



Educating Young Children

Learning and teaching in the
early childhood years

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EDITORIAL PANEL

Sarah-Jane Johnson
Lynne Moore
Jeanie Watt
Marion Mori
Nebula Wild
Sharon McKinlay
Kate Shapcott
Archana Sinh
Kate Constantinou
Sue Webster
Angela Drysdale

COPY EDITING/PROOFREADING

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Address all correspondence and advertising enquiries to

Early Childhood Teachers' Association (ECTA Inc.)
20 Hilton Road, Gympie Qld 4570
Ph: 0418 157 280 Fax: 07 5481 1148
e. info@ecta.org.au w. www.ecta.org.au

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Editorial policy

The material published in the journal will aim to be inclusive of children in Australia wherever they live, regardless of race, gender, class, culture and disability. The journal will not publish material which runs counter to the wellbeing and equality of all children and their families, and those who work with them.

Registered Teachers - Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements

Registered teachers are advised to note the Queensland College of Teachers endorsed position on professional reading, accessing online resources and viewing video-streamed materials as contributing to their CPD requirements for renewal of teacher registration. The endorsed position can be viewed on the ECTA website www.ecta.org.au from the *Educating Young Children* link.

Online access to journal

Educating Young Children is also available online via EBSCOhost and Informit databases.

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All photographs are attributed to the author unless otherwise noted.

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From the President

Kim Walters

I would like to congratulate the very passionate and hardworking ECTA conference committee members who organised the 41st ECTA Annual Conference held on Saturday 25th June.

One of the highlights of the conference for me was connecting with members and regional group office bearers, state coordinating, journal and conference committee members.

As many of us live across the state we use online tools for meetings. The conference weekend is a time to meet face-to-face, strengthen our relationships, reflect and plan.

At the conference 600 early childhood professionals came together in a strong united voice, dedicated to the children they teach and their families. Each year delegates show their professionalism by attending this professional

ECTA members from a wide range of fields share a passion for early childhood education and the provision of quality environments for young children. Our current membership base of 255 organisations and 517 individual members shows an increase in membership from the long day care sector. The ECTA Annual Conference delegate demographics reflected this growth with 32% of delegates noting that they worked in Long Day Care, 42% Approved Kindergarten Programs, 14% schools and 12% in other sectors. It is important to note that you do not have to be a qualified teacher to be a member of ECTA.

development on a weekend, in their own time. Whilst early childhood teaching has changed over the years, conferences like this remain synonymous with practical, realistic and hands-



Conference Committee members - Lisa Cooper, Joanne Young, Jenny Caswell, Fei Yu, Anne Hurman, Robbie Leikvold, Kim Walters, Lynne Ireland and Chris Cook - not pictured Heather Cobbin, Bec Trimble-Roles and Jenny Daniloff

on professional development. Delegates left the conference energised, inspired, informed and empowered to continue the great work they are doing within their individual settings. This journal and the two to follow will showcase articles based on the 40 presentations. These will provide a wealth of information covering all sectors, age ranges and interests.

Our rollout this year of no-cost webinars for ECTA members and staff of organisational members has been very successful and we look forward to continuing to use this platform. This will ensure all members, regardless of where they live and work, can access the professional development provided. We have webinars planned for September, October and November and will be seeking expressions of interest for presentations next year. We encourage people to come together in networking groups to view these webinars.

All you need is a room with access to the internet and audio.

I would like to acknowledge the continued work of Department of Education and Training (DET) Director General, Dr Jim Watterston, Deputy Director-General Gabrielle Sinclair and Regional Directors, who are committed to re-igniting early childhood settings. We applaud the expansion of the work on the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Project. Resources which outline the characteristics of effective

pedagogy are now available for download on the department's website <http://deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/about/successful-transitions/age-appropriate-pedagogies.html>.

This site also unpacks the key approaches to learning and teaching.

ECTA members involved in the project are reporting they are again loving teaching and seeing children engaged in and loving learning. It is so encouraging to hear feedback like this.

I am pleased to include in this journal DVD recordings of two presentations by Paul McGhee from the 2015 conference and Julie Cross's keynote and masterclass from this year.

As always I encourage you to continue to advocate for high quality early childhood practices in all settings from long day care through to primary schooling. To teach young children in ways acknowledged in research as best for learning engagement. To give children ownership of their learning, with learning and play in all its varying forms at the forefront of your curriculum delivery,

Yours in early childhood

Kim



Conference committee, state coordinating committee and representatives from Cairns, Townsville, Gladstone, Cooloola, Toowoomba, Capricorn Coast, Sunshine Coast, Hervey Bay, North Brisbane, Logan and Fitzroy regional groups



From the editorial panel

Lynne Moore

There is much to celebrate about early childhood in Queensland in this issue of *Educating Young Children*.

If you were at the 41st ECTA Annual Conference then we have a great selection of photo memories for you. Going by the happy faces it was a great success.

Greer Casey, Sylvia Murray and Uncle Joe Kirk's story acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures sets our theme with a compelling message about the importance of building a shared journey of reconciliation.

We hear from four educators about the challenges and highlights of working in a rural or remote location, while Megan Davis from Warwick shows how AEDC data can inform your practice.

Margaret Sear's article on loose parts, and Lesley Jones promotion of children's voice in playground design will have you rethinking your play environments.

The expansion of the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Project is an exciting development in Queensland schools. Our conversation with Gabrielle, Mark and Mary from the Department of Education and Training explains why.

Aunty Denise Proud and Rosalie Raciti remind us that learning about and respecting each other's cultures is the focal point of our work. Their message of 'walking together' is shared by the contributors of our feature articles - the EMBRACE culture in kindy team, Rekha Prasad and Roya Yeganeh and Jenny Finlay.

As always we have some great practical advice to guide your curriculum decisions, this time from Lisa Keegan, Michelle Scheu and Kay Harling and Julie Kavanagh.

Finally, I recommend to you the website *Foundations for Success*, opposite. Please take time to visit and learn from this powerful testament to the pedagogies that inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to early childhood.

Enjoy!

The editorial team

Advertisement

Foundations for Success
Learning. Teaching. Leading.

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www.foundationsforsuccess.qld.edu.au

Authorised by the Queensland Government, Mary St, Brisbane

Early Childhood Teachers' Association (ECTA) Annual Conference

Kim Walters, Allison Borland and Lisa Cooper

This year's ECTA 41st annual conference was well received by delegates, traders and presenters alike. These snapshots of the day showcase highlights of the successful conference held on Saturday 25 June.

Forty-six enthusiastic presenters and 547 engaging delegates all actively participated in the workshop sessions. Representation from 29 exhibitors, with the latest resources available in the early childhood industry also value added to an efficacious conference.

Thank you to all the sponsors who through their dedication and commitment helped the success of the day unfold. We appreciate your continued support year after year.

Congratulations to the ECTA Conference committee for their commitment over the past twelve months in preparing, organising and adding the final touches to make this year's conference a memorable one!



Nancy Hunter Gumdale State School one of the early birds collecting her badge after getting her free sponsored coffee by QIEC Super



Mr Barista and QIEC Super Supporting sponsors Graham Burke and Natalie Whittal



Lining up for a QIEC Super coffee before the conference!

Thank you to our sponsors:





Dan Bowen warming up audience Dance Fever Gold Sponsors



Uncle Joe Kirk opens with a Welcome to Country



Kim Walters ECTA President opening address



ECTA Committee members Lisa Cooper, Allison Borland and Leonie Mitchell celebrating MTA's 60th birthday with Michelle Kelly (MTA GM), Hessa Robinson (Events Coordinator) Scott Young and Lisa Davidson (Sales Reps)



Hessa Robinson MTA Events Coordinator blowing out 60th birthday candles



Julie Cross Keynote address



Audience opening Keynote address



Robbie Leikvold thanks keynote presenter Julie Cross



Christine Cook (Central Queensland University and ECTA Conference Committee Member) and Noeleen Christensen (Life Member) coordinating presenters and volunteers



Delegates networking during break



Simone Rose, Kylie Van Roo C&K Greenbank Kindergarten and Joanne Sing C&K all smiles after shopping at the trade stands



Delegates were provided with excellent food and service at the conference by Jill and her team. Lunchtime break



Vicki Lo (Hopscotch House) and Marilyn Beale enjoying a lunchtime chat!



Chris Phillips (South West Rocks Preschool) enjoying her soup outdoors



Leonie Mitchell (ECTA Secretary) and Sue Southey (Logan Regional Group)

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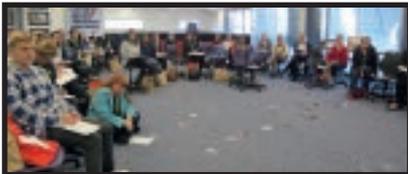
Julie Cross keynote presenter and Julie Wright (ECTA Cooloola RG)



Danielle Cramond (Our Lady of the Rosary Kindergarten) enjoying the challenges of science



Delegates engaging in the arts in Deb Bryant's session!



Engaging in creative ideas in session 'Nature Play in your educational setting'



Carol Braunack presenting: 'A kinder approach to behaviour management using the Calmer Classrooms approach'



Lynden Lauer, Madeline Hagon and Marian Prete (DET) ready to begin their presentation



Judith Forster captivated her audience with 'Playing with number'



Rhonda Livingston (ACECQA) engages delegates with her session on 'Moving forward with the National Quality Framework'



Jacob Willams and Martha Godber from Queensland Ballet discuss the QLD Ballet and education program



Mary Lincoln, Gabrielle Sinclair and Mark Cooper in the Theatre room 'Early Childhood 0-8: priorities, actions and outcomes'



Jenny Caswell all smiles as she collects the Scavenger Hunt entries!



Chris Hanrahan, Lianne Murchie, Annette Anderlini, Erica Conroy and Lynne Ireland. (Cairns) networking during Wine and Cheese



Dani Taylor, Melissa Curran, Vicki Lo, Katie Martin, Kylie Neilson and Michele Alfredson. (Gumdale)



Sue Reynolds, Wendy Dunstan, Jenny Danilioff and Suzanne Johns (Brisbane)



Ashleigh Robinson, Olyivrea Percey, Gina O'Neill, Shay Plath. (front row). Kaylene Tierney and Maree Kirkwood (back row) (Moranbah)

Thank you to our sponsors:





Fishing with new resources available from MTA Kim Walters, Allison Borland and Lisa Cooper



Dembra Conlon, Leonie Mitchell and Moniek De Kievith. (ECTA committee members)



Margaret Sear (Presenter), Deirdre Tate, Kathryn Gurr (QCAN) and Tricia Blake



Scavenger Hunt winner Kathy Carden



G8 Education GOLD Sponsors, Chloe Reeder, Kim Walters, Lisa Cooper and James Muruyama



Kim Walters, Lisa Cooper with John Dwyer, Margaret Kirkman and Paul Oxlade from Catering sponsors Chroma



Lisa and Scott from Platinum Sponsors MTA enjoying their 60th Birthday celebration with Kim & Lisa



Kim Walters, Natalie Tabrett, Troy Wiebusch and Lisa Cooper Supporting sponsors HART Sport



Modern Teaching Aids (MTA) Major prize winner Alyse Edmestone with Scott Young MTA Sales Rep



Kylie Neilsen from Gumdale C&K Beetle Bean Bags Hart Sport



Samantha Bamberry (Vienna Woods State School) all excited as she received her prize of ECTA Membership



Suzanne Johns from Wynnum General Gordon Community Kindergarten received her prize donation from Allen & Unwin



Conference Committee members (front row) Lisa Cooper and Kim Walters. (back row) Anne Hurman, Joanne Young, Christine Cook, Fei Yu, Jenny Caswell and Lynne Ireland



ECTA State Coordinating Committee (front row) Kim Walters President, Suzie Wood Vice President. (back row) Lisa Cooper Treasurer, Jo Young Regional Chair, Allison Borland and Leonie Mitchell Secretary



Regional Group Office Bearers and Committee member's celebrating the successful 41st Annual Conference at Robinson Gardens

Thank you to our sponsors:



Improving the quality of early education using AEDC data

Megan Davis



I am the Director of a Goodstart Early Learning Centre in the beautiful regional town of Warwick, Queensland. I started my career in early childhood eleven years ago in the United Kingdom as a Montessori trained educator. In 2006 I made the decision to further my knowledge and understanding of the industry and enrolled at Sheffield Hallam University to do my Bachelor of Honours in Early Childhood. During this time I used the opportunity to explore many areas of early childhood by working in a variety of settings such as Sure Start Centres (working as part of a multidisciplinary team), independent 'nurseries' (childcare centres); and even a stint with Sheffield Wildlife Trust delivering a Big Lottery Funded initiative that saw our team delivering outdoor play sessions for children in heavily disadvantaged areas of Sheffield during the school holidays. I have been a Director in Australia for three and a half years and specifically for Goodstart for two and a half years.

