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From the President

Kim Walters

2009 has proven to be an exceptional year for early childhood in Queensland and across Australia.

ECTA has been active in informing members of federal and state initiatives throughout the year and advocating on their behalf. The coordinating committee allocated substantial funds for advocacy work this year so that ECTA representatives could attend meetings on behalf of members at a state and national level. This included participation at key stakeholder forums in Melbourne on the reform of early childhood education and care through the National Quality Agenda. These reforms comprise national standards, a ratings framework and enhanced regulatory arrangements to develop a unified national system and will affect all members working in prior to school settings. Other representations included the QSA Early Years Syllabus Advisory Committee and the QLD Children’s Services Alliance. We continue to monitor the progress of the Continued Professional Development (CPD) Framework and teacher registration for teachers working outside of school settings.

ECTA made submissions on behalf of members to the Reform Impact Statement, Early Childhood Teachers’ Award Modernisation and the Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Childhood Settings all of which will affect education and care staff in Pre-Prep and childcare settings. ECTA also facilitated a regional workshop on behalf of ECA who are drafting Teaching Australia’s standards for early childhood advanced teaching and leadership.

This year ECTA nominee for the National Awards for Quality Schooling, Libby Gaedtke, won a Highly Commended Excellence in Teaching Award. Libby was nominated by ECTA because of her work coordinating our state regional groups, her own regional group in Hervey Bay and mentoring teachers in her local area in using ICTs. She does all this along with her continued advocacy for early childhood and her passion for teaching.

As ECTA Regional Groups Coordinator Libby keeps Bayside, Gympie, Hervey Bay, Gladstone, Fitzroy, Mackay and Cairns regional groups informed of professional development opportunities, passes on information from the committee and maintains a webpage for each of the regional groups. During 2009 the Cairns regional Group held a conference in conjunction with C&K. Fitzroy, Gladstone, Gympie and Hervey Bay regional groups organised music workshops by Sue Southey and the Gympie and Gladstone groups organised science workshops by Jill Kearney. Regional groups also came together for Videolinq presentations and those who were unable to access Videolinqs due to site availability took advantage of the new video streaming option to hold PD sessions around the presentations. We have had interest in forming additional groups and look forward to finalising these next year. Contact Libby at herveybayrg@ecta.org.au if you are interested in having a regional group established in your area.

I would like to thank QUT and OLI for their ongoing partnership with ECTA to provide Videolinq workshops of high quality to our members, students and others throughout the year. Videolinqs are now streamed so that members may continue to access the recording via the Members Only section of our website. This year the streaming of three of the videolinqs was also made available to the public via a link posted on our website for one month after each videolinq.

ECTA membership is now at an all time high with 736 members. This year we introduced concessional membership for those who wish to become members but due to retirement or part-time study may be on a low income. Full-Time students qualify for student membership.

ECTA welcomes graduates into the profession each year through Grad Packs which are distributed through participating universities and TAFE institutions to all graduating early childhood students throughout Queensland. I would like to thank ECTA life member Noeleen Christensen who once again volunteered her time to compile and distribute well over a 1000 ECTA Grad Packs this year.

Thank you also to another of our life members Von Davis who packaged and posted nearly 2000 journals and DVDs to members. As our membership expands so does Von’s commitment of time.

Thank you to the website committee coordinated by Gail Halliwel. Gail is a life member and founder of
ECTA and also a member of our state coordinating committee. Gail gives gentle guidance and training to support new members of the website committee. They now meet regularly via Skype to discuss the website with each member taking on a particular area. The site is continuously updated with PD opportunities, advocacy and information about national and state initiatives and issues. Our Members Only area is full of downloadable presentations, articles, past journals and information. If you haven’t visited the secure area I recommend it to all. To enter you will need your username and password which is always included in your eNEWS. This year eNEWS has been sent on a monthly basis to keep members up to date with issues and information. If you would like to join the web weaver team contact Gail at gail@ecta.org.au.

Thank you to the dedicated conference committee who once again did an outstanding job with new life member Toni Michael co-coordinating the event with Robbie Leikvold. It is wonderful to see life member Carole Wild rejoin the conference committee this year. Life member Pam Fulmer once again provided amazing floral arrangements for the conference and along with fellow life member Noeleen Christensen manned the administration stand.

This year our conference went online for registrations. This allowed ECTA to provide delegates with updated information and for the first time confirmation of workshop selections. We received five applications for conference support this year from members in remote areas. The committee decided to distribute the allocated funds between all applicants. The success of the conference is totally due to the major commitment that Toni and her committee puts into the organisation of the event. Conference profits are a major source of income for ECTA and enable us to continue to keep membership fees at a low level. Organisation for next year’s conference is well under way with the announcement of Toni Attwood as our keynote speaker. If you would like to help out please contact Toni at toni@ecta.org.au as spreading the load reduces the workload for all.

Thanks also to Lynne Moore for her continued coordination of the journal committee. Educating Young Children is a professionally produced publication and Lynne has worked with her committee to streamline the editorial and production process. They strive to make our journal practical and relevant. The submission of articles from colleagues in the early childhood field is a vital component to the journal’s success. The team always welcomes helpers so please contact Lynne at lynne@ecta.org.au if you are interested in helping to source articles etc. If you would like to submit an article the website has style guides and further information.

Seven out of ten life members are still involved in ECTA. I believe this is a clear sign of their passion for early childhood and in particular their commitment to ECTA. I would like to thank them and all the other members of our state coordinating, journal, web and conference committees for their time and dedication to ECTA during 2009. Without their support ECTA would not be the strong professional organisation that it is. I wish you all well for the 2010 year. Please contact me at kim@ecta.org.au anytime if you wish to discuss ECTA or your involvement in one of the committees.
Welcome to the final *Educating Young Children* Journal for 2009. You will be receiving this edition just as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meets in December to further progress Australia’s commitment to provide all children with access to early childhood education and care that equips them for life and learning. With the New Year you can expect further clarification about the National Quality Agenda and improvements to quality and regulation of early childhood education and care services in Australia.

This journal is a reminder that in times of unprecedented change the passion and commitment of early childhood educators remains steadfast. In this issue we capture the voices of children, families and educators through story, conversation, environments, feature articles and review.

**Our stories …**

Brooke Van der Kamp describes the *buzz* and *honour* in working with Prep children at Ascot State School and Bronwyn MacGregor speaks with parents about the value of home visits in making *complete* a kindergarten program.

**Our conversations …**

Sue Webster speaks with a range of educators to learn about stimulating children’s mathematical thinking; while Sharon McKinlay takes a look at environments from a child’s eye view. Lou P Tales shares her diary in celebration of this year’s Under 8’s week and Margaret Thwaite provides some behind the scenes insight into planning a regional conference.

**Our features …**

Readers unable to attend the 2009 ECTA conference in Brisbane are in for a treat. In this issue we feature Professor Loretta Giorcelli’s key note address on the topic of resilience and Neil Alcorn’s examination of parental *reflective function* as a strategy in making sense of children’s behaviour.

Brenda Abbey revisits her conference workshop presentation in a series of exercises that take a closer look at behaviour guidance strategies. Kathryn Berting’s article explores children’s active role in negotiated curriculum and Jill Kearney puts the *cool* back into science in the early years.

Once again Bron MacGregor and Liz de Plater take us on a journey into their SEEDS garden and Mark Carthew explores the value of everyday playful interactions with children – joyful and whimsical experiences that ‘never fail’ to raise a smile and shared connection.

By now all early childhood settings in Queensland have received their copies of *Belonging, Being and Becoming – the early years learning framework for Australia*. Our final feature article from Kerry Johns reflects the content of this inspirational document.

**Our media reviews …**

Finally Mathilda Element brings to you a selection of resources, reviewed by educators, to enhance your teaching and promote children’s learning.

**Until 2010 …**

Seasons Greetings from the *Educating Young Children* team.
Brooke Van Der Kamp is currently a Prep Teacher at Ascot State School in the north of Brisbane. Brooke graduated from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) with a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood in 2001. She began her teaching career as a relief teacher around south-east Brisbane before leaving for a working holiday in London, England, in early 2002. She enjoyed teaching children with autism and down’s syndrome at Turney Special School in the south of London. Like most working-holiday teachers she managed to see the sights of Europe and Scandinavia before returning home to Brisbane in August 2003. Brooke was transferred to Hughenden State School in 2004 where she was an Advisory Visiting Teacher for Students with Disabilities and a District Relieving Teacher for the small schools surrounding Hughenden. Brooke enjoys working at Ascot State School and has recently enjoyed creating a Virtual Classroom via The Learning Place for her Prep children and their parents. She also enjoys helping her Prep children focus on their learning by assisting them to build a digital portfolio of photographs.

Since graduating from QUT in 2001, I have felt very honoured to have had the opportunity to teach in various teaching settings in Queensland as well as in London, England. However my heart has always been in Early Childhood Education and I dreamt one day that I would have my own class of five-year-old children. I was ecstatic when I received the phone call I was waiting for. I had received a Prep teaching position at Ascot State School starting in 2007!

Teaching Prep at Ascot State School since Prep began in Queensland in 2007 has been a great learning experience for me and I look forward to seeing the children I taught in Prep in 2007 grow to be successful Year 7 students in 2014. I have learnt many useful strategies from successful teachers and colleagues over the years and also through various school moderations. Networking is a huge part of being a teacher and I always look forward to the next ‘get-together’ to see what great ideas and strategies I can gather from other professionals.

I love class discussions with my Prep children and negotiating the curriculum together. We often have a few ‘interest groups’ running at the same time and it allows the children to play and make their own choices about their learning. The children know that we always ‘plan’ what we want to learn about and then we ‘do’ the learning. I had a chuckle when a child asked recently when we were going to get ‘stuck into play’. I sometimes forget what vocabulary is being picked up by the children! I also become a little uneasy when the children plan to play ‘schools’ and someone wants to play ‘Mrs Van Der Kamp’. I think to myself, ‘Oh my goodness! Do I really sound like that?’ I think in those situations you just have to giggle to yourself.

We always ‘reflect’ on the group learning and individual learning happening in our classroom.
While they are learning, I always have plenty of opportunities to take photographs with the digital camera plastered to my hand all day long. The children and I use these photographs (to reflect with) and also use them for each child’s digital portfolio. I recently took some photographs of the children setting up a cinema. They negotiated with each other who wanted to create a cinema and ascertained who had been to a cinema previously. All children agreed that we needed a movie screen and some sort of machine to project the movie onto the screen. We set up the projector screen and a projector we already had in our classroom. The children really wanted to set the cinema up in a proper way with a ticket office, money and tickets. With some guidance they agreed to have one person to collect the money at the ticket office, one person to rip the tickets in half and an usher to tell people where to sit in the cinema. The children’s prior knowledge of the cinema was very clear. The children knew who did what job in the cinema and how it was completed – even down to minute details such as ripping the tickets in half when you enter a movie cinema.

We held a group meeting to discuss the cost of the tickets for cinema patrons. The children decided that $10 would be enough to buy a ticket to the cinema. I was expecting the children to say $100 but I realised they are becoming more logical towards the end of the year. If I had asked the children to do this task at the beginning of the year, I feel most children would have had difficulty identifying what amount would be appropriate for a movie ticket. We then discussed if there was such a thing as a $10 note so we looked at the notes in the cash register and found the number 10 on the blue notes. I encouraged more depth of understanding by asking if the cinema patrons could pay any other way if they didn’t have a $10 note? I suggested the children try the $2 coins. They found that five $2 coins are the same as $10. They also counted out the $1 coins and found ten $1 coins was the same. The children in the cinema group organised their roles and announced the cinema was open for business! $10 notes were handed out and the cinema patrons received their cinema tickets. The cinema patrons were directed to the ticket usher and were told their ticket needed to be ripped in half and the cinema patrons were to keep the other half, otherwise they would not be allowed out of the cinema ... even to go to the toilet! Tough cinema rules! I was impressed at the children’s level of numeracy understanding when they were dealing with the cinema costs. The ticket office operator also was very diligent in handing over the ticket when he had put the $10 in its place in the cash register.

I feel a buzz when I see children creating roles with each other and getting along well socially. I enjoy observing the in-depth learning taking place from an activity the children have planned and physically created themselves with minimal adult instruction. I have booked myself in to do a two-day Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) workshop about the new Prep to Year Three QSA Numeracy and Literacy Indicators in the September school holidays this year. I am looking forward to learning more about these indicators and hopefully gaining more inspiration on how I could have challenged the children more as they learn about cinema life and other numeracy experiences we look at every day in our Prep classroom.
Home visits - attachment-based practice in action

The teachers, parents and children from Staverton Kindergarten share their home visit experiences with Bronwyn MacGregor

According to the C&K website http://www.candk.asn.au/AboutUs/Parentinvolvement.aspx, one of the special features of C&K community kindergartens are home visits. They are seen as an important process in fostering collaborative relationships between the teacher, the children and their families. They allow the teacher to contextualise a child’s home learning environment and also give family members the opportunity to positively influence their child’s learning by sharing aspects about home life.

C&K values the home visit experience as a way to help the teacher in curriculum planning by gaining a greater understanding of the family and home context. The Association believes that home visits benefit children because they:

- see links between home and their learning centre
- spend some one-on-one time with their teacher
- see their teacher valuing them and their family.

Parents also benefit because they can:

- share information about their child so the teacher can better understand their needs and respond to the child on an individual basis
- build a positive relationship with the teacher
- find out more about the kindergarten.

When I heard about the home visit program that operates at the Staverton Kindergarten, I was keen to have the teachers, children and parents share their experience with EYC readers, especially those who might already use or be considering using this approach as part of an attachment-based approach to transitioning children and their families from home to care, home to kindergarten or home to school.

Home visits have been offered for many years at Staverton Kindergarten. They are seen by the centre’s teachers as another way of supporting the link for the child and their family between home and kindergarten. Teachers Judy Ford and Sandy Howard say the home visit program “offers the chance to spend one-on-one time with both the child and their parent/family, supporting a stronger understanding for the educator of the child and their family.” And note that parents often ask questions during a home visit that they would not ask at Kindy.

According to the teachers at Staverton, “The children and families benefit from these visits through the strengthening of the relationship with their early childhood educator and through the opportunity to have a casual and private conversation with their teacher.”

