



Educating Young Children

***Learning and teaching
in the early childhood
years***

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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the lands that we live on, work on and travel through together. We pay our respects to their elders, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the spiritual connections, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. We recognise their strength and resilience and their long history of caring for and educating children here. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region. We recognise the importance of continued connection to culture, country and community to the health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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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.

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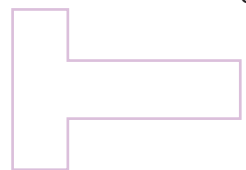
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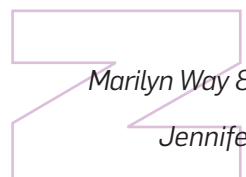
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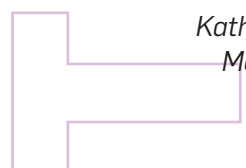
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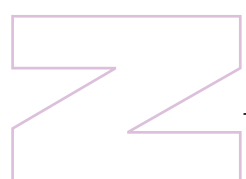
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From the President

The ECTA AGM will be held on 28 November. I invite all members to nominate for positions on the ECTA State Coordinating Committee, Conference, Website and Journal committees. If you would like to discuss your nomination, please phone me on 0418 157 280. Nomination and Proxy Forms will be emailed to all members.



This year has seen ECTA featured on TV News and The Sunday Project and in various newspaper articles. Our Facebook page has 4,324 LIKES which has allowed us to have huge reach this year. The ECTA Statement on *National Assessment Program of Literacy*

and Numeracy (NAPLAN) impact on Audit Culture went viral and currently has a reach of 29,501. Many, many comments congratulating ECTA on the initiative have been posted.

This year representatives from the ECTA State Coordinating Committee met privately with both Grace Grace, Education Minister, and Tony Cook, Director-General of the Department of Education, to discuss ECTA and current issues in early childhood education. ECTA is a regular invitee to the Department of Education Early Years Forum and Early Years Focus Committees organised by the forum. Attending these forums allows ECTA to have a regular voice on early childhood matters at the top level in the Queensland Government and Department of Education.

ECTA representatives have attended a wide number of other events during this year. These include: the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Feedback Session on developing online resources to support PD; AITSL stakeholder consultation on professional learning in early childhood; National Forum on High Quality PD facilitated by AITSL in Melbourne; Ten Year QL Sport and Active Recreation Strategy Forum; Blue Card Consultation Forum; National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse; Department of Education Inclusion Policy Discussion; 2020 Early Childhood Teacher Workforce Working Group; Department of Education Regional Workforce Action Plan Forum; ECIA Best Practice Project Round Table; National Stakeholder Consultation for the Early Childhood Education Expert Panel; and the Department of Education Forum to reflect on recommendations from the *National Review of Teacher Registration* by AITSL.

The National Review of Teacher Registration report made the following recommendations: Require all early childhood teachers in Australia, regardless of

their employment setting, to be registered by teacher regulatory authorities; and amend the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to ensure their relevance and applicability to early childhood teachers.

The report is available at <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/national-review-of-teacher-registration>

ECTA submitted feedback on: the Department's Strategic Plan 2018–2020; *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline (QKLG)*; Review of The Queensland Plan – stakeholder consultation; National Review of Teacher Registration; Discussion Paper on the Statement for young children and digital technology; IHC National Guidelines; and Department HR policies & supporting documents.

The ECTA Early Childhood Conference to be held on 29 June 2019 will be an important networking and fund-raising event for ECTA.

Regional groups play a very important role in expanding ECTA's reach to our colleagues, who may or may not be ECTA members.

Our webinar series allows us to reach all members regardless of their location. This is a major investment financially for ECTA and vital to support all members, especially those in regional and remote areas. Webinars are a major incentive for organisations to join ECTA, as all staff can register to participate online from work or home. We are currently changing our webinar provider and will keep you informed with developments, including how to register with the new system.

Our website needs upgrading so that it is more user-friendly for those visiting and, more importantly, for those posting to the site. Unfortunately, we applied unsuccessfully for a grant to upgrade the current site. We will continue to work towards achieving this goal in the not too distant future.

The *Educating Young Children Journal* continues to provide high quality professional learning for our members and colleagues and I hope you will enjoy this issue, which features articles sourced from conference presenters and experts across the early years sector.

Yours in Education

Kim

Becoming a 'Circle of Security' kindergarten

Last year I came across a quote:

*'Children who develop **secure attachment** grow into caring, thoughtful, reflective, emotionally and socially intelligent, resilient individuals who thrive' (Siegel 2017 p.ix).*



Melissa Clark is currently teaching at Bulimba Community Kindergarten. This is her sixth year of teaching kindergarten. Prior to this, she taught for 11 years in primary schools in state and Catholic sectors in Queensland and the UK. Melissa is a certified 'Circle of Security' parent facilitator.

This quote made me reflect: 'What more could we want for our children? Isn't this what all of us would want for our child?' There is a plethora of research highlighting why kindergartens and early childhood settings should include attachment-based programs as training for staff, parents and professionals working with young children. With this in mind, I began to investigate ways that Bulimba Community Kindergarten could receive attachment-based training, and also find a program that extended this offer of support and training to past, present and future families. It was from research and speaking with other health professionals like psychologists that the 'Circle of Security' (COS) program kept coming up. This early intervention program aims to increase attachment and security and was developed by Glen Cooper, Kent Hoffman, and Bert Powell.

Based on more than five decades of research and the latest studies in neuroscience, the COS parenting program aims to provide children with a secure attachment with their

caregivers. We all know that when there is consistency between the home and kindergarten environments our children benefit. This consistency is where the COS comes into its own because first and foremost it is a parenting program. The theories, application and approaches can easily be used and adopted in an early childhood or classroom setting.

Embedding COS was the goal I had for our kindergarten, and this year Bulimba Community Kindergarten's teaching staff all completed the COS parenting program and now implements its approach in their day-to-day interactions with the children. And while it took more than four years before this idea became a reality, it is wonderful to see the success of this program in our setting. The teachers, parents and most importantly the children are thriving from this approach. Many of our children benefit from not only having the consistent COS approach we use at kindergarten, but also having the COS approach in their homes too. Close to 40 parents and grandparents from our community



have completed the parenting program. This is a wonderful accomplishment for our community kindergarten, and especially for our children, as we are all working together to enable the children to develop secure attachments.

