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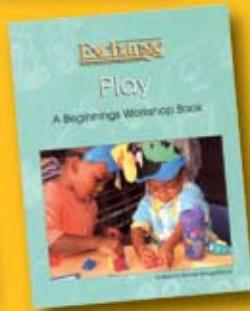


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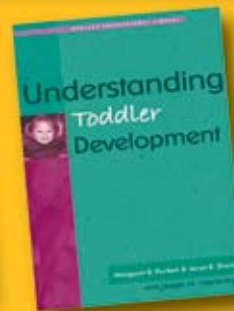
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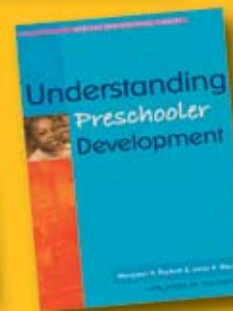
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## Wise vision, workable solutions and early childhood action

With a federal election looming, some early childhood issues will be in the spotlight ... with others staying in the too-hard basket. At the top of the to-do list—or at least the to-talk-about list—will be access and affordability: issues that are quantifiable and easy to discuss but not necessarily those that pose real challenges.

We have seen improvements in the overall numbers of childcare places since the last election but the supply remains patchy. Affordability, too, has improved, but data shows child care is more expensive. The reality is that creeping costs make childcare fees rise, but increase in cost does not equate to increase in quality—and providing quality child care is, by definition, expensive.

**The funding issue that needs most attention is the childcare subsidy (Child Care Benefit). Clearly the maximum subsidy of \$148 per week barely covers the costs of quality child care, now running at about \$70–120 per day. Hopefully at least one political party will think about broadening the scope of the subsidy to include preschool participation and revisit means-testing and income thresholds.**

It is timely to think about the re-introduction of operational subsidies for early childhood services. The sector has changed profoundly over the past decade. Now it is time to establish whether these changes have been for the better. The National Agenda for Early Childhood set out to do this, but its progress has been derailed.

As parties decide their policies, other issues likely to be in the spotlight are family violence and child abuse and neglect. In the Northern Territory, where I am now based, there are many children living in homes and communities where alcohol, drug abuse, violence and poverty are the norm. There needs to be a concerted bipartisan effort to improve experiences and outcomes for these children.

We are likely to hear more about how each party will tackle childhood obesity and improve child health. Last federal election there was a focus on improving 'parenting'—but its associations with Mark Latham's defeat will necessitate a dramatic rhetoric shift for this to be on the agenda again.

Given the strong bipartisan focus on improving literacy and education, and visions of Australians being the best-trained people in the world, education will be high on the agenda. Improvement in early childhood education is at the core of meaningful improvements in school retention and attainment so this area will be in focus.

National curriculum and testing may be leading the education debate, but the upcoming focus will be mainly on older children. Unfortunately,

decisions on a nationally uniform school starting age, which could have underpinned greater consistency in educational experiences and quality, seem to have been shelved for the foreseeable future.

While Australia's literacy performance is generally good and most children are on par with those in comparable countries, there is a huge achievement gap. Too many children, particularly in rural and remote communities, fail to make the grade. Improving the teaching of literacy is critical; but there must also be bipartisan efforts to improve school resources in disadvantaged communities, especially Indigenous ones. Only with the best teachers, most-personalised curricula and reading programs will literacy levels improve.

**It is early days yet and many policies will be launched. Presumably we'll see a number of policies focusing specifically on early childhood care and education, and child and family wellbeing. I suspect, however, we won't hear discussion about anything that is too difficult to achieve, such as the accreditation of early childhood care and education courses (both vocational and tertiary), a national registration system for early childhood carers and educators, or consistent national early childhood licensing legislation and regulation.**

This year's election presents an opportunity for everyone to create positive change for Australia's early childhood carers, educators and children. Later this year Early Childhood Australia will be suggesting ways in which you can make your voice heard in relation to election issues but, for now, I hope the articles in this *Every Child*—which cover a range of issues challenging the images of a 'traditional' children's service (if there ever was such a thing)—are a source of inspiration and a call to action.

**Alison Elliott**

Editor  
*Every Child*



Collette Tayler is a professor in Queensland University of Technology's School of Early Childhood and is a member of Save the Children Australia's Board of Directors. She discusses the challenges faced by Australia, and the world, to provide the best possible care for our children.

## Challenging practice and challenging practices in early childhood education and care

Those involved in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are being challenged to re-think policy and provision in the light of family and work practices of 21st century societies. In the areas that policies and investments have not kept pace with changes in family life, their capacity to effectively serve young children and families has diminished. In Australia, strain on early childhood and family support services is directly linked to matters outlined in *Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care* (Bennett & Tayler, 2006), launched by the Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD) in September 2006.

A change in international policy direction to focus on lifelong learning does not mean that the earliest years of life are appropriate for the methods of teaching and learning used at school. Rather, it is clearly recognised that the period from conception to primary school is when the emotional, social, intellectual and physical capabilities of children are shaped. This period defines the way that children come to know the world and act as learners and citizens.

Acknowledging this—and a concern about the level of access and the quality of provision in this phase of learning—education ministers from the OECD countries commissioned a thematic review of ECEC policy (1998–2004). The final report, *Starting strong II*, examines contemporary ECEC in the diverse social, economic and political contexts of 20 countries.

We concluded that there is a need to:

- attend to the contemporary social context of early childhood
- place wellbeing, early development and learning at the core of ECEC work, while respecting children's agency and natural learning strategies

- create the governance structures necessary for system accountability and quality assurance
- develop broad guidelines and curricula orientations with stakeholders, for all ECEC services
- base public funding estimates on the achievement of quality pedagogical goals
- reduce child poverty and exclusion through upstream fiscal, social and labour policies, and increase resources within universal programs for children with diverse learning rights
- encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services
- improve the working conditions and professional education of ECEC staff
- provide autonomy, funding and support to early childhood services
- aspire towards ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy.

**Substantial re-thinking and much greater public investment in Australia is necessary in order to produce the coherent response that these challenges demand. The level of public funding to ECEC is a key determinant of the total quality of provision. Poor investment leads to services where the staff have limited or no qualifications, low wages and poor working conditions. These factors diminish the likelihood of children experiencing quality early education and care.**

Australia invests 0.45 per cent of its gross domestic product in care and (preschool) education combined, whereas the range in OECD countries is from some 2 per cent in Nordic regions, to 0.3 per cent in Canada. Different funding levels result in significant differences in the quality and scope of services available, as well as the extent to which children and families have access to programs.

**Young children's access to ECEC programs in Australia is among the lowest in the OECD. From 2004 evidence, only 24 per cent of Australian children aged 0–3 years and 61 per cent of 3–4 year olds accessed accredited services. In most OECD countries a large majority of children are in kindergarten programs from age three.**

Additionally, Australia has yet to provide effective paid parental leave, which is vital for the health, wellbeing and psychological needs of infant and family, and to secure adult labour in the economy. This kind of policy—seen in Norway, Sweden, and now Canada and the United Kingdom—goes hand in hand with children's rights to access programs that support their development and learning. High-quality parental support and early childhood programs are especially important for the elimination of the detrimental effects of poverty and social exclusion on households.

We are challenged to act on several fronts:

- to gain much-needed additional public investment
- to win access for all children whose families seek programs
- to establish quality professional education that takes into account strategies for working with contemporary and diverse families
- to ensure that quality early development and learning experience is a right for all children, no matter what their background
- to create participative structures that welcome parental and community engagement with children's education and care, both at home and in the services children attend.

Activism is critical if children are to experience quality programs as a right. Early childhood carers and educators reap improved results when they pay attention and listen to the diverse families and children in their service. Re-thinking and discussing together how best to combine every child's parental and non-parental care and education enables us to better support parents and to support more cohesive development and learning for children.

### Collette Tayler

School of Early Childhood  
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### Reference

Bennett, J., & Tayler, C. (2006). *Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development.

# Doing it 'our way': Including children and families from different cultures

Should individuals from different cultural backgrounds do things 'our way'? We have to answer this individually because 'our way' means 'our culture' and this is a very personal matter.



The question of 'our way' cannot be answered quickly, regardless of how tempting it might be to give a resounding 'No, we have to provide for their culture and language in our service' or 'Yes, we are here to teach them how.' To answer we need to think about what culture is, how it affects each of us, and how to really understand people from our own and other cultures.

## WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture can be defined as the values, beliefs and practices of a group of people. It is passed on by families and caregivers to very young children without them even being aware of it.

Culture is the things we regard as normal day-to-day living, such as eating, sleeping, caring for children and the ways in which we communicate. It includes shared values and special occasions: our rituals, customs and celebrations—everything from birthdays, sporting occasions, special holidays to religious celebrations. In fact, it's probably safe to say that the more 'normal' we regard something, the more it is part of our culture.

## UNDERSTANDING 'OUR CULTURE'

To understand our own culture it is important to spend time in reflection and gaining self-knowledge: thinking about what makes us tick as individuals; how and why we act the way we do. It's also important to be as well-informed as possible: to try to understand different people and points of view by noticing things, talking to people, reading and watching films, listening to music and travelling.

It's also useful to try to describe 'our culture' in the same ways as we describe the culture of others. For example, try to create a fact sheet about your culture. How easy is it? How many people of your culture agree with your description? What about how 'we' bring up children? How easily would you, your friends and your colleagues of the same cultural background agree on all aspects of that?

### Good questions to consider include:

- How much do you value group consensus and success, adherence to norms, respect for authority—compared to individual achievement, self-expression and personal choice?
- How much do you emphasise criticism, social skills and listening to authority—as opposed to self-motivation, cognitive skills and oral expression?
- What do you think about:
  - individual materialism compared with communal goods and relationships?
  - child-centred learning compared with an adult as teacher?
  - formality versus informality in relationships and interactions?
  - the balance between verbal and other means of communication?
  - expressing emotions or keeping them hidden?
  - the relative importance of the present compared to the future?

We often find, first, that these qualities, values, beliefs and behaviours vary according to context; and, second, no two people are the same. Third, when we think about being Australian, we may observe that there are groups of people who seem to have more in common with one another: for example, people from the same socioeconomic groups; people who share the same environments or live in the same areas of a big city. This is the reality of culture: it is not fixed, but it changes according to the interactions between all individuals, their groups and their societies.

