnessed and many are seeking stronger community engagement as they move into retirement. A strong grandparental network creates inter-generation links that can be accessed to facilitate a 'whole of family' view of child care. We anticipate grandparents will be able to engage in certain community-focused projects.

While EYPF is in the start-up phase, we anticipate rapid growth and hope that we may be able to facilitate the formation of similar groups nationwide.

Madeleine Ogilvie
Commercial lawyer, EYPF member

For more information, please visit www.eypf.com.au Alternatively, contact Madeleine Ogilvie ogilvie.m@hotmail.com or 0409 001 800

Feature

Including children with autism in early childhood settings

It is becoming increasingly likely that each of us will know someone whose family has been touched by Autism Spectrum Disorder. Now more common than Down Syndrome, autism is described as a spectrum disorder because people are affected in different ways and to varying degrees, yet share common characteristics. These include difficulties with:

- social interaction (e.g. appearing unaware of others and/or disregarding social conventions)
- social communication (e.g. delayed or absent verbal language, and/or reversing pronouns)
- imagination (e.g. having limited and unusual interests, and insisting on sameness).

Many more boys are affected than girls and probably the most commonly encountered children will be those with Asperger's Disorder. In this case there is no language delay, although communication difficulties still exist.

The value of visuals

It would be easy to assume that it is impossible to educate children with autism alongside others. However, many autistic characteristics have a flip-side which allows opportunity for creative collective instruction. In particular, they may use their strong visual skills to compensate for language and other difficulties.

Depending on their age and cognitive ability, the concept of 'it's lunchtime' might be shown simply by a visual representation of an object (such as a spoon), a photo of a plate, a drawing of a meal or simply the word 'lunch'. You should try to store visuals where they will be used: e.g. visuals for cleaning teeth in the bathroom and visuals for block play where blocks are stored.

In an inclusive setting, ensure that everybody uses visuals. Place the most frequently used within the reach of all children so that peers can use them too. Expect a high rate of wear, so attach velcro and make multiple laminated copies to allow visuals to be dropped, lost, chewed or covered in playdough.

Inclusive teaching

With this simple visual strategy you can help a child with autism—let's call him Matthew—to learn new vocabulary, understand what is happening (incidentally reducing anxiety and averting tantrums) *and* make it easier for a group of children to socialise. Successful interactions enhance other children's tolerance, language and communication. Many early childhood settings already have children's photos on their lockers, labels for the book corner, a picture sequence showing the day's activities and so on. Visuals are considered universal currency because they can assist all youngsters.

Importantly, we can use visuals to help Matthew engage in the unstructured activity that he finds most difficult of all: play. Visuals tell him what to do (first the swing, then the sandpit), increase his enjoyment and participation, and reduce non-functional play such as twirling blocks or spinning car parts.

Physical structuring

Another way to help both Matthew and his typically-developing peers is by physically structuring the setting. This is not particularly difficult, as visual spaces define activities in many environments. For example, a large mat may be rolled out during stories or circle time. If a mat is unavailable, place a small square of carpet on the floor prior to the event so Matthew not only knows that story time is coming, but also knows where to sit. Consider having a weather board (on which children stick appropriate laminated weather pictures), a greetings or a song board: the possibilities are endless.

Rethinking our expectations

Often, the 'best' way to educate Matthew may contradict our expectations. The recommended way to guarantee attention is to ensure he looks at us, right? Actually, Matthew probably finds it difficult, even painful, to look at our eyes and the effort of attempting to do so may drain his cognitive resources so that he cannot concentrate on what we are saying. So, when communicating, encourage everyone to sit alongside Matthew, not necessarily opposite.

Similarly, other long-held expectations may be counterproductive: most of us have been told to use the word 'play' frequently with young children; to expand their vocabulary with new words, to have running commentaries; and use lots of language throughout the day. In fact this may be the worst thing for Matthew who deciphers verbal language slowly and with difficulty. Instead, use the least number of words possible and describe events in the order they will be used. If you say 'we will look at the picture book after you have washed your hands' he will expect to look at the picture book first, because you mentioned it first. Instead, try: 'first wash hands, then picture book'.

One complicating factor is that Matthew may make us believe his verbal understanding is better that it actually is, because of his phonic decoding and rote memory skills. Matthew may be hyperlexic: that is, extremely good at reading text aloud. Or he may remember whole video clips from favourite programs. This does not mean he actually understands what he is saying, so check your assumptions with knowledgeable colleagues.

Creating a happy and healthy environment

Keep in mind that Matthew needs sameness and predictability. He takes whatever we say quite literally, so our world is a bewildering place. We say: 'we'll just be a minute' when in fact we take a quarter of an hour. We 'pop into the supermarket' (why don't we say we'll come out again?) and say 'all eyes on me' (picture it!) when we want the attention of the group. Such a world can be extremely stressful. The more anxious Matthew becomes, the more likely he is to retreat into his own world or engage in self-stimulatory behaviours such as flicking, twirling and flapping.

Stress is compounded by sensory sensitivities. Noise, crowding, smells and fluorescent lights (amongst other things) can exacerbate stress levels so, paradoxically, inclusion may work best if Matthew has some sanctuary time alone in a quiet corner. Watch for warning signs of anxiety, or better still, teach him to use a 'help' visual.

Conclusion

Autism is a lifelong disorder and the belief that we can fade visual supports would be tantamount to saying to a child who wears glasses that, once they are doing well, we can remove their spectacles. The format of visuals may change over time (the toddler's picture board might become the adolescent's pocket-sized diary) but we must continue to provide them. The major consideration is not to envisage a child as 'a problem' but, rather, to focus on how we may change and accommodate. *We should teach the way they think: not expect them to think the way we teach*. These children spend countless hours trying to work out us 'neurotypicals' and we owe it to them to reciprocate to the best of our abilities—for the benefit of all.

Dr Chris Kilham

Head, Educational Support and Inclusion Program
University of Canberra

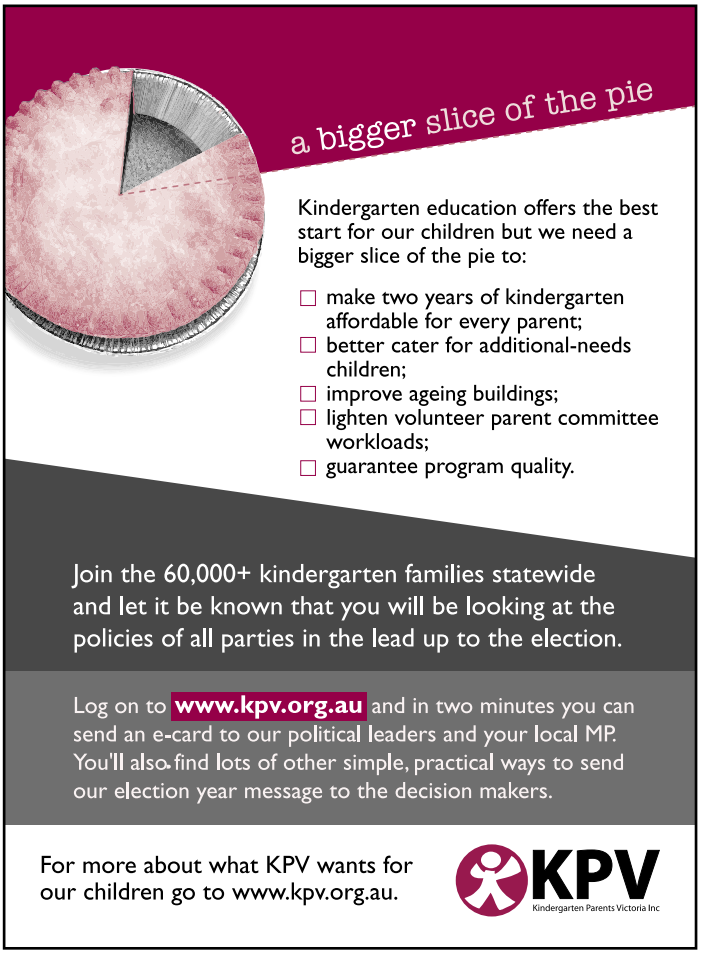
For more information about autism, particularly on post-graduate study, please contact Chris: **Chris.Kilham@canberra.edu.au**

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to the Creswick Foundation for supporting me in research and study of Autism Spectrum Disorder at Division TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children) in the United States, where I was able to experience many exemplars of inclusive practice.