Last year I attended the COS parent facilitators' training in Sydney, with one of the co-founders of COS, Burt Powell. It was amazing to learn about the program from one of the original developers of this successful worldwide program. The skills I obtained during this training enabled me to take our teaching staff through the COS parenting program at the start of the year. The enthusiasm, critical reflection and professional discussions we engaged in as a staff during this training were incredible.

We started 2018 with a renewed sense of the importance of our role in shaping young children and their families' lives. The settling-in period at the start of the year was smoother than previous years. Our teachers felt equipped to help the children regulate and manage their emotions during this time. I was amazed at how well the classes settled into the kindergarten and how supported the children appeared in their new environment. This consistent approach helped teaching staff across the setting get on the same page when it came to settling and engaging with the children around emotional regulation. It provided us with a common language when discussing individual children's needs and ways we could support them.



The COS offered a simple roadmap to see where all the children were, what they needed, and how we could ensure individual needs were responded to quickly and effectively. It also enabled teachers to develop the ability to critically reflect on and discuss their struggles in meeting individual needs through the concept of 'shark music'. During staff meetings,

we mention our 'shark music' and have an open discussion around why this may be occurring and what strategies we can put in place to support each other through this experience. As early childhood professionals, it is refreshing and empowering to develop our awareness and understanding of why children's emotions can sometimes have a negative impact on us. As a teacher with many years' experience, I have found this fascinating, as everyone has different 'shark music'.



Being able to offer this program to our parents was another important factor in wanting to implement COS in the kindergarten program, and it was wonderful that this program was so well received by our parents. The places filled quickly, and I was able to offer it in both term one and term two, due to its popularity. The feedback received from parents helped to reinforce the idea that offering the program was the right decision for our kindergarten. Several parents had already heard or read about the COS and were keen to come along. One parent commented at the end of the program that 'After doing this program, it is the first time in eight years that I am enjoying parenting'. That was a powerful statement to read.

I will continue to offer this parenting program to new staff members as they join our team. It will also be offered every year to our families and the wider community. It feels rewarding to be part of a positive change that benefits our kindergarten staff, our families, but most importantly our children. These little people will grow up and shape our world: if they can do this as securely attached individuals, our world will be all the better for it.

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The day we met Jet Pack Man: a story about 'Fun cup' filling

Transitions were not Jaxon's favourite thing. In fact, he would resist every one of them. Time to go inside? Nope. Time to wash our hands? I don't think so. Group time? Not happening. Jaxon taught his educators that insistence was futile and would end in meltdown. Every time Jaxon was interrupted, he would become furiously frustrated. Jaxon was fortunate enough to have educators who were responsive, thoughtful, and reflective. They realised it was time to try something different.



Sandi Phoenix coaches and mentors educators from a strengths-based perspective, the past 17 years working with children who display complex behaviours. In recent years Sandi has been involved in supporting educators and teams through individualised in-service professional development presenting at conferences, developing written resources, and consulting in the design of curriculum planning software. Sandi is a student of the Master of Education program at Griffith University, and has many years' experience collaborating with educators and teams to support positive relationships and partnerships in the education and care sector.

So, they did. Then magic happened.

On this gorgeous Australian summer morning, Jaxon's class was rounding up for circle time (rounding up for circle time—see what I did there?). I'm not a fan of herding children all at once to sit at a mandatory group time where Jaxon and his people are likely to resist and rebel. As a behaviour consultant, group time with two-to-five-year-aged children keeps me in a job. I wish it didn't.

But this kindergarten room was different to many. This group time was the most respectful community gathering of children I had ever seen. It started with an acknowledgement to the Aboriginal custodians of the land on which they were meeting and playing this day. The children would take the framed words of acknowledgement that they had written with their teachers and bring them to the group. They would then choose one of their peers to 'read' the acknowledgement. The first time I joined this session, I was blown away by the child who uttered it with a twinkle in his eye and an unexpectedly genuine understanding of and connection with the words he was saying.

However, Jaxon did not always appreciate these moments of togetherness like his peers did. So, there was always a good chance he'd take his time getting there. Then he'd likely poke the person beside him a few times and perhaps practise some new armpit noises. Of course, this would evoke corrective responses

from his educators. And now we're in our regular cycle.

But Jaxon's educators were trying new stuff on this day. They'd reflected on where expectations of compliance could be replaced by expectations of being considerate of others. So, when we noticed that Jaxon had stuck together two Weet-Bix boxes in the art area and barely looked up to see his peers sitting in their morning circle, we offered him the choice to join us. Not surprisingly, he said no. He was therefore reminded that his classmates were having their community meeting and it would be respectful to ensure he didn't interrupt them, but did he need anything for his work? Jaxon briefly looked up to reveal a most puzzled look that said to me 'This is new'. Then he mentioned he would need tape and scissors. His educator arranged the tools he needed and moved the fully stocked collage trolley closer to him.

That was the last time Jaxon looked up from his work for the rest of the session. By the end of group time, it was becoming obvious that Jaxon was working on a masterpiece. Jaxon's educators were curious about this involvement as they had recently had a lengthy discussion about 'Fun cup' filling. Glasser (1998) suggested fun is a basic human need and 'is the genetic reward for learning' (p.41). The teaching team had also been considering how complete immersion in an activity, known as a state of 'flow' (Csíkszentmihályi 2008) can also be

intensely 'Fun cup' filling. Furthermore, they were interested in identifying this type of involvement as it means that there is intense mental activity and the child is functioning at the very limits of their capabilities, with an intrinsic energy flow. According to Laevers (as cited in Department of Education and Children's Services 2008) there is no more favourable condition to real development. If we want deep-level learning, we cannot have it without involvement. Jaxon's educators were noticing obvious signs of deep level involvement and flow, such as focused eye gaze and even strong stimuli were not distracting him. They were excited to nurture that involvement, support him to fill his 'Fun cup' and curious to know how long it would last.