Sometimes people will present us with dilemmas, in that they may not accept aspects of our professional best practice. When this happens we need to be particularly careful, proceeding slowly with openness to communicate and share information to reach mutually acceptable resolutions (which always have in mind children's safety and wellbeing). In communicating with parents, try to talk to them and come to understand the 'why' of what they are saying, doing or requesting: and then see what can be done.



## UNDERSTANDING OTHER CULTURES

Given how complicated it can be to understand our own culture and to describe 'our' way of thinking and doing things, how best can we approach people who appear very different?

### 1. Committing

First, we need to understand the benefit to children of reaching out, welcoming and respecting parents for who they are. Young children are very quick to pick up unspoken messages and, given that their parents are so important to them, it is logical that they feel good when they see their parents are welcomed and getting on well with carers. Many parents from other than English-speaking backgrounds want to be involved in their children's service but are unsure of what is required of them.

### 2. Preparing

It takes much more time and effort to communicate with people who have a different first language, strongly accented English, and/or different body language and communication styles than it does with people who use the same language and communication cues. Of course, this is true for both parties and it is even more demanding and tiring for the person using a second language.

Make time to learn about different communication styles—cross-cultural communication in particular. If you feel shy, or afraid you will do something 'wrong', say so: you will probably end up laughing together! Being prepared means having time, skills and a willingness to experiment and enjoy the experience.

### 3. Being informed and sensitive

It is important to think about other cultures in the same way as we think about our own: they are as complex and there are just as many individual differences. This means that we should keep finding out as much as we can about different people and places as background information; but we get our best information from the families we are working with, and should try to build our work around our understanding of (and relationship with) individuals.



## SHOULD OTHERS USE 'OUR WAY'?

Given that there are so many different ways that could be called 'ours', the true answer is probably that we should work with others on an individual basis: talking openly and accurately about the things we do and our reasons for doing them, finding out the things they would like us to do or not to do, and their reasons. The end result should be a situation in which everyone wins—especially children.

**Margaret Young**

National President

Early Childhood Australia

### Reference

Families First Northern Sydney (NSW) & Lady Gowrie Child Centre (Sydney). (2007). *Building connections*. Sydney: Author.



*Observing and planning in early childhood settings: Using a sociocultural approach* is a comprehensive theoretical and practical guide to implementing a holistic approach to learning. It is available from Early Childhood Australia for \$37.95 (including p&h). To order, or to find out more, visit [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pub37](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pub37)

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# School-based playgroups: Engaging families and creating learning opportunities

All playgroups offer chances for children to play with peers and for parents to socialise; but supported playgroups create unique, structured opportunities, especially for children who don't normally access formal early childhood services.

Supported playgroups create opportunities to enhance children's development. They are places where language and literacy skills are nurtured to prepare children for positive literacy experiences in the early school years. These groups collaborate with families, strengthening parents' confidence and competence in supporting their children's learning and development.

Ideally, supported playgroups are part of a 'one-stop-shop' or 'wraparound service' which connects communities with health and social welfare services, a preschool or kindergarten and childcare centre. Supported playgroups share aims and goals with families, based on common understandings of children's cultural contexts and their social and educational needs. Successful playgroups work in concert with families.

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## BELMORE NORTH PLAYGROUP

Belmore North Public School in Sydney provides a supported playgroup which operates on the premise that families should be actively involved in their children's learning and development well before school starts. The group is run by parents who have harnessed a suite of community resources to support young children's development and transition to school. It provides formal school-preparation activities, including computer-based literacy and maths experiences.

As part of the playgroup, parents spend time together getting to know the school and its teachers. The playgroup makes all families feel valued and welcome. It engenders a real sense of belonging and assists parents in supporting their children's development and learning.

## MEADOWBANK PLAYGROUP

The supported playgroup at Melbourne's Meadowbank Primary School has a similar transition-to-school support role. It is a community hub which connects families and schools. Local families start to use the centre when their children are babies; they meet informally and get to know the school environment and staff. Over the past few years, the group has truly involved the community, greatly improving families' transition to school experiences.

According to the school's principal, the playgroup's seamless and unobtrusive support for families and children provides a rich social and learning base. It enables families to participate in scaffolded developmental experiences, including early literacy and problem solving. It also promotes healthy eating and positive behaviours. Children begin playgroup as toddlers and progress to a four-year-old group in the year before school. Most children in this community would not otherwise attend formal child care or preschool programs.

## CHALLENGES TO SUPPORTED PLAYGROUPS

Typically, schools are unable to run supported playgroups on their own, and instead a range of agencies and volunteers—including speech therapists, community health nurses, leaders and students—are brought in to support children and families. Also, there are considerable difficulties involved in finding resources, especially in schools that serve low-income, vulnerable and/or culturally and linguistically diverse minority communities, including Indigenous ones.

Building collaborative strategies, parent involvement and the partnerships necessary to operate a supported playgroup is an ongoing challenge for services. Some schools are on a never-ending submission-writing treadmill to access funding. Continuing and additional government support is necessary for the currently successful programs to continue and new ones to begin.

Alison Elliott

## Minya Bunhii: A little nest of learning

Minya Bunhii is situated in Ceduna on the Far West Coast of South Australia, about 500 km from the West Australian border. Director Mavis Miller and Assistant Director Ursula Montgomerie discuss how the centre is at the heart of this richly diverse community.

Minya Bunhii's centre name comes from one of the local Aboriginal languages, meaning 'little nest'. The integrated centre has childcare, preschool and playgroup facilities, and has gained an excellent reputation for catering for the needs of the local community. It has grown from a small site into a vibrant centre with a strong focus on learning outcomes and the preservation of local culture and languages.

The centre is run by a management committee consisting of parents and members of the community. It excels in reconciliatory, cross-agency approaches to service provision, curriculum, production of resources and children's learning. Training sessions on different aspects of child development are often provided to members of the community.

Minya Bunhii's programs incorporate community awareness and contact with the wider community through regular excursions. The weekly programs have a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, which incorporates the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability framework, with an emphasis on play.

### CARING FOR ALL YOUNG CHILDREN

The centre promotes the use of keyword signing to assist children with communication difficulties and staff members are encouraged to model signing to all children. An example of the positive influence of this procedure is that even children under the age of two can sign 'stop' to other children at the centre. Staff are also available to teach basic signs to parents.

The centre also employs three staff members who work with the Intensive Support Playgroup, a mobile playgroup who work with families within the community and surrounding area.

### PRESCHOOL AND EDUCATION SERVICES

Minya Bunhii preschool sessions are from 9-12 am Monday to Thursday and cater for up to 20 children. Child care is provided by a long day care centre licensed to cater for up to 50 children (15 under-tuos and 35 over-tuos). While Aboriginal families have priority of access, non-Aboriginal children are not excluded and children with additional needs are also welcomed. The centre employs many Aboriginal people and encourages Aboriginal people to apply for all positions advertised.

The preschool facility caters specifically for three-year-old Aboriginal children, assisting them in the transition to mainstream education. We run a bus service to and from the centre. There is a nutrition program which provides children with a nutritious lunch before going home. Some of the preschool children also remain at the centre to attend child care in the afternoons.



The centre is located next door to the Ceduna Preschool and Early Learning Program. These services work with Minya Bunhii in shared leadership to provide a quality-learning environment for children. Close links also exist to other Aboriginal and outreach services in the community, including a speech pathologist, dentist, occupational therapists and health workers. Each year a 'play day' is organised involving local schools and other childcare facilities, encouraging further integration of children's services into the community.

### BOOKS BY AND FOR THE COMMUNITY

Minya Bunhii sells a series of books, produced by the centre to support and promote indigenous language and maintain the community's cultural traditions. The books share the culture of the community, through photos of children, families and the local area. There is a plan to produce a new series in the future.

Books may be ordered from the centre on  
08 8625 3636 or email:  
office.support@minyabunhiikgn.sa.edu.au



## CULTURAL INCLUSION

Children in our childcare and preschool facilities are always busy participating in activities that teach them about the local community. We celebrate many cultural events, such as Chinese New Year, during which we make lanterns, fans and mobiles.

Parents and community members often visit the centre and share their experiences and skills with children, such as creating art, reading stories, making damper and cooking kangaroo tails and bush tucker. Children love participating in these activities.

The centre is also involved in several awareness programs. Every year we participate in Hairlairoo Day, raising money for childhood cancer, and National Families Week, celebrating being together enjoying each other's company. During this week we invite the whole community to a morning tea at the centre.

## CHALLENGES FOR THE CENTRE

Minya Bunhii occasionally has difficulty retaining staff as other occupations can afford to provide higher wages. The centre works to support staff that are studying by giving them lots of opportunities to be involved, holding study days and offering traineeships when money is available. Recently, incentives have been offered by employment agencies to increase staff wages, which have been a great assistance to the centre's budget.

Other challenges faced by the centre include:

- communication barriers
- funding submissions
- racism
- childcare waiting lists



- the lack of time (there is never enough!)
- behavioural difficulties
- changes to administration requirements
- finding relief staff.

All these challenges, and more, are overcome each day through effective communication, shared responsibilities, being positive and, of course, with help from supportive parents and the local community.

Staff always keep what is best for children as their guide. The smiles and laughter of the children at our centre indicate that we are providing a high-quality learning experience and that, later in their lives, they will leave our nest flying high and with confidence.

**Mavis Miller**

Director

**Ursula Montgomerie**

Assistant Director

Minya Bunhii Inc, Ceduna

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\*Lecturer in Music at the University of Southern Queensland.

## Creating a community space

Coralie McAlister, principal of Majura Primary School in the ACT, describes the school's innovative plan for revitalising its outdoor environments.



In 2005, Majura Primary School received a grant to upgrade its interiors. So, when I became principal in 2006, the insides were looking fabulous. Unfortunately, the combination of drought, lack of infrastructure and faulty irrigation had left our outdoor spaces looking quite desolate. Our school community, especially the children, had frequently indicated that they wanted to improve these exterior spaces, so I started a revitalisation project.

### BEGINNING WORK

I was very lucky that an expert in creating community spaces, Barbara Wheeler, has a child at the school. She approached me, offering to help run a process of community consultation.

Barbara and I worked out that, by terminating our grounds' maintenance contract, we could divert funds to pay for the services of a landscape architect to produce a plan of five different spaces. Neil Hobbs, a local award-winning architect, said he'd love to be involved.