If we think about teaching/caregiving practice in terms of Head ☝ (knowledge), Heart ♥ (attitudes/beliefs) and Hands ✌ (skills), we can begin to qualify the benefits of home visits as described by the teachers at Staverton Kindergarten.

☝ The knowledge gained through the home visit of the child, their family and the educator adds another layer in understanding the child and their family and in confirming the importance of quality early childhood education.

♥ As an early childhood professional, I find the home visit supports my understanding of the child and their family, offering the chance for the family and for me to express, share and honour values, beliefs and traditions through shared understandings. Home visits impact and confirm my beliefs about ‘how children learn and teachers teach’. By taking time to make a home visit, I see how this additional ‘teaching tool’ works in developing shared understandings that deepen the relationship, understanding and connection between the family and their child’s educator.

It enables both the teacher and the parents to gain an insight into who the other is – or something like this!

✌ Home visits do impact on what we do. The understanding and knowing of a child continues throughout the year and this develops through a number of experiences both during a kindergarten day and outside kindergarten, such as a home visit. As this understanding unfolds, so too does the connection with the child and family. (Judy)

Often parents share concerns in their home environment rather than on the verandah at Kindy, with others around. (Sandy)
Children love to refer to the time that you came to visit them at home and will still refer to this visit months later. Home visits are another way of supporting and building upon our relationship (with children).

From these responses, it is clear to me that the teachers at this kindergarten value home visits as an important strategy in building early attachments with the children and families at the kindergarten and as a way to support the relationships between children and teachers as well as parents and teachers. The next step was to find out what benefits the parents and children perceived as a result of these visits. It was time to talk to some parents and children about the home visit experience. I asked Julia (mother of Sarah) and Jennifer (mother of Max and Willem) to share their thoughts...

**Julia’s responses**

We were first told about home visits in the initial open night, then again in the pre-kindly interview and then, once Sarah started at kindy, a list was put up for parents who were interested in home visits to choose the date and time we wanted. My initial response to the idea of a home visit by the kindy teachers was, “Great idea!” I knew that my child would love it and it is a great opportunity for the teacher to see the child in her own environment and get a closer rapport/relationship. I see these things as the main benefits of having a home visit.

We did not need to do anything special in preparation for the home visit, other than organise the date, but Sarah and I did cook a cake and biscuits! The visit went as I expected and Sarah was SO excited and proud that her teacher had come to her house. The teacher allotted an hour (of her own personal time) and did stay for exactly an hour. Our time was mostly taken up with Sarah playing with the teacher … which was the purpose of the visit. It was all about the child owning the visit which was great.

I realise an hour is quite a personal commitment when you consider how many children there are to visit but, if I could have, I thought it could be better to have a two-hour visit! This way the teacher can have more time to talk to the parent as well as play with the child. I possibly would have liked to hear more about how my child was doing. I guess there would be people that may not want a teacher to visit their child in their home as they may perceive it as ‘checking up on them’. Personally though, I think it is a great idea.

**Jennifer’s Responses**

My elder boy [Max] was at Staverton for two years and we had home visits throughout his years there as well. Willem was looking forward to a home visit for quite a while because he ‘knew’ that it happened. When I first heard about the idea of home visits, I remember thinking this was such a lovely touch. When the visits happened, both boys had been very excited to share their home environment [their room and their play area] with Mrs Ford and give her a four-year-old’s ‘guided tour’!

We chose to do a lot of preparations for the visit. Mrs Ford has a food allergy and Willem reminded me of this and wanted to ensure that we offered her a morning tea that she could eat. When we were shopping he specifically selected a Strawberry and Cranberry tea [milk-free-drink] that she would like, and we looked through our allergen-free cookbook [we have other allergies in the family] to work out what to make. Willem loves cooking and so the morning spent cooking milk-free gluten-free banana muffins in preparation for the visit was also great fun for him. Willem chose where to sit and helped to set the table in preparation. [Max in previous years was not so concerned about our ‘hospitality’ but wanted to show everything he loved to Mrs Ford: lined up toys, set out his ‘harder’ puzzle games and set up some drawing for Mrs Ford to do.]

I think that both children have got so much out of the home visits. Both my boys have very different personalities, and the visit meant different things to both; to the social one it was the chance to play the host, and to the quieter personality the chance to ‘shine’ by showing his favourite toys, colours [room colour] and games. For both it is a memorable morning whereby the teacher has the time to spend considerable one-on-one time with the child exploring their special things in their own environment. I feel that this shows a ‘completeness’ to the kindergarten program that demonstrates this acceptance and encouragement of each child on an individual level. Is quite amazing, the level of acceptance and encouragement that the child feels, by the teacher taking the time to meet with them in their home environment and be introduced to their special places and special things.

The visit was the highlight of Willem’s week, and it recurs in conversation since! I can’t really think why parents would prefer not to have a home visit as it is a well-intentioned elective part of the program. Everyone has individual concerns, though in our case...
I feel there is already a high level of trust and respect placed in the teaching staff, so coming into our home presented no issues. Perhaps in a different situation with different teachers this may be different? 

All that remained was for me to ask the children about their experience of a home visit …

Sarah said she felt “Happy and great” when she knew her teacher was coming to visit her at home. Willem said he felt “Excited”.

Sarah said her teacher was coming to her house “Because she wanted to visit me.” and that the best thing about the visit was “Playing in my room and her [the teacher] sitting on the chair [in Sarah’s room]. I loved it all.” Willem said he thought his teacher was coming to his house “Because I wanted her to visit me.” The best thing about the visit was “She came to my house and I knew she was coming to my house and she was going to watch Top Gear with me.”

Having shared with you one example of a home visit program in action, why not consider a home visit program in your early childhood setting? Judy and Sandy from Staverton Kindergarten recommend home visits as a valuable component of the early childhood program in supporting the development of shared understandings between the kindergarten and home. They do admit that with many parents both working, a home visit can be difficult time wise and flexibility is required to co-ordinate the visit. Judy’s suggestions for establishing a home visit process is to:

- be flexible;
- be clear with the parent/family and the child about how long you intend to stay; (remember that often time spent is your own personal time) and
- be ready to have a special time!

Sandy suggests, “I always let the parents know at the initial interview that I like to do a home visit to each family in the group in First and early Second Term, as it enriches our relationship both parent/teacher and child/teacher. I then put out a list of dates and times for the families to fill in.”

A quick browse on the internet will give interested early childhood educators links to some online sites for information, arguments for and against, as well as tips and resources about home visits and other teacher visitation programs. Below are some that may be of interest:

**Policy Brief No 11 2008: Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services**

This Policy Brief summarises the research evidence regarding transition to school, including strategies which aim to make it a smooth and successful process for children and their families.

**Teacher visits hit home**

Education World writer Sherril Steele-Carlin talks with administrators about how home visit programs work. Included: Tips for starting a program plus links to Web resources with more information.

**Excerpt from ABC’s of Effective Parent Communication (soft cover)**

ABC’s of Effective Parent Communication contains specific, hands-on advice to help all teachers develop a positive partnership with parents and families to encourage student success. Within the pages of this book, veteran teachers share their secrets for involving families in a dynamic, easy-to-read, practical manner. Reproducible forms are included to help teachers with parent phone calls, conferences, school-to-home communication, and parent involvement in the classroom.

**Right on the Left Coast: Views from a conservative teacher**

This blog voices concerns about home visits … I’ve always been against the concept of home visits. For starters, I’m a teacher, not a social worker. I’m not trained to evaluate what I see in the home, and even if I were, how would I use that information in the classroom?

**The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project**

The Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project is an inexpensive and easily replicated model of parent engagement that has been proven to end the cycle of blame between parents and school staff by building trust and respect, instilling cultural competency and increasing personal and professional capacity for all involved.

**A Guide to Home Visits**

The Michigan Department of Education’s division of Early Childhood Programs produced this thorough guide. Sample forms included.
Numeracy conversations

with Sue Webster

“To be numerate is to use mathematics effectively to meet the general demands of life at home, school, in paid work, and for participation in community and civic life.” (Report of the Numeracy Education Strategy Development Conference, Numeracy = Everyone’s Business – October 1997)

Young children begin to develop numeracy through their early experience of seeing numbers and mathematical information used in their homes, communities and learning environments. Numeracy is part of all children’s everyday lives – their language, their use of objects and it is involved in their play-based learning.

Early development and an understanding of numeracy concepts are critical in developing positive and lifelong attitudes about mathematics.

We sent out a call for educators to respond to the important question of “What does/should numeracy look like in early childhood settings and schools?” Educating Young Children editorial panel member, Sue Webster, has collated the following responses.

Bob Perry
Professor Murray School of Education
Charles Sturt University, Albury

We show we value numeracy through …

• the mathematical language we use in our conversations with adults and children;

• the challenges we set children, and encourage them to set for themselves, ensuring that their mathematical learning will be extended by our provocations;

• encouraging the making of mathematical marks by young children through asking children to record what they are thinking in their own ways and celebrating these ‘marks’ through displays and communications to families; and

• discussions with and information for families about the numeracy their children experience in prior-to-school settings and the numeracy experiences the children and their families have at home, in the shopping mall, in the parks, etc.

We build on each child’s numeracy strengths by …

• firstly recognising these strengths;

• provoking the child’s thinking through the asking of inquiry questions about the recognised numeracy strengths;

• encouraging the child to talk about and record their thinking in ways that make sense to him/her and not forcing the child to conform with some adult standard approach; and

• providing opportunities through which the child can extend his/her thinking, including opportunities for playful investigations with and without materials and for justification of methods, approaches and solutions.

In a numeracy-filled learning area we would see …

• happy, fulfilled children and adults engaging together in relevant, sustained, shared investigations that use their mathematical knowledge in meaningful ways;

• lots of concrete materials such as blocks, play-dough, water, sand, climbing materials, etc. that are used to stimulate mathematical thinking;

• calculators accessible to children;

• standard measuring instruments such as rules, tape measures, clocks, balance scales and weights and capacity measures;

• representations of numbers, shapes and mathematical patterns on display from both the children and the adults;

• opportunities for children to celebrate their numeracy achievements.
We are challenged/stimulated by …

- lots of things but in terms of numeracy the thing that concerns me most is that so many of our early childhood educators do not recognise the mathematics that their children are doing and do not know where it could lead if it was encouraged;

- ensuring that all early childhood educators display positive attitudes about mathematics and mathematics-learning to children and their families;

- the almost unlimited potential that young children display in their learning of mathematics, provided that they are encouraged to run with their ideas;

- the increasing tendency for early childhood settings to have their curriculum influenced by outside forces such as school curricula, standards, and parental demands rather than by the children themselves; and

- the amazing amount of excellent practice that one witnesses in Australian early childhood settings. If only we could make it universal.

An unexpected numeracy experience or moment that occurred …

There are many examples that I could provide, some in early childhood settings, some in children’s homes, etc. What follows is one example that I have carried with me for many years. It comes from the following paper:


It is said that Australia stops on the first Tuesday of November for the running of the Melbourne Cup — a horse race. Schools interrupt lessons, industry halts, and households are riveted to their television sets. At home, Will (aged 3.3 years), his mother, and a friend shared the field of 24 horses among themselves, each receiving eight numbers, which were written onto sheets of paper. Will read his numbers and watched for them as the race progressed. He became excited when it was announced that the winner of the 2001 Melbourne Cup was number 13 — one of his numbers. He recorded this as shown in the figure below:

Will’s summary of a win in the 2001 Melbourne Cup

Our favourite resources or websites are …

By far my favourite resources are the people around me, particularly the children and their families. By talking with them, I can find all sorts of stimuli for mathematical inquiry. Early childhood educators are also great resources because they know what interests their children and can build on this and their observations of the children’s play and other activity in the early childhood setting. (Many of my early childhood colleagues find that recording their observations via learning stories can be one way in which mathematical ideas can be stimulated.)

Any other ideas/comments.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to think about what I think about numeracy in early childhood. I hope the thoughts I have managed are useful to you and your readers.
Jenni Lang-McIntyre  
Acting Deputy Principal  
Junction Park State School

I show I value numeracy by …
listening to, and talking about how numeracy is involved in everyday situations and responding, supporting and developing students’ ideas about number.

I think it is important that students see that I myself value numeracy and how numeracy helps us to function responsibly in everyday life.

I build on each child’s numeracy strengths by …
• building on their prior knowledge and experiences
• engaging students in active, hands-on learning experiences
• asking relevant questions
• providing opportunities to solve number problems in a range of meaningful contexts
• asking children to explain their thinking
• providing feedback and explicit teaching to develop their understanding of number concepts
• building a repertoire of computational skills
• encouraging students to take risks and be creative
• making frequent links across the curriculum, so that concepts and skills are developed and consolidated by being applied in different, relevant contexts
• promoting an interest and enthusiasm for numeracy and confidence with number.

In a numeracy-filled learning area I would see …
students excited about number, solving problems, engaging in discussions, sharing ideas and solutions, thinking mathematically and using numbers confidently, competently and creatively.

An unexpected numeracy experience or moment that occurred …
A Year One student who had learning difficulties told another teacher from a different year level that 8 groups of 7 were 56. We had been doing lots of sorting and patterning in class and she knew just what 8 groups of 7 looked like and could count them. This teacher who knew the student was absolutely amazed and came and told me. It was one of those “yes” moments. I was proud of the student but also re-energized about my program. I knew that children were developing a deep understanding of number and proficiency with their computational skills from my observations, from their discussions and recordings but it was reassuring to have this confirmation.

My favourite Teacher Resources are …
• First Steps in Mathematic - Number  
  (Department of Education and Training, Western Australia)
• Making Patterns by Helen Pengelly
• Mathematics for the Young Child by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (USA)
• Mathematics Their Way by Mary Barotta-Lorton
• MCTP (Mathematics Curriculum and Teaching Programme) by Charles Lovitt and Ian Lowe

A favourite resource are my buckets of junk, which I have collected over the years, and my collections of lids, pegs, rocks, shells and buttons, which I use for sorting and patterning.
I also find the Early MacMillan Starters Kit, which contains easily assessable boxes of resources and games, very useful.