Photos courtesy of Tara Hearne (Prompt Education).
For more information on using visuals in early childhood settings:
PO Box 922 Gosford NSW 2250
Tel: (02) 4362 2922 Fax: (02) 4362 2675
Email: **enquiries@prompteducation.com**
Website: **www.prompteducation.com**

Autism Spectrum Disorder and Young Children by Diana Roe—part of Early Childhood Australia's popular *Research in Practice Series*—is a practical guide for carers and parents. This quality-assured title is available from **www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au** or **freecall 1800 356 900** for $14.95.



Q & A Interview with Stacey Campton

Jacqui Jashari, Stacey Campton & Michelle Phippard at the opening of the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

Stacey Campton has worked as part of the Indigenous and Transitions Group for the last eight years. She is highly accomplished at netball: she umpired at the 2003 Jamaican World Championships and Melbourne's 2006 Commonwealth Games. Stacey began a postgraduate degree in early childhood education in 2002.

How do your work and study relate?

I work in the Indigenous Education Group of the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). The Group develops policy and implements programs that will assist Indigenous people in achieving improved educational outcomes. DEST policy and programs are developed to reduce the educational divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This is a big task.

The reason I started my degree in Early Childhood teaching was to ensure I understood and was aware of the relationship between teaching and the delivery of education. I think it is important when developing education policy and implementing programs that you understand how this may actually work on the ground. The relevance of a teaching degree and the work I do in the Australian Public Service is about maintaining the link between what happens in government to how it translates to education on the ground.

Are there any individuals that have particularly inspired you?

My mother is a very inspirational woman. She only ever had schooling to sixth grade in a country that did not even recognise her as an Australian citizen until 1967 (the Referendum that gave Aboriginal people the vote)—yet she became a qualified nurse after joining the Australian Army. Then, after having two children, she undertook an early childhood teaching course and worked as a preschool assistant in the ACT Department of Education for 20 years.

My father had the courage to marry an Aboriginal woman in the 60s. He loves her dearly and to this day has stuck by her and supported the family through thick and thin. My work colleague Kate Danaro taught me that early childhood education is the foundation of all learning. Another work colleague, Auriel Bloomfield, is a very strong Aboriginal woman who reminds me every day of why I do what I do, and for whom.

Did you have any experiences as you were growing up that influenced your choice of vocation?

Education was a big thing in my house. Making sure I went to school and did well was paramount. If I did not do well, my social life suffered: that is, my social outings were reduced when my grades dropped. My mother was a big influence in getting a good education and I think that related back to her own limited education opportunities. I agree with my mother when she states that an education provides you with options—that is, if you can read and write and operate in society, then you can be whatever you want: a brain surgeon, a mother or a checkout chick. I am known to be strong minded and determined. I am also outspoken about my beliefs. The APS allows me to be passionate about my beliefs and have the opportunity to make a difference to my mob.

What have you found most rewarding about your work and study?

Being able to make a difference in both arenas is a rewarding experience. Little steps in both make towards a journey of change. I study with students, lecturers and tutors who probably have never met an Aboriginal person. They are quite surprised when they first meet me: hopefully, they see me as a good role model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I don't profess to know a lot about all Indigenous people and their culture, but the culture I do know and live is shared with these students, so at least they get a taste of it.

What has been most difficult?

The fact that it is so hard to get improvements for Indigenous people under a government that does not see it as a priority. It is not

Jacqui Jashari, Sharon Kelly, Michelle Phippard & Stacey Campton.

only Indigenous issues: education generally, health and social justice issues are all considered less important than defence, policing and anti-terrorism issues in this country. So, Indigenous people are a very long way down the list and trying to get changes made can be an arduous task.

How does your athletic success connect to your personal and work goals?

Umpiring any sport is about interpreting the rules of the game to meet the skills of the players, and this can be applied at any level of sport. I think working in the government can be pretty similar. You have to interpret the policy and the guidelines developed to make the programs work for all. Government tends to write policy as 'one size fits all'. In most areas this is not appropriate, so I have to find ways to implement the programs/policy on the ground for the people who access it.

In umpiring I have learnt a lot about what lies within me. My determination to be the best I can be at whatever I do—and then try even harder again—is a characteristic of mine. It can be hard on your soul if you don't achieve your best but it also means you don't have an excuse for not 'having a go' at something. I was once told sport reveals character: it doesn't necessarily build/make it. I believe this is true because when you are under pressure—especially when umpiring—you need inner strength to maintain your control and elevate yourself above the pressure on the court. The same could be said of work.

What do you think are the most pressing issues in early childhood care and education?

The sector having a voice. In the big scheme of things, the challenge to ensure that children have access to and then actually participate in early childhood learning (they are two different things) is a very important issue. The early childhood sector needs champions to ensure that all voices are heard, their outcomes are met and that all of our children grow up strong and smart and with a fighting chance.

What would you like to see happen in the future?

- More funding and greater emphasis on the importance of early childhood education.
- A commitment made to really improving Indigenous outcomes. This commitment needs to extend beyond three-year terms of government. We need Federal commitment so that State and Territory governments, regions, councils and all Australian people can work together to bring about change. This commitment needs to be made by all major political parties so that the outcomes have a real impact: Indigenous people need to have fruitful lives, not just merely exist.

Julian Fleetwood

Wage Assistance—expanding opportunities

Wage Assistance helped Great Lakes Children's Centre Incorporated in Forster employ an Indigenous child care worker.

Wage Assistance provides a subsidy to Australian employers who give an ongoing job to **eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders**. The subsidy is worth up to $4400 over 26 weeks for an ongoing full-time job or $2200 for an ongoing part-time job of at least 15 hours per week.

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Connecting families and boosting learning: Inclusion at Meadowbank Early Learning Centre

The Meadowbank Early Learning Centre is a unique playgroup located in a high needs community in outer Melbourne. The community is culturally and linguistically diverse, containing about 65 per cent of families whose first language is other than English. Most families using the playgroup rely on welfare benefits and live in public housing.

History of the playgroup

Since the 1970s, Meadowbank Early Learning Centre has helped hundreds of children and families play, learn together and prepare for school. It is run by Maureen Leahy, an extraordinary community leader and educator who has forged strong ties with families and the community and worked to link parents with the school in meaningful ways. Parents are familiar with each other and the school long before their children start.

The Early Learning Centre is at the heart of Meadowbank Primary School's efforts to connect with its community. It is an open and welcoming group that—as well as functioning as an integral part of the community—offers a range of additional services such as speech therapy.

Most importantly, it promotes a strong sense of respect for families and the idea that they are and should be at the centre of their children's lives.

The influence of individuals

Parents speak effusively about Maureen and the many ways the playgroup has supported their parenting and helped their children's development and learning. The leadership of Meadowbank's principal Robert Greenacre has also been critical to the continuing success of the playgroup, in the securing of accommodation and funding.

This is a school that sees the playgroup as a key part of its outreach. Staff listen actively to parents, genuinely care about children and families, and encourage them to participate in a variety of activities on a regular, often daily basis. Together the school and the playgroup have harnessed community resources to support young children's development and transition to school.

Supporting the community

In the longer term, close connections between home and school are beneficial in a number of ways.