### A CHILD-DRIVEN PROCESS

We agreed from the beginning that we wanted the process to be child-driven: we wanted our children to have the chance to express what kind of space they'd like to have.

I created an environment committee made up of two children from every class and we went on excursions to places like Malkara School, which has a sense-touch playground, and Curtin Primary School, who have play equipment for children with disabilities. We took photos of these facilities and our own school, and the children developed a PowerPoint presentation (available on the Majura Primary School website: [www.majuraps.act.edu.au](http://www.majuraps.act.edu.au)).

The presentation asks four questions:

- What is this space used for?
- How does it make me feel?
- How would I like it to feel?
- What would I like to see there?

### COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

All of our classes went on a tour of the school and watched the presentation. Following this, we letter-dropped, inviting members of the local community to go through the same process.

Through these consultation sessions we decided that we wanted our exterior spaces to be:

- sustainable – to be water-wise and use native plants. The school is part of the Mount Majura corridor which is something we wanted to emphasise in the design, in order to encourage local conservation groups to get involved.
- creative – filled with inspirational and interactive art.
- owned by the community – rather than putting up a fence, we want to invite our community into the spaces.

We presented the results at community forum where there was a further opportunity to make changes, before a plan was ratified. Neil Hobbs was present through the whole process, recording responses from the children and community. He took all of this information and developed a master plan.

### FUTURE PLANS

Some of the features planned for development over the next two–three years include:

- an environment courtyard with chooks and a garden
- a showpiece central courtyard with an amphitheatre, encircled by pergolas connected to each of the classrooms
- ramps for wheelchair access, with a dry creek bed underneath them
- a front space with seats for parents, containing artwork by local artists
- two playgrounds with native grasses and a coloured path to link them.

### THE NEXT STAGE

The master plan was presented to the community in March this year. It included photos of the current locations with projections for the future. The next stage for us is to use this material for grant requests and to involve local businesses as partners. As in the early stages, we plan to include our children, parents and local community every step of the way.

#### Coralie McAlister

Principal  
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In June last year, Early Childhood Australia's (ECA) CEO, Pam Cahir, delivered an inspiring, provocative address challenging community-based early childhood services to reorganise their management systems. ECA's North Coast Region (NSW Branch) responded by inviting members of the early childhood field to a 'Systems Information Day'.

Maintaining viability and sustainability, while continuing to provide high-quality care and education for community-based early childhood services, is an issue of ongoing concern. In a climate of increasing numbers of privately owned children's services and ongoing funding problems for preschools, many community-based organisations are suffering financially.

## CURRENT PROBLEMS

On the North Coast of NSW, and all over Australia, many community-based early childhood services, especially preschools, are suffering economic hardship which is affecting their ability to provide quality care and education. Historical, social, demographic, economic, ethical and social justice factors have also contributed to this situation.

Community-based early childhood services have been successfully managed over the past 30 years by volunteer parent bodies. However, their position in the community

# Re-thinking the management of community-based early childhood services

has been weakened by competition and unwillingness (or inability) to meet their community's needs. This has led to a questioning of whether the current community-based model is the most appropriate for ongoing viability and a sustained future.

## LONG DAY CARE

Long day care centres have also changed significantly over the past 14 years, as privately owned centres have gained equal access to funding. Likewise, family day care places are no longer capped and new services can be established and operated for a profit, providing the relevant legislation is satisfied.

NSW preschools have been suffering from a funding freeze since 1989. Fees have increased and enrolments declined as families opt for long or family day care. Inadvertently, the increased provision and availability of both care types has offered more affordable care for parents in times of increasing fees for preschool attendance. Increased numbers of women working has created demand for longer hours which preschools can no longer meet.

## A WAY FORWARD?

Last November, ECA's North Coast Region (NSW Branch), invited practitioners and managers of early childhood community-based services, service advisors and early childhood professionals to a 'Systems Information Day'. Several speakers, including Judy Radich (ECA's former National President) and Margaret Young (current National President), discussed the possibilities of an amalgamated children's services system.

The speakers indicated that a united approach to service and administration could enable

community-based services to:

- be accessible for all families, in terms of

- affordability

- availability

- flexibility

- locality

- be economically sustainable and viable
- continue to provide high-quality care
- continue to provide satisfying working conditions
- continue to focus on outcomes for children, instead of business-related ones
- have a voice audible to the government.

Both central and local level responsibilities need to be identified in order for the whole field to go forward.

A central outcome of the day was the recognition that services need to respond to shifts in the environment and remember what matters for children—leadership and quality care—and how they affect relationships with young children, staff training, development, working conditions and career prospects.

As Judy Radich said in her speech, 'Services should move away from thinking about "my centre" to shared ownership. We have a role to play to generate a vision together. Children cannot wait—they deserve quality services right now, and in the future.'

### Wendy Boyd

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Pam Cahir's address to the Country Children's Services Association Annual Conference, *A systems approach to the delivery of children's services in this country - does it have anything to offer?* is available to read on the Early Childhood Australia website: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/systems\\_approach](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/systems_approach)

# Creative playspaces

The outdoor environments we create, where we place our children, are often the most neglected components of children's services—yet we spend more time in these spaces and they have the greatest capacity to influence how children grow, develop and interact with the natural world.

The NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services places significant emphasis on the importance of physical environments and discusses their impact on children, adults and the wider community. Unfortunately, outdoor playspaces are increasingly becoming plasticised, stripped of their natural beauty and ability to evoke wonder.

The Dorothy Waide Centre for Early Learning is located in Griffith (NSW) in part of a Department of Housing estate, approximately 4 km from the centre of town. The centre is community based and operated by a parent board. Following changes to our operational subsidy in the mid-90s, the centre's board determined that, in order to remain affordable for our community, expansion was the only real option. Moving from 40 to 70 places would give us the economic base to provide the quality of care and education we wanted, and remain affordable in the long term.

To expand meant we had to negotiate with the Department of Housing for two additional lots of land and also seek capital grants to make it happen. With access to the extra land we could expand the facility and also create a unique outdoor environment. In 1999 we received the additional land and started to plan the new facility and outdoor environments, considering the needs of children and adults.

## PLANNING FOR CHANGE

The planning process gave us an opportunity to reflect on our play as young children, where and how children play and live now, and the significant factors that had changed. Today children usually have less opportunity to take adventures



Sofffall area in big playground



Entrance to the centre

beyond the backyard, whereas we had the advantage of having a very large green space (approximately 0.7 hectares) and eager parents, staff and children who were able to show and tell us what they wanted.

Through consultation with children and others, we determined the most important features to include were:

- large areas for running and games
- intimate spaces for children to play alone or in small groups
- places for water
- spaces that enabled children to play above or below others
- spaces that gave different perspectives of size and location
- materials that were flexible and could be easily manipulated by children for play
- areas that were aesthetically beautiful
- places for animals
- spaces where children could easily connect with the natural world
- spaces for artworks, vegetables, lots of trees, fruit and—most importantly—a mulberry tree.

Overall, the space had to have the feeling of a garden or park and not a plastic playground. It also had to be affordable, easy to maintain and able to be implemented over a few years. One of our parents offered their services as a landscape designer to put the ideas that swam in our heads onto paper.

## THE FOUR ZONES

While the outdoor spaces were being designed we were also extending the existing facility. All of the designs had to complement each other and incorporate existing play areas, entrances and other features. We ended up with four main zones.

**Entrance:** A dramatic and distinctive awning, based on Leonardo Da Vinci's helicopter, was constructed by parents. Around the base are paving stones (arranged by children) featuring the names of children, staff, families and committee members at the service.

**Staff courtyard:** A converted playground, off the entrance area, that provides a place of retreat for staff to sit and to eat. It features varieties of lavender, rosemary and other flowering plants.



**Small playground:** The oldest play area of the centre, which was originally just flat grass. As the trees have grown it has progressively become a series of outdoor 'rooms' that are used primarily by the younger children. It has two softfall areas and a huge sandpit covered by an ornamental grapevine with outstanding colour in autumn. It also features turf lawn areas, pathways and, most importantly, a link to the big playground.

**Big playground:** This area is more like a park than a traditional children's playground. Originally built around a very large sandpit and softfall area, we added a hill that rises about two metres above the landscape, incorporating a waterfall that drops into the sandpit. We added a forest of casuarinas (sheoaks), surrounded by long plantings of native sedges, stands of eucalypts, and pathways that wind through trees and long grasses—all giving a sense of isolation and secrecy.

A long tunnel cuts through the artificial hill which connects the sandpit we call 'the beach' and a softfall area called 'the outback'. Distinctive tile mosaics mark the entrances to each side of the tunnel.

Stonewalls and undulating contour banks created from 4000 tyres provide children with a landscape that allows them to roll, run, hide, slide and just about anything else their imagination could want. There are over 3500 grasses and 300 trees in the main play space alone.

Another feature is the mulberry tree, which provides ripe berries during spring and early summer, gratefully shared by children and staff. The big playground is also home to our chooks and a vegetable garden.

## DYNAMIC DESIGN

Our program revolves around the idea of 'loose parts'. This means there is constantly an opportunity for children to design and create new play spaces: environments that develop thinking, creativity, cooperation and understanding of various concepts. By using moveable equipment we are able to work with children to create play structures which are safe but also challenging.

Our playspace is a work in progress: it is only seven years old, yet the centre will celebrate 22 years of operation this year. Each space has been created by parents, staff and children working side by side, all sharing a vision of creative and aesthetic beauty which will continue to change as the trees grow and our use of the environment alters.

### Neville Dwyer

Director

Dorothy Waide Centre for Early Learning, Griffith

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Sandpit in the big playground



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## Carla Tongun, peace and humanitarian worker

Carla Tongun was born in Sudan. For many years she worked as a women's leader and advocate for peace, until the civil war forced her to flee the country in 1988. After spending almost 12 years as a refugee in Kenya she was granted permission to come to Australia. She is now the women's leader of the South Australian Sudanese Society and the Catholic Sudanese Community.

When Carla arrived in Adelaide in 2000, she was assisted by staff at the South Australia Migrant Resource Centre to find work related to her experience as a peace and humanitarian worker. Carla now works as an African Cultural Consultant, for the South Australian Children, Youth and Women's Health Service. She helps refugee and migrant mothers settle into their new communities, by organising home visits with nurses to identify their needs and to explain their responsibilities as parents in Australia.