Stephanie Cobby  –  Teacher of 3-5 Year olds  
Kiah Occasional Early Childhood Centre, Jamboree Heights

We show we value numeracy through …
• the implementation of numeracy experiences in our daily program, whether they be specifically planned experiences or spontaneous moments which take place at any point throughout the child’s day.
• making numeracy experiences fun, enjoyable, and positive - focusing on children’s strengths rather than weaknesses
• bringing numeracy to life in every environment around our centre – whether it be counting leaves at the sandpit, playing
‘What’s the time Mr. Wolf?’ in the playground, counting how many blocks in the tower on the mat, or discussing the measurements of ingredients on our recipe when cooking.

We build on each child’s numeracy strengths by …

- documenting their abilities and providing experiences and resources, which extend on their learning.
- giving them positive feedback and encouragement when they are trying their best.
- adjusting experiences to suit a variety of learning levels.
- letting the children have some freedom with decision making and allowing them to choose types of experiences that they find interesting, enjoyable or at which they feel competent.
- providing challenges when appropriate.

In a numeracy-filled learning area we would see …

- lots of sensory stimulants/resources that encourage children’s counting or number recognition skills, for example, number books/stories in book corner, posters, puzzles, calendars, puppets, felt/magnet stories, finger plays and singing and collections of objects
- children involved in play, exploration and investigation – using hands-on type learning.

We are challenged/stimulated by …

Although children are enthusiastic when confronted with numeracy experiences, I find that often children find it difficult to count using one-to-one correspondence. They can quite easily rote count from 1-10, but when they come to count ten objects sitting in front of them they are challenged. This is one concept I try to work on often. Also for some children, recognising and identifying numerals is often a challenge. Giving children plenty of visual exposure to numerals throughout the classroom environment seems to help in this area – books, magnetic numbers, puzzles, posters and flash cards seem to work well.

An unexpected numeracy experience or moment that occurred …

One of our nursery staff had brought in a set of bathroom scales and measuring tape, to measure the babies. My assistant brought them out to our room when they were finished and all of a sudden we had started something. The children were eager to have a turn at measuring their height and weight using their newfound equipment. We recorded the measurements on some paper and this encouraged lots of discussion about who is bigger, smaller, taller, shorter and so on. Even though not all the children could recognise the numbers on the scales and tape, they were all involved in the process and with the teacher’s assistance they were soon talking with their friends about how much they weighed, or how tall they were.

It was quite inspiring to see the children so enthusiastic about learning mathematics and numeracy!

Our favourite resources or websites are …

Children really enjoy playing transition games with the giant dice – I find it is a really good way to get the children to practise counting using one-to-one correspondence. Collections of objects such as the coloured bears are excellent as well for sorting and encouraging counting using one-to one correspondence.

Books, flash cards and magnetic numbers are great for developing children’s recognition of numerals. I have recently been introduced to The Learning Ladder (www.learningladder.com.au); they have lots of great resources such as games, books and flash cards. One particular resource I found to be popular with the children is the Starter Stile Tiles matching game. They cover a wide range of learning areas, but I like the way they encourage children’s numeral recognition.

Sue Southey
Pre-Prep teacher
Springwood Community Kindergarten

We show we value numeracy through …

Numeracy is only one aspect of mathematical thinking, so I think it would be more accurate to say we value “mathematical thinking”, and “numeracy” is part of that. I like to see children involved in play that engages all the senses (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic and tactile) and is where possible, creative, and mathematical play...
is no exception. The adults’ role is to capitalise on the numeracy activities that occur in play and children’s creations. Where rote learning is more appropriate, such as counting skills we use number and rhyme combined with whole body or tactile activities.

In a numeracy-filled learning area we would see ...

One of the learning spaces in our room is our “arranging area” which consists of a large workspace, a light table and a trolley containing sets of open ended materials. The trolley is stocked with a variety of “boards” to design on (felt boards, mirrors, pegboards, pizza trays, Lego® boards) as well as sets of objects such as glass beads, counters, recycled materials, stones, fairies, paddle pop sticks, old CDs, mosaic tiles etc. Children are encouraged to create designs using their choice of sets and baseboards.

We build on each child’s numeracy strengths by ...

We notice that children seem to naturally “collect” and impose order on the objects as they create their designs. Inadvertently, they discover mathematical concepts such as space, direction, grouping, one-to-one correspondence, patterning, tessellation, symmetry and quantity by arranging objects purposefully. This is noticeable when materials are presented that emphasise particular attributes such as colour, shape, texture, or weight. When children describe their designs, they automatically attend to number: “I used six dinosaurs and three of them were red.” As children become interested in quantifying we add numerals to the arranging trolley, and challenge the children to create arrangements based on their favourite number.

We are challenged/stimulated by ...

using this creative method of engaging children in mathematical thinking. Children enjoy the beauty of creating designs with inherent mathematical meaning.

It can be challenging to respond to concern by parents, authorities and schools for increased levels of numeracy in children entering school. Many teachers of Pre-Prep children revert to closed and direct methods of instruction to “force” mathematical thinking rather than allowing children to discover the beauty of mathematical concepts through their play and creative designs. A key role for Pre-Prep teachers is to market the wealth of mathematical learning including numeracy that is taking place as children engage in our play-based learning environments.

An unexpected numeracy experience or moment that occurred ...

This activity was planned but what was unexpected was how much the children enjoyed it; we videoed children performing their favourite number song or rhyme and created an interactive PowerPoint with the video clips.

Our favourite resources or websites are ...

Fabric number mats available from www.earthlinkhandcrafts.com


Counters such as butterflies, frogs, fish, dinosaurs, fruit available from a variety of educational suppliers
Jennifer Schlatter  
Prep Teacher  
St Margaret’s Anglican Girls School

We show we value numeracy through ...

- careful planning to ensure that all numeracy concepts are authentically embedded in activities. This careful planning ensures that numeracy is taught and learnt in a relevant, meaningful and real life context, which helps the children to understand and make links between numeracy learning and learning in other facets of the curriculum.

- activities and resources that tap into the individual interests and learning needs of each and every child.

- the links we make between their everyday stories that they like to share to numeracy concepts.

- the organisation of the numeracy-learning centre. To show that we value numeracy, the numeracy-learning centre is enticing enough to draw children into learning vital numeracy concepts through fun, interesting, exciting and challenging resources and materials. This is to ensure that the children think of numeracy as an extremely positive experience.

- the excitement and enthusiasm shown by teachers when teaching numeracy concepts. By outlining the importance of numeracy in everyone’s everyday lives and by providing examples how each numeracy concept can be applied to the children’s everyday lives helps the children to know that we value numeracy because it is an important lifelong skill.

We build on each child’s numeracy strengths by ...

- continually providing a wide range of experiences at a variety of different levels in order to ensure that each child is comfortable yet challenged with the numeracy activities.

- allowing children to share their learning with the class by teaching the other children what they know.

- celebrating what the children do know and not what the children don’t know, which is vital when we work towards creating confident, happy and successful children who can think and work through numeracy activities.

In a numeracy-filled area we would see ...

- a wide variety of resources at a level that is accessible for all children. We have our resources in clear containers to ensure that the children can view the items in the containers as well as labels for those children who would like to read the numeracy resources.

- a large selection of visually stimulating posters, which help to consolidate vital numeracy concepts, which are taught throughout the year.

- a wide range of photos displayed which demonstrate the children engaging in numeracy activities with documentation to explain which concepts the children were actively engaged in as well as the learning that they achieved through this project.

- play situations set up such as a cash register with a trolley, babies and grocery items. These play situations would change throughout the year in order to ensure a wide variety of numeracy concepts are learnt through play.

- smiling faces of children enjoying numeracy activities as they engage in play situations where they are learning vital numeracy concepts.

- an inquiry table of numeracy items or resources that we weren’t sure about which we could explore during mat time as some of the children may know what these objects are used for.

We are challenged/stimulated by ...

- working through investigation projects that involve problem solving. Through these investigations, the children are required to use their knowledge to apply it to a real life situation.

- reflecting on our own numeracy work displayed in the numeracy learning centre. By reflecting on our own work we are inspired to enhance our paintings, models and drawings to illustrate numeracy concepts.

- new and exciting resources that help us to learn vital numeracy concepts.

- new play-based problems that we can work in small groups to solve.
An unexpected numeracy experience or moment that occurred ...

An unexpected numeracy moment that occurred was when a small group of children were applying a wide range of numeracy skills during outdoor play. The children created a pet shop, unaware of the wonderful numeracy activities about to unfold ...

The children decided as a group how many puppies they were wanting to sell and for much. They were counting the puppies and categorising these puppies (children) into groups depending on the breed of the puppies. The children made signs for the puppies, with the breed of the puppy, how old they were and how much they were. They then proceeded to collect and create money which they gave to the children who wanted to buy the puppies and take them home. The girls were so excited when they realised they were successfully using the money because they knew which coins and notes they had and they purchased for the right amount of money.

Our favourite resources are ...

Our favourite resources or websites are picture books that help to demonstrate a certain numeracy concept as well as class big books that the children create. These books are wonderful resources, which are continually utilised to help children to understand and comprehend, in a range of contexts, the vital numeracy concepts. Below is a list of just some of the picture books that we utilise for numeracy:

- *Who Sank the Boat* by Pamela Allen
- *Mr Archimedes’ Bath* by Pamela Allen
- *Rosie’s Walk* by Pat Hutchins
- *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins
- *The Bears who Stay Indoors* by Susanna Gretz and Alison Sage
- *One Woolly Wombat* by Rod Trinka and Kerry Argent
- *The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle
- *The Shopping Basket* by John Burningham
- *The Bad Tempered Ladybird* by Eric Carle

One of our favourite websites is Sparkle Box, a fantastic website for teachers wanting to print out visually stimulating numeracy resources and games. These resources on the website are free and they are absolutely amazing. We highly recommend this website as there is a numeracy section with an abundance of wonderful resources. These resources can be found at: [www.sparklebox.co.uk](http://www.sparklebox.co.uk)

Another favourite resource is Mathletics; the children have very much enjoyed Mathletics online. They are provided with an opportunity to become actively engaged in certain activities that are comfortable yet challenging for them. They love using the computers to practice their numeracy skills (symbols). Each child works at their own pace on activities that have been set up intentionally to match their current numeracy abilities.
Each Thursday afternoon I take the pre-prep group for a walk around the kindergarten neighbourhood. Over the weeks the children see how their environment has changed. As the seasons pass, leaves are falling from trees and new growth is beginning. Some of the children take a camera to capture images of what they see and the rest of the children take a clipboard to draw what they see. Through these images we get to see the environment from a child’s view. The children are becoming very observant and the photos from a child’s perspective are very interesting.

Here is their story ...

**Charlie**: I like flowers. I took photos of flowers ‘cause I like flowers. I always like them at my house. They are pretty.

**Jasmine**: This sign has the number 4 on it and I’m 4.

**Olivia**: It’s a sign that says ‘stop’ ‘cause when there’s traffic it says ‘stop’. I took it ‘cause it has numbers and a letter of a name.
Olivia: It’s Sammy snake and a V. It looked pretty cool and it looked pretty neat.

Cooper: We went for a walk. I took a photo of the tree. It looks like an army ‘cause it got colours.

Eliza: This was a big thing and it was a circle. And I think it was in the meadow. You know where cows is.

Erin: It was gum leaves. I like it because it is really tall.

Erin: The sticks were very pointy.

Erin: There were yellow leaves on it and some green leaves. The yellow leaves were turning brown and falling off the tree.
Eloise: I can see holes in the tree.

Eloise has drawn a picture of a street sign. It is Edward St.

Eloise’s drawing is of the duck she saw on the dam in the meadow. There were also ants on the footpath.

Eliza drew a picture of the chair and the dog she saw. She labeled her drawings.
Diary of Lou. P. Tales on tour in Under 8's Week

With the theme of Creativity – let it happen for this year’s Under 8’s Week, I crafted a storytelling performance titled Anything is possible in the world of stories. I chose two stories that offer creative solutions, and another with scope for children to help create by determining the main characters. The first story involved a blanket being sewn into many different items over time: a jacket, skirt, scarf, hanky and a button. After telling the story I would ask the children what else could a blanket be made into. These were some of their ideas: a hat; a box; a square; a puppet; a cape; a cubby; and hair. Their creativity started to flow. After the second story, which was either The Squeaky old bed or The Banza (depending on the age group), I would pull out of my story box a sound pipe, puzzling over what it was and how I could use it. These were some of the ideas we came up with: a straw, a tail, a nose, a unicorn horn, a trumpet; a telescope; and an elephant’s trunk. Then I would spin it for the children to listen to the sound and imagine what it sounds like and to move like what they imagined. Well it was a whistle, aliens, a fire engine, a train, a helicopter, wind, and star wars. Then we would create our bodies into the shapes that I bent the sound pipe into. So they created ideas, created movements and created body shapes. We then concluded by creating a story together, a story about something scary in a forest. Across the week, this scary creature was a ghost, a bear, a crocodile, a wolf, a dragon and a monster. Here are some memorable moments from each early childhood setting I visited.

Monday 25th May
10am - storytelling with children from Cranbrook Village Kids Child Care at Wulguru Village Kids Child Care.

Memorable moment - The boy aged four who played his self-nominated role of the ghost in the scary story was convincingly scary and followed my story cues beautifully. In fact, he had so much fun he snuck into the second session of storytelling I performed at Wulguru Village Kids Child Care for the Wulguru children.

11am - storytelling with children from Wulguru Village Kids Child Care.

Memorable moment - In The Magic Blanket story whenever Sarah’s items of clothing become dirty the mother always suggests throwing it out. One practical child suggested put it in the washing machine and when I asked her what was Sarah’s first word when she was learning to talk she said: “Washing machine!” Signs of severe domestitis!!!!

Tuesday 26th May
10am - Ingham Early Learning Centre. Every child (even babies in cots) attended, all 74!

Memorable moment: Trying to keep a very large group of very young children engaged.

12noon - Cardwell Early Learning Centre
Oops! They thought I was coming the following day. Twenty-four children who were about to eat lunch were led outside onto the verandah, away from babies and toddlers being settled off to sleep.

Memorable moment: In The Squeaky Old Bed I invited children up to be animal characters, but one child kept correcting me and telling me each child’s real name. This was great as I could then weave the children’s names into the story.