The 2009 AEDC results revealed children in our local area were experiencing difficulties with language and cognitive skills. This prompted conversations with local service providers such as Bushkids, our local paediatrician and speech and language pathologists, who confirmed that this was an area of high need where additional support services could benefit children in the community. Our service began building relationships with these service providers and looking at how our curriculum could become more language rich. We started slowly by purchasing a large range of books that covered a variety of topics.

Our reading areas in the centre became focal points and we worked to develop these areas to make them more engaging for children and encourage positive reading behaviour.

A local speech and language pathologist was invited to the centre to deliver training to our staff to assist them to become more aware of speech development. This enabled our team to identify issues early. The waitlist in our community for a speech pathologist is very long, therefore early intervention is key.

Information generated by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data provides early learning and care services with an informed picture around the developmental outcome trends in their particular community, which is invaluable. Using this data as background information to help develop quality early learning programs can be particularly beneficial when combined with a connected approach, where providers form partnerships with local community and services for the benefit of children and their families.

We were incredibly fortunate to be chosen by Goodstart to be an EChO Centre (Enhancing Children's Outcomes) where we had access to additional funds to invest in a speech and language pathologist for a twelve month period in order to build capacity within the team.

It is clear to see how the AEDC data can assist in meeting the National Quality Standards. In particular Quality Area 1, element 1.1.1 (curriculum decision-making contributes to each child's learning and developmental outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners



Visual timetable to create an inclusive environment for all

and effectiveness as communicators); Quality Area 6 (linking with other organisations and service providers); as well as QA4 in terms of training and capacity building within your team.

By building relationships with local service providers, you can also assist families in the referral process. In our experience, personal introductions and referrals are extremely beneficial when helping families to engage with external stakeholders. This again links in perfectly with QA6 standard 6.1 (developing respectful supportive relationships with families), and standard 6.2 (supporting families in their parenting role and respecting parents' values and beliefs on child rearing).

It is positive to note that the 2012 and 2015 AEDC data revealed a decrease in the number of children vulnerable in language and cognitive skills in our local area. However, the data showed an increase in children identified as being vulnerable in physical wellbeing. Again, this data could be useful in considering the factors that might be contributing to these results, paving the way for positive early intervention that could lead to improved health outcomes for children.

So the question now is how we work with children, families and external agencies to ensure that children continue to make improvements in their language development,

but also pay attention to their overall physical wellbeing. By starting to make small changes and by being aware of the data, you can become more intentional in your centre planning, leadership and educational practice.

References

Commonwealth of Australia 2015, *Findings from the AEDC*, viewed 24 May 2016, <http://www.aedc.gov.au/early-childhood/findings-from-the-aedc>



Quiet reading area

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in early childhood programs

Greer Casey, Uncle Joe Kirk and Sylvia Murray



Greer Casey is an early childhood educator who has taught across many sectors including childcare, preschool, state schools and kindergartens. She is currently assistant director and teacher, at C&K Wagner Road Kindergarten, where she has been for the past ten years.



Sylvia Murray is an early childhood educator who has taught in community childcare centres and kindergartens over the past 20 years. She is currently the director, at Wagner Road Early Childhood Centre and Kindergarten, where she has been for the past nine years.



Uncle Joe is an Ipswich and Brisbane Aboriginal Elder of the Wakka Wakka people from the South Burnett Region. He works with Christian Brothers and students from St Edmund's College using a literacy and numeracy based approach he designed to impart traditional culture and spirituality. He also works with government and local councils, he is a published author and sits on the Murri Court in Ipswich.

Uncle Joe Kirk, Brisbane Aboriginal Elder, along with Sylvia Murray and Greer Casey from Wagner Road Early Childcare Centre and Kindergarten share a story about the partnership they have formed over the past five years. Their efforts are ensuring children, both in their Centre and the wider community gain an understanding of traditional Aboriginal cultural ways.

Wagner Road Early Childhood Centre and Kindergarten has recently earned a rating of excellent from Australian Children's Education and Care Authority (ACECQA) and in this rating we were acknowledged for this partnership.

The rating, the highest achievable under the National Quality Framework, was awarded for the service's commitment to respecting and celebrating diversity and their development of collaborative partnerships that enhance children's learning.

Wagner Road ECC&K and Uncle Joe have worked together for over five years, on many projects, including the development of a yarning circle in the service's outdoor area (ACECQA media release, 9 May 2016).

ACECQA Chief Executive Karen Curtis congratulated our service on this achievement, in this media release saying:

I applaud Wagner Road Early Childhood Centre and Kindergarten for its efforts in building a relationship with their local Aboriginal community and the educational outcomes for children that have resulted (ACECQA media release, 9 May 2016)

It has been an exciting and positive learning journey for us, which we started after reading the National Quality Standards and Early Years Learning Framework. We then incorporated their underlying principles into our Centre's philosophy statement.

Our next step was to critically reflect on our practices. We realised we needed to undertake professional development relating to cultural inclusion and competency. We attended a session by Dr Melinda Miller from QUT. Her inspiring talk led us to learn more about the traditional owners of the country where we are located and to invite Brisbane Elder, Uncle Joe Kirk, to our Centre.

Who could have known that from that first time Uncle Joe came to visit we would form a warm partnership with him and his family, that he would become a valued member of our community, that he would open our playground renovation at an evening event, that we would present together at conferences and workshops, and that we, along with another early childhood educator, Sandi Harrold, would write books for young children to increase their understanding of Aboriginal traditional culture. These books about Uncle Joe's stories are used in other early childhood and care services and have been published by Scholastic.

Uncle Joe is now a regular visitor at our centre, coming not just for Reconciliation and NAIDOC weeks, but also to spend time with the children and staff, to read his stories, to create artworks with all of the children and to share his life with other educators at meetings organised by our Centre at local schools and as well as our Centre. His presence is seen in both indoor and outdoor environments from our yarning circle, to welcome signs in our foyer, and artworks he has painted with the children in our rooms.

Most recently, we, along with Uncle Joe, have been honoured as finalists in the 2016 Queensland Reconciliation Awards. A very special event, which we will be attending together in Townsville.

We are looking forward to continuing our journey.

Reconciliation action plans: building a shared journey of reconciliation for all children

Australian early learning services and schools are building respectful and reciprocal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities through the support of a free program developed by Reconciliation Australia.

Narragunnawali – Reconciliation in schools and early learning is helping to foster a deeper understanding and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions by supporting early learning services and schools to develop their own Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs).

The Narragunnawali program offers a free online resource called the RAP Developer that provides a practical framework for schools and services to tailor and implement. The RAP Developer includes a step-by-step guide that facilitates a plan for taking action in the classroom, around the school or service, and with the community. Once a school or service has signed up to the program, it is assigned a Narragunnawali worker to support it through the process.

What is a RAP?

A RAP is a formal statement of commitment to reconciliation. Reconciliation Australia started the RAP program with eight organisations in 2006. More than 650 organisations have created a RAP since and many more are developing one. A RAP provides an action plan for building positive relationships and understandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, and sets the foundation for developing communication with the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

How do we get started?

You can start your RAP here: <http://www.schoolraps.org.au/users/signup>

Being a rural or remote educator

As an educator the setting and location in which we work often creates particular opportunities, challenges and successes. We asked Kim, Julia, Michelle and Tabatha about working in a rural or remote setting and asked them to share some of their experiences with us. Whilst there are some similarities for educators working in areas that may have less access to resources, networking opportunities, and support, each educator's experience is unique.

Kim Mostyn



Position ... Relief Teacher (mainly Early Years) with DET QLD. My background is predominantly as an Early Childhood Teacher and Director, working in community kindergartens in NSW and QLD. I have also taught modules within the TAFE Certificate

3 in Child Care course. I see the introduction of the National Quality Standards as providing a forum for best practice and community engagement, as well as networking across a diverse range of early childhood service providers.

Being an educator in a rural/remote location enables me to ... live a lifestyle away from long commutes to and from work.

The time I save allows me more time for professional reading, as well as engaging in my local community. I can access information and webinars more readily these days, while still being able to attend area meetings.

I am challenged by ... the effects of the current difficult economic circumstances of many of the families I meet in my work. These challenges impact on choices families make for their child's education. On the plus side, parents are reporting that their situation has meant more family discussions on priorities for their family. Another challenge I am seeing first hand are longer waiting lists for children's educational and medical needs to be assessed and addressed.

I would like to see ... more intervention services available for children in rural/remote locations, to help reduce the wait time and/or distance travels. It would also be helpful if children could be observed with some liaison with their early childhood service, if such a model could be feasible. This would give a more accurate picture of the child's level and patterns of social interaction, which may differ from that observed in a specialist's room. In an ideal world, this liaison might also help raise awareness of what values and practices are upheld in early childhood services today.

I network and collaborate with other educators by ... attending our area ECTA meetings, as well as via phone calls, online forums and emails. Many helpful ideas are shared and trialled in our workplaces. Digital photos are a quick way of showing physical aspects of our work, for example, storage and display ideas in our learning areas. Professional development workshops are a good opportunity to meet with other educators.

The most unique thing about being a rural/remote educator is ... building relationships with the families and the community, as well as respecting the particular characteristics and challenges present in the community. This could mean working within the challenges imposed by drought and realising that longer travel distances may mean different timetabling and personal needs, such as transport and accommodation needs to enable participation in community events and professional development.

Julia Hassall



Position ...

Kindergarten Teacher
Long Day Care in
Stanthorpe

Being an educator in a rural/remote location enables me to ...

live the lifestyle I have chosen. I live on a vineyard property and Stanthorpe has

great weather. We have four seasons unlike many other Australian locations. Stanthorpe is a tourist destination and we have many transient families who come here for seasonal fruit picking.

I am very pleased to be able to deliver a kindergarten program to children in long day care. There once was a trend for parents to take their children to the local kindergarten as that was their only option. Since the introduction of kindergarten in long day care, parents are now able to have the care they need while they are at work as well as an educational program, providing transition to Prep from long day care. Parents often prefer to have siblings at the one place; older siblings help settle the younger ones.

I am challenged by ... a lack of networking. The other challenge is resources. Shopping online is the usual method, but it isn't always easy to find what you want and if in a city it is easy to pop into an educational supplies venue and get what you want. Another challenge is the availability of trained teachers who want to work in long day care as we do not attract the same dollar value as other teachers even though our area of expertise sets the learning pattern for life.

I would like to see ... less focus on webinars and more focus on personal networking. That is why I like attending ECTA and other workshops where people are able to learn hands on.

I network and collaborate with other educators through ... day to day conversation with colleagues and webinars. We are fortunate to be part of a Long Day

Care Group and are supported in that way, but distance and travel costs preclude us from popping over to see what other centres do.

The most unique thing about being a rural/remote educator is ...

many of the parents and many of my colleagues grew up in this area. Nobody is a stranger and everybody recognises that the care we are giving to the children provides them with the skills they will need to continue developing this community in the future. People treat others as part of the community. Many have family businesses and therefore the idea of moving out of rural/remote areas is not even conceivable. *Belonging, Being and Becoming* in this country lifestyle is preferred to the fast-paced city life.

Michelle Powell



I am the Prep/1 teacher at Tambo State School and have been living here for four years after moving from Brisbane. Tambo State School was my first teaching posting and I have loved every moment of it.

The people in the community are so friendly and welcoming, it makes you feel like you are at home.