### WORKING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

Carla has developed training courses and resource materials on cultural awareness and runs several social/community groups, including playgroups for young migrant mothers. This is important work, necessary to boost new mothers' confidence and assist them in developing social networks. She has given talks to various communities, and advocates on a policy level for all African women.

Central to Carla's work is helping African mothers deal with the cultural and legal differences of parenting in Australia. African communities tend to have much greater emphasis on community care than Australian ones:

*'Motherhood is very special and every woman looks forward to it in my society ... Women and children are cared for and supported by their community like an extended family.'*

*'In Australia children are usually the responsibility of nuclear families and are protected by the state through various organisations.'*

The high social value many African societies place on children can, conversely, lead to problems not usually encountered in Australian communities. This emphasis can make life very difficult for married women without children. Carla believes that we need to reach a balance between both cultures: 'There is good and bad in all cultures, and we should learn from each other in order to deal with our current challenges.'

### WORK CHALLENGES

While Carla is very passionate about her job, the requirements are great due to the challenge of satisfying the competing demands placed on her. New arrivals are spread far and wide across the city/metro area and are very much in 'mobile communities' so Carla spends much of her time locating families and travelling long distances to assist them.

*'Some families are left out of services such as playgroups because they live in areas where this service is not offered, even though the need is great. The lack of long-term services for mums with literacy and language problems is very challenging.'*

The problems caused by a lack of local services are compounded by the time it takes for newly settled parents to get a driving licence and access to vehicles. It can be very difficult for these parents to join support groups and receive the community assistance vital to help them settle into their new home.

### INTERNATIONAL PEACE WORK

In 2005, Carla returned to Africa to attend peace conferences in Uganda and Kenya. She was one of seven women from Australia invited to share their diverse experiences and ideas about the role of women in establishing and maintaining peace.

The Ugandan conference was especially touching for Carla because it was community-driven and focused on one-to-one relationships:

*'The conference was about peace, justice and equality for all—which resonates even in first-world countries like Australia, New Zealand, the US and Canada, whose indigenous people are still searching for justice and equality.'*

*'The most striking aspect was the energy of women who often work behind the scenes and don't get recognition for their achievements, yet never give up.'*

Carla feels that the humanitarian work of women across the globe is something that needs to be recognised and celebrated by all societies.



## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Carla continues to work tirelessly for children, women, families and communities at local, national and international levels. She has clear ideas about what aspects of child development require the greatest focus and support:

*'Parents maintaining the same care and love as they received when they were born. Building good relationships with children, even when they are teenagers or young adults.'*

*'For African families, open communication is the key to understanding children. They should be allowed to explore and develop in a free world, fully protected by families and communities.'*

Early Childhood Australia is very proud to celebrate Carla Tongun's work and wishes her much success in the future.

Carla Tongun spoke to Julian Fleetwood





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# Behaviour, belief and action

Language influences how we interpret what is going on around us. Conversations are the means by which beliefs and ways of seeing the world are established.

The way we talk about children and their behaviour determines how we think about it and, in turn, influences what we do about it, especially in the longer term. Such discourses can become powerful in a group situation and make it hard to challenge less helpful interpretations of behaviour.

## DIFFERENT WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING

*Sophie is struggling to put on her boots to go outside in the rain. She can't get one on and throws it in fury across the room. When one of the early years staff offers help she screams at her to go away.*

The language used to describe Sophie and this incident indicates what people believe is going on. One person may label this behaviour as disruptive, another as aggressive—perhaps deliberately hurtful or uncontrolled—while another may see it as determined, or 'out of character'. Sophie, herself, may be described as defiant, uncooperative or insolent. Alternatively she may be thought of as independent, over-tired or distressed. Some may refer to broader aspects of the situation that have implications for others—such as Sophie lacking guidance or being hard-to-manage.



## SEEING CHILDREN AS THE PROBLEM

Sometimes adults see problems as existing within children. They get labelled as 'attention-seeking', 'impulsive' or 'spiteful'. Occasionally the label suggests an abnormality, such as 'conduct disorder'.

This way of thinking is often referred to as the 'medical model' and has roots in deficit psychology. It looks to a child to change or get treatment. This is not a very helpful or hopeful way of understanding behaviour.

**Trying to make a child change has limited impact and risks increasingly forceful methods or drug regimes. Children also tend to live up to labels. If a youngster is frequently told that she can't do something she will learn to see herself as that person. However, if children are given positive labels—such as 'helpful' or 'determined'—by significant adults, they will do their best to meet these expectations.**

## BLAMING THE FAMILY

Another way of seeing difficult behaviour is that it is the fault of parents. Although this may be understandable, blame does not help. Families usually want the best for their children and do what they can with the knowledge, skills, resources and support that they have.

Families sometimes lack one or more vital ingredients necessary for parents to be effective. Professional involvement needs to focus on supporting parents for the sake of their children. One mother, faced with a litany of her son's misdemeanours, summed up her sense of hopelessness: 'They wanted me to work miracles and I just couldn't do it.'

## POSITIONING

There are many potential constructs we use to 'position' others. How you 'position' Sophie will imply how you have positioned yourself, a decision which influences any action you will take:

- If you see her as disruptive then perhaps you position yourself as responsible for maintaining order.
- If independent – you acknowledge her developmental drive for autonomy along with the need for appropriate socialisation.
- If defiant – perhaps you consider the need to re-assert control.
- If aggressive – your focus may be on protecting others.
- If insolent – you may take this personally and consider you have to defend yourself.
- If, over time, you position Sophie as 'not normal' you may focus on her differences rather than what she has in common with other children. You may also believe her problems are 'beyond the limits of your responsibility'.
- If you see the behaviour as a coping strategy you may help Sophie find more acceptable ways of responding to difficulties.
- If you see her as having a tough day with frustration getting the better of her, then perhaps you will look at how to make the day better and explore some ways of getting her frustration to quieten down.

Evidence indicates that, when professionals look for competencies and possibilities, families respond by being less defensive and more prepared to collaborate (Roffey, 2002).

## AN INTERACTIVE PERSPECTIVE

This view acknowledges that there are things you can change and things that you can't. You cannot do anything about a child's history or past experiences, family, personality, level of development or innate characteristics. Early years professionals do, however, have choices about:

- perspectives
- expectations
- responses to needs and difficulties
- what they say and how they say it
- their use of resources and facilitation of learning.

A child's potential can be maximised by a supportive environment and constructive relationships. Small consistent changes have the potential for making big differences over time. Spending energy on what you can do something about is likely to be more fruitful and less wearing than focusing on things a child is not doing well.



## SOLUTION- AND STRENGTH-BASED PERSPECTIVES

A solution-focused approach is clear about the link between beliefs and actions. It asks different questions about challenging situations (Kim Berg & Steiner, 2003). Instead of looking backwards to find the details of incidents and why they occur, solution-focused approaches look for exceptions, times when things are going well: 'What is going on when this is not happening and how can we get more of it?'

They also focus on the future: 'What do we want to happen?' Is the goal that Sophie puts on her boots independently, or are we more interested in how she manages frustration without losing her temper? What do we want her to be able to do?

In following this approach, it is still important to consider a child's individual needs and their situations—and the younger a child is, the more important this consideration. Sophie may require special nurturing, or to have something changed in her life, in order to help her deal with frustrating situations. For example, she may be feeling upset because she has a new baby brother or because she has been left out of a game. These situations need to be dealt with, as well as teaching her about managing frustration.

Once we are clear about all of this, we can begin to look for exceptions such as: 'When does Sophie manage frustration well?' What helps her? What can she do independently? How did she learn this? Once someone sees they are already part of the way to a goal, their sense of optimism and confidence increases.

### Sue Roffey

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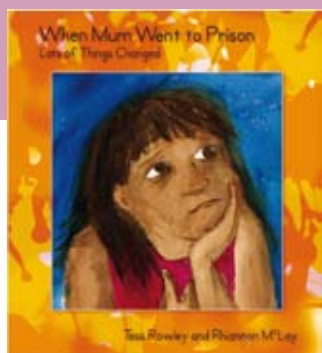
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## When Mum went to prison lots of things changed



**Tess Rowley and Rhiannon McLay**

Good Beginnings Australia (2006)  
RRP \$12.00 (paperback)

'No accurate figures exist of the number of Australian children affected by incarceration of a parent.

'When children's mothers are imprisoned, the children are likely to suffer far greater disruption to their lives than if their father is imprisoned.'

(Rowley & McLay, 2006)

This sensitive picture book is narrated by 'Holly' and 'Sam', who tell the readers about when their mother went to prison.

Holly and Sam talk about the changes in their lives, such as living with Mum's friend Jenny, missing their dog, and being teased by other children. The book gives you a sense of how much they miss their mum, the special way she made a sandwich or brushed their hair, and how important phone conversations are to them. The text and evocative illustrations also give insights into life for Mum in prison and the processes and rules children must follow when visiting her.

This is a great resource to share with all children from three to eight to promote tolerance and understanding between classmates when a child in their environment is placed in this difficult situation. Children in such situations need support, understanding and optimism—this book encourages it.

### Judy Radich

Manager  
Cooloon Children's Centre Inc.

## Ethics in action: Introducing the ethical response cycle



**Linda Newman and Lois Pollnitz**

Available from Early Childhood Australia (2002)  
RRP \$14.95 (paperback)  
[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/rip0203](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/rip0203)  
1800 356 900 (freecall)

In all of our workplaces we are faced with ethical dilemmas. These situations require solutions based on 'sound knowledge and thoughtful reasoning' (Newman & Pollnitz, 2002). *Ethics in action: Introducing the ethical response cycle* is a useful resource to assist early childhood practitioners in making ethical decisions when no one course of action appears satisfactory.

The authors describe the underlying ideas of ethics and ethical theory, explaining a series of basic principles that can be used to guide action. These include:

- autonomy (freedom to choose a course of action)
- non-maleficence (not causing harm to others)
- beneficence (contributing to health and wellbeing)
- justice (promoting fairness and common interests)
- fidelity (keeping promises and maintaining loyalty).

Newman and Pollnitz describe the purpose of an ethical code, such as Early Childhood Australia's *Code of Ethics*. They go on to set out an ethical response cycle created to guide early childhood practitioners in their ethical decision making. While the phases used in their framework may not need to be comprehensively worked through each time an ethical dilemma is faced, the authors warn that they should all be considered, to check accountability.