Next, it was morning tea time. In the past, Jaxon might have been forced through this part of the routine. Wash hands, sit at the table, eat, then you can return to play later. However, being interrupted in deep level involvement and flow is not only 'Fun cup' emptying but potentially counterproductive to learning. So, we trusted Jaxon to tell us if his Survival cup needed filling: 'Jaxon, do you need to eat?' His head stayed down as he muttered 'I'm not hungry'. A plate of fruit and crackers was put aside for him for when he was ready. And his work continued, uninterrupted.

After hours of intensely involved experience, Jaxon put the finishing touches on his work. A door was cut into the boxes which opened to reveal many milk bottle top buttons and switches. Two formula tins were attached to the base through which bright red and orange crepe-paper flames flowed to the ground. The straps were tricky and required the support of an adult to find a way to mount the Jet Pack neatly onto Jaxon's back. He was bubbling with excitement and pride as he stretched out his arms and spun on the spot. His educators' eyes lit up with smiles and pride that matched his own. Jaxon looked up and seemed to bask in the light of his educators' beaming faces. His peers were in awe of Jet Pack Man. Jet Pack Man flew from room to room, outside, inside, to the office, through the foyer and back to his room in a speedy display of flowing crepe paper, giggles, and zooming noises. Jet Pack Man stayed to play all day, all week even. Whole body, full of imagination, deep-level play that involved many of his friends and even some new ones. Children were not scared of Jet Pack Man like they sometimes were of Jaxon. When parents came in

the afternoon, they joined in their exclamations of awe at Jaxon's work. He was quite used to seeing adults frown at him, or raise an eyebrow, or shake their head. But this felt much better. He was being looked at with delight. This was new.

On this day, Jaxon was not expected to be compliant and obedient and do as he was told, potentially emptying his cups. The teaching team understood his need for 'Fun cup' filling and supported him to make choices within the expectation of being considerate and cooperative. If Jaxon had been forced to transition to circle time or morning tea with his peers, we never would have met Jet Pack Man. If they had interrupted him and forced him to attend group time or morning tea, there's a good chance Jaxon would have been distracted and distracting. After being corrected with statements like 'Jaxon, please stop interrupting', 'Jaxon, keep your hands to yourself', 'Jaxon, walk inside please', 'Stop! You're hurting your friend', there's a good chance Jaxon would have become disconnected and angry. Sometimes when his cups got really empty, Jaxon would yell, throw things around the room or flip a table. Not today. On this day, we met Jet Pack Man instead.

We met Jet Pack Man that day because Jaxon's educators bravely allowed him to co-construct the curriculum while they critically reflected on a transition that has 'always been done that way'. We met Jet Pack Man that day because Jaxon's educators trusted him to know how to meet his own needs, or in cups language, Jaxon was supported to choose behaviours that filled his cups without emptying the cups of people around him. His educators looked for involved play, respected it, nurtured it, and refused to interrupt it. Due to this decision to allow Jaxon to continue his work, we discovered Jaxon's potential. We realised his persistence and ability to concentrate on a task for much longer than we knew he could. Jet Pack Man taught us a great deal that day. I'm so glad we met him. He is awe inspiring. Make sure you don't miss an opportunity to meet Jet Pack Man. It's time to take the 'Fun cup' seriously.

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Supporting social and emotional development in early years primary

The social and emotional development of young children is a fundamental focus of early years' programs in Australia. They aim to ensure children feel a sense of *Belonging, Being and Becoming* within their world as they use play as "a context for learning through which [they can] organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they actively engage with people, objects and representations" (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 46). Yet as children move forward into early primary settings the attention shifts away from social emotional development to predetermined academic curriculum goals. A growing concern amongst early primary teachers is how many young students do not yet have the social and emotional skills required to cope with the expectations of 'how to do school'. The Department of Education acknowledges in the recently released Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework (2018) that "a supportive environment that combines a focus on wellbeing with a focus on learning is optimal — without one, the other will not happen" and schools can do this by "explicitly teaching and modelling social and emotional skills" (p. 1-2). With this in mind, the following conversation with Debbie Miller, Director of Education and Learning at Pathways to Resilience, an organisation that works with educators to deliver social and emotional wellbeing programs, invites us to think about how we as early phase teachers can assist with young children's social and emotional skills as well as allowing them to consolidate and practice what they have learned in an authentic and safe space.



Debbie Miller

In early years primary (grade one & two), how can educators address the social/emotional needs of children?

When we consider a child's ability to negotiate the social

and emotional landscape in the primary years classroom, it is within the safety of a trusting relationship with their teacher that skills develop.

It is through explicit teaching of learning concepts; interactions and communication that foster and model appropriate strategies and skills; and a culture of safety and healthy relationships that children develop socially and emotionally. Opportunities provided by educators for children to practice these skills will support the development of capacity in self-awareness; emotional regulation, empathy and skills of focus and attention, fostering harmonious classrooms and school communities

What do you think early years primary educators' expectations are of children's social and emotional skill development?

It has been my experience that early years educators in primary classrooms have concerns regarding children who are struggling with their social and emotional skill development and the challenges they face learning and developing healthy relationships.

I think early years primary educators have an expectation that children will be able to self-regulate and show empathy for others. This requires significant practice within the safety of reciprocal relationships, and a healthy sense of self that has developed from the earliest attachment relationship. When children have not had this experience, opportunity to learn how to breathe and stay regulated is extremely important for developing as class members and learners. Usually our education system also requires a child to be intrinsically motivated to focus, considerate of others and show determination and grit. However, our education system can often use extrinsic motivation to try and encourage children to behave in a manner considered appropriate, and inadvertently does not provide opportunity for children to learn and practice these skills.

How are we ensuring schools are ready for children and not the other way around?