Being an educator in a rural/remote location enables me to ... focus my attention on developing and improving my teaching abilities. Teaching in a rural environment has opened me up to many opportunities quicker than being in a major city, such as being a mentor for two beginning teachers. It has allowed me to experience teaching a variety of subjects and year levels.

I am challenged by ... not having a year level team to collaborate and share planning and teaching ideas with.

I would like to see ... more resources available to the students and teachers, along with more professional development opportunities closer to town so you don't have to travel five to six hours to participate.

I network and collaborate with other educators by ... the Education Queensland discussion lists, Facebook education discussion pages and other teachers who live in close proximity.

The most unique thing about being a rural/remote educator is ... having only seven students in my Prep class last year! It really allowed so much one-on-one time for each student and enabled them to get the most out of their first year at school

By having such a small class size, I have such a good rapport with those students today.

Tabatha Lippert



Position ... I recently joined the Goodstart Early Learning Roma family this year. I am a passionate Early Childhood Teacher to 34 children with 22 children attending daily. My experience in early childhood originates from

family day care dedicating a decade of service while raising our three daughters. I also fulfill the role of Educational Leader and Assistant Director within our centre. In these roles I am inspired, motivated, affirmed, challenged to extend the practice and pedagogy of educators.

Being an educator in a rural/remote location enables me to ... engage in teaching practices that are creative yet resilient to ensure delivery of a high quality program; develop a deeper meaning for all cultures as we all connect outside the classroom sharing in life in the same town, and build strong family and community connections, establishing a natural flow of family

input, school transition, health and support services being embedded into our program and practices. Most of all becoming a highly regarded member of the community as you become a part of families' lives for their children and themselves within the local community.

I am challenged by ... the sense of professional and personal isolation at times, cultural differences, limited local resources available and the distance to metropolitan areas for networking and support opportunities. Educating in a rural community, I believe, takes initiative to seek out further opportunities for the children, classroom and ourselves.

Utilising local knowledge and connections as well as networking outside to metro areas plays a key role within my practice.

I would like to see ... increased professional development delivered locally for educators also enabling some hands on experience as opposed to relying heavily on virtual communication or extensive travelling. Supporting the need to develop further opportunities for the community and families to attend local courses on development, health services and extended learning available for their children.

I network and collaborate with other educators by ... travelling to attend Goodstart professional learning days, engaging with fellow educators and professionals within the early childhood field which has built relationships extending communication via phone conversations and email. Participating in telelinks with educators in our region when opportunities arise to discuss questions or concerns and share in our successes. I also utilise online forums and social media groups to collaborate ideas from all early childhood pathways and school setting.

The most unique thing about being a rural/remote educator is ... the relationships you build with families and community. You feel that overwhelming sense of belonging yourself as an educator, belonging to Goodstart, to your team, to the classroom, to the children, to the families, to the community and a true ownership of knowing what you are doing is making a difference – it's pure magic.

Why loose parts? Their relationship with sustainable practice, children's agency, creative thinking and learning outcomes

Margaret Sear



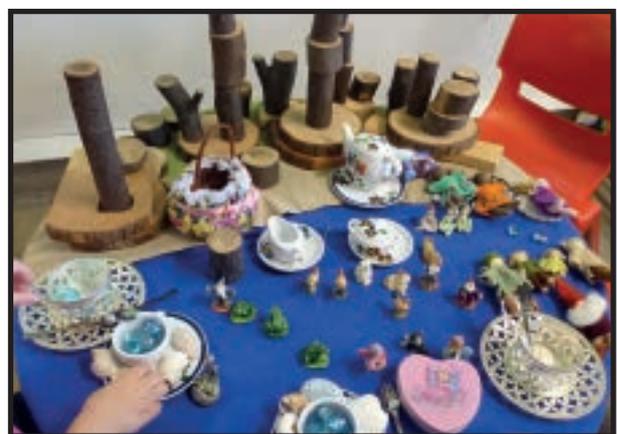
Margaret has taught in community kindergartens since 1969 and is a strong advocate for children as competent and active citizens. A leading practitioner in the area of education for sustainability, Margaret has worked to enrich indoor and outdoor environments as stimulating, challenging and natural play-spaces for children that encourage free choice and constructive risk taking. Margaret has been recognised by Redland City Council for her efforts to promote sustainable practices in industry and was awarded a World Environment Day Workplace Champion Award in 2010. Margaret is President and a long time member of Qld Early Childhood Sustainability Network (QECSN Inc.). She is a member of Redlands Organic Growers (ROGI) and promotes organic principles.

Introduction

Environments that include loose parts are infinitely more stimulating and engaging than static ones. Play environments need to promote and support imaginative play in a way that doesn't direct play and play opportunities, but allows children to develop their own ideas and explore their world. It underpins the belief in the competency, skill and creativity of children. Loose parts play provides children the opportunities to problem solve, make mistakes, build connections and create within a secure environment. An active learning environment organised for child choice stimulates learning experiences that cater for individual interests, abilities, skills and cultures.

'Loose parts' or 'open-ended materials' are terms often referred to in early childhood education (ECE) curriculum documents and resource texts, but what are they and why are they important? Loose parts are everywhere. Loose parts can be anything that can be picked up, arranged, moved, carried, changed, stacked, and pulled apart, balanced and redesigned by children. They can be large, small, natural, built, found, and/or recycled. Loose parts can be: flowers, grass, seed pods, seeds, bark, leaves, pine cones, sticks, timber

off cuts, tree bikkies, pebbles, rocks, seashells, ribbons, wool, beads, tin cans, lids, nuts and bolts, cardboard rolls, boxes, fabric, tarps, poly pipe pieces, ropes, pavers, cooking implements and utensils, electrical reels, materials from industrial processes, hardwood planking, water containers, pot plants, industrial drums, carpet squares, artificial grass pieces, sugar cane, or straw bales. Loose parts can also be what you have and use in the classroom all the time – blocks, dress up clothes, plastic animals, vehicles, figurines, art supplies, manipulative sets and even books. Even the smallest spaces can squeeze in a little access to loose parts by



Tea party accessories enrich play experiences

using small shallow containers, trays, tables, mats and rugs.

They can be used indoors and outdoors. They are what adds pizzazz to play!

Natural materials should always make up a large percentage of the loose parts. Regular exposure to these materials allows children to have a relationship with nature, and to feel connected with it. They have the potential for scientific discovery, and can also invoke a sense of wonder and intrigue.

However, there are several important elements to remember when using loose parts. Simon Nicholson in his work *The theory of loose parts* believed that 'in any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.' (2). Loose parts should therefore:

- have no defined use, and educators must support the children when they decide to change the shape or use of them
- be physically accessible and stored where they can be reached by children without having to ask the educators; the children should know that they can use them whenever and however they wish
- be regularly replenished, changed and added to.

Loose parts theory is about remembering that the best play comes from things that allow children to play in many different ways and on many different levels.

Both Reggio and Montessori educators understand children's innate drive to investigate and discover. Knowledge in young children is



Pipes, timbers and pavers sourced from local tradesmen



Materials as provocations for tinkering, manipulation and construction

constructed rather than acquired, so supporting the development of creative and innovative thinking is highly significant. Loose parts open new possibilities for learning. A wide variety of loose parts will encourage active and sustained engagement in less-competitive play and more social collaborative interactions that enrich children's learning experiences.

Sustainability

Linking the addition of loose parts to the environment, relates directly to your Centre's sustainable practices and procedures, and by doing this, will support your QIP and improve your NQS outcomes. By provisioning for and encouraging children's engagement with loose parts you will link your practices to the National Quality Standards across all seven Quality Areas and through the National Curriculum Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) Learning Outcomes 1, 2, 4 and 5 as well as the Principles of Practice 1-5. This will mean that you are embedding sustainable behaviours throughout your Centre practise and curriculum and not just within Quality Area 3.

When you discuss the acquisition of and use of loose parts with children, families, committees and members of your local community, you will be engaging in discussions related to sustainability on a daily and ongoing basis.



Natural and sourced materials in socio-dramatic play both indoors and outdoors enriches social interaction and language



Cubby construction provides many possibilities for social and imaginative play, both independent and collaborative



Encouraging children to value things and learn where products come from can also make a difference to your waste systems and budget. Encouraging children and families to refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and repurpose, and choosing the most environmentally friendly and socially responsible products and services you can, develops and embeds a culture of education for sustainable development. Many things are too good to waste and by educating children and families to 'rescue' products and repurpose them will make a huge impact on our future. In terms of sustainability, loose parts have benefits beyond educational outcomes in economic, environmental, social and cultural terms.

Children are drawn into deeper and more meaningful play by intentionally organising the environment in ways that allow children access to and use of loose parts. It will increase the environment's ability to be more flexible and become the 'Third Teacher'. Sustained and repetitive play sessions in flexible environments, will see children engaged in more purposeful, complex and self-directed play, involving higher order thinking.

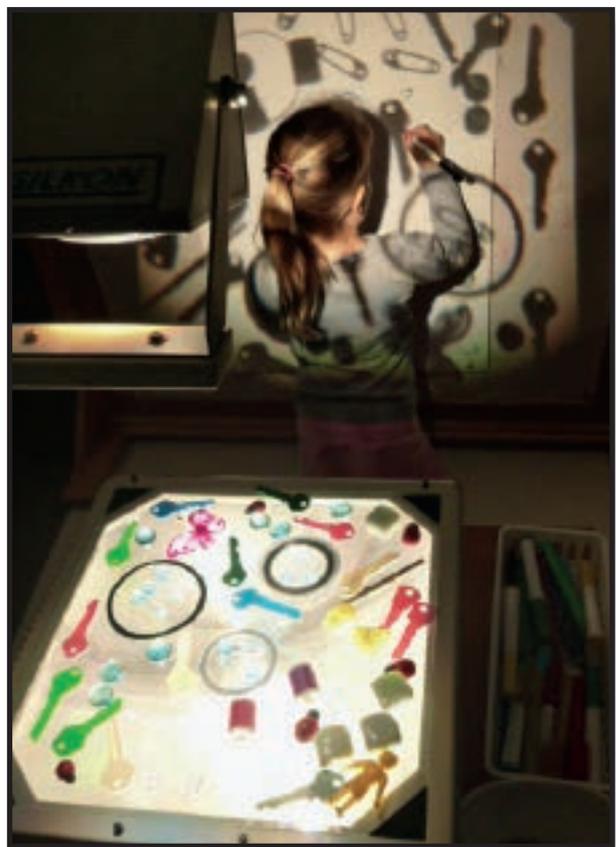
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Three dimensional representation as creative expression



'Loose parts' have limitless possibilities for learning

DET expands the Age Appropriate Pedagogies program

ECTA sits down for a conversation with representatives of the Department of Education and Training about how the program is progressing.



Following the pilot of the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Project in 46 state schools across three regions in 2015, the Department of Education and Training (DET) has expanded the program to include 115 state schools across all seven regions in the state. ECTA discussed the outcomes of the pilot and the plans for the program in 2016 with Gabrielle Sinclair, Deputy Director-General, Early Childhood and Community Engagement, Dr Mary Lincoln, Director Early Learning Pathways, and Mark Cooper, Principal Program Officer, Early Learning Pathways, who are leading this work for DET in partnership with colleagues in the regions and State Schools Division.

How do you see the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Program contributing to the strategic work of the Department?

Gabrielle: Across the work of the Early Childhood and Community Engagement Division we have maintained our strong commitment to putting children first in our decision making. The *Advancing education: An action plan for education in Queensland and Every student succeeding – State Schools Strategy 2016–2020* leads us to keep focused on the importance of continuity for children and those key transitions from home to early childhood education and care services, into Prep and across the early years of school.

We have been actioning the Queensland Government's undertaking to 'establish strong foundations for children's continuity of learning through refocusing on age appropriate pedagogies that underpin active, purposeful,

creative learning experiences in the early years of school (Prep to Year 3)' through the Age Appropriate Pedagogies (AAP) Program. Regional Directors are leading this important work with schools in their regions supported by the Griffith University team and local coaches.