Working through ethical dilemmas is never easy as they force us to decide what it is we value most. This publication is a useful resource for all of us when faced with such situations.

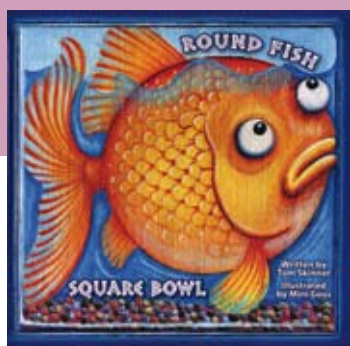
### Lennie Barblett

School of Education  
Edith Cowan University

Early Childhood Australia recently updated its *Code of Ethics*. Lennie Barblett was the convenor of the national working party who produced the revision. You can read Early Childhood Australia's *Code of Ethics* and download it free at [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code). Alternatively, visit [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/ethicspack](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/ethicspack) or freecall **1800 356 900** to order posters (A1 size) and brochures.



## Round fish square bowl



**Tom Skinner**

Illustrations by Mini Goss

New Frontier Publishing (2006)

RRP \$24.95 (hardback)

*Round fish square bowl* explores how it feels to be different from others. Tom Skinner employs the simple device of turning around well-known sayings from children's stories and common parlance, to show how negative emotions can also be viewed from a positive perspective.

You may, for example, have felt 'as scared as a pig'—but being scared empowers the three little pigs to frighten a wolf away. The simplicity of the text is complemented by bright illustrations that fill the pages and bring the sayings to life.

*'I'm sure everybody has felt that they don't fit in: like a square peg in a round hole ... this book helps you to see that it is not always as bad as it seems and there can be a bright side to everything you feel. The book shows you, for example, that being stubborn is not necessarily a bad thing and it can be good. Like the book says: "Be a square peg today that's what I say." To accompany these ideas are wonderful pictures that really illustrate the feelings discussed.'*

**Laura Marshall (age 9)**

This book offers scope for teachers to explore with children the meanings underlying various ways of feeling—how different emotions may position individuals in particular ways and the impact this can have on feelings.

It encourages readers to think beyond a view of emotions as fixed and one-dimensional ways of feeling and rather to view them as multifaceted states of being that shift according to the context in which a person finds themselves.

Discussions of this kind might resonate strongly with children who are often pressured to conform to others' expectations of how they should act and feel. Accordingly, this book could be read in early childhood settings and also the early and middle years of primary school.

**Jane Page**

Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood

Faculty of Education

The University of Melbourne

## The Rough Guide to African music for children



**Various artists**

World Music Network (2006)

RRP \$33.00 (CD)

This is an exciting and energetic collection of 12 tracks performed by some of Africa's most notable musicians. The motivation behind the CD was to 'raise awareness and understanding of different cultures through global music and the performing arts'. British children located at more than 26 schools and ranging from five to 11 years were invited to select the music, ensuring that the chosen tracks would appeal to a broad range of musical tastes.

The musical styles represented on the CD range from energetic rhythmic dances to rap, ripe with social commentary; from quirky narrative songs about life to 'Lion', more recognisable to audiences as 'The lion sleeps tonight'. The concluding song, 'A star and the wiseman', is performed by the world renowned Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The glorious vocal harmonies and lilting, repetitive phrasing of their performance creates a complex and yet calming salve, providing a dramatic contrast to the vivacity of the earlier tracks.

Throughout the CD the music is vibrant and rich and invites listeners to get up and move. Furthermore, it offers the possibility of exploring music as a medium of communication not limited to shared spoken language. The music is expressive and demands a physical response. Three-year-olds find the beats compelling and energising, while many older children may use various tracks as a catalyst for their own music-making.

Like all good music, this selection transcends any particular set of meanings or interpretations, instead inviting listeners to participate at many levels. Most importantly, it bridges cultures by introducing its listeners to difference which is both engaging and challenging. This CD encourages understanding and appreciation of our world's diversity.

**Carmel Richardson**

Teacher and researcher

Wiradjuri Preschool Child Care Centre, ACT

# Our responsibility to reconciliation

No Indigenous person I have ever spoken to holds any person individually responsible for what has happened over the last 220 years. What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want is an acknowledgement that this is their land and that terrible things have been done to them and their communities. While you and I are not responsible for the past, we are responsible for the future. We need to work towards creating a just society.

## KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Firstly, racism is taught—and if it is taught, then we can teach differently. We can teach the seeking of knowledge and an understanding of the ‘other’ and we can teach enjoyment—rather than fear—of the unknown. Perhaps as childcare workers and educators, this is your most important role: to teach genuine, unselfconscious inclusion and acceptance—even celebration—of ‘other’.

The second challenge is to get informed. It’s easy really: just read with an open mind and think critically about what you see in the media and hear in government proclamations. Start with Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation Victoria (ANTaR Vic - [www.antarvictoria.org.au](http://www.antarvictoria.org.au)) and ‘Koorie history’ websites ([www.kooriweb.org/foley/indexb.html](http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/indexb.html)).



Reconciliation was supposed to be the best of all possible gifts—it was to bring justice for all Indigenous people. Sadly many activists, both black and white, feel that reconciliation is dead. It can be revived, but only if all of us act.



Be sceptical of what you have been taught and hear. Indigenous people have their own stories: we need to listen and learn from them—including their views of what our society has done.

This is not to say that there aren’t problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There certainly are, but the ways we report and deal with these problems often cause more harm than good. We need to understand from Indigenous points of view, why Indigenous people find themselves in the situations they do.

## POSITIVE ACTION

The third challenge is to do something! Good intentions will not prevent ongoing suffering, exclusion, multiple disadvantages and discriminations faced by Indigenous people. It is us, the non-Aboriginal 98 per cent of the population—as members and beneficiaries of the dominant culture and the institutions that represent and serve us—that need to act. It is us who must make space for Indigenous people to take back the initiative, to regain their confidence, skills and pride so that they can rebuild their own future.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

ANTaR Vic has prepared twin papers ([www.antarvictoria.org.au/treaty/WhatCanIDo.html](http://www.antarvictoria.org.au/treaty/WhatCanIDo.html)). The first, in six short points, aims to address the question 'What do they want?' and the second suggests six levels of activity for each of these six areas, for a total of 36 possible actions. No doubt there are many more possibilities, but these are a starting point from which everyone can find many things to do now: today.

Category	Level one	Level two	Level three	Level four	Level five	Level six
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	Be verbal at meetings.	Use building plaques and car stickers.	Fly flags, wear a tie-pin or lapel badge.	Seek, pay for and act on advisory input.	Public signage and building names.	Use/change streets and other names.
<b>Honesty</b>	Whose land are you on?	Where are you from really? How racist are you?	Educate self and others about inherent societal inequality.	Build into all non-government organisation policy and procedure.	Build into all government policy and legislation.	Build into all corporate policy and procedure.
<b>Safeguard</b>	Participate in a 'Learning Circle'	What can you influence/safeguard?	Know and speak of Indigenous days and events.	Learn some local language.	Ensure right of access (e.g. hunting and fishing).	Include in park and forest management.
<b>Recognition and respect</b>	Build into family, work, faith, friends and culture.	Get political: inform, educate, advocate and agitate.	Mark/celebrate important days and events.	Understand cultural obligations.	Ask for information and pay for expertise.	Land: pay the rent.
<b>Representation</b>	Join a solidarity and activist group: support Indigenous voices.	Change existing organisational and representational culture to suit Indigenous people.	Create the expectation of self-determination as the norm.	Make demands on non-government organisations and faith groups.	Schools, TAFEs and universities: ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoints are recognised.	All levels of government and corporate policy bodies.
<b>Reparations</b>	Make space, provide resources and allow time.	Human remains returned.	Create and honour Indigenous land usage and other agreements.	Establish secure opportunities.	Commonwealth, state and local government land returned.	Land returned with freehold title.

These 36 suggestions may change with time, but they mean that we can no longer use the excuse that we don't know what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want or what we can personally do about it. Work within your sphere of influence. Or at least support the work of an activist organisation like ANTaR Vic. The critical thing is to get involved and start doing what you can.

Of course, it's important to think carefully before you act: talk to organisations such as ANTaR Vic about how best to build relationships that enable you to check with local Indigenous people, to ensure that what you are planning is appropriate to their needs and cultures, does not cut across some action they are taking, or will have consequences that you do not anticipate or may not even ever hear about.

## CONCLUSION

It's important that you don't act just for 'them': act for yourself, and our children's honour, safety and chance to live in a just, civilised society. Reconciliation is just one part of the political struggle for human rights for all of us. Most importantly, don't single out Indigenous children as special. All children are special: respect and celebrate each of them for their uniqueness.

### Frank Hytten

Acting CEO  
Reconciliation Victoria  
Former Coordinator of  
Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation Victoria

If you would like to find a speaker, educational resources, information on how to run a workshop, ideas and support to build a small campaign, or generally if you want to be involved, please contact ANTaR Vic ([www.antarvictoria.org.au](http://www.antarvictoria.org.au) or **03 9419 6313**) or Reconciliation Victoria ([www.reconciliationvic.org.au](http://www.reconciliationvic.org.au) or **03 9662 1645**).



*Diversity and difference: Lighting the spirit of identity* raises areas in which all early childhood practitioners can have a positive influence, if they seek to embrace values that encompass cultural inclusion and social justice through their day-to-day work with young children. To find out more about this publication, please visit [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/rip0603](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/rip0603) or freecall **1800 356 900**.



# Strengthening indigeneity through whakapapa and Māori pedagogy

As societies grow more and more multicultural every day, it becomes increasingly important to challenge our practices; to make them more relevant to these changing contexts. In this inspiring article Ngaroma Williams provides an introduction to Māori pedagogy and calls on nations to support their indigenous peoples' identities—by telling their stories and educating about their beliefs.

Realising indigenous potential relies on attitudinal transformation and practical shifts to recognise, respect and reflect the cultural beliefs of a nation. Worldwide indigeneity is about supporting the rights of indigenous people to live firstly as themselves and, secondly, in wider societal contexts where they can succeed in whatever ways they choose.

## MĀORI PEDAGOGY

In order to begin to understand the Māori world it is necessary to first know about whakapapa (the placing of layers, one upon the other). Our tapūna (ancestors) created many valuable methods of passing on knowledge and skills. Whakapapa, as the 'basis for the organisation of knowledge in respect of the creation and development of all things' (Barlow, 1998, p. 173), is a fundamental principle of such knowledge.