We can ensure schools are ready for children by looking after Maslow before we worry about Bloom. This of course means that we address children's needs, especially physiological, and the state children are in sitting in our classrooms, or we will find it difficult to have them in a state and ready to learn effectively, engaged in higher order thinking. We can look at how we structure the day and learning environment to provide children the best opportunity to do well. Time for children to engage in sensory experiences, music and rhythmic activities and the natural environment, with pockets of quiet and calm are all regulating. They soothe children who may be

experiencing the clattering of a brain in a state of alarm, and help all children become ready to learn.

What transition strategies assist children and support emotional wellbeing across settings?

Meeting children where they are emotionally and breaking the transition down into manageable steps will help to provide smooth transition to new settings. A gradual plan with steps where children are gradually exposed to the new learning environment, so they have further information and understanding can help allay concerns. We can acknowledge if a child feels worried rather than distracting them from how they are feeling, and chat about what they are saying to themselves about it. This will give an insight into what they may need more information or experience with.

We can help children think some powerful thoughts about the new educational environment by giving them descriptive feedback about the skills we notice them using such as being brave in another situation, helping other children, or solving a problem and not giving up.

A strong sense of self, and opportunity to have felt worried and then get through a situation helps a child build an understanding that they are capable and strong. Removing any challenges or difficulties from a child's path prevents them from learning about themselves and building skills. Children build these skills through strong relationships that support and encourage them.

Do you have recommendations for working with families to support developing social/emotional skills in school?

Similarly, to working with children in our classroom, we can begin with a focus on how we want families to feel, both as part of the school community and about their children being members of the class. When teachers are able to connect with children we see a strong bond form with families. I have yet to meet a family, whether the children are faring well or struggling who do not want to know that their child is a valued member of a class. Families can become defensive and feel negative about a child if they constantly receive feedback about their shortcomings. When we can focus on strengths, and building upon something a child does well or brings to the class, and then help them develop skills to do well, families have a very different sense of their value also. We see them begin to interact differently, acknowledge the child's effort and developing skills, and want to understand how to help their child further. An understanding of how the brain develops and works is very empowering for children and families alike. When school and family work together to help children do well, by viewing any difficulties as an indication of what they may need to learn, and explicitly teaching strategies that will help children be in a more regulated state and ready to learn, everyone benefits.



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Sustainability in early childhood development

With our cities growing and our suburbs sprawling, it's easy to see how children today may be suffering from disconnect. As educators, we have a responsibility in creating connected, resilient, self-aware, empathetic, future leaders.



Lukas Ritson, as founder of Worthy (previously Own Grown Organics) has been working within the early childhood development sector in Australia to create sustainable and organic outdoor environments since 2013. His philosophy aims to embed sustainable practices into each early childhood centre they work with, as well as the wider community, by providing educational programs and functional sustainable outdoor environments that align with the development of children.

Children are so very rarely given a voice on a global scale, and it's amazing what they have to say when they are. As adults, our role is to give them the knowledge and the tools to become global citizens - secure in the belief that they really can change the world. (Greenberg, 2016)

And yet, today we face a growing tide of disconnected, self-indulgent, inconsiderate, dependent, negligent young adults who are so disconnected with themselves and our planet that it raises the question: What can we do right now to create change in the development of children? The answer is SUSTAINABILITY. So, what is sustainability?

Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature exist in productive harmony. (EPA 2017)

It is about living within our limits and understanding the interconnectedness of environment, economy and society. At first thought, sustainability brings to mind actions like recycling, composting and everything physical in relation to the environment. We can deepen that understanding by switching the mindset to identify as part of the environment, in order to achieve sustainable development. Therefore supporting children through their exploration of nature, kickstarts their connection with environment.

The goal of life is to match your heartbeat with the beat of the Universe, to match your nature with Nature. (Jane n.d.)

There are three pillars of sustainable development – environmental, social and economic.

Environmental sustainability

is about caring for a viable natural environment, with a focus on preventing non-renewable resource depletion. Prioritising one pillar can place the whole system out of balance, resulting in major suffering. If your basic needs are not being met, how actively will you consider the environment? In a relationship, you need to feel trust and feel important, feel like your needs are valued. When it comes to learning about sustainability, that relationship is with nature and it is the growth within environment that develops a fundamental connection with our surroundings. Acts of love and caring for environment are critical in creating conscious, caring, resilient and independent, self-sufficient learners.

Social sustainability is the promotion and maintenance of a healthy community. When social isn't looked after, the standard drops and all areas suffer - which is evident in some countries. If you are supported socially you can interact with nature more efficiently. With balance comes health, therefore finding the balance in sustainable development creates a healthy existence.

Economic sustainability involves creating economic value, meaning that decisions are made with long term benefits in mind. Like environmental sustainability, economic sustainability is also about sustaining natural resources and the environment for future generations. Our consumption dictates where resources are allocated. The more electricity we use or water we consume, the more the government or council

comes in to meet your needs - supply and demand. The less we consume, the smaller our footprint on the earth will be, resulting in greater resources and more opportunities for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Knowledge is not power. Knowledge is only potential power. Action is power. (Robbins n.d.)

We are blessed if we are able-bodied enough and in a position where we are influencing and creating future leaders of the world. It is our purpose as educators, parents, leaders and humans to come from a place of love and kindness by using these innate qualities in children to highlight, elevate and prioritise feelings of belonging and worthiness.

The truth is, we cannot have environmental sustainability with only environmental practices. We need to make it a social practice through connecting with environment and this starts with children - exploring and being supported within it. Since the beginning of time, environment has always supported us. What have we done in return? We have overpopulated the planet, created pollution and climate change, consumed the majority of natural resources, and caused the destruction and extinction of many habitats and species. Sounds pretty bleak when we think about it.

Perhaps it's time we did something to support the environment rather than aggravate it?

Once our personal connection to what is wrong becomes clear, then we have to choose: we can go on as before, recognising our dishonesty and living with it the best we can, or we can begin the effort to change the way we think and live. (Berry n.d.)

Here are three steps from experience as an educator on how we can take action and reinforce the relationship that children have with the environment:

1. Nourishing resources - healthy habits, growing with the environment

Incorporating functional and sustainable learning such as edible gardens, composting, water tanks and chicken coops actively encourages children, educators, families and the wider community to understand interconnectedness - a mutual reliance on a healthy environment and the repercussions of the choices we make when we consume resources. Promoting the use of natural objects, recycling and composting does this too, as exploring, experiencing and understanding the natural environment stimulates a child's development much more than single-use toys do.