1.45pm - Cardwell State School
All children from Prep to Grade Three attended.
Memorable moment: In the last story, the children voted for a crocodile to be the scary creature living in the forest, which seemed particularly apt as I had noticed warning signs on the foreshore at Cardwell of crocodiles lurking in the waters (see photo below).

Wednesday 27th May

Drove from Cardwell to Lower Tully State School. It certainly is tucked away in the cane fields.

Memorable moment: The boy who took on a main role with a girl – being the children who dared to go into the forest, really shone in his role, picking up the story pattern and taking initiative with dialogue.

After I finished, the teacher asked the children to move to do a ‘whispering’ about what they liked from the storytelling. I joined in and heard two girls say that they liked it when this boy was going through the forest and said “Ooo! I like this flower.”

Great to hear children appreciating each other.

Thursday 28th May

Began at Cairns FDC - at 9.30am

Group of six carers and their children (22 one to four year olds). I was very ambitious and told three stories and even managed to co-ordinate two groups of children to be bands in the last story. Though must admit that their enthusiasm to play instruments drowned out their singing.

Memorable moment: In the story The Banzu, I asked two children to be tigers and go and get Cabree the goat some water. I then whispered “but don’t came back.” The two children didn’t come back. They found a patch that became their waterhole and they leant forward and pretended to lap up water for quite some time.

Then rush, rush and navigate around Cairns to locate Cairns TAFE CCC for 10.30am performance. Their older group of 22 children were seated waiting for me.

When I finished the final story, many of the children were pleading to do it again and when I closed the session by undoing the story spell, many children requested: “Let’s start all over again.” A sign of satisfied customers: begging for more.

In afternoon - Water St Occasional Care

Children were playing outside when I arrived. A group of about thirty then gathered on the carpeted area under house.

Memorable moment: One toddler who had just woken up from a nap, giggled hysterically when I did my performance of Sarah’s messy painting and gluing.

As I left, a boy asked: “Are you going to fly away?” I replied: “Yes, tomorrow”, which was true, but I suspect by the wonder in his eyes that he thought I had the power to fly without assistance.
Friday 29th May

First Steps Child Care Centre, Atherton

Drove up the winding, winding, winding road, feeling more and more nauseous and started to wonder if I might have to weave in a sudden escape to the bathroom within my storytelling. Fortunately once my feet were on firm ground, all ill feelings subsided. Most of the children from the centre gathered in their foyer space.

Memorable moment:

In *The Magic Blanket* story when the mother of the young girl in the story said that her blanket must be thrown out, one young boy with serious concern blurted: “Oh! She wouldn’t like that.”

The next story I told was *The Squeaky Old Bed*, with the main character being a girl in the pre-prep group. Other children were the pets that her grandfather bought for her and they all played under a table. They accommodated each other well in the cramped space. When we recalled all the stories at the end, the girl who played the main character in this story referred to it with “it was about me”.

At the end of each session at each centre/school that I visited, I invited a child to choose a wishing stone from a bag of wishing stones as a gift to make their wishes come true. Each stone had a single word on it, that of wish, create, dream, magic or strength. I also gave each service their own magic blanket (orange satin with black velvet stars and moons), for the children to create stories, costumes, games and ideas. On returning home, after briefly entering the lives of about 350 children, I imagine all kinds of stories emerging in each setting from their blanket and their stone.

Stop Press

A teacher from Lower Tully State School tells me: “We used your gifts to create oral stories to end the day. We had a lot of fun with these and extended it onto string stories and circle stories.”

And above are two children from Wulguru Village Kids in Townsville making their own story about a magic blanket.

Creativity – let it happen!!!

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Under Eights Week is organised annually by Early Childhood Australia Queensland Branch. All over Queensland, schools, kindergartens, childcare centres, family day care schemes, libraries, councils and other organisations hold events to bring to create a fun week for children and an informative week for parents. Why not start planning for 2010 now!

**Under Eights Week 2010**

**Dates:** 21-28 May, 2010

**Theme:** Living Diversity: Act Locally—Think Globally

The Cairns Regional ECTA Group in conjunction with C&K organised an Early Childhood Conference in Cairns for the first time. An organising committee was formed with local ECTA office bearers and members, and regional C&K consultants.

PLANNING

The conference planning meetings started towards the end of last year. We aspired to organise a conference that would provide up-to-date information on current early childhood issues. We also wanted expert keynote presenters and interesting workshops from professionals in a variety of fields. These included information technology, social work and mental health, education (practical literacy and numeracy), cultural diversity, environments, occupational therapy, speech pathology, storytelling and science. We decided on a weekend in August (that suited the keynote speakers) and booked the venue after researching and comparing prices.

Initially, regular meetings were planned every three weeks, then every fortnight, and finally every week as the conference weekend loomed closer. We all kept in touch frequently by email (at least every week, and sometimes several times a day!) asking for feedback, or for proofreading of the program, documents and forms that we were creating on computer.

We were on a very tight budget and wanted to use as little paper as possible, so the Conference Program and Registration were released via the internet through the ECTA website, the P-3 Discussion List, the Early Childhood Australia website, Far North Early Childhood Network website, and emails to C&K, Education Queensland, and Catholic Education in our region. Delegates were able to register and select their Workshop preferences by email, fax or mail. Registrations were mostly received and acknowledged by email. Receipts were given to the delegates at the Conference when they signed in and collected their name tags at the Registration desk.

It was our hope that we would attract at least 100 delegates at the Conference. We had an ‘early bird’ registration discount for all delegates and also offered a discount for ECTA members and full-time students. By the cut-off date for the early bird registrations, we already had 100 delegates, and there were still 2 weeks to go for registration! In the end, we had to turn people away, as weren’t expecting such a big response and the main lecture room could not cater for more than 140. We had to include our presenters in the final numbers; there were just over 130 delegates from as far north as Badu Island and as far south as Giru (south of Townsville), and out west to the Tablelands and the Gulf of Carpentaria. There was a good cross section of early childhood professionals - mostly teachers from schools (P-3) and C&K kindergartens, and also staff from childcare centres and TAFE, and university students.

SUPPORT

We appreciated the support from ECTA and received a donation of $500 towards the conference. Kim Walters and Toni Michael deserve a special mention. They both provided so much information and support via many emails. C&K also provided knowledge and expertise from Barrie Elvish, Will Jones, Gwynyth Beale and Anne Grant for the Opening Address and some of the workshop presentations.

Local business, ‘Harleys Educational’ donated and packed all the conference bags, donated scissors for one of the workshops, and two prizes (a book pack and activity pack) for two lucky delegates. All the names tags were returned for a ‘lucky dip’ (and to be recycled for next conference). The prize was a gift pack from another local business, ‘Class Act’. C&K also donated bags and inserts for the conference bags.

Rydges Tradewinds Resort provided a great venue that overlooked The Esplanade. The staff set up all the rooms, provided delicious food, and
management support to help the conference run smoothly. There were trade displays from Harleys Educational, Class Act, Book Garden, Educational Experience, Noah’s Ark and Earthlink. There were also displays from ECTA, C&K and Queensland Teachers Union Health.

CONFERENCE WEEKEND

The Conference started on Saturday 15th August. After the inspirational ‘Welcome to Country’ by Professor Henrietta Marrie, Barrie Elvish from C&K gave the opening address that outlined some future directions and possible changes in the early childhood sector. April Schipke from Education Queensland, presented an overview of the ‘Early Years Learning Framework’. Keynote Speaker, Sarah Davies-Roe from Queensland Health spoke about the importance of emotional attachment and bonding in young children and backed up her presentation with some interesting brain development research. Dr. Reesa Sorin from James Cook University outlined the latest information and results from the ‘Australian Early Development Index’, and Mary Kimani Githaigu from James Cook University presented an eye-opening slideshow of ‘Early Childhood Education in Kenya’.

Workshops were held in the afternoon. We had an interesting variety of workshops presented by professionals in the field, and the topics for both days included: Sarah Davies-Roe’s ‘Starting to Sow Some SEEDS in Your Organisation’;

Jenni McDonald’s ‘Alternatives to Workshops (Developing literacy and numeracy through hand-on learning)’;

Gwenyth Beale’s ‘Creating Great-Looking Documents, Presentations and Web Pages’;

Anne Grant’s ‘Theory into Practice in Creating Indoor Environments’; and ‘Theory into Practice in Creating Outdoor Environments’;

Barb Powell’s ‘Think Talk Play (Using imaginative play to develop language and cognitive ability in young children)’;

Will Jone’s ‘Beyond Cultural Diversity (creating a truly inclusive cultural framework)’;

Kylie Giordimaina’s ‘Speech, Oral Language and Phonological Awareness’;

Helen Ramoutsaki’s ‘Storying the Everyday (Relating and reflecting children’s experiences)’;

and Heidi Streiner’s ‘Mini Beasts (exploring the fascinating world of insects through hands-on activities)’;

The Notes and PowerPoints from the workshops and presentations can be viewed in the ‘Secure’ Members section of the ECTA Website.

On Sunday, the day started early with a full hot breakfast on the verandah of the resort that overlooked the Coral Sea, creating a tropical ambience on a beautiful winter’s day. After breakfast, Eva deVries from Independent Schools Queensland, presented a lively and practical Keynote, ‘Young Children’s Numeracy Learning’. Eva presented a follow-up Master Class afterwards. Staff from the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care were introduced and we were informed about their role and future directions.
As the conference drew to a close, Will Jones formally farewelled C&K Consultant Els Heijnes and acknowledged her dedication and commitment to the Far North region. Finally, Storyteller, Helen Ramoutsaki sent us on our way with some wise words in her 'old world' tale of fear, ignorance, knowledge, courage and hope. As we finished the conference around lunchtime, delegates who had travelled long distances were able to get home at a reasonable time.

From the Conference Evaluations, there were a small number of delegates who have volunteered to help with the next conference. So, the workload will be shared by more people next time. I cannot finish this article without thanking five special women who have also been part of the Conference Organising Committee from the beginning to the end. Lynne Ireland, Trudi Allen, Leslie McCllland, Els Heijnes and Will Jones – thank you for all your commitment, inspiring ideas, contribution, positive support, level-headedness, teamwork, sense of humour and the many cups of tea/coffee. WE DID IT!

Margaret Thwaite
Secretary
Cairns Regional ECTA Group

Did you know an integral part of the work of ECTA is to work with and provide support for groups of ECTA members throughout Queensland? Each year, a portion of the total funds received through ECTA membership subscriptions is set aside for Regional Groups undertaking local professional development initiatives. Groups may apply for a one-off allocation or for several small grants. To find out more about ECTA Regional Groups go to www.ecta.org.au
While preparing for a recent presentation to ECTA professionals, and quite by coincidence, I came across the autobiographical books of Judy Westwater whose charity work for vulnerable street children in South Africa had been recommended to me during my own ongoing work there. Hers is a horrific story of childhood abuse, exploitation and neglect through which she displays the fundamental characteristics of resilience, i.e. the ability to anticipate, plan and hope in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Westwater’s ability to move beyond her own turbulent past, raise four resilient children and to now dedicate her time and energy to saving the physical and emotional lives of street children in areas such as Soweto, Cape Town and in cities in Mexico and Ecuador, is testimony both to her own indomitable courage and to the human ability to develop resilience despite adversity of the worst magnitude.

Four characteristics are commonly used to define resilience. These are: future orientation - the capacity to anticipate, plan and hope; the capacity for gratitude and forgiveness; the capacity to love and have empathy with others (despite their differing world views); and the capacity to interact and connect with people. Parents and early childhood professionals have a critical responsibility to develop and nurture these four characteristics in children. They are guides to the child’s developing resilience, i.e. the ability to bounce back from a setback and to reconcile challenges and responsibilities for personal behaviours as part of life’s journey to maturity as a human being.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the best predictors of the development of resilience are factors such as easy temperament in the child, consistent and non-turbulent family relationships, competent care givers who are both present and available, the active development of self-esteem (sense of self), a deep sense of emotional security, a sense of personal history, the use of rhymes and mantras to cope with stress/anxiety and, of course, the presence of buoyant parents and teachers.

The aims of the Pegasus Charity founded by Judy Westwater demonstrate a deep understanding of what children need in order that they flourish into self-sustaining, loving and resilient human beings. They also form a useful framework for the formulation of a resilience-building program in early childhood settings as follows:

**Personal Development:**
- to develop an awareness and understanding of self
- to build confidence in their own ability and the opportunity to grow in mind and body
- to develop curiosity and imagination
- to develop concentration, memory, listening skills, quality of voice and linguistic skills
to aid children to realize and achieve their full potential

to generate interest and enthusiasm for further experiences

Social Development:

to help children to understand the needs of others

to help children to be sensitive and sincere, to see and respect the ideas and points of view of others

to aid communication and group awareness

to encourage the exchange of ideas and interaction which promotes confidence in groups of children

The aim of any resiliency-building approach must be to develop and stimulate the imagination, spontaneity, self-awareness, group awareness, self-confidence, clarity, communication, sensitivity, sincerity, reaction and interaction. According to Grotberg, the resilient child must be able to say:

I am a likeable person and respectful of myself and others (i.e. cognitive resilience)

I can find ways to solve problems and I can control myself (i.e. behavioural resilience)

I have people who love me and people to help me (i.e. emotional resilience)

I like myself...I have self-esteem (i.e. emotional resilience)

These categories are drawn from the findings of Grotberg's International Resilience Project which identified 36 qualitative factors that contribute to resilience. These can be divided into three major categories, 'I Have', 'I Am' and 'I Can', each consisting of five parts.

I HAVE

The resilient child says ...

I HAVE

Trusting relationships

Children of all ages need unconditional love from their parents and primary care givers, but they need love and emotional support from other adults as well. Love and support from others can sometimes compensate for a lack of unconditional love from parents and care givers.

Structure and rules at home

Parents who provide clear rules and routines, expect the child to follow them, and can rely on the child to do so. Rules and routines include tasks the child is expected to perform. The limits and consequences of behavior are clearly stated and understood. When rules are broken, the child is helped to understand what he or she did wrong, is encouraged to tell his or her side of what happened, is punished when needed, and is then forgiven and reconciled with the adult.

When the child follows the rules and routines, he or she is praised and thanked. The parents do not harm the child in punishment, and no one else is allowed to harm the child.