Parent engagement is linked to academic success and school retention. Especially, because the playgroup is part of the school, parents feel they know what is going on and can talk about issues before they become problems.

The Early Learning Centre and the school have an active policy to work with community groups to build cohesiveness and tackle disadvantage. They collaborate with organisations and agencies as diverse as the local police, the fire brigade, Anglicare, the Gould League and the Natural Resources Conservation League of Victoria.

The school is a key partner in the Victorian government's Neighbourhood Renewal Program and this has contributed to sustained community cooperation and improved facilities and services for local families.

The playgroup enables children and their parents to participate in scaffolding developmental experiences, including early literacy and problem solving, learning about healthy eating and building social competence.

Encouraging early development

Children begin playgroup as toddlers and progress to a four-year-old group, in the year prior to school. Most of their children would not normally attend formal preschool or kindergarten in the year before school. The playgroup provides a strong, rich learning environment and offers a range of unobtrusive family support and services that would be otherwise difficult to access. It also acts in a capacity-building sense to boost skill and empower parents.

Conclusion

Anyone involved in building school–community ties knows that family engagement does not happen spontaneously or overnight. It is a result of sustained efforts to value, respect, welcome and talk with families. Crucially, children and families must be engaged in learning programs and events that are worthwhile and meaningful. And as Maureen Leahy has demonstrated, the best time to begin is well before school starts.

Alison Elliott

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An exciting ECA initiative to help children's services enhance their relationships with parents

All early childhood services—whether they are long day care, preschool, family day care, occasional care, playgroups etc.—strive to support high-quality experiences for the children in their care.

This special initiative from ECA makes it viable for children's services to offer their parents quality-assured resources in an environment where it is increasingly difficult to offer additional benefits.

The parent-friendly resource

Early Childhood Australia's *Everyday Learning Series* was developed by early childhood experts specifically to meet parents' and carers' needs. Each book provides practical tips and knowledge, illustrated through everyday interactions in the home environment.

ECA is offering bulk subscriptions* of the *Everyday Learning Series* to children's services, for them to distribute to their parents as a built-in benefit of using their service. Subscriptions have been reduced by 60%; from $40 to just $14.99 per parent.

What this means for your service

Having strong relationships with families is crucial to the quality of a children's service and to its success.

High-quality children's services continually enhance their relationship with their parents.

Supporting parents in their parenting is an essential part of that relationship.

While it is always difficult for services to offer extra benefits to their parents, this reduction means there are many ways to absorb the cost, without affecting your cash flow.

Some of the ways your service can fund this initiative:

- Using part of the resource or parent support budget allocation
- A small, weekly fee increase now or at the end of the year—just 29c per parent
- Using part of the service's budget surplus from last financial year
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'I think this is a wonderful initiative. I think it is enormously supportive of parents and will be a resource for them for a long time.'
—Ros Cornish, Lady Gowrie, Tasmania

'It's a wonderful resource. The information is current, topical and user friendly.'
—Gosford Family Day Care Scheme, NSW

'It makes me feel better about my parenting and gives me ideas for enjoying my kids more.'
—Narelle, mother-of-three, Tweed Heads, NSW

*This offer is only available for bulk subscriptions (50 min)

Want to know more about this exciting initiative?

See back cover or contact ECA: **freecall 1800 356 900** or **www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/edl**

The child carer's handbook: A guide to everyday needs, difficulties and disorders

Lorraine Wickham

Hodder Arnold (2006)
RRP $59.95 (Paperback)

This is not a book aligned with current thinking on children, child care and education—at least in an Australian context. The title is a misnomer: it implies the book is an everyday reference tool which any self-respecting child carer could not leave home without. However its focus represents a deficit view of children, with no reference to the 'everyday needs' which underpin their care and wellbeing. As such, the author's approach is not consistent with the philosophy and policies of Early Childhood Australia.

While it does contain some useful factual information on a range of conditions which may affect some children, it is written in a definitive, prescriptive style using headings such as 'causes', 'symptoms' and 'diagnosis' which leaves no room for 'possible' or 'may be an indicator of'. This is problematic, as it encourages staff to use the book as a diagnostic tool, despite being unqualified to do so. This could lead to the labelling of children: an outdated approach that most early childhood professionals have worked hard to dispel, and one which has no place in inclusive practice.

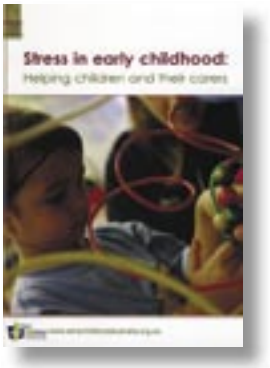
Lorraine Wickham's book uses language and assumptions which, at times, bear no relation to modern thinking on certain issues, e.g. she states that 'aggression and non-compliance and anti-social behaviour is more common in boys ... '; a section on behaviour management speaks about 'rewards' and 'punishment' rather than *encouragement* and *consequences*; and the section on 'birth order' describes a range of characteristics in each category which are entirely negative.

High-quality practice requires childcare practitioners to take a holistic view of children and to work with their strengths and abilities, rather than attempt to diagnose any perceived shortcomings or developmental delay. This book is not recommended for everyday use in child care.

Penny Richardson

Director of Support Services
Lady Gowrie Tasmania

Stress in early childhood: Helping children and their carers



Patrice Thomas

Available from Early Childhood Australia (2006)
$39.95 (inc. p&h) to order, freecall 1800 356 900

As a mother of teenagers, I am acutely aware of the influence of stress in children's lives. Children who are unable to manage stress, or are overexposed to it when they are young, find it difficult to make the transition from childhood to adulthood. The author of *Stress in early childhood* promotes the notion that if young children learn to manage stress from an early age 'they can gain more personal control in their lives'.

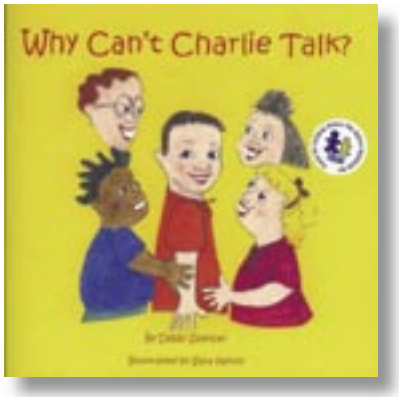
In Australia we are experiencing high rates of suicide and significant numbers of adults with mental health concerns. It is therefore timely that *Stress in early childhood: Helping children and their carers* has been published to provide valuable support and advice to the carers of young children. In early childhood settings we are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge stress that young children, their families and childcare practitioners may be experiencing. This book emphasises the complexity of the issue: not only does it describe the experience for children and their carers from multiple perspectives, it also has a wide range of achievable approaches for reducing the impact of stress. I really appreciate that a range of options have been explored in this format.

This is an excellent publication. The author has discussed many of the stressful points in children's and carers' (including parents') lives and explored a gamut of strategies for managing them. I encourage all practitioners to read this book and recommend it to others. It will have a powerful influence on how individuals respond to each other. Reducing and managing the stress in our lives opens the door for strengthening relationships and enhancing the sense of 'fulfilment, wellbeing, resilience and happiness in life'.

Jennifer Cartmel

School of Human Services
Griffith University

Why can't Charlie talk?



Debbie Spencer

Illustrations by Sara Kenny

Miss Muffet Books (2004)
RRP $17.95 (paperback)

For some children who have not experienced a child of school age who does not talk, this book may be a little confusing. After the story was read to a kindergarten class, one child suggested that perhaps Charlie had a sore mouth, not making the connection that there was a longer term issue.

The children in Charlie's class understand that he is different: he has autism and does not talk to them. The teacher explains that he will talk when he is ready and there is much excitement when he invites a friend to play using alternative means of communication, taking her by the hand and leading her to home corner.