An example of whakapapa are the documents *Te Whāriki* (early childhood curriculum) and the supporting book, *Quality in action*, which integrate Whare Tapa Whā into daily practices. Whare Tapa Whā is a four-sided model developed by Professor Mason Durie for New Zealand's health sector which can be used as a basis of Māori pedagogy, beneficial to all early childhood educators and carers. It is divided into: Taha Wairua (spiritual health), Taha Whānau (family health), Taha Hinengaro (psychological health) and Taha Tinana (physical health).

## TAHA WAIRUA

This concerns the spiritual connections that everyone has to past, present and future pathways. Māori practices are governed by their historical accounts, conveyed through stories and education about the importance of local geographical features. Māori refer to this part of our pedagogy as taonga tuku iho (knowledge being passed down) which means we incorporate the traditions of the past into present day teachings and programs, which enhance our future pathways.

For example, Aoraki (Mount Cook) is not only a New Zealand icon, but also at the centre of cosmological accounts of the origin of the area. These accounts explain the genealogies of Ngāi Tahu Iwi (South Island tribe) who are charged with rangatiratanga (chieftainship) over Te Waipounamu (South Island) and provides tikanga (protocols) for daily practices, such as the karakia (incantations) which are passed down by educators to young children.



## TAHA WHĀNAU

This aspect of Whare Tapā Whā deals with the interactions and relationships with local people and environment. It is important for all early childhood services to establish and maintain healthy relationships with tangata whenua (specific Māori people who hold chieftainship of a designated area).

There are many tikanga that can easily be incorporated in daily practices to support Taha Whānau. An example is separating the cloths used to wipe tables and chairs. This protocol is required because of the tapu (restrictions) that dictate culturally appropriate practice.

Chairs are for sitting on and tables are where food is laid upon and eaten so if chairs and tables are wiped with the same cloth then cross-contamination is more than likely to occur. The two parts involved are polar opposites of the body so clearly designated cloths need to be used. A noa (free from tapu) environment is one in which colour-coded cloths are allocated for specific use and are laundered and stored separately.

In order for a centre to positively reflect Taha Whānau, it is necessary for all carers and educators to be united, consistently following tikanga correctly.



## TAHA HINENGARO

This is about the expression of one's thoughts and feelings. A generic tikanga within Māoridom is simply to greet and farewell people. Tangata whenua (indigenous people) are considered your hosts and all like to be recognised as great ones. Accordingly, there are reciprocal dialogues that have been used since the beginning of time, such as when one visits a marae (sacred place) and when you take part in a pōwhiri (welcome) and poroporoaki (farewell).

Educators can easily incorporate greetings and farewells into everyday practice, such as:

- 'Tēnā koe Emma' ('Hello Emma').
- 'Kia ora Douglas' ('Hi there Douglas').
- 'Haere rā Emma' ('Goodbye Emma').
- 'Ka kite anō Douglas' ('See you again Douglas').

The more you use another language the more confident and competent you become. Taha Hinengaro is about enhancing your thoughts through implementation of another language and its protocols, becoming more receptive and responsive to another language and culture. As a recipient of greetings and farewells, a person's taha hinengaro is acknowledged and this sets the scene for reciprocal and responsive relationships.

## TAHA TINANA

This concerns a person's physical wellbeing and the environments they interact within. A simple practice that respects tikanga is providing sufficient space for both adults and children to move about during mat sessions. Correct tikanga would be to have a pathway available so that both adults and children can access the mat without stepping over anyone.

Each person is regarded as tapu and by stepping over someone you are encroaching on their personal space. The preferred noa option would be to walk behind the person or ask the person to move so that you can pass. By employing simple practices such as these, Taha Tinana is promoted and the safety of your own body and those around you is maintained, via the structuring of the environment.

Early childhood education is now 10 years into the implementation of Te Whāriki. However, for Māori pedagogies to be truly reflected within a bicultural curriculum, there has to be increased opportunities for all early childhood educators to learn the narratives of the iwi (tribes) within their geographical regions. Whakapapa is the key to provide the many pathways to pedagogical Māori approaches. All iwi need to be encouraged and supported in telling their stories since Māori cosmogony is the fundamental aspect of strengthening biculturalism within early childhood education.

## CONCLUSION

This article calls out to all indigenous peoples of the world to tell your history, language, cultural values and protocols. If nations are to accelerate success for their indigenous peoples then it means that your language and cultural values must form an integral part of everyday life and, at the macro level, there must always be an emphasis on achieving and celebrating indigenous potential.

We are all citizens of the world, however indigenous peoples are the traditional ambassadors of nations and it is an indigenous right to tell our stories. Our culture is integral to our identity and our cultural practices are iconic symbols of our nationhood. If there is to be a shift in thinking and an attitudinal change, it is the responsibility of nations to support the telling of our stories.

### Ngaroma Madeleine Williams

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### References and further reading

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Ministry of Education. (1998). *Quality in action: Te Mahi Whai Hua. Implementing the revised statement of desirable objectives and practices in New Zealand early childhood services*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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'Thank you for your great service. We have found it a very positive experience.' *TAFE Kids Child Care Centre*

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# The ethics of controlled crying



Controlled crying (sometimes referred to as 'controlled comforting') is a technique used to manage infants and young children who wake at night or do not settle alone. It involves letting a child cry for increasingly longer periods before comforting them.

'When a baby, or indeed any person, child or adult, is unwell [or stressed or afraid] that person or baby needs more attention than usual, not less. Your baby will recover fastest if he can be calm and feel loved. If he is in pain, or feeling very miserable, there is no other way for him to tell you about this except by crying.' (Parenting and child health, 1999)

## FURTHER READING

This article was based on AAIMHI's statement on controlled crying, available online:

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/papers/april2003\\_aamia.pdf](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/papers/april2003_aamia.pdf)

For further information about the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health Inc. see [www.aaimhi.org](http://www.aaimhi.org)

While controlled crying is widely used, the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health Inc. (AAIMHI) has expressed concerns that there have been no studies, to their knowledge, that have assessed the degree of stress and psychological impact that controlled crying has on a developing child.

AAIMHI points out that babies have to adapt to a totally new world and the smallest change may be stressful for them. Crying is a sign of distress or discomfort and, so, use of controlled crying may train a child not to expect or even seek support in the future.

In terms of emotional development, infants, from six months, all experience a degree of anxiety in separation from their carers. This anxiety is overcome as children learn that their carer will return and they can be safe while they are away. This process of learning—which often involves waking at night time and needing reassurance—can take up to three or four years, but often happens sooner.

## IS 'SAFE' CONTROLLED CRYING POSSIBLE?

As indicated, the AAIMHI is strongly concerned that not responding to an infant's distress and need for comfort counters research into the requirements for a secure attachment and may also cause undue and harmful stress. They suggest that it should only be considered at an age when children have an understanding that they are safe and secure with the absence of carers (developmentally after about three years) and after a full professional assessment of a child's health and their relationships with others.

**Julian Fleetwood**

In-house Editor  
*Every Child*

### Reference

Parenting and child health. (1999). Question of the week - Why can't I use controlled comforting when my baby is unwell?, Retrieved 29 August 2006, [www.cyh.com/Archive/NewsDetail.aspx?p=154&id=96&np=247](http://www.cyh.com/Archive/NewsDetail.aspx?p=154&id=96&np=247)

*Lee-Beau*

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**HANDY LINKS**

Australian Association for Environmental Education:  
[www.aeee.org.au](http://www.aeee.org.au)

Climate Institute of Australia:  
[www.climateinstitute.org.au](http://www.climateinstitute.org.au)

Climate Action Network Australia:  
[www.cana.net.au](http://www.cana.net.au)

CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research:  
[www.dar.csiro.au](http://www.dar.csiro.au)

David Suzuki Foundation:  
[www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)

Early Childhood Australia:  
[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

ECA Code of Ethics:  
[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code)

Raising Children Network:  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

ECA Supporting Best Practice web directory:  
[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/sbp](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/sbp)

ECA WebWatch e-newsletter:  
[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca\\_webwatch](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eca_webwatch)

**NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION WEEK**

2-8 September 2007

Visit [www.napcan.org.au](http://www.napcan.org.au) and start planning an event!

**NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK**

27 May-3 June 2007

Their Spirit Still Shines

Visit [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)  
to find out what's happening.

**NATIONAL DAY OF HEALING**

26 May 2007

Visit the National Sorry Day  
Committee website:

<http://home.alphalink.com.au/~rez/Journey/>

**CALLING ALL GREEN SCHOOLS**

Green Schools Connect assists Australian schools  
to realise all sorts of projects from cleaning up  
local creeks to planting native trees.

You can find out how to apply for support for your  
project at: [www.conservationsvolunteers.com.au/greenschoolsconnect](http://www.conservationsvolunteers.com.au/greenschoolsconnect)

The closing date for nominations is  
15 June 2007.

**OUT AND ABOUT: KIDS AT THE HOUSE**

Theatre in The Studio, Sydney Opera House

Babies Props present

The colour of fun 22-27 May

Holidays at the House

Dougal the garbage dump bear 11-22 July

Other Shows

Dr. Egg and the man with no ear 25-28 July

The green sheep 15 August-1 September

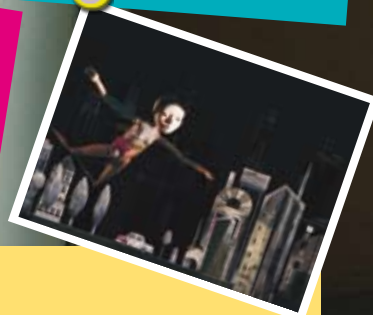
**WELDING FOR WELFARE**

Welding for Welfare is an emergency project created  
to provide adequate housing for 620 orangutans in  
Nyaru Mnteng (Indonesia). The project urgently needs  
a range of items from clothing to tools. If you think you  
can help please contact Fleur Butcher, Vice President  
of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation at  
[fleur1@bigpond.net.au](mailto:fleur1@bigpond.net.au) or through the organisation  
website: [www.orangutans.com.au](http://www.orangutans.com.au)

**TELESCHOOL FOR DEAF AND BLIND CHILDREN IN REMOTE AREAS**

The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children has  
launched a new educational service for children  
with hearing and vision loss, living in regional and  
rural areas.