Role models

Parents, other adults, older siblings, and peers who act in ways which show the child desired and acceptable behavior, both within the family and toward outsiders. These people demonstrate how to do things, such as dress or ask for information, and encourage the child to imitate them. They are also models of morality and may introduce the child to the customs of their religion.

Encouragement to be autonomous

Adults, especially parents, who encourage the child to do things on her own and to seek help as needed, help the child to be autonomous. They praise the child when he or she shows initiative and autonomy, and help the child, perhaps through practice or conversation, to do things independently. Adults are aware of the child's temperament, as well as their own, so they can adjust the speed and degree to which they encourage autonomy in their child.
Access to health, education, welfare, and security services

The child, independently, or through the family, can rely on consistent services to meet the needs the family cannot fulfill — hospitals and doctors, schools and teachers, social services, and police and fire protection, or the equivalent of these services.

I AM

The I AM factors are the child’s internal, personal strengths. These are feelings, attitudes, and beliefs within the child. The resilient child says ...

I AM

Lovable and my temperament is appealing

The child is aware that people like and love him or her. The child does endearing things for others that help make him or her lovable. The child is sensitive to the moods of others and knows what to expect from them. The child strikes an appropriate balance between exuberance and quietness when responding to others.

Loving, empathic, and altruistic

The child loves other people and expresses that love in many ways. He or she cares about what happens to others and expresses that caring through actions and words. The child feels the discomfort and suffering of others and wants to do something to stop or share the suffering or to give comfort.

Proud of myself

The child knows he or she is an important person and feels proud of who he or she is and what he or she can do and achieve. The child does not let others belittle or degrade him or her. When the child has problems in life, confidence and self-esteem help sustain him or her.

Autonomous and responsible

The child can do things on his or her own and accept the consequences of the behavior. There is the feeling that what he or she does makes a difference in how things develop and the child accepts that responsibility. The child understands the limits of his or her control over events and recognizes when others are responsible.

Filled with hope, faith, and trust

The child believes that there is hope for him or her and that there are people and institutions that can be trusted. The child feels a sense of right and wrong, believes right will win, and wants to contribute to this. The child has confidence and faith in morality and goodness, and may express this as a belief in God or higher spiritual being.

I CAN

The I CAN factors are the child’s social and interpersonal skills. Children learn these skills by interacting with others and from those who teach them. The resilient child says ...

I CAN

Communicate

The child is able to express thoughts and feelings to others. He or she can listen to what others are saying and be aware of what they are feeling. The child can reconcile differences and is able to understand and act on the results of the communication.

Problem solve

The child can assess the nature and scope of a problem, what he or she needs to do to resolve it, and what help is needed from others. The child can negotiate solutions with others and may find creative or humorous solutions. He or she has the persistence to stay with a problem until it is indeed solved.

Manage my feelings and impulses

The child can recognize his or her feelings, give the emotions names, and express them in words and behavior that do not violate the feelings and rights of others or of himself or herself. The child can also manage the impulse to hit, run away, damage property, or behave otherwise in a harmful manner.

Gauge the temperament of myself and others

The child has insight into his or her own temperament (how active, impulsive, and risk-taking or quiet, reflective, and cautious he or she is, for example) and, also, into the temperament of others. This helps the child know how fast
to move into action, how much time is needed to communicate, and how much he or she can accomplish in various situations.

**Seek trusting relationships**

The child can find someone — a parent, teacher, other adult, or same-age friend — to ask for help, to share feelings and concerns, to explore ways to solve personal and interpersonal problems, or to discuss conflicts in the family.

The following items are used in the Grotberg International Resilience Project as a checklist for the perceptions of resilience in children:

- the child has someone who loves him/her unconditionally.
- the child has an older person outside the home she/he can tell about problems and feelings.
- the child is praised for doing things on his/her own.
- the child can count on her/his family being there when needed.
- the child knows someone he/she wants to be like.
- the child believes things will turn out all right.
- the child does endearing things that make people like her/him.
- the child believes in a power greater than seen.
- the child is willing to try new things.
- the child likes to achieve in what he/she does.
- the child feels that what she/he does makes a difference in how things come out.
- the child likes himself/herself.
- the child can focus on a task and stay with it.
- the child has a sense of humor.
- the child makes plans to do things.

Adult modelling, support and involvement are at the heart of happy, resilient children and teens. Walberg, in his work on effective partnerships between home and school, outlined the ideal *curriculum of the home* for supporting the development of resilience. Elements of the curriculum are:

- open signs of affection
- discussion of everyday events
- interest in child’s friends
- interest in child’s learning goals
- joint viewing and analysis of videos/films
- setting of definite boundaries and limiting of indulgences
- knowledge of child’s strengths and fears
- delaying immediate gratification for long-term goals.

In a very recent publication, the research of Mayr and Ulich in Germany has focused on the development of positive wellbeing in children which to date has not been the subject of much, if any, empirical research. The aim of the study was to develop a theoretically and empirically-based instrument for practitioners to observe and assess preschool children’s wellbeing in early childhood settings. The analysis of preschool teachers’ ratings yields six dimensions of social-emotional well-being: (1) making contact/social performance, (2) self control/thoughtfulness, (3) self-assertiveness, (4) emotional stability/coping with stress, (5) task orientation, (6) pleasure in exploration.

It is through such foci that young children in early childhood settings and in nurturing families will develop and sustain the critical ability to face life’s many challenges with a reflective and resilient mindset.

**References**


Over the past two decades it has become increasingly clear that the development of attachment security is intertwined with how accurately a carer is able to link their child’s behaviour with emotional and psychological factors (Fonagy P, Steele M, Steele H, Moran GS, & Higgit AC 1991; Fonagy P, & Target M 2005; Slade A, 2005). A parent who has a balanced view of how emotions and behaviour co-exist is more likely to truly represent what goes on in their child’s mind back to that little person. This encourages the development of a strong sense of self which, when developmentally appropriate, gives the child access to what happens in the minds of others. These children come to see other people as understandable and somewhat more predictable – that behaviour isn’t random but linked to feelings.

Perhaps the most challenging task for parents is to manage both their own feelings and those of their children. When strong feelings are aroused in us it can be difficult to think clearly about how to manage the behaviour that aroused such feeling. The ability to understand and regulate emotion promotes the effective ability to exist in relationships with others. None of us are born with the ability to do this. We learn to manage our emotions in the context of relationships with others – in particular with our primary carers via parental ‘reflective function’ (RF). This article will briefly describe ‘reflective function’ and approaches to enhancing RF in the parents and children with whom we work.

What is ‘reflective function’ (RF)?

Parental ‘reflective function’ is defined as a mother’s capacity to understand that her own or another’s behaviours are linked in meaningful, predictable ways to underlying mental states, to feelings, wishes, thoughts and desires’ (Slade, 2002, p.11).

Other definitions include ‘holding mind in mind’, ‘seeing yourself from the outside and others from the inside’ (Allen, Bateman and Fonagy, 2008, p.3) and ‘thinking about feeling and feeling about thinking’ (Target, 2003, as cited in Slade 2006). The hallmark of skilled RF is to be able to do so while in the midst of high emotional disarray.

Mental states and behaviour are inseparable. RF involves reflection on the mental states of ourselves as well as others. It includes reflection on past, present and future internal and external experiences and understanding moment to moment interactions as well as emotional relationships that have grown in great depth and complexity over time. We must be able to attend to the behaviour and mental states of others and use our imagination to find alternative perspectives of their internal experience. A sense of playfulness is also crucial in providing a ‘safety’ to explore those perspectives.

Low parental RF might be expressed by a lack of awareness or denial of the existence the child’s emotional or internal life. When asked how a child might be feeling about something, such a parent might instead talk about the child’s personality, behaviour or physical attributes. Parents with higher RF are able to recognize the interplay between their own states of mind and the internal life and observed behaviour of their children, especially during emotionally painful moments. Such a parent might say of their three year old who is throwing a tantrum:

‘My partner is away so I have been a bit frazzled and he picks up on that and gets unhappy too, so then his behaviour gets worse and then I get more upset and it’s a kind of
vicious cycle. It wouldn’t have helped that he was in the stroller for an hour at the shop either – and he misses his dad.”

The ‘average’ person would be considered to have reasonable reflection on most relationships with an understanding that thoughts and feelings are related to personal experiences. It is also incredibly encouraging to know that we don’t have to be super at being reflective to give our kids a ‘good enough’ experience of themselves.

**What impedes the development of RF?**

RF mostly begins to shut down when our needs and emotions are not held in mind or, worse, misrepresented, distorted and misattributed and where there is overt physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The often insidious and chronic process of psychological neglect suffocates the development of RF. Maltreatment may occur within the context of parental personality disorder, mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence.

**How might we develop RF in the parents and children with whom we work?**

Reflecting on why people do what they do is something that most of us do to some degree every day. Maintaining a focus on someone’s feelings and thoughts; how they perceive the feelings and thoughts of someone else; how they think that person perceives their feelings and thoughts – and holding a wondering, inquisitive stance without giving advice or finding solutions can be hard work, though!

Slade (2006) suggests we begin at the level of the parents’ capacity to understand internal experiences and seek to develop within the caregiver a ‘reflective stance’ (p.642) where behaviour is understood in terms of feelings and thoughts which are then responded to. Caregivers are helped to understand the most simple of mental states – for example, happiness and joy. They are then encouraged to imagine their child’s experience – to simply wonder about how their child might be feeling. The next step is for parents be in touch with their own feelings in thinking about the impact of their states of mind and behaviour on their children before learning to manage this emotion in the presence of emotional upheaval. The parents’ emotional needs need to be kept in mind, especially when their own early experiences have been difficult. It is also very comforting for parents to remember that the very emotionally powerful ‘hot’ moments of parenting will pass in time.

**Summary**

People who can’t manage strong feelings often find themselves with difficulties in social relationships. The way that we develop our styles of relating to other people depends on the sensitive, responsive, timely and consistent management of the emotions we experience primarily in childhood. At the core of this process is the critical role of parental reflective capacity. This apparently simple and yet enormously complex phenomenon gives birth to empathy and to the foundations of our deepest relationships with each other.

Slade, Saddler and Mayes (2006) propose that interventions to promote reflective function should help parents to begin to consider that their children have a mind and feelings; understand that behaviour is a communication of those feelings and then engage in the more complex task of helping parents to see that their child’s mental state is affected by their own mental state and vice versa.

**References**


Fonagy P, & Target M (2005), Bridging the transmission gap: An end to an important mystery of attachment research? *Attachment & Human Development*, vol. 7 issue 3, 333-43.


This article is a précis of my workshop at the recent Early Childhood Teachers’ Association (ECTA) conference. The focus of that workshop was on the personal and professional attributes of practitioners because we now know the profound and lasting effect adults can have on the lives of young children. This is especially so in the way practitioners relate to children including their behaviour guidance practices.

During that workshop, participants worked individually, in small groups, and in concert to:

(a) Examine adult-child relationships
(b) Explore behaviour guidance strategies
(c) Align behaviour guidance strategies with adult-child relationship styles
(d) Review their behaviour guidance strategies in the light of democratic relationships
(e) Rehearse strategies through role-plays.

You now have the same opportunity. Each of the above topics is presented, and is then followed by an exercise similar to that undertaken by the participants in the workshop. In this way, you can reflect upon your own practices, and adapt any of these that you feel will lead to you being more effective in guiding children’s behaviour democratically.

(a) Adult-child relationships

Adults relate to children in different ways, and each has its own effect on children. These ways of relating can be grouped as:

- Authoritarian
- Democratic
- Laissez-faire/Permissive.

Authoritarian sees adults with all the power (i.e. children have little or no autonomy). Democratic is recognised as best practice. Here adults:

- Establish positive relationships with children and foster positive relationships among children
- Involve the children in the construction of agreed guidelines, whenever possible
- Implement guidelines in a respectful, fair, and consistent manner
- Promote autonomy by encouraging children’s active participation in decisions about their own behaviour.

Laissez-faire/Permissive sees adults having warm relationships with children but setting few boundaries for their behaviour.

Exercise 1: Think of instances where practitioners use these styles. Could the democratic style be used?

(b) Behaviour guidance strategies

You would have seen, heard, read about and used many different behaviour guidance strategies. Now is your chance to construct the ultimate list.
Exercise 2: Brainstorm with a colleague(s) every behaviour management strategy that you can recall. Keep this list as I will refer you to it later in this article.

The behaviour management strategies that the carers used in the study I undertook for my PhD are listed in the table below. The 21 carers in the study were from four childcare centres in South-East Queensland. The study extended over eight months during which time I spent a full day each week in each of the centres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of carers’ behaviour management practices and their descriptions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Categories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect Guidance</td>
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<td>Prevention</td>
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<td>Educative Methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scaffolding Children’s Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imposed Control</td>
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solutions. (While punishment could be regarded as a form of imposed control, it has been dealt with separately because of its intent to deter children from repeating the behaviour.)

### Reward

Carers reward children for behaviours that they want them to repeat. The rewards, termed positive reinforcements by the carers, range from social to tangible. On occasions, children are enticed to behave in a particular way by the promise of a reward if they do so. In this study, rewards used by the carers included (a) Stickers and star charts, (b) Privileges, (c) Social reinforcers, and (d) Praise.

### Punishment

While carers avoid the term, they attach a number of penalties to children’s inappropriate behaviour to deter children from repeating it and to ensure that children know that it is not acceptable. In this study, punishments included (a) Applying aversive stimuli, (b) Withdrawing privileges, and (c) Time-out.

### Ignore

Sometimes carers pretend that they do not see children commit particular acts other than those acts likely to cause harm to themselves or another. The pretence is consummate with no eye contact with the children, no conversation, and no body contact. Occasionally, carers go so far as to remove themselves from the area, or simply turn their backs as though their attention is fully occupied elsewhere. For the strategy to be effective, it is imperative that carers ignore the behaviour every time it occurs. Raised eyebrows, sighs, and other non-verbal signs are easily read by children who see that the behaviour is upsetting to the carers, rendering the strategy ineffective. In this study, carers used ignore (a) To discourage children’s dependency on adults, (b) To teach children to rely upon their own skills at problem-solving, (c) To avoid reinforcing inappropriate behaviour, and (d) Because they did not know what else to do.