While the illustrations are clear and colourful, they do not appeal to all readers and may not be the best vehicle for telling the story about Charlie, which is a little idealistic in its suggestion that 'he will talk one day'.

Adults and children who have experienced children like Charlie would recognise him immediately and this book provides a wonderful opportunity to discuss difference and diversity. Charlie is obviously included in the life of the classroom even though he does not always choose to participate with the group, and this is dealt with very sensitively in the story.

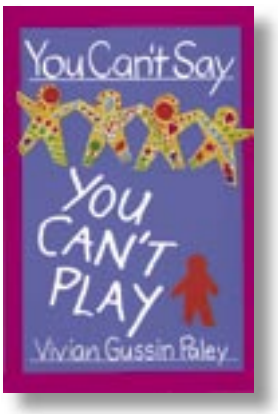
This book could be a valuable addition to the bookshelf for the discussion it may generate and the understandings it may develop about difference and diversity.

The kinder children did not particularly notice the rhyme, which is at times clumsy. There are two grammatical errors/typos in the book, lets instead of let's; friend's instead of friends, which probably only adult readers will notice.

Kaye van Nieuwkuyk

ECA Tasmania Branch

You can't say you can't play



Vivian Gussin Paley

Harvard University Press (1992)
RRP $28.95 (paperback)

This is one of a number of books written by renowned kindergarten and nursery teacher Vivian Gussin Paley. An educator with over 37 years experience, Paley writes about the lives of young children.

During her own kindergarten days, Paley was excluded from playing games by other children and this book details her investigation into why this occurs in school communities. She explores the basic underlying forces of social exclusion that can make children feel like strangers in their own classrooms.

You can't say you can't play is divided into four sections:

- You can't play: The habit of rejection
- The inquiry: Is it fair? Will it work?
- The new order begins
- It is easier to open the door

Through the four sections, Paley probes the moral dimensions of the classroom and investigates the phenomenon of certain children being granted the status of 'boss' by their peers: giving them the power to create games, make rules and determine who will be excluded.

Paley discusses her classroom rule, 'you can't say you can't play'. She quotes conversations with children from kindergarten to Year 5 about the fairness of this rule. Alongside this, she develops a parable about the adventures of a magical magpie. This story enables Paley's students to understand and voice their feelings of rejection and loneliness.

This book is presented in an easy-to-read format. It is relatively short (130 pages) but makes a powerful argument to teachers, parents and society at large, to think about their practices within classrooms and question previously accepted behaviour.

Fay Harding

Hilliard Primary School, Brisbane

Picture book agenda: The role of gender

Picture books are a wonderful part of a child's life: closely bonding them with family and providing lasting inspiration, enjoyment and education. Unfortunately, many of these books reinforce restrictive gender stereotypes rather than upholding cultural progress and preparing future adults for further change.

The status of stereotypes

In an interview conducted 21 December 2005, Sue Walker (lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology School of Early Childhood) pointed out that there has been some alleviation of the rigidity of gender stereotyping in children's books during the last few decades, but 'it is [still] usually boys who are saving the day in the end.'

One of the fundamental problems with this and other gendered behaviour patterns commonly appearing in picture books, is that many of the children exposed to them—particularly those aged between two and three—are discovering early on how to categorise themselves by gender.

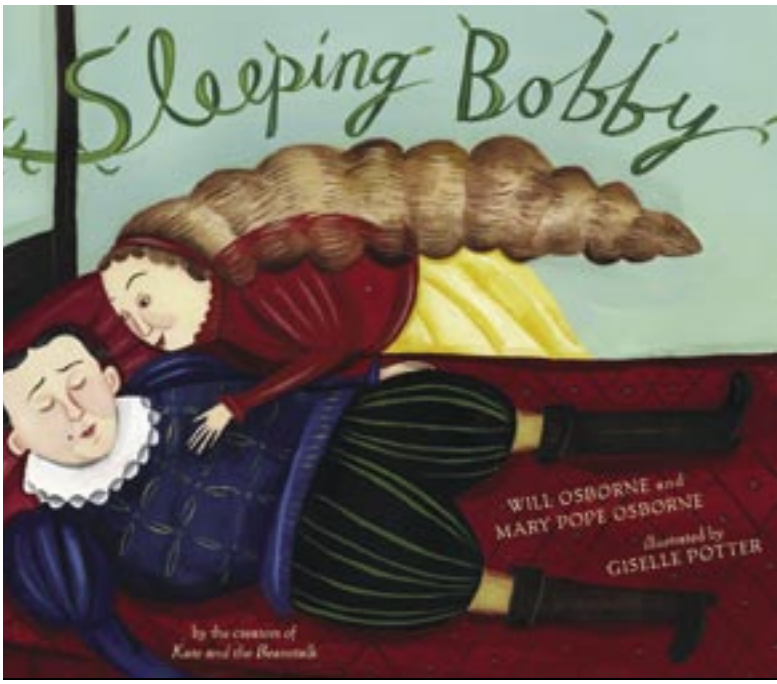
Once children of this age group form a gender identity, Walker says, 'they actively pay attention to gender relevant information, so behaviours and values that are presented as "for boys" or "for girls" are likely to be adopted. They also tend to ignore, avoid or forget information that is counter-stereotypical.' She believes encouraging adherence to stereotypes can restrict children's engagement with early childhood programs and prevent them from reaching their potential.

According to Walker, girls don't often play in the 'block corner' and lack visual–spatial skills as a result—while boys avoid dramatic play and tend not to develop verbal and 'perspective taking' skills. Girls usually have well-developed fine motor skills from sedentary activities, while boys' active play improves their gross motor muscles.

'Often when boys commence school they are not developmentally ready to hold a pencil and write,' she says. 'Missing out on these early experiences can act to limit choices as children grow and develop.'

Walker argues boys may be most at risk, because in early childhood they conform to gender stereotypes more rigorously.

'It is more acceptable for girls to engage in counter-stereotypical behaviour than it is for boys,' she explains. 'It has been said that the most important thing for girls to learn is how not to be a baby, whereas the most important thing for boys to learn is how not to be a girl. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the male role is perceived to have more value in our society.'



Depictions of parents

In addition to generally being more 'active' in children's stories, male characters are more prevalent. Unfortunately, as US researchers, David Anderson and Mykol Hamilton found in their 2005 analysis of 200 award-winning and best-selling picture books, they are rarely portrayed as good parents.

While there were 'father' characters in 47 per cent of the books studied, 'mother' characters appeared in twice as many scenes and were shown from an entirely different perspective.

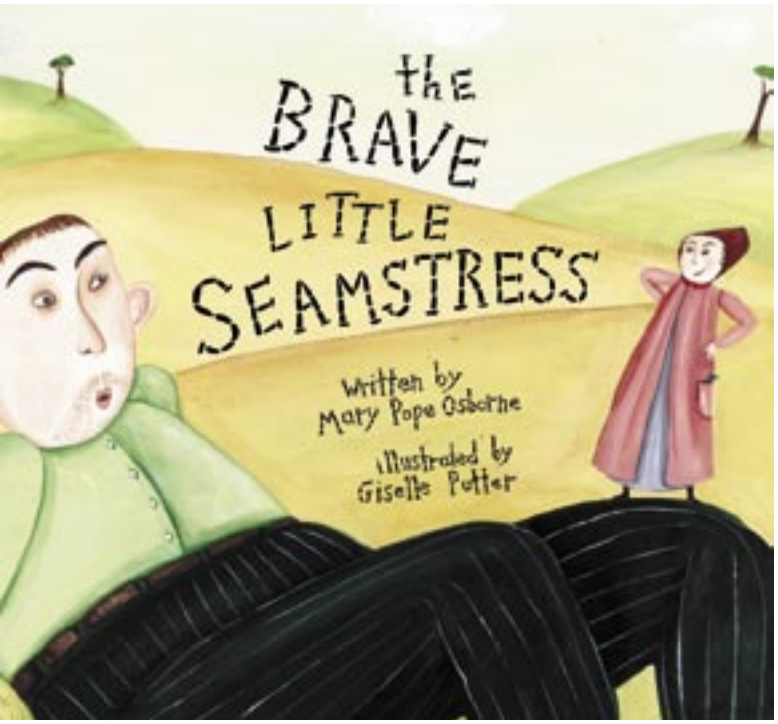
'When present, fathers were relatively less likely than mothers to touch, hug, kiss, make other contact with, talk to, or feed children,' the authors report. 'Mothers were shown more often than fathers as caring nurturers who discipline their children and express a full range of emotions. Fathers were under-represented and portrayed as relatively stoic actors who took little part in the lives of their children.'