We are re-positioning children at the centre of teaching and learning decisions and the age appropriate pedagogies support schools are strengthening learning experiences for young children, leading to a love of life-long learning.

What is the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Program seeking to achieve?

Mary: This program is about creating space for teachers and school leaders to focus on the

factors that underpin good teaching in early years classrooms. By good teaching I mean ways of presenting curriculum that engage children in their learning and motivate them to want to learn while maintaining academic rigour. We know that having a positive disposition to learning sets children on the path to success at school and beyond.

Why is this program so important?

Mary: The AAP Program has a strong research base that validates the practices that underpin effective teaching in the early years of school. *The age appropriate pedagogies for the early years of schooling: foundation paper* identifies the characteristics of effective teaching in the early years of school and describes the approaches to teaching that engage children. Most importantly, as teachers involved in the program are reporting, the use of these effective pedagogies ignites children's enthusiasm and extends their learning.

ECTA members have asked if this program is refocusing on play-based learning in Prep?

Mary: The AAP Program emphasises the importance of a range and balance of pedagogies. This is essential as children learn in a variety of ways and we know that in Prep the curriculum expectations are effectively achieved through the use of a range of pedagogies.

Play is one of these effective pedagogies that supports children's learning when it is purposeful, guided by curriculum expectations and part of a balanced learning program.

Griffith University was commissioned to conduct research during the pilot. What were the findings?

Mary: What teachers found was an almost immediate change in children's levels of motivation and engagement in learning. Teachers noted that the characteristics prompted a corresponding response in the way children engaged in the learning experiences. They also found that children responded

positively to the use of a range of approaches. The approaches supported active learning, choice and creative responses. Teachers also reported that they strengthened their understanding of the Australian Curriculum as they thought carefully about the alignment of pedagogy and curriculum to support children's learning outcomes. We also noted a flow-on effect for parents. They were delighted by their children's enthusiasm for learning and became more interested and involved in what was happening in their classroom.

What has been the response from Principals involved in implementing the program?

Mark: School Principals play an essential role in the success of the program. As the leader in their school they support their teachers to try new evidence-based approaches and are there to help teachers reflect on successes and challenges. Principals contributed to the school-based research. Their perspectives on the impact of the characteristics and approaches on children's learning are important in disseminating information about the program to other school leaders.

Brett Shackleton, Principal of Ferny Grove State School provided an insight into his thinking about the AAP Program and what it meant for him as a leader:

It's about trusting teachers, empowering teachers to actually know what's best for children of this age. Fundamentally I believe we are about handing the profession back to the people who own it – and that's the teachers, the people who have the knowledge base. However, there needs to be a key member of the leadership team involved with them doing the action research.

How is the program being implemented in 2016?

Mark: This year we have schools in each DET region participating. The Griffith University team is continuing to provide support to participating schools using a cluster model and conducting further research on the impact of age appropriate pedagogies on children's learning and development,

participation and engagement. We are also engaging regional leaders in the program. Building an understanding of the characteristics and approaches and their place in supporting existing DET priorities such as the State School Strategy and the P-12 Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework is essential. This program is just part of the work of teachers and schools. It isn't an additional requirement, so links to the priorities that guide teacher's work is important.

What information is available for teachers not involved in the program?

Mark: I encourage anyone interested in age appropriate pedagogies to access the information currently available on the DET website at <http://deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/about/successful-transitions/age-appropriate-pedagogies.html> including the foundation paper. A range of professional resources including videos, case studies and examples of teacher practice will be made available on the website.



Promoting early learning

This is an exciting program and a great time for early years education in school.



Engaging children in their learning

First 5 Forever: creating opportunities for all Queensland children

Kylie Webb, State Library



State Library of Queensland is responding to the need for a focus on the early years

First 5 Forever is a universal early intervention family literacy program led by the State Library of Queensland in partnership with public libraries and community agencies. The primary aim of *First 5 Forever* is to provide strong emergent literacy foundations and life-long learning capabilities for all Queensland children in the first five years, by directly supporting parents and primary caregivers as their child's first and most important educator.

First 5 Forever draws on the latest neuroscience and early childhood development research in identifying the urgent need to create a positive cultural shift and more confidence in learning and literacy in our communities, enabling parents and caregivers to better understand their role and what they can do to support their children by encouraging everyday play, learning and language rich interaction and environments at home.

Co-ordinated by the team at the State Library of Queensland, *First 5 Forever* aims to maximise the opportunities that the existing 320 library networks already have throughout Queensland and expand these through a range of initiatives to reach all children and their families. *First 5 Forever* aligns with the Australian Library and Information Association's (ALIA's) *Early Literacy Framework and Strategy for Public Libraries* (2014) and *The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF, 2009).

Libraries provide valuable informal learning opportunities in the early years

Libraries are a large existing network across Queensland that reach into every community. They are the major supplier of free baby time and story time sessions, activities and resources for families.

Libraries are neutral spaces where children can utilise the range of informal learning opportunities to explore, learn and expand their knowledge.

Dan Georgeson, Executive Manager, Literacy and Young People's Services at the State Library of Queensland states:

public libraries through their targeted programs and services, are well placed to respond to the local needs of children and their families. Libraries are available to children, and their families, from babyhood, providing year-round, free access to resources and services that support language, reading and literacy activities.

What's happening across Queensland Libraries? How can you get involved?

First 5 Forever commenced in 2015 and is about implementing a practical approach utilising what we already know about the importance of the first five years to empower parents and primary caregivers of all Queensland children. It aims to maximise existing networks including the Early Childhood Education and Care network. See below as to how you can get involved!

A range of actions are being implemented statewide. Look out for what's happening in your community.

1. An increased number of places in public library baby, toddler and story time sessions.

Encourage the families you work with to go along to the free children's programs and activities at your local library. Access your library or council website for more information.

2. Outreach strategies and partnership opportunities with local organisations to reach families that are not currently accessing library services.

Contact your local library to see what they have planned. Get involved in your community events and let the families you work with know about First 5 Forever.

3. Partnerships. *First 5 Forever* encourages the use of existing partnerships as well as the creation of new partnerships to ensure consistency, collaboration and a clear message to families about what they can do to enhance the lifelong learning capabilities for their children. The *First 5 Forever* team are also building strategic partnerships at a statewide level.

Ensure your local library is a key member of your early year's network and make sure young children are on the agenda in your community.

4. Information toolkit to parents. Extensive research and development has occurred to create a multi-modal range of resources that libraries can provide free to families. These resources are practical and aim to support existing community programs and messages around what parents can do to enhance their child's communication and emergent literacy. These resources have been endorsed by Speech Pathology Australia and Queensland Health's Centre for Children's Health and Wellbeing.

Contact your local library and ask about the availability of First 5 Forever resources for families in your community.

5. State-wide Awareness Campaign. A range of strategies have been utilised both at a statewide level as well as by local councils to spread the *First 5 Forever* message. The

First 5 Forever website has been specifically developed to provide practical ideas directly for parents.

Visit the website www.first5forever.org.au and be sure to let your families know about the website. Contact your local council library to see what's happening in your community.

6. *First 5 Forever* Language to Literacy Workshops. Councils are hosting workshops with staff from the *First 5 Forever* team facilitating these for local communities. Workshops are suitable for those directly working with children and their families of 0–5 years as well as key decision makers. Key outcomes include understanding the latest evidence and applying this in the context of communication and emergent literacy strategies as well as the development of community-based action plans.



First 5 Forever team

Early childhood education and care staff are key contributors to these workshops. Contact your local library to see if a workshop is coming to a region near you!

Your local area

First 5 Forever is a distributed funded model, so the investment is provided to local councils.

First 5 Forever funding, programs, services and resources collectively supports emergent literacy and wellbeing of zero to five-year-old children locally.

Local councils across Queensland are conducting a range of programs and activities and we encourage you to get in touch with your local library service to find out what's happening. Advocate to families about this statewide Queensland government initiative that puts the focus on the early years and its importance!

For more information, please contact the *First 5 Forever* team ...

first5forever@slq.qld.gov.au or visit
www.first5forever.org.au

This article was compiled by Kylie Webb, Consultant Speech Pathologist, State Library of Queensland.

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To infinity and beyond! Actualising children's voice in outdoor playground design

Lesley Jones



Lesley Jones is the Queensland State Manager at Goodstart - Australia's largest provider of early learning and care. Lesley began her career as an educator in Long Day Care Centres in Queensland. She has subsequently held a range of senior leadership positions in long day care organizations operating across Australia. Lesley has also lectured in undergraduate programs in both NSW and Queensland universities and her PhD thesis explores educator capacity to support the development of social competence in young children.

The challenge and the opportunity

With the introduction of the National Quality Standards (NQS) and the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) there has been a recalibration of the ways in which organisations and educators consider the types of outdoor learning environments that are provided for children. The NQS include requirements for early learning services to consider how to include natural elements into the environments for young children and to begin to raise awareness of the natural world and sustainability considerations (Commonwealth of Australia 2009b). Goodstart, like many other early childhood service providers, agrees with contemporary thought that children are infinitely capable communicators and learners. When the opportunity arose to undertake a number of child care centre playground upgrades, we were committed to ensuring that we included and honoured children's capacity to design their learning environments with us.

The objective of the project was to explore how playgrounds could be co-designed with the children, families and educators who would ultimately use them.

A team of enthusiastic educators, consultants, architects, tradespeople and managers worked for twelve months in 36 centres across their local communities to ensure the new playgrounds honoured children's voices and their capacity to engage in design work. Using a comprehensive project approach (Katz 2000) the objective was to create an end to end project from design, construction to use, that authentically incorporated children's views along the way.

Gathering child voice: from pirate ships, fairy gardens, infinity and beyond

The initial and critical phase of the project was to begin with the children. Teachers and educators in their local Goodstart Centres began by discussing with children what would be good things to have in their new playground. There were many very animated and excited discussions of what could be in a playground.

Children discussed fantastic elements such as pirate ships, fairy gardens and places of pure fantasy; they also discussed elements of movement such as being able to climb, be up high, to be able to swing, roll and slide. Some expressed the need for gardening and digging and mucky dirty play.



Co-designing the playground with children

The teachers and educators saw that the natural extension to these early discussions was the need for a project approach to really explore what children were thinking about their outdoor play environment. Group meetings and research on the internet set the children to looking at what makes up a playground, what features they might have and what elements from nature could be incorporated. Educators displayed the children's drawings, mind maps and group discussions for parents to see and contribute to as well. Parents added photos of excursions into their own local parks, playgrounds and surrounding areas. By the end of this stage, every Centre had a rich collection of ideas of what the children thought were great inclusions. Our Centres became a buzz of excitement as educators, children and families took ownership of the possibilities of design.



Designing the bike track

Next steps: from fantasy to reality – honouring the consultation process and child voice

The architectural team's challenge was to take the artefacts, project documents, children's drawing and research, and weave them together in designs that not only honoured the children's contribution but delivered contemporary designs to support best pedagogical practice, NQS and the EYLF. Some aspects of this were easier than others; active areas for swinging, climbing, sliding were the more expected elements of design.

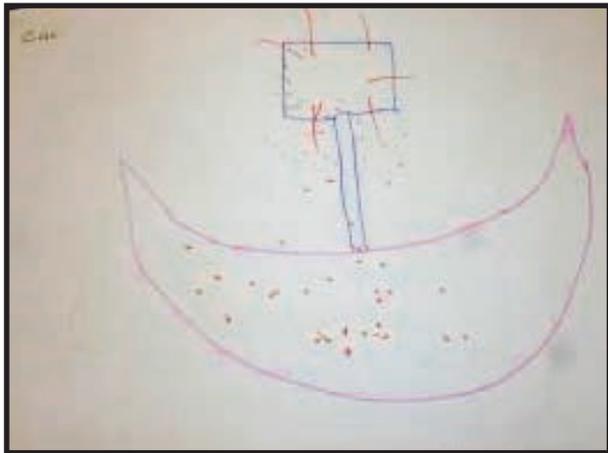
Meeting the integrity of the more fantastic designs such as pirate ships and fairy gardens required some deeper thinking and consultation by the architects with members of the project team including teachers, early learning consultants and health and safety experts.