### Encouragement

Children are encouraged when their efforts are acknowledged in a way that develops their ability to recognise and accept their positive qualities, strengths or internal resources. Encouragement focuses on the deed rather than the doer, develops the ability to self-evaluate, and enables children to value learning and to work for self-satisfaction. It accepts and respects diverse abilities and strengths rather than compares.

### Choice

Choice refers to carers extending to children the right to decide upon significant aspects of their day. Importantly, it also refers to carers providing children with options or alternative behaviours to replace inappropriate behaviour.

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**When practitioners use a guided reflective practice as detailed in this article, they become more skilled and effective practitioners with increased enjoyment in their work with children.**
In summary, the carers in the study:

- over-used prevention
- rarely used educative methods
- rarely scaffolded children’s relationships
- often misused democratic strategies.

(c) Align behaviour guidance strategies with these adult-child relationship styles

Perhaps the simplest way for you to obtain an accurate picture of the way you guide children’s behaviour is to refer back to your list from Exercise 2, and then complete the following exercise.

Exercise 3: Using one colour, highlight the behaviour guidance strategies you use that you know to be authoritarian. Now, using a different colour, highlight those strategies that are democratic. The remaining strategies should be laissez-faire. Your relationship style with children should then be apparent.

(d) Review behaviour guidance strategies in the light of democratic relationships

For those who seek to guide children’s behaviour more democratically, consider strategies that you would:

(i) use less of
(ii) add
(iii) use more of
(iv) use differently or more skilfully.

Making these changes will take time. An effective way to achieve this is to start with the strategy that you are most confident of changing.

(e) Rehearse strategies through role-plays

Now rehearse this strategy. Examples of strategies practitioners often commence with include:

- redirection
- reminders of rules
- inductive reasoning
- following up a child’s assertive message
- consequences, and
- facilitated conflict resolution.

Exercise 4: Ask a colleague(s) to help you rehearse before using it with the children.

Conclusion

My conference presentations and workshops move the focus away from children and on to the practitioners’ knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and their practices. When practitioners use a guided reflective practice as detailed in this article, they become more skilled and effective practitioners with increased enjoyment in their work with children.

References


My philosophy of teaching and learning is summed-up in this quote from Dockett and Fleer (2002, p. 197):

The value of a child-initiated curriculum is twofold. On the one hand, children become engaged in content that is of interest and relevant to them. The focus is on content that children consider “worth knowing” and, because of this, intrinsic motivation and the commitment to the experiences are likely to be high. On the other hand, it is empowering for children to have adults take them, and their interests seriously.

My own journey of bringing a negotiated curriculum into the classroom has not been without challenge. Beginning my teaching career in a multi-age Preschool-Year One classroom initiated me into the realities of teaching very quickly. Fortunately, with the support of an excellent mentor* and a growing understanding of the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines, I learnt that my curriculum could be developed with the children in my class. The purpose of this paper is to share an example of how the negotiated curriculum ‘looks’ in our classroom.

Much of the learning and teaching in our classroom occurs through negotiated projects, using the ‘plan, do, reflect’ cycle outlined in the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006). These projects may be whole-group, small-group or individual in nature. They may also be child-initiated or teacher-initiated but are always negotiated. This means that the children are very much involved in planning the direction of the project and the experiences that will be involved. The ‘Olympics’ project is an example of one such project that was initiated by the children.

The Olympics Project

The extensive coverage of the Olympics in the media created much interest among the children.

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*Kathryn Berting is an early childhood teacher with experience in multi-age settings. She has taught Prep, Year One and Year Two and is currently teaching Prep and Year One at St. Patrick’s School, Allora. Kathryn uses the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines as a basis for teaching and learning and presented a seminar on ‘Prep Projects in a Multi-age Context’ at the Queensland Studies Authority Early Years Conference in 2007. She also presented a seminar on ‘Contextualising Assessment in an Early Years Program’ in 2009. Kathryn is interested in the use of negotiated projects to achieve learning outcomes through children’s specific interests and needs.
One of the children suggested we have our own Olympics at school and the idea was very popular. We spent a very lengthy planning session discussing and recording ideas for our Olympics. We also represented our favourite sports using self-selected visual arts techniques.

During fitness time, we practiced a variety of sports for the Olympics. This included discussions about the rules and the equipment needed. Some of the children wrote the rules for each sport to be read out at the Olympics before the events began.

After deciding (through voting) which teams would be in our Olympics, we researched their flags. Quite a lot of time was then spent making flags and streamers for each team.

We also made trophies and medals to use at our medal ceremonies. There was a lot of discussion about what colours the medals should be and what should be written on them. We also had to work out how many of each medal we needed – we had to have enough for every sport (including multiple copies for team sports).
We did a lot of research on China while we were organising our Olympics. We learnt about things such as food, homes, language and location. Our understanding of these things was reflected in the diary entries we wrote as part of the reflection process.

We read about how Chinese people value shared meals together as a family so we cooked fried rice and stir-fry and shared a meal together as a class. We also had a go at writing our names in the Chinese written language.

We did a lot of research on China while we were organising our Olympics. We learnt about things such as food, homes, language and location. Our understanding of these things was reflected in the diary entries we wrote as part of the reflection process.

The day of our Olympics finally arrived and we began with an opening ceremony where each team marched with their flag to the beat of the drum. Before each event, the rules were read out and the teams announced. A medal ceremony was held after each event to recognise the winners and place-getters.

During the Olympics, we kept a medal tally for each team. We also did this for the real Olympics, using a picture graph to record the medal tally each morning. When our Olympics were over, we reflected on the process, discussing the successes and difficulties and our proudest moments. We also planned and reflected daily throughout the project to keep us on track.

Conclusion

The 'Olympics' project is one example of how the negotiated curriculum works in our classroom. It is important to note that, while the focus and content of projects is always changing, the underlying process of 'plan, do, reflect' and negotiation with children underpins them all. The way children are involved is summarised by Tinworth (1997, p. 25) who explains the child’s role within this type of curriculum:
The child has an active role in the initiation of interests, questions and hypotheses and remains a collaborator in the process and form of subsequent inquiry, exploration and creative expression.

It has been my experience that when children are active collaborators in their learning, and when their ideas and opinions are valued and acted upon, they are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning.

*I would like to acknowledge Anne-Maree D’Abadie whose dedication to early childhood education and value of children has been, and continues to be, a source of inspiration for me in my career.

References

It is important to note that, while the focus and content of projects is always changing, the underlying process of 'plan, do, reflect' and negotiation with children underpins them all.
Eurekas, beakers and seekers: the excitement of science in the early years

Jill Kearney

Jill has a Medical Science degree and also an Arts degree in English Literature and Ancient History. She has worked in hospital laboratories, public relations and as a published children’s author. Jill is now a teacher aide at Gympie South where she is delighted her multidisciplinary perspective can encourage young children in their experience of the excitement and fun of science and the wonders of the world around them. The collection of experiments that Jill compiled years ago for her science-rabid children, is now published in book form as, A-Z Science Experiments for the Early Years, available from Digital Preschool, c/- 20 Hilton Rd, Gympie, Old.4570. www.digitalpreschool.com.au. Ph. 0418 157 280.

'Science allows us to live, Art makes life worth living', is a truism that to me stresses a vital need for a balanced, well-rounded education – especially in these complex times. It’s therefore worrying to note the decline in numbers of science students in Australia which has led to Australia being no longer a developer, but an ‘end-user’, of technology.

Some understanding of science is essential since scientific factual knowledge, theories and problem-solving skills underpin much of this technological age. Science also confers an insight into our profound and innate connection to nature, indeed, ‘We are all made of star stuff’, according to the luminary astronomer Carl Sagan.

Science subjects undoubtedly become more difficult as school years progress, but the ‘early years’ present a unique opportunity to captivate and engage this curious, enthusiastic age group with the wonders of their world and the great fun and excitement of scientific concepts, hopefully ultimately assisting in allaying future fears of incomprehensible, gruelling, inaccessible and totally scary science.

For your interest, I’d like to outline some of the approaches found to be successful in stimulating Eureka moments with Prep at Gympie South State School. Most importantly, the principles of a child negotiated curriculum were used to explore and extend the children's consuming fascinations. This ensured engagement and motivation while stimulating infectious interest – especially when coupled with fun, hands-on, open-ended experiments, demonstrations of rivetingly relevant underlying concepts and the ownership of their classroom science centre.

The smallest amount of space can be converted into a ‘science centre’ for the children to bring in their own, thrilling science finds. To prompt their spirit of inquiry, as well as their skills of observation, collection and classification (sorting), a display box of varied intriguing specimens (e.g. sea urchin skeletons, crystals, insects, exquisite shells, unusual seed pods and leaves, vibrant feathers’) was introduced, accompanied by a range of magnifying glasses, enlarging sheets etc. and also paper and pencils for the students to draw the objects and record stories. This
triggered an incoming avalanche of their own treasures and ‘found’ specimens to display. In turn this led to wonderful opportunities for conversations and communication, including those with relatives, friends and other members of the school community proudly dragged in to view the accessible exhibits.

Another great source for provocation was any live animal(s) installed in the science area (e.g. fish, tadpoles, hermit crabs, silk worms, snails, elephant beetles, butterflies, very securely sealed nests of hatching wasps). Children’s assistance with feeding fish was also found to be an invaluable settling activity for some students with separation anxieties. Information on ‘Animals in Education’ is published by Education Queensland at: http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/area/science/animals-ed.html, while Species Specific Information Sheets compiled by the Queensland schools Animal Ethics Committee Queensland are available at: www.education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/area/science/animal-species.html

To identify specimens, the class would investigate in books, seek out and ask an expert, and/or explore on the internet, subsequently printing out and displaying the results. To introduce the children to a wider community of scientists, on one occasion we sent a letter and a clear photo of a large water bug (taken beside a ruler) to the Inquiry Centre, Queensland Museum, South Bank, PO Box3300, South Brisbane BC, Old, 4101. The children were agog at the reply and information sheet sent especially to them.

Depending upon the children’s interest, longer term science projects were run, like an illustrated tadpole diary, a bulb sprouting and flowering photo record, sprouting seeds on damp washing up cloths in hanging snap-lock bags, and daily adding to the measurement graph of a shrinking dinosaur (a plastic lizard from a toyshop that had swelled to Godzilla proportions in water and conveniently shrunk back slowly when dry, in measurable increments). We also tried a ‘My Body’ measurement project during which the children collaged a life-sized tracing of themselves and were avidly interested in recording those
useful, real world numbers denoted by their own personal height, weight, blood pressure, temperature, lung volume, walking speed, etc.

I always tried to make our science centre displays as colourful, eye-catching and attractive as possible (including photos, models, books, charts, etc.), and changed them as often as possible, but none of this could compare to the high octane buzz of a dramatic, hands-on, often messy, experiment. Some arresting and effective, but simple, experiments that have been popular have been:

**Dinosaurs:** For dinosaur discoveries, small plastic dinosaurs were set into plaster of Paris to be painstakingly and realistically chipped out by budding archaeologists. An Ice Age was made for our dinos by mixing the lining from disposable nappies with two to two and a half cups of water per nappy in a large trough to produce cool, safe, slushy snow.

**Sauce bottle rockets:** A small bore straw was fastened onto the nozzle of a squeezable sauce bottle with Blu-tak. Over this straw was placed a larger bore straw that had been cut slightly shorter and sealed at the further end with Blu-tak too. Then we squeezed the bottle sharply for lift-off!

**Sausage sunburn:** Sunscreen was lathered on sausages in patterns, words, etc (one was kept uncoated to be the control). They were then placed in the hot sun for about one hour. When the sunscreen was then wiped off, the sausage was still raw underneath the sunscreen, but scarily like our own skin, it was cooked and sunburned where there was no sunscreen.

**Phase bottles:** To observe marvellous phase patterns, baby oil, water, food colouring, glitter and small plastic animals were mixed in different combinations in plastic bottles and then the lids were sealed on. Sharks in a bubbly, aqua surf were favourites.

**Volcanoes:** King of the sand pit experiments: vinegar added to a cup in the sand volcano’s cone containing bicarbonate of soda, red food coloring, warm water and a few drops of washing up liquid gave us satisfyingly dramatic and frothy lava.

EUREKA! Or rather, COOL! and AWESOME!

**References**


'Science allows us to live, Art makes life worth living', is a truism that to me stresses a vital need for a balanced, well-rounded education – especially in these complex times.
The SEEDS garden grew from seeds sown through a collaborative partnership between Queensland Health and parents and professionals from the Early Childhood Education and Care sector. The outcome of this partnership was the SEEDS (Social and Emotional Early Development Strategy) project which developed a mental health promotion framework designed to enhance the social and emotional wellbeing of children, parents and staff in the sector.

The analogy of sowing SEEDS, growing a flower and tending a garden full of flowers best describes not only the process of how the SEEDS MHP Framework came into being; but also describes the hope and potential of the desired outcome of enhancing the capacity of those in the ECEC sector to learn, love and live well.

We hope you will enjoy taking a walk in the SEEDS garden and consider planting your own SEEDS and, in so doing, become a more conscious social and emotional gardener amongst the children in your care, their parents, your colleagues and the wider community.

Sowing and Growing SEEDS

The seeds sown were ideas and concepts about rethinking attachment, information about early brain development and the implications for long-term life outcomes. These seeds were sown into fertile soil – a group of very experienced child care professionals, parents and, later, training organisation representatives.

The ideas germinated and the roots of SEEDS grew and strengthened through opportunities to support thinking and by discovering shared values. As the group’s energy and motivation to reach their goal grew, so did the stem of the SEEDS flower. To keep the flower growing, time was taken to recruit more professionals, providing more content, collecting the ideas and activities...
that the workshops generated, feeding them back to parents/staff/trainers, generating resources and posters. These things fed the flower’s energy like the leaves on the stem and kept SEEDS alive.

The centre of the SEEDS flower was the goal - to identify and bring together key components of a mental health promotion framework that would support the Early Childhood Education and Care sector in enhancing the social and emotional wellbeing of children, parents, staff and their communities.

Once developed, the SEEDS MHP Framework became the centre of the flower, the place where more SEEDS would develop, ready for another cycle of planting.

The petals of the flower began to represent the outcomes of reaching that goal – Secure Happy Children; Confident Valued Staff; Confident Valued Parents and a Well Informed Community.