Anderson and Hamilton did not extend their research to examine the influence of parent stereotypes in the picture books studied, but they believe it is likely that parents' and children's attitudes and behaviour would be directly affected.

A search on Amazon.com uncovered several non-stereotypical books published in recent years. For example, *Skateboard mom* (2004) and *Claydon was a clingy child* (2001) both portray active mothers. *The princess knight* (2004) and *Do princesses wear hiking boots?* (2003) diversify the traditional princess character, while fairy tales are rewritten in *The brave little seamstress* (2002) and *Sleeping Bobby* (2005).

Some older books I found in a university library (presumably for student teachers) which oppose and diversify gender roles include:

- ***William's doll* (1972) by Charlotte Zolotow and William Pene du Bois**
- ***The paper bag princess* (1980) by Robert Munsch and Michael Martchenko**
- ***My dad takes care of me* (1987) by Patricia Quinlan and Vlasta van Kampen**
- ***Tidy titch* (1991) by Pat Hutchins**



Positive representations

Children's book illustrator, Terry Denton said (in an interview conducted 10 January this year) that he aims to minimise stereotyping in his work and seeks out texts which support this. He illustrated Natalie Jane Prior's *The paw* (1993) which features Leonie, a school-girl by day and a brave and bold cat-burglar by night.

'As a parent with daughters I was delighted to have a text to illustrate that presented such a heroic and active girl character,' Denton says. 'An illustrator's job is to reflect what the author has written, and in this case the author gave the reader a great non-stereotypical character.'

However, Denton has noticed a recent resurgence in books which emphasise separate genders. 'Now authors and publishers and booksellers seem to feel there is a big market for what they perceive as typically boy- or girl-centred literature ... I am often being told by editors to make the girls more girly and the boys more boy-y.'

'We all have our soft side and our aggressive side, our wild side and our calm side, our irrational side and our logical side. That is what makes us unique as humans,' Denton says. 'One of my challenges is to depict kids of whatever sex as multi-dimensional.'

Melissa Giles

Reference

Anderson, D. and Hamilton, M. (2005). Gender role stereotyping of parents in children's picture books: the invisible father. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 52*(3–4), 145–151, Retrieved 3 February, 2006, www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_3-4_52/ai_n13651301

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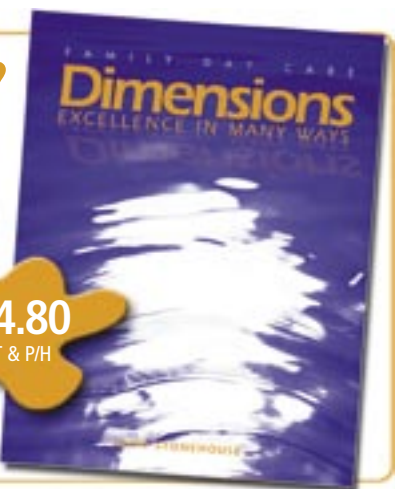

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Assisting inclusion through writing

Josie was born with a lot of health problems but her mother was still hopeful about her starting at kindergarten. When Jen first took Josie to school she noticed how the other parents and children were unsure how to interact with Josie. In response, she decided to write the following story.

Josie's story: An autobiography of a little girl starting kindergarten at Mt. Nelson Primary School in 2005

Hi my name is Josie. I live with Dad, Mum, Lucy (Grade 5), Luke (Grade 3) and Lily (Grade 1) in Mt. Nelson.

I have Kabuki Syndrome which affects many things about my body. I thought you might like to know a little bit about me. I've already had an operation on my heart but I still have high blood pressure and can easily become out of breath.

The joints in my body are hyper mobile which means they are very loose and dislocate easily (which they often do!). I've had operations on both hips and knees.

In April 2005, I went to Melbourne to get a 'second skin'. This is like a body suit that helps keep my joints in place. I also wear knee pads as extra protection.

I have a wheelchair because my muscles and joints aren't very strong and I tire easily.

I can understand what you are saying to me and I am starting to talk but sometimes I use my hands to sign what I find hard to say. I love being with my family especially when I'm at home with my dog, cats, rabbits and fish (I also love nanny's goats). When I'm at home I like to sing and dance, but sometimes I get a little shy when I'm out.

My favourite toys are my dolls and I also love funny DVDs (especially *Kath and Kim* and *Dumb and Dumber*).

I love swimming in our pool, which is good for me—but sometimes Mum thinks I'm going to drown!

I can become very stressed when there's lots of noise ... I get very frightened if anybody knocks or pushes me.

Because of all these things I will need someone at school to make sure I stay safe, feel safe and help me with my school work. ... I am very excited about going to school so then I'll be like my big brothers and sisters. I can't wait to wear a uniform and take a lunch bag. Mum is feeling very anxious about me going to school—but I think eventually she'll enjoy the break!

Dimity is in high school but, like Josie, she faced a difficult transition after undergoing a spinal operation that left her in a wheelchair. She was very worried about how people would react to her with a disability. Fortunately she had the support of good friends like Callie.

Shortly after Dimity returned to school, Callie used a letter to help express her feelings about meeting Dimity after the operation:

The first time I saw her in her wheelchair I didn't really know how to act around her. I could tell Dimity was feeling kind of nervous of how I would react as she didn't really talk or look at me much. But when we started spending time together by ourselves, I realised the only thing that had changed about her was she was in a wheelchair.

Callie Sutton

Parents now come up to Jen, ask her how she is going and share stories about their children. In some schools, teachers and parents have taken similar action as Jen to explain to a class how to relate to a child who is different.

Jennifer Holsworth

Josie's mother

Rowena Wilkinson

Coordinator, Early Learning Tasmania

Forum for Father-inclusive practice

Last October, a Father-inclusive practice forum was held at the University of Newcastle. The forum called on policy advisers, practitioners and researchers to identify the principles, the knowledge, skills and attitudes for including fathers in services. The principles decided upon ask the following questions of services nationwide:

- Which fathers are currently included in activities?
- Do fathers experience your services as respectful of their fathering role, and is your service recognised as an advocate for father-child connection?
- Are fathers from diverse backgrounds represented among those accessing your services?
- Do policies and staff development processes support the building of a mixed-gender workforce competent to engage with fathers?