The work of Reggio Emilia in Italy has challenged many in early childhood to think more deeply about the environments we create and support for young children. This work has highlighted the concept of the environment as the third teacher (Strong-Wilson and Ellis 2007).

Strong-Wilson and Ellis state:

Education is often understood as the sole responsibility of parents and teachers. Reggio Emilia identifies a 3rd teacher between child, teacher, and parent: the environment. In its attention to how space can be thoughtfully arranged, Reggio Emilia has reconceptualised space as a key source of educational provocation and insight (2007 p.40).

There was agreement that we needed to provide a more conceptual platform for children to engage with fantasy and pretend play rather than props that were akin to theme park rides. There were many behind the scene conversations as the architectural team became excited in taking the quite literal ideas for children's imagination, and working with our early learning experts to dig deeper to see



Designing the pirate ship ...

conceptually what children were exploring. For example:

- Our pirate ships became a bow-shape front on a deck that protruded into and open formed sand pit so children could continue to engage in pirate ship play but not be restricted by an actual pirate ship (and the decks could be used for so much more).
- Our fairy gardens became quiet places at the back or side of the yard with plantings that provided a sense of seclusion. Vegetation 'hid' design features such as toad stools and log low seats and provided the concept of miniature, quiet places for discovery.

Once the concept designs were finalised, they were sent back out to the centres for further consultation with children, educators and families. Final feedback was gathered and sign off from centres meant we were ready for the construction phase.

Preparing children and educators for a new environment

The children were keen observers of the construction phase and spent long periods of time watching the diggers and builders work on their new playgrounds. This stage of the project kick started many learning projects for the children as they explored concepts of construction themselves. Our educators continued to document and record the project for children and to trace the journey of their Centres new playground.



... to inform construction

With new playgrounds about to come online across Queensland, our educators and teachers were busy engaging with early learning consultants in new pedagogies to support enquiry and learning in more natural environments. We explored the opportunities to support learning with design elements that included new physical topographies, and open ended design elements such as water, mud, grass and gardens.

New playgrounds provided an opportunity for new ways of supporting and facilitating play.

We discussed with children about the new outdoor environments and what they might be able to do in them, how they could keep themselves safe with some of the new elements such as rocks and logs, and how the children would manage their new environments by helping to maintain and care for them. This project meant that our teachers, educators and children were leaving behind artificial turf and fantastic plastic environments; the need to teach the children about caring for a natural environment was a necessary aspect of the project.

As construction came to an end in each Centre, educators and teachers engaged in the environments (before the children) in hands-on professional development in order that they could experience the environments as learners themselves before supporting children in this same space.



New quiet spaces

The final result was some truly inspired outdoor environments that incorporated the concepts discussed by children families and educators. This was a positive example of children's capacity to engage in design work. It was also

a testament to the commitment of the teachers and educators, architects and managers honouring the voice of children and their capability to authentically engage in the process of design.

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New garden areas

Sharing cultures in early childhood settings ... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

Aunty Denise Proud and Rosalie Raciti



Aunty Denise Proud is a proud Aboriginal woman born on Wakka Wakka Country in the South Burnett, the youngest of ten children. With a background in early childhood Aunty Denise has also worked in the corrective services with youth, women and men inside maximum security prisons. She spent several years living in Denver in America, loves sharing her culture through art, has spoken at a number of international conferences and written papers relating to her life's work.



Rosalie Raciti graduated as a Kindergarten teacher in 1964, has worked at Palm Island Aboriginal Community on two separate occasions, and travelled throughout Queensland as a preschool adviser for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. Rosalie is passionate about cultural understanding and sharing across cultures and as a retiree is now encouraging the concept of reconciliation with a particular interest in the early childhood sector.

Getting to know your community

When working with Aboriginal children and their families, it is imperative that you get to know the community in which the children are living. You may feel out of your comfort zone. You may have preconceived notions about what to expect. You may have stereotypes that influence your thinking about the families of those children. There may be a lot of hurt and pain from past experiences with some non-Indigenous people and with various government policies. However, if you reach out to these families, you can build a trust with them that will establish the building blocks on which to build your relationship.

Initially you need to visit families accompanied by someone that the families trust, such as a community education counsellor, an Aboriginal teacher-aide or a local Elder. This person can introduce you and be the link between you, the newcomer, and the families of the children you will be teaching.

Listen and learn from these families, from the Elders, and from Aboriginal people working in the school and the community.

Whether you are in an urban setting, a rural setting or an Aboriginal community setting, the cultural protocols will be similar.

Respect the community

It may take a very long time to learn about the cultural issues that are integral to the community. By listening to those around you, you will learn. It is important to give people time to get to know and trust you, and to allow for silences in your communication with people.

Time is an important factor in the development of relationships. Sometimes people will need to consult with others and think about your discussions. They may not want to reply to your questions right away. They may prefer not to respond to direct questioning and you may

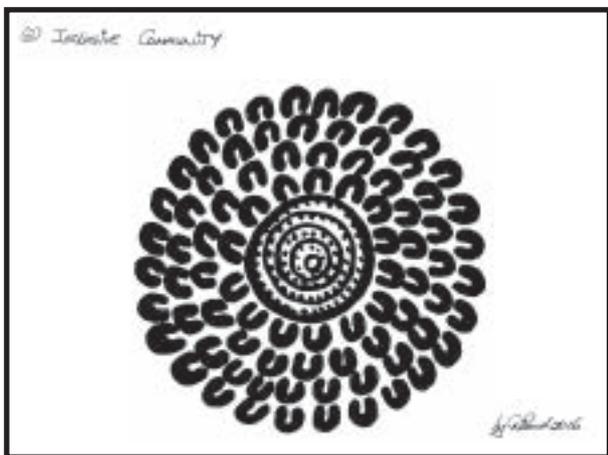


Understanding community connections
Artwork Denise Proud

need to consider using a more indirect means of gathering information.

Being a part of the community is a positive step towards gaining trust. Attending the local weekend football matches, barracking for the right team, wearing the colours, chatting to families in the queue for a hamburger or visiting local gathering places. All of these indicate that you are trying to get to know the community at a deeper level, that your interest is not just superficial and limited only to school/centre-related issues.

Recognising the local dialect, learning some of the local language/s, becoming familiar with the history of the area and learning the names of the local language groups and learning the genealogy of your families are all things to do.

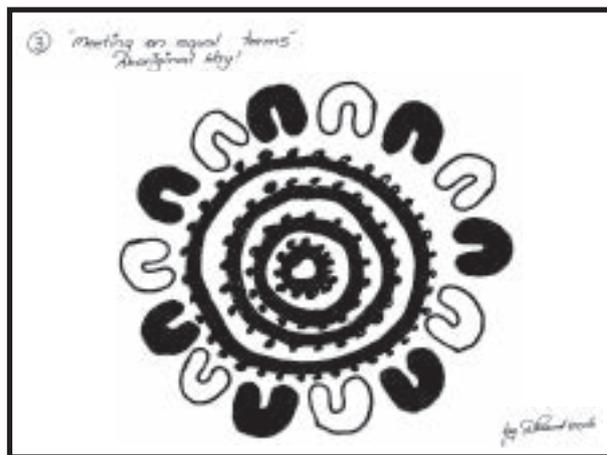


Inclusive Community. Artwork Denise Proud

Aboriginal people usually know exactly where they fit within their community and can tell you their place within this community. Some of these stories can be quite complex and the extended family relationships can be quite confusing to an outsider. Aboriginal people have a strong sense of place and of relationships within this place. In some remote communities, non-Aboriginal people can be given an honorary place within this community. If this happens, the rules of family apply. Such an honour must be taken very seriously.

Meeting families

There is a tendency in the non-Aboriginal system of schooling to rely on enrolments, on parents coming with their children into the school grounds, on the written newsletter or on



Meeting on equal terms Aboriginal way
Artwork Denise Proud

notes to give parents information, directions or instructions. Many parents do not communicate effectively in this way, and a verbal invitation or explanation will be far more useful. Parent/teacher relationships are so important. Home visiting can provide valuable feedback.

Many schools do not encourage home visiting. Our own experiences with kindergarten children and their families, leads us to believe that visiting children in their own homes, having a cuppa at the kitchen table, and admiring the bedroom where they sleep, can strengthen the teacher/child/family relationship considerably. Parent interviews at the beginning of the year and throughout the year might be conducted somewhere away from the centre/school, maybe at a local medical centre, at a coffee

shop, at the local library or somewhere else where the parent feels comfortable. They might want an aunty or uncle to come along too. Having extended family present may make them more comfortable and you may be able to learn more about the family by having additional people at the meeting.

Resources

All children should be learning about the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the history of this country. They should have access to appropriate resources. You could invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visitors to the centre to read to the children, to tell stories of their childhood, to play musical instruments or to share their cultural dances.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art work can be displayed at the centre, children can learn some of the elements used in traditional Aboriginal paintings and they can learn from Aboriginal artists about the traditional painting methods once used and the change to more contemporary interpretations. It is important

to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are different.

It is important to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of doing and being within the curriculum. To be valued, this acknowledgement needs to be there all the time and not simply brought out during Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week. Employment of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander staff members can be an excellent start to the embedding process.

Conclusion

Learning about and respecting each others' cultures is the focal point for reconciliation. Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are learning about and embracing the cultures of the First Australians. We need to walk together as Australians.

We need to acknowledge the history of the past and we need to walk the journey together towards a harmonious future.



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EMBRACE Culture in Kindy Program

Cherie Lamb, Ranu James, Dr Rekha Prasad and Elle Hughes



L to R: Ranu James, Elle Hughes Dorothy Brown (C&K), Cherie Lamb and Rekha Prasad

Cherie has worked in the not-for profit sector for more than 25 years, running early intervention and prevention programs that facilitate access for families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and diverse cultural backgrounds into schools, early childhood settings, health services and employment. Ranu is of Papua New Guinean/Australian descent with more than 23 years experience working in the early childhood sector and a lifetime of experience living and working with diversity. Rekha has spent the last 24 years in Australia having worked in the area of cultural diversity in South Australia with the Multicultural Child Care Unit, the Multicultural Communities Council, TAFE and the University of South Australia. Elle is an early childhood educator and community development professional with more

than 20 years experience working to improve outcomes for vulnerable young children in Aboriginal Australia, Africa and Asia.

There are many ways to build trusting relationships and many ways to lay the foundations for genuine partnership with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, leading to their active and inclusive participation in early childhood education.

EMBRACE Culture in Kindy Program

The EMBRACE team committed to enhancing the cultural competence and proficiency of educators through ongoing professional development, resourcing, support and advice, and through opportunities to participate in professional networks, conferences and forums. The team wrote the *Embracing cultural diversity in kindergarten* professional development package and then successfully facilitated it in communities throughout Queensland, and in doing so, engaged several hundred educators and practitioners. We facilitated two Embracing cultural diversity in early childhood conferences and utilised all of these programs and events to

The EMBRACE Culture in Kindy Program was funded by Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) to provide statewide support to kindergarten providers and communities in Queensland for the purpose of increasing kindergarten participation for families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

connect educators with local Elders, community partners and local community services.

Strategies that worked

The program found that services achieving the highest kindergarten participation rates were those that employed support workers and group facilitators from the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds as local residents. Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, bilingual and bicultural workers built bridges between families and early childhood services to ensure that once children were enrolled they remained engaged.

They also linked families to schools and a variety of other services.

Bilingual workers were able to build strong relationships with both educators and parents. They were able to explain aspects of culture that educators were struggling with.

Educators were then linked with ethno-specific cultural groups and community Elders for further support. This reassuring and systematic approach helped educators to establish connections with local cultural communities and to work more inclusively and knowledgeably with their children.

One community partner employed bilingual workers to engage members of local African, Chinese and Indian communities in continuous community consultation. The workers found that health, employment, financial and linguistic needs are often prioritised above early childhood education by families in the initial settlement phase. Relationships with families were maintained through activities such as playgroups, community barbeques, parent support groups and English classes. Programs that could not be delivered in-house were offered through a number of community-based agency partnerships. This strategy ensured that young children's needs were nested within the context of other resettlement needs, increasing the likelihood that families from diverse cultural backgrounds to engage.