Visit [www.ridbc.org.au/services/remote.asp](http://www.ridbc.org.au/services/remote.asp)  
to find out more.

**COMMON COLDS NEED COMMON SENSE NOT ANTIBIOTICS**

With winter nearly upon us, it's important to have accurate information about the common cold. Children get around five-10 colds per year. The start of a cold is usually the most infectious period, however children can remain so for up to three-four weeks.

The National Prescribing Service will soon be rolling out its national *Common colds need common sense not antibiotics* campaign. It aims to inform parents, carers and educators how to correctly manage children's colds. Some commonsense guidelines include; ensuring children get plenty of rest, relieving symptoms with or without medicines and seeing a doctor or pharmacist if a cold gets worse.

The simplest and most effective way of stopping the spread of common colds is to make sure children wash their hands for 10 seconds, rinse for 10 seconds and then dry them thoroughly. A clever idea is to ask children to sing 'Happy Birthday' to themselves, as they wash and then rinse.

Other ways to help prevent the spread of colds is by encouraging children to:

- cover their nose and mouth when sneezing and coughing
- keep their hands away from their eyes, nose and mouth
- use paper tissues (not hankies) to blow their nose and then throw away tissues after use
- avoid sharing cups, glasses and cutlery.

Unfortunately, many adults incorrectly believe that antibiotics can treat a common cold. In fact, antibiotics only work on bacterial infections and are completely ineffective against common colds, which are caused by viruses. Also, in the long term, the unnecessary use of antibiotics may do more harm than good: overuse of antibiotics now means they will be less effective in the future.

For more information on the campaign and tips on how best to manage children's colds visit: [www.commoncolds.nps.org.au](http://www.commoncolds.nps.org.au)

# Learning about science using a wondering box

Scientific concepts are often of a very abstract nature and can sometimes be difficult for young children to grasp, especially if presented in a way that does not coincide with the manner in which they learn. A wondering box is a resource designed to encourage children to discover scientific principles through play and exploration.

Young children learn through direct, hands-on experiences that enable them to use all their senses to explore and discover concepts. Wondering boxes are ordinary containers which educators and carers can decorate and fill with various everyday materials that encourage curiosity and interest, and which motivate young children to investigate their world.

By interacting with these materials children can build a strong experiential foundation of specific concepts. These concepts can be developed further, through questioning and more structured experiences.

## Wondering boxes:

- arouse children's intellectual curiosity (Hadzigeorgiou, 2001)
- link closely with the effective practice of offering children an active, hands-on approach to discover phenomena
- provide the opportunity for children to play with science-related resources
- enable children to gradually develop familiarity and experience with new science concepts
- use consumable and recycled materials to model how science concepts can be developed cheaply and simply
- motivate children to ask questions about science concepts and encourage lateral thinking
- allow children to make choices in regards to what and how they learn.

## WONDERING ABOUT WATER

Water is an excellent medium for developing scientific concepts due to its highly sensory nature and physical properties (McIntyre, 1984). By using a wondering box containing a bottle of tap water and containers for freezing water, early primary school-aged children can explore the properties of water and reversible change.

### Suggested questions for children to explore include:

- What happens when water is poured into the different containers?
- What happens to water when it is put in a freezer?
- What happens to ice when it melts?



## Through experimentation with the contents of a wondering box, children can discover:

- water is reversible—it can change to a solid (ice) or gas (vapour) and then return back to its natural state
- the process of cooling (freezing) will change water from a liquid state to a solid
- gas can also condense to a liquid when cooled
- evaporation is the change from a liquid to a gas
- frozen water expands to approximately 10 per cent more volume than it has as water (McIntyre, 1984).

## USING WONDERING BOXES

A wondering box can be used individually or in small groups during free time, before school and as an activity for early finishers, as a way of encouraging children to raise their own questions to investigate more formally, such as: 'do all liquids freeze?' Other areas for children to explore with a wondering box include sound (the box could contain a ruler, comb, wooden sticks, plastic containers and elastic bands) and, for older children, light and sound (include a torch, coloured cellophane, CDs, mirrors and containers to hold water).

### A wondering box can also be used as a:

- diagnostic assessment tool for establishing children's prior knowledge of science concepts
- formative assessment tool during free exploration time, to enable children time to construct their own knowledge in relation to scientific concepts
- summative assessment tool to observe the way children apply newly constructed knowledge.

**Brooke Kavanagh**

Pre-service teacher  
Edith Cowan University

**Mary Morris**

Lecturer in Science Education

### References

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- McIntyre, M. (1984). *Early childhood and science*. Washington: National Science Teachers' Association.

# Circles of Change: Innovative approaches to field education

Griffith University recently redesigned aspects of several of its Human Services programs in order to improve the quality of field education. All of those involved in the process of student placement greatly benefited.



Griffith University staff recently made significant changes to the way its BHS/BE (CFS/P) programs are taught. These changes were initiated by university staff concerned about future practitioners' preparation for work in the field (particularly in regard to the quality of their practicum experience with infants and toddlers).

These concerns were supported by local childcare directors who were disappointed that graduates didn't have the same interest in working with toddlers and infants as they did with preschool-age children. These directors approached the university asking for suggestions about what could make a difference to the field, and to the lives of young children.

## CIRCLES OF CHANGE

The authors decided to place university students in childcare centres in fours: two for the infant and toddler rooms. The four students, two/three practitioners and a university facilitator participated in Circles of Change three times during the four week field education experience. These Circles of Change provided periods of reflection and also served as a way of debriefing and microteaching during field education.

The 'Circles of Change' were self-managed learning groups built on the fundamental principles of adult learning which encourage and support critical reflection on what we think we already know. They also served as a way for students to form new understandings with regard to important issues.

The overriding approach to the Circles of Change was 'democracy in action' in its truest sense; the learning circles encouraged all views to be expressed and explored. The process of discussion and reflection generated new knowledge for the undergraduate students and the experience empowered them to act on the basis of this new knowledge.

## VALUES OF SELF-EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

Undergraduate students were encouraged to become critically reflective in order to evaluate both their own practice and that of others in the human services sector, particularly in childcare centres. Reflection was a means by which students could continue to develop their knowledge, important practical skills and engagement in their professional development.

There were many benefits for all involved. Students supported each other during placement, worked collaboratively and often planned experiences together. They did not experience the isolation resulting from individual settings. The process made students feel like they were a member of a community of professionals committed to quality practice with children and their families.

For the university, the approach improved systemic practice in a number of ways:

- As students were placed in fours, less practicum placements were required.
- Funds usually allocated for visiting university staff were available to pay for the release of centre staff.
- Childcare centre directors also praised the program:
  - ➔ 'This process is for the future. It gave me some confidence about people coming into the field.'
  - ➔ 'One of the spin-offs for me as director of a childcare centre was how the initiative contributed to the professional development of the centre staff.'

## CONCLUSION

It is important to encourage continued learning and to alleviate fragmentation of the field. We want to improve scholarship and practice. The changes to the programs challenged us to 'think otherwise' (Foucault, 1984) about how early childhood practitioners might be prepared for the field.

### Kym Macfarlane

Convenor, Child and Family Studies

### Jennifer Cartmel

Practicum Coordinator

### Chris Maher

Lecturer, Child and Family Studies

School of Human Services  
Griffith University



## Reference

Foucault, M. (1984). Polemics, politics and problematisations. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Michel Foucault, ethics: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1* (pp. 111-9). London: Penguin.



# More than 'looking after the children': Success stories of child care in remote Indigenous communities

Most Australians have little idea of the remarkable growth of children's services in remote Indigenous communities or the types of services evolving in these settings. Formal, funded children's services—managed and staffed by local people—are becoming a familiar part of remote community life.

Child care is not a new idea in remote Indigenous communities. Indigenous people have provided effective child care for millennia. However, the current conventional model is relatively new, even alien in its values and goals, to many communities.

The child care evolving in remote Indigenous communities is influenced by the poor health, education and wellbeing of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The negative affects of European colonisation are well known and persistent. In many communities, this historical legacy presents daily challenges. Less well-known are the positive stories about communities that are making things better for their children and families.

This article provides some of these stories, drawn from a participative action research project undertaken by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, involving more than 75 people from six remote communities in the Northern Territory. Each community dealt successfully with complex problems and found ways to improve the lives of its young children and families. Mainstream visions of child care have proven too limited in these contexts.

## MORE THAN LOOKING AFTER THE CHILDREN

Each service has its own ideas about what its community requires. One service emphasised the role of helping children get used to going to school. This service was located in a room attached to the school.

'Sometimes you'll find some of the kids don't like to come to school. But if they come here and see that it's fun ... [they'll] encourage all the kids to come. Another one might go home, like some of the kids go home with their pictures and their paintings, and all their little brothers and sisters, they see it, and they want to do it too. Sometimes they come with them.'

—Indigenous director

Another service saw child care in the conventional sense as their original goal, but it evolved to include a broader educational focus. Child care became the place where young children could learn basic skills to survive on their own as well as in non-Indigenous cultural worlds.



'[We] teach them. ... They learn language, colours and numbers. We work with them ... washing hands, use the toilet and after toilet wash hands before lunch. If they eat the food [it] will make them more stronger.'

'At five years old they're learning their home responsibilities, learning about their home language. ... They have to learn about their [own] ways, also [non-Indigenous] ways too ... both ways'

—Indigenous childcare worker

## INCLUDING THE COMMUNITY

Another service developed an open-ended, responsive program that included everyone in the community, providing programs based on what the community needed at that time.

'[The children] just walk in. ... Usually when they see a lot of kids [they shout] "Oh, there something happening! Let's go see what happening."

—Indigenous childcare worker

'It's a place for women to meet, to sit down and talk, a place that gives women something to do.'

—Indigenous staff member

'Men can come. They ask first though. They often help out with what needs to be done. 'We get the nutritionist com[ing] down here and she teaches the ladies about cooking and that ... [there is a] growth assessment too ... [and we asked] if we could have it here. ... We get people ... [who] teach us how to look after the bodies with high blood pressure and heart diseases.'

—Indigenous senior supervisor

## ASSISTING FAMILIES

Support for children and young mothers was seen as a real need for one community, and became the key focus for a service:

'When the kids come in the morning we take care of them. We wash their clothes, their own clothes for [the] afternoon, so they can take childcare clothes off and put their clean clothes back on. They need food in the morning. Sometimes they're really hungry ... We do have problems with some skinny kids.'