The framework documentation is available **www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/efathers/includingfathers/index.html**

Males in Early Childhood

'Blokes can do it as well'

The Males in Early Childhood Network Group was established in 2002 in Newcastle. They meet every 6 weeks at the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle. There is more information about the group, including a forum, at **www.malesinearlychildhood.bravehost.com**

National Literacy and Numeracy Week

28 August–3 September

To find the key events in your state visit www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au/2006/default.htm

Breast Cancer Month

October

There will be a host of events throughout the month to help the National Breast Cancer Foundation reach its target of $4.2 million. To find out what's happening in your state, or for help organising your own event visit **www.nbcf.org.au**

Out and About: Kids in the House

Theatre at The Studio, Sydney Opera House

Babies Proms present
Music Book 06 (22–27 August)
Capital E National Theatre for Children (New Zealand) present
Hinepau (10–21 October)

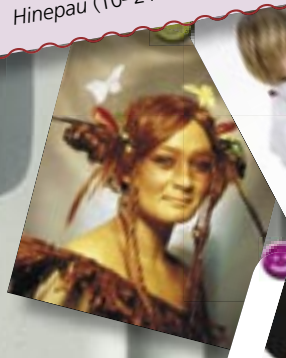
Anti-Poverty Week

15–21 October

For more information visit **www.antipovertyweek.org.au**

Father of the Year

Nominations are open for the 2006 Australian Father of the Year award. Merchandise will be on sale from 7 August–3 September: money raised will be split between five different charities that teach hearing-impaired children. Nomination forms are available at **www.fatheroftheyear.com.au**



Together a Partnership conference

7–9 September

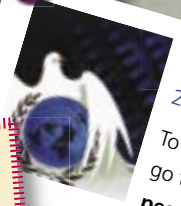
Crowne Plaza, Darwin

The Early Childhood Australia Northern Territory Branch conference is themed Weaving our Children's Voices. The conference program is available **www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/nt_branch/eca_nt_conference_program.pdf**

National Child Protection Week

3–9 September

To find out what's happening in your state visit **www.napcan.org.au/NCPW/index.htm**



International Day of Peace

21 September

To find out what's on and how you can get involved, go to **www.internationaldayofpeace.org/peaceday/australia/index.htm**

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"Not just a school"

Trish Keller, recent recipient of an Order of Australia, discusses programs she has helped implement which have turned Narrabundah Primary school into a model of inclusion.

Earlier in the year, a delegation from Korea visited Narrabundah Primary School. As they departed, the leader smiled at me and said 'Not just a school, not just a school!'.

Narrabundah has become 'not just a school' through a raft of successful programs and improvements in which inclusion has always been our guiding principle. Visit the school on any given day and you will witness many examples of deeply embedded inclusive practice. We help marginalised young people to engage with curriculum and school life. We also strive to build the resilience of our students in order to strengthen their capacity to cope with negative life influences. Our challenge is to maintain a safe and supportive environment through innovative programming and cross-agency collaboration.

Keeping values central

Yerrabi Pathways is based on the belief that social skills are vital for healthy growth and development. Through its design, development and implementation, our passionate teachers were determined to push the boundaries to make a difference in learning outcomes. A core set of values statements were created in consultation with the parent/carer community:

- quality
- responsibility
- acceptance
- courage.

These values are the focus of our social skill development, student management program and Yerrabi assemblies.

Helping kids stay healthy and happy

Our Schools as Communities program was initiated in 2001 to strengthen and support the engagement of local families and community, using the school as a focal point. It is a preventative, early intervention program addressing the problems faced by children and young people at risk in ACT government schools.

In 2002, Kootara Well was launched by the ACT Chief Minister. This program is a joint commitment to crossing boundaries to achieve health and wellbeing outcomes for children with extra needs. Student health and wellbeing is not just another curriculum extra, something mandated by the powers that be. The program relies on the cooperation of cross-sector agencies in enhancing community networks and bringing together on-site medical, social and health education services for students, families and the local community. A doctor attends a clinic within the school every week and provides a bulk-billing service to the community. This addresses the priority of the Canberra social plan to improve health and wellbeing.

Dr Bill Glasson, the patron of Kootara Well and immediate-past president of the Australian Medical Association, has commended our school on 'its innovative and compassionate approach to health and learning and helping disadvantaged families give their kids a healthier start to their lives'.

At the end of the day the students in our school are here as whole people learning. We pride ourselves on addressing the nature or essence of each student, a key aspect of our professional role.

Inclusion at an Indigenous school

Saraswathi Griffiths-Chandran describes inclusion at Queensland's Aboriginal Islander Independent Community School, known locally as the Murri School.

On Monday the buses start to roll up. Children spill up the path towards the tuckshop singing out to the drivers, cousins, sisters and brothers... Auntie T has cereal and hot toast waiting. Some eat—others chat, skip or start games of touch footy. Children peep through the windows at busy teachers. Little ones report news to the bigger ones.

Meanwhile, up at the office, kids help answer the phone, run messages and sit in the principal's chair: work out who's here, who's not and who is needed. Further along the wooden veranda, children dart out of Auntie D's room as she quietly helps ease their grief, anger and loss amongst the cushions, toys and tears. No-one peeps through the windows.

Back at the tuckshop, children scout for Auntie L to check who is here and who is away: she adjusts the plan for learning support. Uncle C watches as staff interact with children, the groundsman, teachers, bus drivers, families and the principal who is not clear just who is who. These are adults interacting with children, playing, yarning and watching. Plenty of respect words, relationship words; some swear words, maybe, then stern words.

Listening, lots of listening. Plenty of red, black and gold. A real special belonging place, a welcoming place.

Acting coordinator of Remote Area Children's Support Services Unit

Learning outside the classroom

Once the health and welfare intervention programs were operating, our teachers were able to focus on a deeper level of learning. Assisting the students to achieve their full potential and best possible learning outcomes was the motivation for our guided reading program: this provides individual literacy guidance, enabling students to reach national literacy benchmarks—an opportunity that should be afforded to all children regardless of their social circumstances. We have high expectations of our students and plan for success.

Birrigai Boys was established for Indigenous boys who needed a different approach to learning. The key to this program is providing a variety of opportunities to learn and develop self-identity in a positive and supportive outdoor environment. Significant government funding has led the program to being accessed by many other ACT government primary schools, under the name 'On Track'. A component for girls was added this year.

Comprehensive individual care

We have high expectations of all our students academically, ethically, socially and emotionally. The intricacies of providing all members of this diverse student body with appropriately challenging and engaging curriculum, while preparing our students to be healthy, principled and contributing citizens, is our daily challenge.

At Narrabundah Primary we know our students well. We know their individual interests, backgrounds, need and wants, motivations and learning styles. We are insistent on the mastery of foundational skills such as reading, numeracy and science. We also work to encourage high levels of critical thinking, problem solving and teamwork. We encourage our students to accept responsibility for their education and teach them how to be lifelong learners.

Continual development

We place a high priority on the identification and remediation of gaps and difficulties in student learning. Today's students are proficient in a range of information communication technologies. Our up-to-date infrastructure engages students. We are hopeful that the use of this technology, which is a shift in our teaching culture, will engage the group of students who find traditional classrooms and teaching methods difficult. Literacy and ICT are ideal partners and have the potential to enhance the learning and teaching for all students.

In September we will receive another delegation, this time from the International Colloquium for the Prevention of Crime. They will be looking at our programs to find ways of increasing crime prevention through education.

Narrabundah Primary is not just a school!

Trish Keller
Principal
Narrabundah Primary School

Together in Partnership
Weaving our Children's Voices
Early Childhood Australia Inc.
ECA NT Conference Darwin
The Conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 6-9 September
This conference aims to provide opportunities for professionals in education, children's services, health, and child protection together with parents to reflect on practices and gain new information.
Conference Streams
Parents – Children's first educators
New Practices – for Carers and Teachers
A Healthy start is a good start
Keynote Speakers
Matt Sanders
Professor Frank Oberklaid
Anne Stonehouse

A model of safe health care for children

At any time, one in three children has a health care need, usually related to a chronic condition such as asthma, epilepsy, allergy or diabetes. It could be a mental health issue: the national survey of child and adolescent mental health (Sawyer et al., 2000) found that 14 per cent of children aged 4 to 17 have a mental health illness, problem or disorder. When we add first aid, control and prevention of infection and infestation (the dreaded head lice!) and personal care (such as assistance with daily living tasks), it is easy to see why education and children's services staff wonder if they should change their jobs to that of nurses.