2. Design out play bias

Creating an environment that recognises play

as fundamental to development is key in giving children the space and independence to explore.

3. Risky play - establishing an environment for children to feel safe and secure and supporting them physically to assist them to learn

Providing opportunities for positive risk-taking is developmentally beneficial; risky play is important for fostering children's optimal development. The Emotional Regulation Theory of Play is a body of research that outlines the importance of risk and play - anyone working in the childcare sector should consider this:

The theory that one of play's major functions is to teach young mammals how to regulate fear and anger. In risky play, youngsters dose themselves with manageable quantities of fear and practice keeping their heads and behaving adaptively while experiencing that fear. They learn that they can manage their fear, overcome it, and come out alive. (LaFreniere 2011)

Sustainability should be at the core of everything we do. Whether it's teaching a child how to recycle, purchasing fewer plastic products or finding strength and compassion within our communities, living a sustainable life and reducing our negative impact starts and finishes with us. Nurturing that relationship with nature from a young age encourages respect, inspires growth from within the environment and connects us to a cause greater than ourselves.

The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives. (Meehan 2018)

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Growing a growth mindset through the use of the outdoors

Provocation

'Today's children are enclosed in school and home, enclosed in cars to shuttle between them, enclosed by fear ... and enclosed in rigid schedules of time'. (Griffiths 2013 p.54).



Marilyn Way moved to Brisbane seven years ago and is now director and educational leader at two services in the Redlands area. Marilyn's key educational beliefs are centred on building resilience throughout our lives by overcoming challenges, and seeing effort as the pathway to mastery and achievement.

Kerry Boland has 28 years' experience as approved provider of a childcare centre and has recently opened another service for school-aged children at a local primary school. Kerry has maintained a strong interest in catering for diverse learners and promotes inclusive practices and community building through use of an outdoor environment at Birdwood Place, which is a property owned by Kerry adjacent to the centre.

Our story

Our story begins with the regeneration and use of an overgrown bushland adjacent to our early childhood centre. This project was the catalyst for changing our mental models and for the implementation of an action research project. Inspired by Carol Dweck's 'Growth mindset' (GM) model (Dweck 2006), we identified how challenge was a key factor in promoting grit and resilience for children through the use of the outdoors.

Our research led us to investigate the use of the outdoor environment for promoting children's learning and relationships within our community. Key elements fostered in the natural outdoor setting included breaking down social barriers with the provision of a space for the whole community. Birdwood Place has become a gathering space of special value in the wider centre for community celebrations and events. Through the regeneration of the bush and its conservation, the children have been involved in sustainable practices and thinking. A number of key stakeholders were consulted and there has been overwhelming support for the vision and the project from local community leaders.

Our challenge

We were concerned that children were not having the opportunity to explore natural environments and be active decision makers in their own learning and play. It appeared children in our care were being passively entertained by information technologies and highly structured activities that resulted in over-scheduled, busy lifestyles. We observed children in our context not initiating or sustaining play. They lacked the focus and the necessary skills to engage fully in learning experiences. It appeared the children had forgotten their innate desire to play. Teachers noticed an increase in undesirable behaviours, aggressive interactions, acting out and disengagement from the group.

We were inspired by the Dweck's GM model to think creatively of ways we could ignite the interests of the children in our centre by holding high expectations for them as competent learners and to seek opportunities for promoting potential for learning through challenge, active play and through the building of relationships. We used our outdoor bushland setting to plant the seeds for change.

Making change—how?

Underpinned by the theories of Vygotsky, Nottingham, Dweck and Gardner and framed by the *Early years learning framework*

for Australia, we shared insights with the aim of inspiring educators and parents alike to become more skillful at promoting possibilities for children's 'Being, belonging and becoming'. The five key outcomes of identity, wellbeing, communication, active learning and connecting are facilitated for all children in the outdoor space.



Our research encourages organisational flexibility to 'change the lens' and challenge preconceptions and mental models around early childhood education and care. Redefining challenge and struggle meant that we stopped doing everything for children and gave them time and space to learn and practise skills. In Australia, early childhood environments can be risk averse and often place an emphasis on regulatory compliance and care routines. Higher-level esteem priorities of self-efficacy, i.e. the development of risk competencies and recognition around the learning potential of young children, are often overlooked when we wrap children in cotton wool.

Findings

Carol Dweck's investigation into growth and fixed mindsets provided a foundation for our thinking when conceptualising the potential outcomes we desired for children. The outdoors was identified as an optimum setting for young children to increase their resilience and develop confidence and grit as they take on new challenges. Child voice was encouraged as children set their own goals and struggled to persist in overcoming hurdles. Failure and mistakes were redefined as learning opportunities and children became active agents in planning their own learning pathways. Children discovered that hard work takes time, attention and effort and were encouraged to collaborate with others to reach their desired goals. They demonstrated increased confidence, independence, learning and critical thinking skills. Children were able to provide

insightful reflections on their own learning, as well as provide feedback to others.

Anecdotal data and interviews with children, parents and teachers reveal that children had a high sense of ownership when they were more autonomous and actively engaged. They were constantly questioning and building knowledge through investigation and in sustained conversations that came from meaningful connections with others. Through continuous engagement with the outdoor space, children are involved in theory building, construction of new knowledge and inquiry-based learning (Coates 2011).



Conclusions

Through the use of Birdwood Place, our community has built a new identity with its own way of being, culture and traditions. The community calls for commonality and union between members, and celebrates difference as members bring diverse strengths and take on different roles and responsibilities. The functioning of our whole community is dependent on the contributions of its members, resulting in it being dynamic and organic.





The need for teachers to guide and direct children's behaviour has decreased significantly. Children are more actively engaged in the outdoors with focused play-based exploration and authentic learning of life skills. Children demonstrated

improved levels of self-regulation and found new strategies to cope with challenging situations. Intentional teaching was built into the program's pedagogical practice, complemented by child voice to map the pathway of learning.