Locating multicultural playgroups within kindergartens appeared to be an excellent engagement strategy, especially when the

Director made a point of being part of the playgroup on a regular basis, taking the time to form relationships with parents and to answer their questions. Families who were shy to approach formal early learning institutions became familiar and comfortable in this environment. Word of mouth is a particularly good way to promote a service within the context of a cultural community. Kindergartens that ran playgroups in tandem with community-based organisations found that their enrolments increased considerably.

A successful strategy employed by several community partners was the provision of outreach to families through releasing workers to conduct home visits and attend cultural events.

Once trust had been established, the worker was able to educate and reassure parents about the differences between the education system in Australia and their country of origin. Some families came from countries with no early childhood infrastructure due to many years of war and political disruption. Others had cared for their children collectively in the safety of a village environment, with grandmothers, aunts and older siblings sharing the role of primary caregiver and thus negating the need for formal child care.

Eliminating barriers to participation

Pre-Kindergarten Grants (PKG) program partners worked towards eliminating physical barriers to inclusion by providing practical and material support directly to families through fee relief, waiting list payments, assistance with



Stakeholders and partners at the EMBRACE Practice Symposium, 2014

collating, translating and filling in complex enrolment paperwork, which was always in English, and through the provision of transport. They ensured that children had lunch boxes, hats, bags and sunscreen to help families financially. They also educated educators about the importance of engaging accredited interpreters rather than relying on family members or older children.

The result of these well-timed early intervention strategies was that many children are now thriving in their early years. Their culture is being validated and their sense of identity and self-worth along with it. Children who engaged positively with an early childhood service as a result of the EMBRACE program or our community partner programs have now made a confident transition to school.

We firmly believe that all children living in Australia deserve the right to belong, to be and to become (DEEWR, 2009), and we know that educators can make this a reality for children from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, migrant

and refugee backgrounds by creating early learning environments that are culturally safe, culturally inclusive and culturally appropriate.

As educators and practitioners we can continue to work towards achieving cultural competence by implementing the strategies such as those outlined in this article as part of our standard practice.

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Perspectives on positive cultural identity

Dr Rekha Prasad and Roya Yeganeh



Rekha has worked in the area of cultural diversity with the Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS), the multicultural care unit and the Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia, TAFE and the University of South Australia. Before migrating to Australia she lectured at Indian universities in the area of family studies.



Roya has extensive experience working with children who have a disability, and with refugees, humanitarian entrants, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. She has worked across multiple sectors, in diverse areas of practice and research.

Culture is the fundamental building block of identity, and the development of a strong cultural identity is essential to a child's healthy sense of who they are, and where they belong (Connor 2011).

In an Australian context, 'culture incorporates the scope of human diversity and ways of being, such as gender, ethnicity, class, religions, ability, age and sexuality' (DEEWR 2010, p.22). Cultural identity is the foundation for social awareness and connection. It gives us a positive sense of who we are, and the feeling that we are valued and respected, as part of our family, community and society.



Learning and sharing

Children achieve better outcomes when their diverse strengths, abilities and cultural practices are understood and supported. These positive experiences support children in developing an understanding of themselves as significant and respected individuals, and to feel a sense of belonging in their early childhood service.



Sensitive interactions

Moving between cultures and identities

It is common for people to move between cultures and identities. Young children in early childhood settings have opportunities to learn from and share in these experiences.

The experience of cultural change plays a major role in changing children's identities. Children may not only look different, they may also come from countries with different social and political climates. They may have parents from different racial and ethnic groups or they may have been traumatised by a refugee experience.

Cultural change may also influence the parenting role. The main or dominant culture is likely to affect specific values, attitudes or social norms of the individual child and may sometimes lead the child to negate their own identity.

When children from diverse cultural backgrounds participate equitably they have opportunities to be creative, resourceful and cooperative. They feel a sense of belonging and learn to appreciate diversity in others.

Family a vital role in children's identity

Children's acquisition of cultural identity starts with their family experiences. Children develop positive self-identities and better educational outcomes when early childhood professionals build on the work of the family to provide culturally safe, inclusive and appropriate programs.

When children experience a sense of belonging, their sense of safety and wellbeing is enhanced, which helps them make meaningful connections with their environment and their community. Building social networks and friendships helps them to feel part of their community and to learn within a community context. Families are better able to support their children when they are informed about and connected to their community through support services, cultural groups and social networks.

Enabling children to develop a positive sense of themselves

As educators we play a major role in enabling children to feel emotionally and culturally safe and to develop a positive sense of themselves. You can do this by:



Being a role model.



Supporting early friendships

1. Creating welcoming environments that support a sense of belonging for all children.
2. Encouraging families to actively participate in your early childhood program, and to share their culture if they are confident to do so.
3. Giving respect, love, and encouragement so they are confident to share their cultural stories and experiences.
4. Demonstrating positive cultural messages that result in them feeling proud to be themselves and to learn from each other.
5. Embracing diversity by talking about differences and similarities.
6. Interacting sensitively and being a role model.
7. Supporting early friendships which add new dimensions to children's sense of who they are and where they belong.
8. Turning differences into learning opportunities.

Conclusion

Children knowing who they are, and what their cultural roots are, will not only bring them closer to their home culture, but also enable them to become better Australian citizens. By embedding cultural diversity into all aspects of the early childhood environment, we will encourage children to think critically and this will support and facilitate opportunities for all children to be curious and inquisitive about diversity.

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Unwrapping the layers of inclusion

Jenny Finlay



With over 30 years experience, Jenny Finlay has worked across numerous areas of the early childhood education sector including as a kindergarten Director, Daycare Director, TAFE and University lecturer. Jenny is currently Director of Borilla Community Kindergarten in Emerald Queensland and has held this position for 19 years. Jenny has a passion for inclusion and supporting families as they travel individual and sometimes difficult journeys. She is an advocate for ensuring rural children and families have the same opportunities as those in larger towns. Jenny has also mentored numerous educators through their study helping many individuals achieve their teaching qualification. She is currently the QIEU Early Childhood representative.

Early childhood education can be a challenging domain in which to work. This is primarily due to our core business: children and families! Children and families do not come in identical packages, from similar backgrounds or live in similar communities. Children and families are unique and come from distinct genes, multiple family contexts, diverse communities and often various countries.

What is inclusion?

How do we ensure each child's specific needs are accommodated? Inclusion is the magical word. The Early Years Learning Framework (2009) defines inclusion as 'taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes'. Early Childhood Intervention Australia (2016) takes inclusion a step further and lists the active participation of children with and without additional needs, within their family, early childhood programs and community settings. Perhaps it is Guigni (2015) who really encapsulates this magical word inclusion when she states

It is easy to think that working with inclusion, diversity and difference is about including those who are different, but as we have established, everyone's different.

Why is it important?

Early childhood educators set standards of delivery in their curriculum. The early childhood education benchmark in Australia is set by The National Quality Standard (NQS), a national level for early childhood education and care, and outside school hours care services in Australia. This is reinforced by The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Commonwealth of Australia 2009), which sets out the foundation for ensuring that children in all early childhood education and care settings experience quality teaching and learning. Furthermore, individual State curriculums such as the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline and Building Waterfalls detail the goals and outcomes to be delivered in the early childhood education realm. These documents set the scene for the delivery of a program that is inclusive.

How can we achieve this?

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) developed the ecological systems theory to explain how everything in a child and the child's environment affects how a child grows and develops. This theory fits with the above described documentation early childhood educators are to follow in Australia.

What does it look like?

Put simply, inclusion begins with the child.

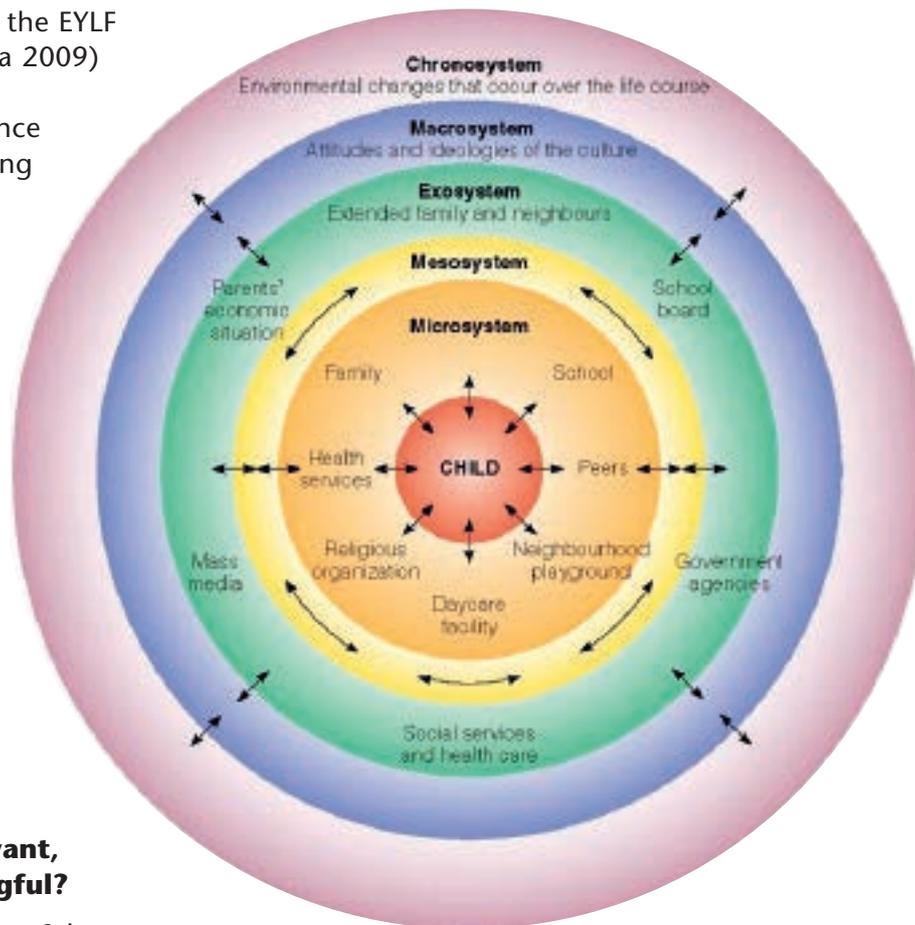
The five principles stated in the EYLF (Commonwealth of Australia 2009) that reflect contemporary theories and research evidence concerning children's learning and early childhood pedagogy are those that are used for every child:

1. **Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships**
2. **Partnerships**
3. **High expectations and equity**
4. **Respect for diversity**
5. **Ongoing learning and reflective practice**

How can each early childhood service strive for inclusion that is relevant, professional and meaningful?

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS, 2013) has put forward the transdisciplinary early childhood model. This model involves a team of professionals who work collaboratively and share the responsibilities of evaluating, planning and implementing services to children and their families. Families are valued members of the team and are involved at all levels. One professional is chosen as the primary service provider for the family and acts as the conduit for the expertise of the team. The full team remains involved and the primary provider reports back to the team constantly. The Early Childhood Intervention Reform Project (DEECD 2010) provided a synthesis of the evidence that suggests that the following key features are critical:

- High-quality early childhood programs form the necessary structural base for high-quality inclusive programs (an element of NQF, EYLF and QKLG)
- Specialised instruction is an important component of inclusion (this is called intentional teaching in QKLG and supported by ECDP)



- Adequate support is necessary to make inclusive environments work (an element of the National Quality Framework, Early Years Learning Framework and Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline)

Inclusion in action is not so simple

There are definite barriers to inclusion. Some of these barriers include:

- Attitudes. Staff, family and the wider community may have preconceived attitudes about inclusion that may take time and work to overcome.
- Staff training. There is an unquestionable need for professional attitudes and skills. The availability of training, and the cost to services, particularly in rural areas can create financial barriers.

- Time constraints. Additional time needs to be given to make inclusion successful. Time for:
 - planning
 - meeting with parents
 - meeting with teams/therapists
 - staff training
 - writing Individual Learning Plans
- Resources, class size and room size need to be considered.
- Many communities struggle to have consistent access to trained therapists and staff.
- Families accessibility to these services.