Tending the Garden - The Gardeners’ Reflections

While there is still much tending to be done in the garden, such as watering, weeding, pruning, repotting, grafting, planting, pollinating, two passionate SEEDS gardeners take the time to reflect on how the SEEDS garden has grown and flourished. They watch as the SEEDS flowers sway in the breeze of today’s world; seeing more SEEDS scatter and be carried on that breeze to places where they hope the SEEDS will germinate, take root and grow; believing the truth of the SEEDS motto ‘All the flowers of all the tomorrows are in the SEEDS of today’, and that seeds, like people need time and nurturing to flourish.

These two gardeners, Liz and Bronwyn, took over the tending of the SEEDS garden from other skilled people who had already broken the ground to begin the growing. They found that, by making time to talk, reflect and connect as they worked, their strengths grew as the SEEDS grew and they too thrived, discovering their own combination of Head Heart and Hands. In sharing their reflections, they encourage others to look at the possibilities that exist for them to begin the SEEDS journey.

Bronwyn: As I reflect on my journey through the SEEDS garden, I find it interesting that this journey was not made by foot, but rather it was a journey of Head, Heart and Hands. I began my work with SEEDS from a Head perspective, eagerly hoping to gain more information about social and emotional development that I could use in my other role as a tutor for students enrolled in the Children’s Services qualifications. My ‘task-oriented’ persuasion was also keen to get my Hands busy collecting, sorting and compiling this new information and making it into something that others could learn from and use (again head and hand focused).

What I now see is that my greatest journey was taken with my Heart. As a new mother, growing the SEEDS garden seemed perfectly timed with the growing that my young daughter was doing, and that I was experiencing as a new mother. Whether I intended it or not, understanding the SEEDS framework led me to a greater awareness of myself, not only what I know and what I do, but who I am and what I feel as someone who is a key figure in the social and emotional development of my child. I also learned the value of partnerships – where my head and hand strengths complemented Liz’s head and heart strengths – great things were achieved. Recognising and building on partnerships with colleagues, parents and families is an important part of what nurturing connectedness is all about.

Liz: As I reflect back I realise my journey through the SEEDS garden began long ago. In completing my Social Work degree I spent many hours searching for clues about who I am and how I became who I am. In doing this I realised how important being a conscious social emotional gardener was: that what I thought and felt, influenced what I did – and that they had an impact on my physical and emotional health – and on those I had contact with – throughout my whole life!

The SEEDS Head Heart and Hands framework, grew from the cross pollination of social work and early childhood education and care pollen in a garden where there was a desire to find ways to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of children, their parents, staff and the wider community. While tending the SEEDS garden over the past two years with Bronwyn, we have witnessed the moments when staff and parents make the connection that relationships matter enormously and, more importantly, that who they are as individuals matters enormously as they go about their lives learning, loving and living – every day. That is a very
powerful moment. Bronwyn and I bringing together our particular version of Heads Hearts and Hands with those SEEDS participants who journeyed with us, together created the SEEDS garden which is flourishing today. The SEEDS framework is an example of what taking time to talk, reflect and connect can do.

Using Your Head Heart and Hands to be a more conscious Social and Emotional Gardener

To adopt a SEEDS approach to your work and life is to accept that you will take the time to be more aware of your role in the relationships that are a part of your world. To be more conscious of how what you know☺, how you feel and who you are❤ affect what you do. Perhaps it can begin by taking some time to read through more of the reflections of the staff and parents who participated in the SEEDS project workshops. Read what others have said and use the following reflective questions to help you to find a place to begin planting your SEEDS. Begin to connect to yourself and be more aware of the relationships you have with your colleagues, your own families, and the children and families in your care.

One staff member who participated in SEEDS said,

'The SEEDS concept appears simple and easy to implement. However, it requires an awareness of self, and how our past experiences impact on the way that we relate to others (adults and children) and our availability for emotional support.'

All gardeners need a grower’s guide or someone they can consult with as they tend their garden. The SEEDS project had a rich and varied group of early years and health professionals to consult as the workshop participants and Reference Group members worked through the process of developing the SEEDS framework.

A Reference Group member reflects …

'As I reflect back on my journey with SEEDS, I become more aware of how the reference group has grown like a plant. At times, feeling nurtured and having strong growth, then having a period of dormancy and finally having varying periods of growth – some strong and others spindly but finally starting to blossom.'

What do you know and believe about the way young children learn, grow and develop … do you know people who share these beliefs and are willing to help you sow the SEEDS of wellbeing? Who do you know that is passionate about their work with children? Where do you find your motivation when your energy is low?

Parents’ reflections:

'I have a deeper understanding of my child. I pay more attention to things because I try to understand what is important to her.'

Reflect on the relationship you have with a child you know … how much attention do you pay to what is important to that child? How able are you to recognise what is important to the child and prioritise that need?

'I am more aware of how I speak to the children.'

Reflect on the language you use in your daily conversations … does your tone match your words, are they sincere, do they communicate respect, are they kind?

'I am aware of children’s need for quiet time.'

Reflect on your day … Is quiet time important to you? How much quiet time do you give yourself? How much quiet time do you plan for the children?

'I looked at my son’s attachment to me.'

Reflect on a child in your care … how much thought have you given to the importance of a child’s attachment to his/her family? Does what you do foster children’s attachment to you?

'It made me aware that I needed to support my child to attach to his father also – not just to me.'
Reflect on the fathers of the children in your care ... how do you encourage their involvement in what you do with their child?

'Yes, I talked to my husband about some things I learned.'

Reflect on your relationship with other adults ... who do you talk with ... about the things you know or have learned ... about your feelings ... about your actions?

Staff reflections:

'After learning new information it makes you relook at everything you do. I have already begun to rethink the way I talk and respond to the children and I feel as this process goes on I will just continue to learn, change and develop.'

How do you process new information ... how does it change the way you think 😊, feel ❤️ and act 🌟? Are there things you think, feel or do that you would like to change? Do you know how to make changes? Have you looked for information on new ways of doing things?

'On reflection I knew that this (reading, singing and talking) was happening at (our centre) but did I really understand why? The mother in our group stressed how important it was for her to feel reassured about her parenting skills in these areas.'

Reflect on some of the practices you have in your teaching ... where did you learn them? Why do you do them? Put yourself in the child’s place ... do these practices support the child? How? Who reassures you about your practices?

How does your SEEDS garden grow?

Conclusion

We hope this article inspires you to become a more conscious gardener tending the social and emotional needs of those around you with your own combination of Head Heart and Hands, learning to be more aware of the impact you have on people’s lives.

Finally, remember a time when you know you have made a positive difference in someone’s life – gave a compliment, just being with someone when they are sad, used your knowledge to fix a problem. Stay with that feeling, savouring what that feels like for you. You can feel that every day for the rest of your life.

Thank you for taking a walk in the SEEDS garden.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SEEDS

SEEDS website: Soon to be up and running - email SEEDS@health.qld.gov.au for more details.

Authors: bron@ecta.org.au & Liz_dePlater@health.qld.gov.au

HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY OF THE SEEDS PACKET

Contact: SEEDS@health.qld.gov.au or phone: 07 3000 9104
When Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens screamed out, 'Do it again!' (Barrie, 1931) his voice echoed the collective conscious of children and adults across the world who connect with the repetitive, resonant and anticipated joyful, whimsical experience.

One can almost imagine the ageless Tinkerbell repeating exactly the same thing to Peter as she held his palm gently upwards, circling tenderly whilst saying ...

Round and round the garden,
Like a teddy bear,
One step ... two steps
Tickle under there!

The ‘never fail’ aspect of this and other action rhymes’ ability to raise a smile and shared connection is fascinating to researchers and others interested in early childhood.

Some seemingly simple questions may hold a key to the riddle for those seeking answers to the central question of – why? and the raison d’être behind the resonance of this and other children’s rhymes that cross the boundaries of time and cultures.

- Is it the alliterative evocation?
- The storyteller’s call associated with the response to come?
- The tactile entwined nature of the onomatopoeic tickle?
- The connection with the imaginary storyteller?
- The anticipation of the one ... two ... then the accompanying, knowingly anticipated and joyous sensation of three?
- The joy of repetition?

Early childhood educators, caregivers and parents know from their daily interaction and experience, that it is, of course, a mixture of all these things and more. Analysis of iconic work and research from collections from around the world, such as wonderfully rich collections of anthologist and children’s folklore historian Iona Opie, provides insight into the structures of rhymes that lead to some of these questions.

In I Saw Esau: The Schoolchild’s Pocket Book (1992), Opie highlights the variety of historical and culturally embedded notions that percolate through the whimsical world of early childhood rhymes. In their research for the seminal text The Singing Game (1985) Iona and Peter Opie detail a multitude of sub-genres and categories of ‘folkloric’ games, dances, chants, songs, rhymes and activities utilising language play. While investigating the area of clapping they somewhat obviously state, ‘The prime requisite of a successful clapping song is that it should have a pleasing rhythm.’ (Opie, p445)
The connection of rhymes with musicality is one passionately explored by Stephan Mithen (2006) in his wonderful book *The Singing Neanderthals*, where he articulates the connection further:

Language and music share three modes of expression: they can be vocal, as in speech and song; they be gestural, as in sign language and dance; and they can be written down. (Mithen, p15)

One of my favourite action songs *Skinnamarink*, collected from Canada and included in *Can You Keep a Secret? Timeless rhymes to share and treasure* (2008) and the accompanying CD *Timeless songs to share and treasure* (2009) combines all these three elements in delightful accord; and I, like you, could no doubt list hundreds more ...

It would be a bold stance, however, to try and prioritise the elements of that work so essentially in unison. I would argue that it is the ‘conceptual’ language, musical and kinaesthetic union that creates the symbiotic resonance. An excerpt of *Skinnamarink* and others can be heard at: http://www.markcarthew.com.au/books/cykas.html

Antes in her excellent article on kinesics and the value of gesture in language and the classroom (1996) defers this resonance to that which Edward Sapir famously called:

that elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all. (Sapir, cited in Sapir et al. 1999, p 169)

Dovetailing into this, Antes also further quotes Wylie, in a wonderful statement that I’m sure will be recognised by all teachers:

The tone of voice, the use of silence, the tension of the body, the expression of the face, the rhythm of our movements, our use of space, our gestures, and many other signals — some known, some unknown — play a crucial role in communication. We communicate not only with our voices but our entire bodies and the space around them. (Wylie 1977, cited in Antes 1996, p 7)

Music’s pivotal role in situating words and rhymes in our cultural meme is of equal interest to those searching for ‘hooks’ into the quantitative aspects of language acquisition. While beyond the scope of this article, one doesn’t, however, need to be an expert in socio-linguistics or musicology to know that strong musical rhymes embed in our memory, often forever. One only has to begin to hum or sing the first two or three words of tunes such as *Baa, baa, black ..., Twinkle,*
Twinkle ... or Frère Jacques ... and the listener is already singing and/or reciting the ensuing verse in their mind’s eye, if not aloud; and most likely close to pitch! Like Skinnamarink, the seemingly natural connection between the words, music and body movement or actions in timeless rhymes such as Incy, Wincy Spider and I Hear Thunder further reinforces the interwoven nature of language and musicality. While there is renewed interest in discovering the ‘real’ meaning and origins of nursery rhymes in popular books such as those by Sam Foster (2008) & Albert Jack (2008), their collective and individual resonance and ability to evoke emotional and physical response is also of great interest to educators, musicologists, linguists and researchers.

In an interview conducted with June Factor for Magpies Magazine (2008), her answer to a question on why so many early childhood rhymes embed in our collective memory is illuminating:

It seems to me that poetry in some ways probably precedes prose, biologically and physiologically. If you listen to the first sounds a baby makes - they’re rhythmic, they’re melodic and they’re repetitive. And they usually rhyme. There are even early onomatopoeic sound utterances. The reaction of adults is to mimic and reinforce those sounds by offering extensions, such as nursery rhymes – in the English tradition there’s This Little Piggy Went To Market, Inky Winky Spider, Round and Round the Garden. These are all verse. I think that poetry is the first language, the ‘natural’ language and we have to learn prose, which is more difficult, more complex. (June Factor, cited in Carthew 2008, p 8)

Early childhood educators and caregivers witness the symbiotic connections within natural language every day in the playful interactions of children.

The highly visible, vibrant relationship that exists between oral language, text, kinaesthetic communication and body movement, visual imagery and music is certainly patently clear in the body language and enjoyment of children (and adults) singing, dancing and engaging with their favourite stories, rhymes, verse and songs.

Disclaimer

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References


It's question time!

Karyn Johns

Karyn Johns is a Speech Language Pathologist who has worked with children and families for 19 years both interstate and on the Gold Coast. She has experience working for a number of agencies including EQ, private schools and more recently consulting to the Commonwealth funded Communities for Children Initiative on the Northern Gold Coast. Finally, she is a partner in a thriving private practice (S.P.E.E.C.H) on the coast. Karyn is passionate about sharing information and strategies with families, teachers and early childhood professionals that will support language, literacy and social skills development. Her work includes clinical practice with individual children and their families, consultation advice and writing of school curriculum programs, role modelling activities in child care settings and classrooms, conducting workshops, and co-producing resources and materials.

This paper will explore the process of effective questioning in early childhood settings. It aims to present a model that is developmentally and environmentally appropriate and seeks to support educators to facilitate the achievement of Learning Outcome 5 (Children are Effective Communicators) from the Early Years Learning Framework.

An adult asking questions during an interaction with young children is common place in many settings i.e. in homes, early childhood centres, and classrooms. We also hear questions asked in exchanges about behaviour and problem solving (Why do you do that? How do you think _____ feels? What should you say?). In this sense language and questioning is being used as a tool for moderating and regulating behavior and emotion, as well as building thinking skills. The literature includes many examples of how asking children questions can support their language development and learning (van Kleek, 2003).

There can be many reasons for why we ask children questions:
- to check their knowledge - where do these animals live?
- to find out information - how was your day?
- to scaffold development of thinking skills - what might happen next?
- to elicit engagement - what did you like best about the story?