–Indigenous centre director

'It's good to have young mothers with their kids. They can walk around with their mothers and they can help put them to sleep.'

–Indigenous education worker

## SERVING THE COMMUNITY

One of the services ran a full-time, complex set of programs to address a range of needs and issues required by the community. For example, the service:

- organised a program for young mothers called 'First Foods for Babies'
- accommodated a research project which enabled childcare staff to learn how to detect ear problems
- ran an outside-school-hours care program for large numbers of school-aged children, contingent on whether they had attended school
- provided three healthy meals for all of the children every day and take-home meals for children who had to be turned away (due to licensing requirements)
- regularly invited older women to the service to do traditional weaving activities and speak to children in 'strong' language (language spoken traditionally by the older generation)
- cared for children from birth to five years with activities that could be found in any early childhood program in Australia.

## CONCLUSION

With all of these programs, the overriding theme was the need to ensure that children learned their culture.

'The kids are important. Help them with their learning as well, their culture, before they get to preschool.

'Yes, we have cultural activities and group time ... staff talks to the kids about kinships, and when they playing together or if they fight, we say "You're related to that, that boy or girl is your nephew or cousin."

–Indigenous family coordinator

**These services are different to mainstream urban childcare services. While they still feel the 'tug of the stream'—they are, after all, funded, regulated, supported and taught primarily by people from mainstream departments and organisations—they still assert their own values and maintain their own distinctive character, culture and focus.**

These services readily select, adapt and create practices that suit their needs. There is a continuous negotiation about what child care means in these settings. There is no simple template for how a remote Indigenous childcare service develops or what it can become.

### Lyn Fasoli

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### Acknowledgements

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# Rotavirus gastroenteritis

Rotavirus is the commonest cause of gastroenteritis in our community and is one of the major killers of children globally. Very few children in Australia die from rotavirus gastroenteritis but up to 10,000 are admitted to hospital each year.

Gastroenteritis is a term that indicates damage or inflammation to the lining of the intestine (the small intestine in the case of rotavirus). Rotavirus gastroenteritis occurs most commonly between six-24 months and it will infect all children before the age of five. For most of Australia, the peak period for rotavirus gastroenteritis is mid-late winter into spring.

Rotavirus typically appears with fever and vomiting—one of the major causes of dehydration—closely followed by watery diarrhoea. It is more of a diagnosis of exclusion, rather than a specific diagnosis, as there are many causes of fever, vomiting and diarrhoea in infants and young children. Rotavirus is an extremely infectious illness and is usually spread by the transfer of faecal matter to the mouth.

## TREATING DEHYDRATION

Dehydration is the most common reason children die from rotavirus gastroenteritis. In the early stages of dehydration, children will be thirsty, alert and sometimes restless. As the severity of dehydration increases, features of sunken eyes or fontanelle, dry mouth, restlessness and loss of body weight will become apparent—the greater the loss, the more severe the dehydration.

Children at greatest risk of dehydration are those under 12 months of age with a very high stool frequency, more than 8 in 24 hours, or vomiting significantly (4 or 5 times within 24 hours) and they need to be observed in an emergency department.

Most children without evidence of dehydration and for whom vomiting has not been a major issue, are able to be assisted by giving small volumes of fluid frequently, as little as a teaspoon every five minutes. However, if children continue to vomit, are unable to keep fluids down or become restless, then they need to be seen immediately by a doctor.

## RE-HYDRATION

Clear fluids (water or oral re-hydration solution available from chemists) are best if children show no signs of dehydration or have mild or moderate dehydration. There are now oral re-hydration icy poles available, which are sometimes better tolerated by children. Fluids that should not be used include low calorie cordials, lemonade or any fruit juices (as these can contribute to diarrhoea).



If a child is being breast fed then this should continue through the re-hydration period, in association with giving oral re-hydration solution. Formula feeding should stop until the child settles down, usually within 24 hours. Solids should also be stopped during the acute phase but can be reintroduced when the child is hungry, usually within the first 24-36 hours. It is very important to start re-feeding children within 24 hours or as soon as they feel hungry. If this does not happen then a visit to an emergency department may be required.

There are no medications that should be given to children for diarrhoea. Anti-diarrhoeal agents can cause significant adverse effects and have very limited benefit in terms of reducing the amount of diarrhoea. Similarly, anti-vomiting agents have not been shown to have any benefit in the management of children's acute diarrhoea and vomiting and have significant side effects.

## VACCINATION

Two rotavirus vaccines will become part of the routine immunisation schedule so that all children born after 1 May 2007 will be eligible to start their immunisation against rotavirus gastroenteritis on 1 July 2007. These oral vaccines are designed to fit in with the routine immunisation program at two, four and six months. Hopefully rotavirus gastroenteritis will become an infection of the past similar to smallpox, poliomyelitis and many other childhood infections.

### Geoff Davidson

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# Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics: Challenging practices



It is impossible to consider the work of early childhood professionals without reference to the myriad daily decisions we make about children, families, ourselves and our colleagues. These decisions define our work and are the measure by which we claim to serve the best interests of children. A fundamental role of Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics is to challenge our daily decisions and actions so as to ensure that children always remain at the centre of our thinking. The Code therefore acts as a reflective tool, a guide and a mentor.

Thinking of the Code of Ethics as part of a system of review adds another dimension to the way in which it might be used. It shifts from something we reference when we have a problem to solve, to a framework we can build into our daily reflections about our work.

The Code of Ethics is a touchstone for the profession. Many use it when faced with difficult decisions or dilemmas on which they feel they need guidance. In fact, it was created to challenge ordinary decisions: the everyday way in which we work and view our contributions to the lives of children. This is reinforced in the preamble: 'This Code of Ethics provides a framework for reflection about the ethical responsibilities of early childhood professionals.'

Embracing the Code as an integral part of what we do and how we do it should challenge us to ask questions about our work. This is not an easy task: finding time to reflect is always a trial in a busy workplace, yet if early childhood professionals do not systematically analyse their practice, it may compromise the quality of their programs.

Challenging our everyday practice and reflecting on how we might act in new ways is a long-term endeavour and the categories of the Code lend themselves to continual reflection. They should not be seen as lists of tasks to complete or points to check off. Rather, the Code should guide us to ask questions about what we do, why we do it and how we do it.

The Code of Ethics does not provide direct answers to many of the challenging questions of our practice, but it does give us a framework to evaluate ethical practice. Using it in this way will influence the quality of our practice and, in turn, the care and education we provide.

Catharine Hydon and Lennie Barblett

Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics Working Party



The Code of Ethics is available to view and download on the Early Childhood Australia website:

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code).

Alternatively, visit

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/ethicspack](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/ethicspack) or freecall 1800 356 900 to order posters (A1 size) and brochures.

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# The role of children's rights

NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People, Gillian Calvert, explains the relationship between children's rights and their wellbeing.

NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People, Gillian Calvert

The most significant moment in the recognition of children as holders of rights was in 1989 at the passing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has been signed by every government in the world except Somalia and the United States. The principle underpinning the Convention is that children have the same inherent rights as all people, such as the right to adequate food, shelter, education and health.

At the same time, there are political and social misconceptions clouding debates about rights, which suggest that if one group in society has their rights recognised it will be at the expense of another section of the community, who will have fewer rights.

Often, adult concerns around the concept of children's rights are grounded in fears that some individuals may use their rights to threaten the safety and wellbeing of a community (an argument sometimes used to oppose the rights of juvenile offenders). Or that recognising the rights of children will somehow undermine the rights of parents or carers to do their important job of raising children.

**The Convention on the Rights of the Child does not claim to be a solution for all the ills that children and young people face. What it does provide is a baseline of outcomes against which societies can measure their progress, in the areas such as child protection, health and education. It also provides an opportunity to recognise where society needs to make a greater investment to build stronger families and communities.**

## BEYOND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Convention is a good start to improving children's lives because the concept of rights works best in a framework of laws, regulation and monitoring. However, children's wellbeing is complex and made up of lots of positive and negative influences which cannot always be enshrined as rights or neatly boxed up within laws.

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People recently conducted research into what children think is good for their wellbeing. The *Ask the children: An overview of children's understandings of well-being* (2007) study revealed the importance children place on issues, such as:

- belonging
- identity
- relationships
- effectiveness of influence
- physical environment.

**Children tell me that they experience their world largely through their relationships with other people—their family and friends, teachers, childcare workers and neighbours. They also have a need for independence, to be safe and to feel like a good person.**

## WORKING FOR THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN

A concept of rights for children is important and beneficial in areas of their lives where laws are effective—such as being required to go to school, or being protected from sexual abuse. But our research shows that a broader wellbeing framework, which has its foundations deeply embedded in children's relationships and the activities of the people around them, may work better for children and young people.

Rights are important. But, rather than limiting society's vision for its children to rights alone, we might all benefit from extending the terms of reference to encompass all of the aspects that they identify as making up their wellbeing. This will give us a better chance of having a broad and positive influence on children and helping them to succeed.

### Gillian Calvert

NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People

### Reference

United Nations. (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Paris: Author.

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People produces a series called *'Ask the children'* which aims to make the views of children and young people known to the public and to decision-makers.

In the latest *Ask the children*, kids tell us what makes them feel good. *An overview of children's understandings of well-being* explores the views and perceptions of 126 children and young people, and reveals kids' acute sense of what affects their own personal well-being.

The research project was undertaken in conjunction with the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.

For a copy, contact the Commission on **02 9286 7276**, email [kids@kids.nsw.gov.au](mailto:kids@kids.nsw.gov.au) or visit our website at [www.kids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au).

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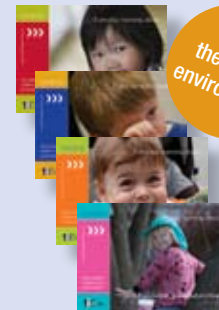
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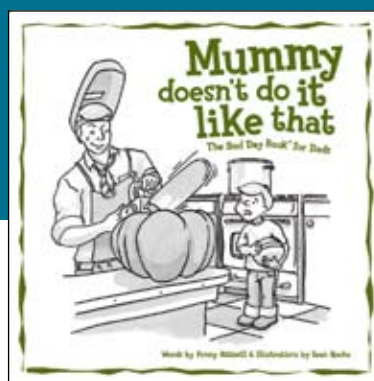
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