Children exhibited a pronounced sense of agency and autonomy over their learning direction and a stronger connection with others. Insightful reflections were evident through conversations with children and documented in children's own learning stories and teacher observations of children's play.

Restoration of Birdwood Place's natural bushland setting has provided exceptional opportunities for children's learning, aligned with strengthening of our relationships within the community. Children were less likely to need teacher intervention due to unacceptable behaviour and were able to demonstrate a significant improvement in thinking, inquiry, and negotiation skills. Children were creative and confident in designing their own learning pathways in the outdoors, demonstrating a growth mindset that resulted in an increased resilience to deal with challenge and struggle.

In the outdoor space, both children and adults connect with the land, gain insights into themselves and experience a greater sense of free will. Resilience and grit are enhanced through working together, solving problems, embracing challenging tasks, trying new things and children designing their own play.



Significant learnings

There has been a visible shift in the way children and teachers/educators are seeking new possibilities and transforming our natural environment. Through use of the growth mindset framework, we have redefined challenge and learning. The outdoors is both dynamic and engaging for children, as well as offering a place of tranquility. We feel connected to the land and each other, which fosters a sense of wellbeing and of belonging for all.



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Ecological Storytelling: engaging with our living world

Still and silent we were, watching the swamp hens poking about the riverbank. This four-year-old and I sat, calming down after a raw emotional moment where she had struck out at another friend. In the shallow water nearby, sunshine sparkled on the ripples and shadows of 'things' slipped by under the surface. She noticed the beak of the swamp hen was bright red. I noticed how they stepped so carefully, flicking white tails under their iridescent purple feathers. She wondered what they were looking for in the grass, and then answered her own question: "It's moisture. In the ground. They are looking for moisture because their beak is sore and their feet are sore. They flick their tails because they are angry."



Jennifer McCormack is an early childhood teacher, storyteller, bush school leader and artist with a passion for respectful education, the creative arts, conservation and well-being. Jennifer, with colleague Narell Neville, co-founded Birdwings, a unique nature immersion program for children and adults. Birdwings celebrates the belief that children thrive when their environment values play, honours family and culture, respects development and supports children's autonomy in learning. Environmental connection, conservation and the creative arts underpin the Birdwings approach to learning and experiencing in nature.

We watched one swamp hen pull up grass with its toes and lifted the grass to its beak. "Wow" I said, "I can't do that. Can you?" So, we tried. We took off our shoes and walked like swamp hens, flicking our tails and lifting our knees and trying to pull grass with our toes. We noticed that bird knees are built backwards, and we couldn't walk the same way. It made us giggle. On the way back, we told each other a story about the swamp hen, and how it had been arguing with the eel in the river (a dark and mysterious presence we have always been fascinated with, also slightly wary of). The eel had bit the swamp hen in anger, and now its beak was red and sore: so sore it had to look for moisture in the ground to cool off and use its toes to help it eat. "Yes" she said, "that's why its beak is red."

In this peaceful exchange, a simple moment in nature, so much experiencing had occurred. She had come to terms with her anger. Her riverbank wonderings had become fused with her recent big emotions and she had made connections between the place and her own self. The story had tied all of this together. In this moment she had found meaning, and for a long while afterwards, when returning to this spot, she'd sometimes say "this is where we came when I was angry", and then talk about the swamp hens and the eels, affirming these connections she had made.

We did look up swamp hens in our guide book and added some of this

information to her story, which we shared with everybody when it was ready. We tried to find a Kombumerri story and the Yugambah name for the swamp hen, and never did, but we did discover that the eel was known as 'Jurun': a powerful sounding name. This added a new dimension to the story, and now we knew the eel and the hen were arguing over who was the boss of the river. It fitted with her experience, and so we told the story again with this new information. It felt right.

That's our story now, our own dreaming of why the swamp hen has a red beak. This is our connection with this part of the river, and with the experience of being angry. This story, this riverbank, and these creatures are now forever part of her ecological identity, adding a layer of understanding of self-in-place and place-in-self. Nanson (2005) notes that when significant indigenous wisdom is lost and children's learning occurs most frequently through technology and classrooms rather than direct outdoor experience and mentoring, children gain knowledge in national culture but lose knowledge in local natural history. Nature play and storytelling in early childhood allows us to make new and authentic connections to our local ecology and to share our experiences with this place. I am not certain this moment with the swamp hens would have been so powerful for her if we had not been in the habit of visiting

and wonder about nature regularly, and to share storytelling experiences every day.

Ecological Storytelling is not just a medium for sharing information about species, habitat, indigenous culture and sustainability. This is certainly a significant part of the process, however, storytelling from an ecological perspective is also concerned with our relationships within the living world, as well as what we know about it, and our reflections upon what that means for us personally. In our nature play, finding sticks shaped like snakes led to storytelling about snake safety, and observing native bees enter and leave their hive became a story about finding our way back home. In the shaping of stories from these experiences, the children have opportunities to make sense of their experience and share it with others (Nanson 2005). Connecting with nature through play, visual arts, drama and collaborative storytelling has supported a deep and rich connection to self, to each other and to the living world in which we are a part.

Children are natural storytellers. The very act of their playing is often a movement through story. In sharing stories with children, it is well worth not restricting ourselves only to reading from books. Taking our stories off the page gives children the freedom to engage in their own internal journey and to shift their imaginings into a new adventure, a new experience which will unfold differently for each listener. Oral language is long recognized as an important foundation for literacy development (Flewitt, Cremin & Mardell 2017). Children who experience frequent oral storytelling begin to incorporate modelled vocabulary, language conventions, rhymes, songs, story themes, expressions and gestures into their play. 'Storytime' may even be their play as they set up scenes with loose parts and retell stories they remember. There is a reverence that unfolds with oral storytelling: respect for this time and space, for the person who is sharing and for the listener's own experience in receiving the tale. Great disappointment is expressed if we run out of time for a story!