Investigating needs

Between 1998 and 2000, the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) undertook a major project to investigate the requirements of non-health workers to care for other people's children; identify work systems that are safe for children and staff; and to reassure families. This project included staff in government and non-government education and all types of childcare services.

In 2001, DECS released *Health support planning in schools, preschools and childcare services: Partnerships for health care and education*. These guidelines describe roles and responsibilities for families, health and children's services workers. They also include a four-step process of health support planning for services:

1. Make sure you have a service policy so that families (as well as staff) can clearly see what workers are trained and employed to do. If families want staff to do something special to support their child's health—for example: give medication, administer special first aid or manage a psychological health issue—then obtain a healthcare plan from the health professional treating the child.
2. When the parent/guardian releases the care plan, develop a corresponding worksite/service health support plan. Look at whether you are able to do what has been requested and examine issues of training and risk management.
3. Monitor and review your plans and worksite systems, referring to occupational health and safety principles.

There is a range of health care and support planning proformas, information and training that has been developed to support these guidelines:

- A first aid manual and training for education and childcare workers, developed with first aid training agencies.
- Personal care resources and training to support children (preschool-aged and above) with personal hygiene, continence care, oral eating and drinking support and physical transfers and positioning (lifting), developed with therapists and nurses.
- Booklets and information sessions about a wide range of health conditions, developed with medical personnel.
- References and information sessions on standard precautions and the control of head lice and other public health pests, developed with public health specialists.

Families and education and childcare staff are involved in an ongoing process of developing and reviewing this work. These guidelines, as well as many other helpful resources, are available on South Australia's Child Health and Education Support Services web site **www.chess.sa.edu.au**

The DECS project described work that was too complex or invasive to be managed using the guidelines: for example looking after children who have gastrostomy feeds, require tracheostomy care, or providing physiotherapy for children with cystic fibrosis. To assist with such situations, a collaborative service was developed with nurses and care workers, called the Access Assistant Program.

Insurance agencies and risk management services have agreed that a system of non-health workers supporting child health is safe and reasonable: funders certainly agreed it was cost efficient! In 2005, there was agreement across the South Australian government and non-government services that the DECS guidelines would be used in all services employing staff who were not trained health workers, but were nevertheless supporting children's health care needs. This system could and should be implemented nationally.

Debra Kay

Manager Interagency Health Care
Department of Education and Children's Services South Australia

Reference

Sawyer, M., Arney F., Baghurst, P., Cark J., Graetz, B., Krosky, R., Nurcombe, B., Patton, G., Prior, M., Raphael, B., Rey, J., Whaites, L., & Zubrick, S. (2000). *The mental health of young people in Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. Retrieved 11 July, 2006, www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs/$FILE/young.pdf

Project Good Start: Numeracy in the early years

Project Good Start was funded under the Australian Government's Numeracy Research and Development initiative (through the Department of Education, Science and Training) to investigate the practices and learning experiences that support the early numeracy development of children, in the year before and at the beginning of school.

Evaluating numeracy programs

The research (conducted by the Australian Council for Education Research) took place over two years and focused on the questions of how effective numeracy programs can be identified and what constitutes evidence of effectiveness. In the first year, 1615 children were sampled from 81 preschool, day care and early childhood centres. In the second, 1620 children in their first year (including 231 from the previous year's sample) from 44 primary schools participated. The study represented all states and territories.

The project profiled children's numeracy development at the beginning and the end of both years. This enabled the gauging of children's numeracy development through preschool and early years programs. The research method involved:

- 'Who am I?', a developmental instrument requiring children to copy geometric shapes, write some numbers, letters of the alphabet, words and a simple sentence and draw a picture of themselves, and
- 'I can do maths', which required children to write, draw, count and measure (typically in the areas of number, measurement and space).

The results

The findings of the study showed that preschool centres tended to fall into two categories. In 'play-focused' centres, staff believed in providing a program with a strong emphasis on play and introducing numeracy concepts subtly through play activities. Other centres orientated staff towards a more structured and purposeful approach integrating early numeracy in a formal manner. Such centres had well-defined, structured and purposeful programs that were presented in creative, innovative, imaginative and flexible ways which captured the attention of children, irrespective of their ability level.

The results obtained from the achievement data reflected that children attending centres that had a more structured and defined numeracy program had quite high levels of numeracy. For instance, most students understood concepts of 'smaller', 'more', 'longest' and 'shortest'. Furthermore, more than one-third could answer complex requests such as 'put a tick on the shape that makes the side of the cube'.

Influence of verbal interaction

The level of verbal interaction between staff and children was also an influential factor. At some centres it was observed that children were provided with resources and given limited guidance or direction on what to do and then left to their own devices. This tended to result in children not really engaging in what they were doing.

In contrast, children at those centres with high levels of verbal interaction were more engaged in the activity they were completing, took more care and were more focused. Such interaction also resulted in staff subtly extending children in the activity they were pursuing. For example, after a child could build a square out of blocks, they were asked if they could build another four-sided shape and were asked what it was called.

Reactions to the study

Some preschool staff had showed initial concern about children's reactions to an assessment activity that was unfamiliar to them in terms of format—however, a recurring comment from staff and parents was that they were surprised by the level of numeracy acquisition that children had attained at preschool and, in particular, parents were enthusiastic about the ongoing numeracy skills their children were building in their first year of school.

That some preschools indicated they don't teach numeracy, *per se*, is evidence of the subtle ways in which numeracy is acquired through less-formal settings, and also suggests that incidental learning of numeracy from everyday experiences can be successfully incorporated into a learning context.

In general, the findings of *Project Good Start* show children in their year prior to school demonstrate a quite sophisticated level of numeracy acquisition, which they subsequently build upon in their first year of school.

Catherine Underwood and Sue Thomson
Australian Council for Educational Research

Where are the gifted under fives?

Inclusion and support programs for gifted children

In 2001, the Government conducted a Senate inquiry into gifted education but, unfortunately, its recommendations and subsequent implementation strategies passed the early childhood field unnoticed. I believe we may have missed the action on gifted children because of six commonly-held myths:

❶ 'All children can be well catered for by the developmental program or emergent curriculum currently offered in early childhood settings.'

Fact: Gifted children have particular special needs and strengths that require an individual education plan—ideally created cooperatively by their teacher and their parents—which is regularly evaluated.

❷ 'Young gifted children (if they exist at all) are bound to have deficit needs. For instance, they generally have poor eye-hand coordination and social skills, and, as we are not gifted experts, these are the areas that should be programmed for in the early childhood setting.'

Fact: Gifted children often develop unevenly and are plagued by insecurities as a result of their 'different-ness'. Programming for strengths is a strategy that will enhance self-esteem and help gifted children overcome reluctance to confront weaknesses. The difficulties they sometimes encounter with their peers are usually due to their advanced mental age, rather than with a social skills problem: gifted youngsters often feel more comfortable with older children or adults.

❸ 'Gifted children are already ahead of other children and therefore do not require particular programming. We need instead to focus on children who have deficit needs or are disabled.'

Fact: Gifted children have a number of special needs including chronic low self-esteem, perfectionism and boredom. Giftedness has its window of opportunity and, if it is not attended to, it atrophies like an unused muscle. Besides, why must it be a choice between programming for the gifted or for the disabled?

❹ 'Children, whether gifted or not, need to play and to have a normal childhood. There is plenty of time for scholastic activities later on.'

Fact: Early childhood educators have had numerous conversations about the 'image of the child', but no-one has yet questioned the image of the playing child and what 'play' may mean in this context. In the case of gifted children, 'play' could well mean composing music (think of Mozart who did just this at age five). Our role is not to tell children to wait until we think they are ready, but to be responsive to their actual needs whenever they occur.