How can a service build its own capacity to accommodate inclusion and make it successful?

Achieving successful inclusion in your service is not insurmountable. There are some very basic things that you can do to break down the barriers

- Employ diverse staff
- Participate in professional development
- Source resources – these can be borrowed from Noahs Ark or build your own resource pool
- Advocate for early childhood everywhere you can
- Become a presence in your local community



Provide adequate support



Children as active participants



Specialised instruction

- Attend meetings – local level alliance, child protection strategy meetings, disability support meetings, interagency meetings, early childhood networks
- Write/ring to your local State or Federal member
- Apply for grants
- Talk with your committee/manager/central governing body/management
- Challenge past practices
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Build your service capacity – add a speech therapist on staff if necessary
- Dare to dream
- Self-care – always take good care of yourself first.

Within the current educational climate and with the roll out of the NDIS a reality, the conversations around 'inclusion' are becoming more complex and placing greater demands on the early childhood sector. Despite all the pressure and uncertainty it is clear that 'inclusion' is not something 'we do' for a particular child. It is a continuous approach to working with children, parents, families and colleagues every day (Wardle 2003). It is embedded in everything we do for every child, from the moment a parent/carer completes a waiting list form until the child transitions to

school and sometimes beyond this. It is a 'lived philosophy', dynamic and responsive to the individual need of each child and family. Enjoy the journey!

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Growing the pear tree: transforming practice beyond learning outcomes

Lisa Keegan



Lisa is a research student with Griffith University. Her research focuses on the outcomes of the National Quality Standards (NQS) assessment ratings for services Australia-wide and the barriers to early childhood educators implementing transformational change in practice within their service in implementing the Early Years Learning Framework and NQS. Prior to embarking on research Lisa was the Director of the Bayside Community College Early Childhood Centre, based on campus at Moreton Institute of TAFE (Alexandra Hills campus).

National Quality Standards (NQS) rating outcomes indicate more than half a million children are attending poor quality or non-rated services Australia-wide (ACECQA 2016; SCRGSP 2015; AEDC 2015). *Quality Area 1 Educational program and practice* requires most improvement with critical reflection and the application of all elements of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) fundamental (ACECQA 2016). Broader societal, economic and political impacts on NQS quality rating outcomes must be explored further and solutions found. In the interim, educators skilled in critical reflection and possessing knowledge of the EYLF provide a higher quality of care and education for children (ACECQA 2016).

Educators play a pivotal role in quality early years experiences, important determiners to children's immediate and lifelong outcomes (SCRGSP 2015; Moore & MacDonald 2013). The NQS legislate quality care and education benchmarks which individual services interpret and implement to meet their individual service contexts (DEEWR 2009; ACECQA 2013b). Assessment by regulatory authorities determines that of the 15,333 services operating Australia-wide (ACECQA 2016) only 45 have received an excellent rating (the highest rating achievable). Almost one third are not meeting the NQS, and of these 22% did not meet *Quality Area 1 Educational program and practice* with 47% not meeting *Element 1.2.3 Critical*

reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, which is regularly used to implement the program, fundamental for the quality care and education of children (ACECQA 2016).

Key factors impacting educators' capacities to meet the NQS include imposed societal, economic and political constraints (SCRGSP 2015; Yarrow 2015; DET 2013). Improving educators' knowledge of embedded critical reflection and inter-related elements of the EYLF (ACECQA 2016) empowers educators to direct change.

Educator practices are influenced by socially constructed ways of thinking, varied interpretations, diverse and complex pedagogies, and the differing dialogues existing in services (Cartmel et al 2012). These create habitual and learnt thinking and behaviours influenced by historically constructed views and cultural influences on the role of family, maternal care, childhood, employment and government (Penn 2011). For continual improvement, the NQS require taken-for-granted to be identified and reconsidered through critically reflective practices (Penn 2011).

Examining multiple perspectives, linking theory to practice, actively exchanging new knowledge and ideas, considering diversity of interpretations, and suspending judgment (Macfarlane et al 2014) reveal the entrenched

taken-for-granted practices that can occur within childcare services.

Empowering educators to rethink current practices by questioning their validity to expectations within the NQS improves outcomes for children and families accessing services (Cartmel et al 2012).

Pre-supposed ways of thinking require examination through equity and a social justice lens (DEEWR 2009). When engaging with young children, this occurs when adults (those in positions of power over the child) ensure advantage is not applied adversely in their interactions with children (MacNaughton, Smith and Lawrence 2004) ensuring children are active decision makers and participants (DEEWR 2009).

Secondly, social justice occurs through engaging with and teaching children equity, human rights and social justice (Brodyk 2010). Modelling socially just interactions in the service, and critically reflecting to question and challenge the status quo within and beyond the service is paramount to creating an inclusive and socially just environment for children (Commonwealth Government 2015). Social justice is not about 'right or wrong' but analysis and critical reflection on events, circumstances and attitudes, to make informed socially just decisions (Brodyk 2010). Educators must possess and practice behaviours and attitudes reflecting socially just teachings and expectations for children, to meet the requirements of critical reflection within the NQS.

The NQS include higher standards with more challenging elements (ACECQA 2013a) that empower services' self-determinations in program provision, shifting from a compliance-based to collaborative approach, and endorsing ongoing quality improvement. To continue with entrenched habits and taken-for-granted is at odds with this intent. Critical reflection to improve pedagogy must be made visible through documenting ongoing changes and improvements (ACECQA 2013b) that reflect the needs of children and the service context (ACECQA 2013c).

Documentation should show educators' critical reflection as a way of 'being' in the world, a lens through which pedagogy and

documentation occur (ACECQA 2013c). Critical reflection is not an outcome or end product but rather is woven into the fibre of quality childcare provision. This challenges educators' curriculum decision making, their traditional practices and the impact of these for children (DEEWR 2009). Identifying and deconstructing taken-for-granted reveals underlining agendas and notions (Cartmel et al 2012) and generates ongoing professional learning (ACECQA 2013b) regarding children's engagements and learning. Analysis of documentation from multiple perspectives (ACECQA 2013b) including considerations of social justice provides young children the opportunity to enhance their current potential, a foundation for future learning success (ACECQA 2016).

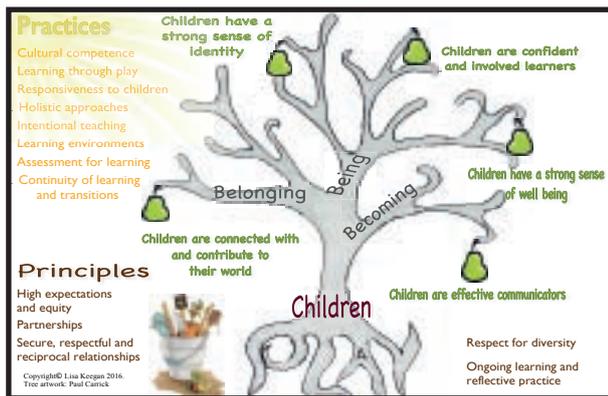
Templates or program formats for documentation are non-prescriptive within the NQS; educators may develop a method that meets their individual needs (ACECQA 2013c).

Content quality is of importance, not quantity or formatting style. Additionally, services are required to implement the EYLF in its entirety to provide evidence that an approved learning framework informs their curriculum (ACECQA 2016).

Almost half of services not meeting the NQS are not meeting *Standard 1.1 An approved learning framework informs the development of a curriculum that enhances each child's learning and development* (ACECQA 2016). For quality learning outcomes to occur all three interrelated elements of the EYLF (DEEWR 2009) must be intertwined in the program, not exist in isolation.

This 'growing the pear tree' analogy shows the inter-relatedness of all elements of the EYLF. For a tree (child) to reach their full potential requires good foundations (play-based learning and child focus), strong branches (belonging, being, becoming), tending of the soil (principles) and sunlight (practices), ultimately reaping high quality fruit (learning outcomes). Learning outcomes cannot be achieved without interplay of all elements.

Each child's progression within and across the outcomes will differ yet be equally significant



(DEEWR 2009). Therefore, EYLF learning outcome examples exist as a brief compilation of possible examples (DEEWR 2009). They are neither compulsory nor exhaustive. Learning will differ between children based on their interests and capabilities and therefore cannot be predetermined nor deemed as universal (DEEWR 2009; ACECQA 2013c).

Improvements are required in educational program and practice, particularly embedding critical reflection and all elements of the EYLF.

Whilst broader impacts influencing educator's capacities to engage in quality practices exist, improvements in pedagogy potentially empowers educators to improve quality outcomes for the 99,655 educators and 1.2 million children currently engaged in child care services across Australia.

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Thinking play: curriculum designers

Michelle Scheu



Through her practice as an early childhood educator, Michelle has developed a pedagogy known as Thinking Play. At her school, she is an early year's team leader, mentor and a cognitive coach. She is passionate about sharing her learning, striving to contribute to local and global educational communities. Michelle mentors teachers from across Queensland on implementing Thinking Play through classroom visits, emails and on networking websites. She has been published in *Reggio Australia*, *The Educator* and *Early Horizons* magazines. Michelle was awarded an ASG NEiTA National Teaching Award in Leadership and attended the Education Accord Summit in 2014. Michelle set up a YouTube channel to promote play-based education. The most well-known of her clips, titled 'Let the children play', has received over 3800 views worldwide.

Australian curriculum

It is a challenge for governments globally to design curriculum to meet the diverse educational needs of its young, enabling them to become effective members of society. Since the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, education has shifted from the reliance on trusted teaching professionals to provide developmentally sensitive learning, tailored to meet children's needs, to being replaced by a curriculum driven by an increasing use of over-generalised norm-reference testing. The impact of this change is most evident in the education of children under the age of eight



Play that is relevant to the lives of young children

where active, inquiry, play-based methods were once used to teach children to think and reason. In many settings, this style of learning has been replaced by passive formalised instruction where focused learning has become the testable restating of facts. If policy makers want Australian children to grow into effective members of society, this has to be reflected in the way its teachers implement the Australian Curriculum.

Accountability

Policy makers preference learning and teaching that can be easily measured through norm-referenced tests. These assessment tools create publishable data where learning outcomes can be compared between individuals, schools and regions. Such assessments focus on the acquisition and regurgitation of facts and procedures (Mergler 2010) potentially causing a negative impact on teaching and learning. Norm-referenced testing fails to explain what a child actually knows – an assessment of learning as opposed to an assessment for learning. This form of testing can dictate the teaching and learning process, and create a competitive culture that discourages children from working collaboratively to problem-solve and to share ideas and experiences – key skills required to work effectively within the 21st Century.



Rich real life experiences

Successfully educating individuals to reach their full potential depends on a multifaceted and complex web of contributing factors.

Education cannot be at its best if focus is given to only one or two factors such as norm-testing and accountability.

Decline in student performance

Australia has seen a steady decline in student performance in the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) scores, with the 2015 report showing the lowest in the past ten years (Bagshaw and Smith 2016). During this period, NAPLAN and the Australian Curriculum (AC) were introduced throughout Australia, and Curriculum to Classroom (C2C) was introduced in Queensland as a suggested method of delivery to assist teachers in implementing the AC in their classrooms.

Decades of teacher experience and craft knowledge is being ignored, as education leaders promote this approach as best practice in a top down model for all teachers and classrooms to adopt.

On the other hand, Finland's approach to education, which promotes a well-balanced, effective teaching cycle, boasts the highest PISA scores in the world (OECD 2015).

Open-ended learning

Concerned teachers are searching for alternative ways to implement the AC. These teachers and administrators, are investigating a return to inquiry-based learning, such as 'Walker Learning' (Walker 2007) 'Lane Clarke Inquiry Process' (Clarke) and Thinking Play (Scheu 2015) where curriculum is centred on an investigation that promotes open-ended learning.

Children assume the role of partner in the decision-making process, facilitating deep thinking throughout. Both essential and incidental learning is valued equally, to honour the uniqueness and individual intelligence of each child.