When storytelling shifts into our documentation we create an evolving collection of children's stories of self, community and belonging within their learning and living environment. As collaborators we reflect on our sense of belonging to this place and the stories we tell change and grow with us. *The Early Years Learning Framework* (2009) recognizes children as capable constructors of their own understandings and acknowledges their ability to share their learnings with others. Collaborative documentation with children allows them to explore and share their own growth in different ways, and makes visible the intentional

teaching practices, thinking processes and research experiences behind their group and individual learning (Millikan & Giamminuti 2014). Rather than dry recounts of child observations and daily activities, McArdle (2016) maintains that 'artful teachers' can use documentation to create maps which represent children's unique ways of being and knowing. Artful teachers listen with attention, see with curiosity, look for connections, wonder and find ways to share this so that others may experience it with new eyes (McArdle, 2014).

Teachers and children alike can be artful in their observations, reflections and responses. Observations of turtle and eastern water dragon activity became a story about overcoming shyness and learning how to be a ninja. This story evolved and was refined and recorded in the form of maps for ninja training courses, lists of skills that turtle and dragon ninjas can do, observational drawings, records of conversations, photographs, and the final text of our story, agreed on after many shared re-tellings. Notes recorded conversational popular culture references to ninja turtle superheroes, including special qualities of each ninja identity, and through this reflection the theme of finding one's own inner strength emerged.

Ecological Storytelling has, for these children, created a relationship between themselves, their inner qualities, and riverbank life, broadening their ecological identity in a rich and memorable way. By allowing the process of storytelling to evolve over time through regular outdoor and wild nature play, visual art, conversation and drama the connections are strengthened between local natural knowledge of place, rich knowledge of self and empathic connections with other living things. When these children are adults, they will have a bank of natural experiences contributing to an inner desire to know and protect their earth and its ecology: for all humans and all living things.

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Domestic violence and the role of early childhood educators: understanding court orders and supporting children

Domestic and family violence is abuse by one person against another person in a family relationship, most commonly in intimate partner relationships. Domestic violence can include a range of physical and non-physical behaviours such as physical assault or threats, emotional and verbal abuse, financial and social control or sexual abuse. Domestic violence establishes a debilitating power imbalance centred on coercion and control through fear.



Lulu Milne is a social worker with over 15 years' experience working in the domestic violence and homeless sectors. Lulu is the Principal Social Worker at Women's Legal Service Qld (WLSQ), where she supervises the social work team.



Rachel Neil is the Principal Solicitor of the WLSQ. She is an experienced domestic violence and family lawyer. Rachel is passionate about providing vulnerable women with high quality legal support.

For children, exposure to domestic violence is known to be detrimental to their emotional wellbeing and contributes to a number of behavioural and developmental issues. High levels of fear and stress in children compromises learning, leading to poorer educational outcomes, low self-esteem and insecure attachments (Wathen & MacMillan 2013).

Exposure can mean witnessing or hearing violence occurring, seeing damage or injury after the incident or witnessing their parent in distress.

Children may suffer direct abuse from the perpetrator or try to intervene to protect a parent and may be injured. Children may blame themselves for the violence, leading to emotional distress. Relationships characterised by violence can create unhealthy family role models where children observe that aggression and intimidation is effective in getting what they want. For older children, it may be safer to align themselves with the perpetrator as a survival strategy, however, this can lead to intergenerational patterns of violence (Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research 2017).

Each situation is different and the extent to which each child will be impacted depends on a number of factors including their age, how long the child was exposed to domestic violence, the severity of the violence, whether the child has a secure

attachment to the protective parent, their connections with other significant social supports and whether or not they are experiencing additional stressors such as poverty (Howell et al. 2010; Martinez Torteya 2009).

Children need physical safety and trusting relationships to recover and thrive following domestic violence. It is important to recognise that violence doesn't necessarily stop following separation. Post separation violence can include verbal or physical abuse at handover of children, ongoing financial abuse, and using the children as a weapon to undermine parenting.

Parenting orders

Not all separated parents will have court orders. Where the parents can agree, they can make informal agreements or a parenting plan (a written agreement signed by both parents). Court orders can be made by consent, or by a judicial decision of the court following a hearing.

Under the Family Law Act 1975, parents do not have 'rights' to their children, rather they have duties and responsibilities. The default presumption is that both parents equally share parental responsibility. Parental responsibility is about making long term decisions about such things as education, medical care, religion and culture. It is not about where children live and without a court order, both parents can take or keep the children. This is why the

police may be unable to assist when one parent takes the children - unless a separate criminal offence has taken place or there is a domestic violence order with conditions about the children (e.g. prohibiting the respondent from approaching the child, or attending the child's school or child care).

Domestic violence orders

Each state and territory in Australia has their own legislation, procedures and terminology for domestic violence orders. Since November 2017, all domestic violence orders are nationally recognised and enforceable in any state. This means victims are protected if they travel or relocate interstate.

Domestic violence orders are made by a Magistrates' Court and put legal restrictions on people who commit domestic violence. Typically, domestic violence orders will have a mandatory condition requiring the respondent (perpetrator) to refrain from committing domestic violence toward the aggrieved (victim). Schools and child care centres should be given a copy of any domestic violence order that applies to a child in their care. If you think a domestic violence order is being breached you should call the police.

The terminology for domestic violence orders varies from state to state. Below is a table of domestic violence legislation in each state.

Child protection orders

Children have a right to be protected from harm. In Australia, each state and territory has its own child protection legislation, which defines when a child is

'in need of protection' and the processes for statutory interventions to protect children from harm, if parents (or care givers) are unwilling or unable to provide safe and adequate care.

In responding to child protection concerns resulting from domestic violence, US based psychologist, David Mandell provides a best practice model. Dr Mandell's model, *Safe and Together Framework* starts from the premise that the perpetrator is 100% responsible for the violence, regardless of the other parent's issues, or their decision to leave or stay in the relationship. Supporting the non-abusive parent (usually the mother) is crucial for the wellbeing of the children (Mandell 2013).

Teachers and early childhood educators have mandatory obligations in most jurisdictions to report cases where they suspect a child is at risk of serious harm. It is important that teachers/educators are aware of their obligations and workplaces provide support and training to staff around notifications of risk or harm to children. If educators are making a notification to the statutory authority about a child who is at serious risk due to domestic violence, it is important to inform the parent (preferably the non-abusive parent), if possible, and provide referrals to domestic violence support services and legal services, such as Women's Legal Service, or Legal Aid.