The challenge is to ask the right questions at the right time to the right child in a way that is functional and supportive. Another challenge is in knowing how to respond to an unexpected response or no response. If asking questions is to be a supportive strategy then adults should be prepared to modify and adjust the question if the first attempt “fails” to elicit the expected response. There is a variety of ways to simplify and scaffold responses from children that support their language learning experiences e.g. initial sound cue, semantic clues, rephrasing the question, sentence cloze, or choice questioning. However, it is important that adults are aware of these and thus prepared to use a variety of these language support techniques during their interactions.

One very important and potentially strategic use of questioning, in conversation and play with young children, is as a scaffolding tool that moves children’s language development along the oral to literate language continuum. The progression from oral to literate styles of talking, underpins school readiness and preparedness for literacy skill acquisition.

Literate language, in comparison to conversational language, requires a child to use
more specific vocabulary and more complex language structures. The classroom also has its own rules for conversation and dialogue that can be foreign for some young children. That is, the teacher usually leads and sets the topic, and asks the questions (usually knowing the answer)! Also, children must wait to be asked or raise their hand and thus may not get to share their knowledge.

Literacy is language, and like all other aspects of language it is influenced by and dependent on the contexts in which it exists and the uses to which it is put. Although literacy is an extension of language, unlike oral language, it is seldom acquired simply by exposure. It requires explicit teaching. (Westby, 2005).

This explicit or intentional teaching occurs through verbal exchanges and usually includes exposure to a variety of question types.

A framework for adults asking children questions

Given that a question-answer exchange is common place and is purported to be a useful language and thinking developmental tool, it would seem important to ensure that we use this 'tool' as effectively and appropriately as possible with young children. One model or framework that can guide adults in this quest is the Blank's model of questioning developed after extensive research into classroom dialogue (Blank, et al, 1978).

The underpinning principle of this framework is the development of decontextualised language and the concept of the perceptual-language distance. For young children language development and conversation is primarily based on the here and now. However, in the progression towards a more literate and classroom style of dialogue, children need to practice talking about the then and there. This normal developmental phase of language development from the contextual to decontextual occurs in the early preschool and primary school years.

The Blank's model or framework alerts adults to the level of difficulty of certain types of questions and thus helps educators to scaffold their own language to meet the language level and needs of the young child. Increasingly educators are expected to be able to adjust their style of interaction and offer differentiated pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of children in their care. Speech Language Pathologists are well placed to provide information and support to services, schools and educators about this question asking framework. They can discuss the Blank’s model and demonstrate ways to help support the child’s progression along the perceptual-language gap to enable them to respond to higher level questions and demonstrate higher level thinking. Strategies can include the use of props, the teaching of specific linguistic forms, providing opportunities for practice and repetition as well as multi-age peer modeling. Many practical and ready to use resources, that supports everyday pedagogy, are available (see list below). Also, these materials can support effective differentiation and support for children with developmental delays and learning needs.

References

Websites and Resources
Hanen Research Centre www.hanen.org
www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au - fact sheets; find a SLP
http://www.speech-language-therapy.com/freebies.htm - downloadable resources for professionals and parents
www.loveandreilly.com.au - educators and SLPs – resources, games and free on line newsletter
www.sandpiperpublications.com.au – resources developed by SLPs for use in classrooms to support language and literacy
Ready Set Learn CD – Speech and Language Resources – email Karyn for ordering information kispeech@bigpond.com
As early childhood educators, we are often like bower birds – always hunting for the latest, shiniest book or website, and weaving the ideas we glean from these texts into nests of knowledge that support both our wise practice and expand the worlds of the children we teach. In the reviews section of the journal, it gives the editorial team great pride to know that not only are we supporting teachers when we ‘discover’ new resources, but that through this we are directly supporting children. However, another party is supported – that of the authors, many of whom are passionate, dedicated professionals who choose to produce resources directly to support children.

In this edition, we are going to hear about some amazing products – indigenous stories written as early chapter books to support both beginning readers and indigenous authors in rural communities; speech language resources written by dedicated and caring professional therapists; behavioural guidance programs which are supported by strength-based Brisbane community organisations and much more. These products have been reviewed by fabulous educators working across diverse fields – from pre-service teachers to experienced professionals, we are pleased to offer you their words.

If you are a teacher who would like to be supported with free resources, or know of a teacher in an under-resourced community who would appreciate some books in exchange for a review, please email mathilda@ecta.org.au for more information. We are committed to supporting you.

**Title: Food Words - Phonological Awareness**

**Food Words - Vocabulary**

**Authors:** Sharon Crosby & Shannon Wandschneider  
**Illustrator:** Scott McIntosh  
**Published by:** Grow Words  
**www.growwords.com.au**  
**RRP:** $60.00

**Reviewed by:** Melanie Anderson

Developed by two Brisbane Speech Pathologists, the Grow words resource books contain activities that target speech and language skills. The authors, Sharon Crosby and Shannon Wandschneider, have extensive experience working in educational settings and have written these books to be used in any early childhood classroom.

Food Words can be used to develop children’s sound awareness skills and vocabulary. The black-line masters in these books can be used as games, activities and worksheets. Classroom favourite games - bingo, memory and “What am I?” are included. Each task has an instruction page which clearly explains the activity. The recording sheets are useful for monitoring progress. Food Words - Phonological Awareness includes activities to target syllables, onset and rhyme and phonemes. Food Words - Vocabulary includes receptive and expressive language tasks.

These books were of particular interest to me as all the activities could be used for whole class lessons, small group work and learning centres. The illustrations are very clear and children would easily be able to identify each picture. As many of the games used would be familiar to children, teachers could use them to teach the speech skills rather than teaching the procedures for playing the game. I would highly recommend Food Words for use in lower primary classrooms and in pre-primary settings with additional adult support.
Recently the organisation that I work for, Lighthouse Resources, came across a model that offers a new way at looking at children’s problems. This model originates from Finland and has been devised by psychotherapist Dr Ben Furman. Dr Furman invites us to consider that practically all children’s problems can be seen as skills that need to be developed. Lighthouse Resources is the Australian Ambassador of this program.

Based in Brisbane, Lighthouse Resources is the not-for-profit business enterprise of Kyabra Community Association. We provide strength-based training, consultancy and bookshop services for staff and their organisations in the human services area including early childhood education. When we came across the Kids’ Skills program, we saw a potential application within Australian early childhood centres. Anyone who works with children can follow the step-by-step Kids’ Skills program in order to master this way of working collaboratively with children and their families to learn, build and develop new skills and, at the same time, eliminate problems by focusing on solutions.

Ben Furman challenges us to shift our focus from a child’s problem and its causes to instead focus on a skill that each particular child needs to learn. The following examples illustrate the difference between the traditional methods of focusing on problems or deficits as compared to focusing on solutions – the Kids’ Skills way.

- If a child plays with food, the skill for her to learn is not to stop playing with food (focus on problem) but to eat properly (learning a new skill).
- If a class of pupils walk to library class in a noisy way the skill for them to learn is not to stop shoving one another in line (focus on problem) but to walk to library quietly (learning a new skill).

The Kids’ Skills Program comprises of 15 simple steps showing us how to work alongside children to help them convert problems into skills. These practical steps are clearly described in both the Kids’ Skills book and can be supported by a Kids’ Skills booklet which provides an opportunity for a child to plan and record the progress of the skill.

If you would like to purchase Kids’ Skills and its accompanying program resources, or if you would to find out more about Kids’ Skills workshops, please contact Lighthouse Resources on:

Phone: (07) 1800 009462
Website: www.lighthouseresources.com

**Ben Furman challenges us to shift our focus from a child’s problem and its causes to instead focus on a skill that each particular child needs to learn.**
'I can’t read the music!' There is an abundance of song books with music suitable for young children. However, for educators who can’t read music, they are not much help. The Queensland branch of KMEIA has produced a wonderful resource for professionals working in early years settings called *Musical Beginnings* that requires no ability to read music. This DVD contains 50 traditional songs and rhymes suitable for children in early years schooling, and preschool education/settings. The video footage filmed in primary schools is aimed at showing professionals how to teach these musical activities in a Kodaly style, rather than as viewing for young children. In typical Kodaly style, these songs are presented with no accompaniment so that children focus on pitch, beat, and rhythm, all foundation skills in early years music. Accompanying notes provide suggestions for creating further musical learning experiences for individual songs, as well as guidelines and teaching strategies for music in the early year settings. Early childhood professionals will be able to extend these activities into everyday experiences in co-created curricula so that children experience music across their day, rather than just in music sessions.

Whilst the cost of this resource is fairly high for personal purchase, it is very professionally produced and would be ideal for schools, beginning teachers and professionals without access to music specialists to enable them to provide high quality music experiences.

This resource is available from the KMEIA Queensland website at http://www.kmeiaqueensland.com.au or by emailing Deb Brydon at brydon@dovenetq.net.au.

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**Title: Play School – Colours**

**Author:** Helen Martin  
**Published by:** ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
**ISBN:** 978 0 7333 2466 6  
**RRP:** $14.95  
**Reviewed by:** Tanya Dawson

Wonder, imagine and be in awe while enjoying Play School’s latest book *Colours*. Where real-life and imagination meet and mix, this book brings together nursery rhymes, real-life experiences and pretend-play to investigate colour. Young children will learn about and experience colour with all their favourite characters from Play School, including Humpty Dumpty, Big Ted and Little Ted.

The brightly-coloured photographic illustrations are creatively designed to capture young children’s imagination. The uncluttered pages are visually stimulating and aesthetically pleasing, enabling children to develop an appreciation for each colour represented. In typical ‘Play School’ style all props used in the photos are lovingly made from reusable items and craft materials.

Recommended for children aged two to six years, this board book is perfect for facilitating discussion about colour. Ideal for engaging toddlers, the simple text includes questions that encourage interaction while reading.

*Colours* is one of those books that children will request and read again and again. Another excellent addition to your Play School book collection!

A must-have for teachers of Child Care, Pre Prep and Prep classes.

Available from: ABC Shops and other retail bookstores.
These early chapter books are written by Indigenous authors and convey subtle messages about the importance of environmental protection. Although the series has been designed to support the literacy needs of Indigenous children, the message and style of delivery would be suitable in any classroom. In addition, each book has accompanying teacher notes providing suggestions on how to integrate and expand on the themes within the books.

**Bush Secrets**
Bush Secrets tells the story of Debbie and her grandfather and the secrets they share revolving around their love of nature and the bush. The story is told by Debbie who shares her feelings about a special tree with her visiting Grandfather. On a trip to the bush, Debbie’s grandfather introduces her to other wonders in the bush with some lovely descriptions of flowers and wildlife that children will be able to easily understand and relate to.

The underlying message in this book revolves around the importance of preserving the environment for future generations, within the related theme of family relationships. This book would be a great opportunity to either introduce or support these themes within a classroom context.

**The Great Cold**
The story revolves around Crow’s struggle to survive and protect her egg as the environment changes and threatens her wellbeing, and those of the other animals. Goanna saves her and becomes an integral part of the story as firm friend and protector of baby Crow. Eventually Goanna and Baby Crow work together to save the environment and their friends from ‘The Great Cold’.

Again, this story, although told in a very different style, revolves around messages of environment, linking relationships to part of the solution. It is told in traditional Indigenous style, and perhaps suitable for more advanced readers as the story involves several simultaneous storylines that potentially could be challenging for younger readers to follow.

Both books would be an interesting and thought provoking addition to any classroom with great potential to explore important concepts from a literacy basis.
Foundation Blocks - Communication, Language & Literacy

**Title:** Foundation Blocks - Communication, Language & Literacy  
**Author:** Irene Yates  
**Published by:** Curriculum Corporation  
**ISBN:** 9 781 863 667 787 6  
**RRP:** $35.95  
**Reviewed by:** Melanie Anderson

The Foundation Blocks series was written for Early Years Practitioners working with children 4 years +. The Communication, Language & Literacy book outlines practical lesson ideas based on purposeful play and familiar topics.

This book is divided into a number of sections including speaking and listening, playing with rhyme, enjoying stories and making books. Each page clearly states learning objectives, a lesson outline, resources required and possible variations. There is also a planning guide which identifies which Essential Learnings could be demonstrated in each lesson.

Personally, I found the making books section particularly useful. The ideas for designing flap books, wordless books and I-Spy books were creative. My Year 1 class enjoyed presenting their stories in these novel ways.

I would recommend Communication, Language & Literacy to teachers looking for a very practical resource of language and literacy activities.

Reading Eggs

**Title:** Reading Eggs  
**Author:** ABC  
**Published by:** Blake Publishing  
**RRP:** Class Subscription (maximum of 30 students) - 6 months $299, 9 months $399, 12 months $449. Can also get a site licence that has no limit to the number of students participating - this starts at $1100 for 6 months  
**Reviewed by:** Kylie Plant

The ABC Reading Eggs package (level 1) includes access to the ‘Reading Eggs’ Website, readers, map, progress stickers, activity book and flashcards with suggested activities. The package aims to develop children’s phonemic awareness, letter recognition and overall reading ability. Within this, the program also provides structured opportunities to develop basic computer skills such as mouse control and computer navigation, as children move between screens to personalise their program.

The program is tailored for individuals, ensuring children are working at an individual level and pace. Each child registers as an individual and is able to save his/her game. There is the initial option to start from the beginning (Level 1, lesson 1), or to play a game to determine starting levels.

Each child’s character or ‘Avatar’ moves though the reading levels which are visually displayed on a map. As children complete lessons they collect golden eggs and other ‘privileges’ such as new games, the ability to ‘buy’ from the shop, collect ‘critters’ and access to new and different areas of the program. By referring to the map children are easily able to track their progress. They can revisit previous lessons or choose to continue along the Reading Eggs ‘Path’.

The games are framed positively with achievement emphasised. The visuals are engaging and the auditory soundtrack provides extra prompts and reinforcement for children. The activities are varied, and short enough to maintain children’s attention span as they move from one activity to the next. In particular, the ongoing opportunity to collect and add new elements to each child’s personal program is motivating and interesting.

The website program is complemented by reading books for each lesson and level. Children can read these books online and then have the opportunity to revisit and reinforce concepts using the readers. The pack also includes alphabet flashcards with suggested games that can be adapted depending on each child’s reading goals. These could also be used independently of the website.

Overall, this program could easily be used in the classroom as an aid to literacy learning. It’s easy for children and adults to understand and operate, and would be a useful resource to revisit or reinforce concepts learnt in class or as a possible extension activity for children.