❺ 'Parents who claim their children are gifted have been spending too much time hot-housing them with scholastic activities, that's why these children seem to be ahead of others. Experience indicates that once they have been attending a centre for a while, you can no longer tell these children from the others.'

Fact: Research has consistently shown that parents who nominate their children as gifted are mostly correct in their assertions. There is also ample evidence from twin studies that intelligence has a genetic component, and research shows that gifted parents tend to spend more time with their children, demonstrating that both genetics and environment help to kindle gifted children. Additionally, gifted children soon learn the 'norms' in a particular setting and are excellent at 'hiding their light' in a setting where their different-ness is not appreciated—that's why they seem to fit in after a while.

❻ 'We have never had a gifted child at our preschool or childcare centre.'

Fact: If 10 per cent of the population are intellectually disabled, then the 10 per cent on the other side of the normal distribution must be gifted. Giftedness is generally categorised in a similar way to disabilities: e.g. mild, moderate, etc. (see box). So it is likely that there are at least four or five gifted children at a 50-place service.

A seventh myth is that the concept of gifted education is elitist.

The summary of the 2001 Senate inquiry acknowledged that:

- gifted children are found in all socioeconomic and ethnic groups; and we fail underprivileged children's special needs the most, because they are least likely to have other supports
- early childhood staff should, therefore, be trained to identify gifted:
  - children from low socioeconomic backgrounds
  - children with a disability
  - rural children
  - children of Indigenous descent.

Level of giftedness	IQ	Prevalence
Mildly gifted	IQ 115–129	>1:40
Moderately gifted	IQ 130–144*	1:40–1:1000
Highly gifted	IQ 145–159	1:1000–1:10 000
Exceptionally gifted	IQ 160–179	1:10,000–1:1 million
Profoundly gifted	180+	<1:1 million

(Feldhusen, 1993, cited in Gross 2000)
*Intellectual giftedness is classified as 130+ by most school systems.

- we have neglected gifted children's special needs; therefore many suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress
- the special needs of gifted children should be seen in the same light as intellectual disability special needs and physical disability special needs
- the Commonwealth should sponsor national curriculum materials (including online materials) to help teachers differentiate the curriculum for gifted children
- suitable acceleration of gifted children should be encouraged (e.g. early entry into the school system for gifted preschoolers).

Current perceptions

The issue of early entry mentioned above applies especially to early childhood services where gifted children's parents should be able to find support and information (Wellisch, 2005). This is why it is clear that the Senate inquiry was a wake-up call, not just for schools, but for the early childhood sector too. Unfortunately, rather than being at the forefront, our field has regressed. Take the current Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) handbook (NCAC, 2005), for example, which makes no mention of gifted children at all—whereas they were included in the 1993 version (albeit in the introductory section).

Recommendations

Young gifted children should be provided with a program that meets their needs. The Government's commitment to gifted education should be extended to fund courses for early childhood educators, early childhood support services and be embedded in the QIAS. And what should services do in the meantime? If you feel inadequately trained to assess and program for gifted children; are unaware of the early entry option and don't know whether you have a gifted child attending your service; then you can—and should—visit the websites below and make a start on providing more adequately for the special needs of young gifted children in your care.

Mimi Wellisch

References and further reading

The Government's *Gifted and Talented Policy* is available online www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/gats/PD20040051.shtml as is the *Gifted Education Professional Development Package* www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/gats/

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Wellisch, M. (2005). School readiness: When should we consider early entry? *Every Child, 11*(3), 26–27.

Well-known psychologist and educator Louise Porter has updated and revised her book, *Young gifted children: Meeting their needs*, which is a comprehensive but easy to use resource for early childhood professionals. This, and other quality assured titles, are available from **www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au** or **freecall 1800 356 900**.

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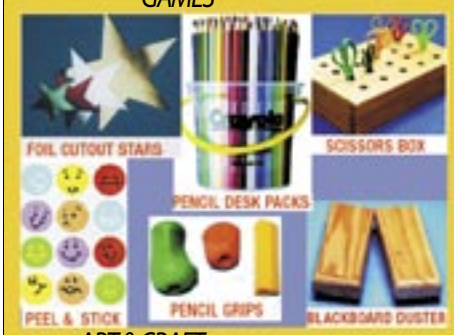

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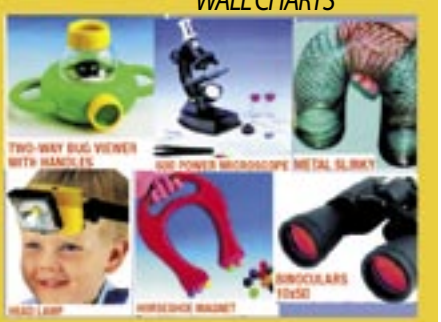
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Promoting evidence-based practice in early childhood intervention

Elwyn Morey Child Study Centre has been set up to develop programs of evidence-based practice. Angelika Anderson and Di Chandler discuss why such research is crucial.

There is increasing awareness of the vital importance of children's early years to their overall development. This has been highlighted by recent media attention on early childhood services. What happens between birth and age six is critical, and it is vital that we provide our young children with beneficial experiences during this time. This is especially true for children with special needs, with which precious instructional time needs to be used to best effect. Parents as consumers are sometimes confronted with a bewildering array of choices. How can we know which programs or interventions are best? How can parents make informed and wise choices? What we need is evidence.

The importance of research

As consumers in other areas such evidence is often available. When choosing a new washing machine, for example, we are able to access information about its efficiency (electricity and water consumption rates). Such information is available because manufacturers test their machines and monitor production to ensure high (or improving) standards. Sometimes consumer organisations run independent tests.

Ideally, this is how it should be with educational services, including early childhood intervention programs. Even if the efficacy of a particular program or practice is known, we still need to ensure that it is used effectively in specific instances. For example, we know that not all car mechanics are equally good at repairing cars, even if they use the same methods, techniques and tools. So how can parents be sure that they access quality educational or childcare services for their children? How can service providers be sure that they provide effective services?

Centre philosophy and purpose

The Elwyn Morey Child Study Centre has a long-established reputation for providing quality early childhood intervention programs for children with a range of disabilities. Our services and programs are based on a philosophy of family-centred practice supporting families to manage their child in life, delivered within a play-based environment.

At the centre we are building a program of systematic research. Our aims are to promote effective evidence-based practice, to engage in a program of ongoing improvement, and to promote the development of a centre of excellence in practice and research. A focus of our research program is to improve the way we foster the development of language, play and social skills in children with developmental disabilities, and facilitate their inclusion in mainstream settings.

Connecting to the community

Better outcomes for children can be achieved by looking at ways in which parents, practitioners and early childhood teachers in the mainstream can work together. To that end, two further developments at the centre are of interest. Since the beginning of this year, the Elwyn Morey Child Study Centre has been offering an inclusive kindergarten program alongside the early intervention programs. We have also extended our community outreach program, in which a skilled early intervention teacher works alongside mainstream teachers in a team-teaching capacity, to develop and implement effective inclusive practices. We look forward to being able to report on the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Angelika Anderson and Di Chandler
Elwyn Morey Child Study Centre
Monash University, Clayton Campus

We need to encourage evidence-based practice, based on research. Such research can have a number of functions:

- To test the effectiveness of interventions and programs.
- To monitor the continuing effectiveness of established programs.
- To provide practitioners with feedback, in order to improve practice.

Research requires effort, commitment and resources—but only if we have data can we invest our limited resources, time, and energy in the most efficacious programs and interventions. Only with feedback can we know what works and how to improve.

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—Judy, Cooloon Children's Centre, NSW

I am funding the Everyday Learning Series from an unexpected surplus in the last financial year, and I intend to include it the enrolment package for families for 2007 as an additional benefit of enrolling our service.
—Centre Director, Tas

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