Teachers ensure education possesses real world relevance by tailoring the investigation to suit the individual needs, interests and real life concerns of the children they are teaching in the context of their local community. Assessment processes are built into the learning experience to facilitate children's view of learning as relevant and useful, becoming an assessment for learning (Mergler 2010).

Assessment

Assessment needs to be authentic, providing accurate information on a child's learning,



Children take ownership of their learning

demonstrating their ability to think, reason, inquire and construct knowledge. As opposed to driving the curriculum, authentic assessment focuses on the students' 'key knowledge, understandings, common skills and learning dispositions' (Mergler 2010, p. 52; Killen 2005). When assessment is authentic it informs practice and is part of a balanced teaching cycle (Ormiston 2011). Teaching that facilitates imagination, creativity and higher order thinking occurs when it is deliberately planned for. Albert Einstein (1953, 1947) expressed a similar view on education, claiming that a society's competitive advantage will not come from how well its schools teach the multiplication and periodic table, but from how well they stimulate imagination and creativity and train the mind to think.

Curriculum designers

Teachers build valuable relationships with children, their families and the wider community, and accumulate knowledge of each child and their developmental stage.

Frequent interactions and observations by the teacher help to design rich inquiry-based curriculum. This addresses the individual learning needs of each child with support, as they work in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978). Dedicated early years teachers have grieved the loss of researched, play-based inquiry teaching



Literacy is embedded in play

methods where curriculum was child-initiated and designed in collaboration, and where developmental continua were used to track learning (Early Years Curriculum Guidelines 2006).

In many Prep classrooms familiar resources such as painting easels, blocks, costumes and manipulative equipment have been pushed aside for desks as teachers feel pressure to implement the teacher-directed, formalised learning of the scripted C2C units with accompanying worksheet-style assessments. The autonomy of teachers in their role as curriculum designers has been ignored with many teachers being asked to follow a single approach to instruction.

Nurturing the full potential of the child

One of society's greatest responsibilities to its people is to educate their young wisely. The over-generalised, over-assessed education of the masses cannot effectively compete with curriculum designed by teachers who are well-informed in researched-based pedagogy and highly skilled in the practice of meeting the individual needs of the child. These curriculum designers facilitate developmentally sensitive learning to enable the child to work in their zone of proximal development, ensuring each child views themselves as capable and successful.

Learning becomes excitingly dynamic when the child is asked to think and not just to know, to be a partner in curriculum design and not just a passive receiver of information.

Nurturing the full potential of a child in their development as a valued, effective member of society must be embedded in educational pedagogy. It is time to give trust back where it belongs and reinstate teachers as curriculum designers. When curriculum design is moved from the preferences of political parties and entrusted to teaching professionals who implement researched-based pedagogy to address the individual learning needs of children, progress will become possible.



Skills for life - collaboration and co-operation



Children are partners in the decision making processes

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Not just five currant buns: transitions in early childhood

Kay Harling and Julie Kavanagh



Julie Kavanagh and Kay Harling have combined early childhood experiences of over 60 years. They work in a double unit kindergarten in Emerald in Central Queensland and have a wealth of practical knowledge to share with other educators. Kay and Julie feel their best qualification is that they are teachers working in the industry with children daily and providing stimulating quality education to their students.

In the seemingly unstructured flow of our daily work environment, there are times that stand out as those most likely to develop into chaos. When children's behaviour becomes unpredictable, out of control and rowdy challenging behaviours surface. Why is it that some people can bring a rowdy group of four-year-olds to attention without shouting, demanding, or blowing a whistle while others struggle to maintain the smallest amount of leadership?

Let's take some time out to observe exactly what is happening during your transition times. Ask a co-worker to observe your most challenging transition and reflect on your practice. What is happening around you? Are you using a loud voice? Are you distracted by too many details? Or are you fully present and ready to gently and calmly guide children through the process?

Ideas that work

Remember, you want to calmly guide children through change not make every change a rush. There are many ways to make the process flow naturally and smoothly:

1. *Involve children*
Giving young children a gentle reminder prior to clean up helps them to mentally

Transitions refer to those times throughout the day when the focus moves from one activity to another, for example moving from the outdoor environment to the indoor environment.

prepare for the change. We recommend going around the room and calmly sharing the news.

2. *Utilise co-workers' strengths*
Co-workers who are confident with singing and engaging children can sit with the main group of children whilst others work with small groups to tidy individual areas.
3. *Reduce amount to be done*
Keep the environment at a manageable level of tidy. Use discretion and consult with children to tidy a space or pack it away if it is no longer being utilised.
4. *Positive reinforcement*
Praise, praise, praise. Make sure you be specific, that is 'Oh Kay, you have packed all of the blocks away into exactly the right places, that is fantastic' rather than 'Wow Kay, great packing up!'

5. Fair not equal

It is important to remember children have different capabilities and expectations must change to reflect this. Children can be expected to help at their maximum capacity. We must be flexible as educators and accept that children will also not be able to achieve the same results on different days and at different times.

The way your environment is set up makes a difference to whether children will be successfully independent.

To help transitions run smoothly, you will want the set up of your room to lead the children towards taking care of their own needs. This might involve simple things like making sure paper towels and a rubbish bin are within children's reach and beside the sink so children won't have to walk across the room to dry their hands and put paper towels

in the bin. Or bigger things such as making sure you position the furniture in your room so it gives clearly defined areas for play and clearly defined places to put things away. If you find yourself having to follow behind children sorting things that land in the wrong place, consider whether your room needs to be more clearly defined and intentional in its design so the children can achieve greater success.

Consider your daily schedule or routine.

Does each part of your day naturally lead to the next or does it require a complete stop and restart? When planning your daily routine, visualise how your children will be able to progress through the day without having to come to a complete stop and without having to wait.

Sing simple songs and chants with actions that promote fine motor control, listening, working together, rhyme, rhythm and more.

Songs such as *Ethel the caterpillar* can be shared with sound, without sound, and the words can be changed. Choose songs or finger plays that help to keep little hands and voices and bodies busy and focused on enjoying time in music together. Remember, a transition isn't a time to teach a brand new song as much as it is a time to pull out old favourites and modify them.

Transition times are also a good time for teachable moments

in daily routines such as why we use tissues to blow our noses, germs and how they spread. Then give the children an opportunity to put their new understanding into real life practice. As your children become more adept at meeting small expectations, your transitions will naturally start to run more smoothly.

Finally, **use transition times to build community.** Do this by being fully present and prepared with ideas for keeping children engaged during the process of transitions. Building community is all about positive interactions and conversations so bring your best to every transition as a teacher and lead your children toward having a successful experience.



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Title:	We're going on an egg hunt
Author and Illustrator:	Laura Hughes
Published By:	Bloomsbury
ISBN:	978 1 4088 7011 2 - pb
RRP:	\$14.99
Reviewed by:	Sue Webster

Laura Hughes, London-based author and illustrator, has reworked the old favourite of *We're going on a bear hunt* to create an exciting lift-the-flap egg hunt. This book is a delightful romp through a farm (I love the way the themes of farm and Easter are involved) to find all ten eggs that have been hidden by that rascal of a bunny.

The story is a happily familiar one with an Easter twist.

We're going on an egg hunt.

We're going to find them all.

We're REALLY excited.

Hooray for Easter Day!

We excitedly follow the bunnies on a hunt for the eggs all over the farm and come across ducks, bees, chicks and lambs. There is also a devilish wolf to keep track of through the story and a fun door slamming end to the race home.

The illustrations are colourful and perfect for this Easter story. Each page has much to take in and consider as well as the flaps to peek underneath.

This is a wonderful book to keep in mind for next year's Easter reading.

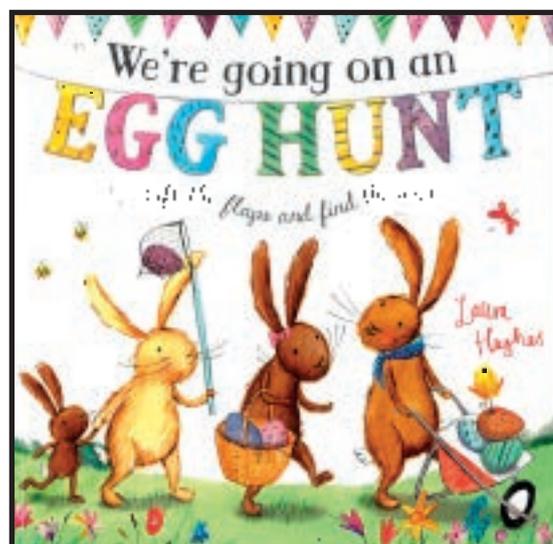
Ideal for young children of any age.

A few of my friends said:

Violet – 'The hunt for the eggs is very exciting. I would like to do one.'

Drew – 'I really, really liked it when they slammed the door on the wolf. I laughed.'

Felix – 'The pictures are very colourful and pretty. I would like to paint an Easter egg.'



Guidelines for writers

The EYC editorial panel welcomes articles and ideas for possible inclusion in the journal.

One of the journal's strengths is in the variety and individuality of contributions. These style guidelines should help you to prepare your contribution in the EYC 'style'.

Style

We like to maintain a uniformity of approach within the journal. Here are some examples of the preferred 'house' style.

- Use Australian spelling in preference to American.
- Write numbers up to twelve as words; figures are used for numbers 13 upwards. (For example: one, eleven, 18, 200.) Exceptions are where numbers appear in a table, list or refer to a measure. (For example: Anne was seven-years-old when she walked 5 kilometres to school.)
- Use the following examples to help you write dates and times:
15 February 2006, 1900s.
She left at 7.25 am in order to catch the seven-forty train.
- Usually, you would write amounts of money in numerals. (For example: 20c or \$0.20, \$120 and \$88.15.) Words may be used in approximations such as 'he made millions of dollars'.
- Use italics for titles. For example: *The Australian* rather than 'The Australian'.
- Use a single space after full stop.
- Use single quotes.
- Use an en dash between spans of numbers.
- Aim for a style that is free of jargon or slang (unless this is relevant to your contribution).
- Don't assume that your audience has prior knowledge of your topic. For example, it is possible your readers will not be familiar with an acronym that you use every day. You should use the full reference the first time, followed by the acronym in brackets as shown here: Early Childhood Teachers' Association (ECTA).
- Advertorial should not be included.

Referencing

If your contribution concludes with a list of references, you should check these carefully as the editor may only pick obvious typographical errors. A search on Google usually brings up any reference you do not have to hand.

Maybe you need help with referencing. If so, The preferred style for the *ECTA Journal* is the author-date system (pp. 188–208 of the *Style manual for authors, editors and printers, 6th ed.*).

Example of in-text citations: This approach (Smith 1995; Tyler 2002) suggests ...

Example of book referencing: O'Hagan, M 2001, *Early years practitioner*, 4th edn, Harcourt, London.

Example of journal referencing: Bredekamp, S 2006, 'Staying true to our principles', *Educating Young Children*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 21-4.

Direct quotations within your article should be in italics and referenced with name of author and the source.

Specific terminology

We are presently compiling a standardised list of frequently used terms. Examples are:

- day care (rather than daycare or day-care)
- child care (rather than childcare or child-care)
- preschool (rather than pre-school)
- the Preparatory Year or Prep (rather than prep)
- Year One, Year Two/Three (words rather than numbers)
- 'the staff members are' (instead of the awkward singular noun 'the staff is ...')
- five-year-olds (i.e. age with hyphens)

The journal committee reserves the right to undertake some minimal editing or rewriting in order to maintain conformity of 'house style'. If an article is provisionally accepted, but fairly major changes are required, we will contact you to discuss this.

Length of contribution

- Article: 1200 words
- Book review: 300 words
- Regular article: 650 words

Form of submission

Your contribution should be submitted via email to info@ecta.org.au Photographs may be submitted digitally – minimum 3 megapixels on the highest resolution. Art works should be scanned. Photographs require a release agreement. A hard copy should also be included.

Author release forms must be signed and a hard copy forwarded to ECTA 20 Hilton Road, Gympie, Qld. 4570. Where original artwork or material has been submitted it will be returned at the contributor's request. All contributors will be sent a copy of the journal.