If there is a child protection order in place, this may mean that parents are not permitted to take the children so schools and early child care services should be given a copy and be aware of the conditions on the order.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ORDERS ACROSS STATES		
State	Legislation	Name of protection order
Queensland	Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012	Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVO)
NSW	Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007	Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (AVO)
Victoria	Family Violence Protection Act 2008	Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO)
ACT	Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008	Domestic Violence Order (DVO)
South Australia	Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act 2009	Intervention Order (DVRO)
Western Australia	Restraining Orders Act 1997	Violence Restraining Order (VRO)
Northern Territory	Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007	Domestic Violence Order (DVO)
Tasmania	Family Violence Act 2004	Family Violence Order (FVO)

Role of early educators

Early childhood educators can play a crucial role in supporting children who may be traumatised from experiencing domestic violence. Children need opportunities to play and learn in a safe environment and make social connections.

Trauma-informed principles when working with children:

- Increase your education about trauma and how to identify signs and symptoms of trauma in children.
- Create a sense of certainty and predictability through daily routines and communicate clearly any changes in routine. Change and uncertainty can be stressful for traumatised children.
- Create opportunities for children to make choices throughout their day, even if they are small choices, to give them some sense of control. Provide a range of activities including physical, musical, and tactile experiences.
- Identify a safe place or person for the child to go to if they are feeling stressed.
- Identify the child's individual strengths and promote activities that they are good at.
- Relationships with consistent and trusted adults and peers is crucial in recovering from trauma. A trusted teacher can become an important relationship to strengthen that child's support network. Be a role model for respectful communication. Avoid making promises that cannot be kept.
- If a child discloses violence, listen and avoid minimising their concerns. Some children may feel worried about their parents. Let the child know that they can talk to you. Give them the message that the violence is not their fault. Remember, it is not safe to discuss these concerns with the perpetrator of violence.

Prevention of domestic violence with children

Victims/survivors of domestic violence may talk to teachers about concerns for children while at school or early education centre. Ask the non-abusive parent what she needs to increase their safety and assist with the problem solving around this. Copy any relevant court orders and work with the non-abusive parent to develop a safety plan if the perpetrator contacts or attends the school or centre. It may be helpful to have a photo of the perpetrator in the office so staff know who to look out for. Please make sure this photo is not visible to children or other parents.

If there are no court orders in place, staff may agree to contact the parent if the perpetrator attends or attempts to collect the child without prior agreement.

There may be practical solutions to increase safety for children, for example collecting children from the classroom, rather than outside the school. Ensure details about people authorised to collect children and emergency contacts are up to date.

There are also universal safety and security measures that should be considered to prevent domestic violence even when there have not been disclosures of domestic violence:

- Young children should be encouraged to memorise their address and know how to call 000 for help in an emergency. They will need to say their full name and address. This is an important skill for every child and can be taught in the context of fire safety, natural disaster or accidental injury.
- Protect confidential information. Ensure that personal details such as home address, phone number, or email address are kept confidential i.e NOT in a 'pocket' or 'pigeonhole' with the child's name that another person might access.
- Consider security at the early education centre – is there a pin code access for parents or can any person walk in to access classrooms?

Resources

'Penda' App (available for Apple and Android) National Information and Referrals– www.penda.com.au

Family Law and Domestic Violence Legal Factsheets – www.wlsq.org.au/information-sheets/

Domestic violence resources for professionals – www.1800respect.org.au

Domestic Violence and Child Protection – Safe and Together Model www.safeandtogetherinstitute.com

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Breaking the cycle of violence for child refugees who display aggressive behaviour

Children with refugee experience have often witnessed torture and other atrocities in their country of origin, followed by lengthy periods of deprivation in refugee camps and/or detention centres. If a child faces repeated and ongoing trauma at developmentally sensitive periods before language fully develops, their brain will become wired around hypervigilance. They will become overly reactive to perceived threats and stressful situations, disrupting their developmental processes, delaying learning, and reducing their ability to regulate their emotions and behaviours (Zilberstein 2014). Many of these children will experience high levels of psychological, emotional and behavioural problems in resettlement (Bronstein & Montgomery 2011). This article discusses presentations of aggressive behaviour in young children from refugee backgrounds and explores the way one teacher created a safe, stable environment for a four-year-old boy, serving to interrupt a potential cycle of violence. All names used are pseudonyms.



Cherie Lamb has founded and led early intervention and prevention programs facilitating access for refugee and migrant families into early childhood services, schools and family support services for more than 25 years. Cherie is currently a PhD candidate at the University of New England conducting research titled 'Facilitating participation in early childhood education for families from refugee backgrounds in Queensland'.

As part of my research into kindergarten participation for children from refugee backgrounds in South East Queensland, I asked 26 early childhood practitioners (teachers, educators, family support, cultural & inclusion support workers) to provide examples of children who had difficulty participating in a kindergarten program, and the strategies they used to facilitate inclusion. Of the ten most common disruptive behaviours mentioned, aggression occurred most frequently, and it presented the biggest challenge to educators, mainly because of the threat posed to others. The following quotes from participants were typical:

... Because he didn't know how to interact without hurting and using adult words that you don't use at kindergarten, and the risk factor of hurting someone else, we needed someone there to be with him (teacher).

... The [kindergarten teacher] said: 'We can't have this child anymore because of the behavioural problems. He's too disruptive. The other children are scared of this child (inclusion support worker).'

Interestingly, most children from refugee backgrounds did not behave aggressively, in fact one teacher enrolled at least eight children from African refugee backgrounds in her kindergarten, none of whom rated a mention because they had settled in so well! Her entire interview was taken up with the one child who demonstrated trauma through violence.

It is important for early childhood practitioners to understand the reasons behind aggressive behavioural enactments because, if they do not, they are more likely to negatively label a child as 'oppositional', 'rebellious', 'unmotivated' and 'antisocial' (Streeck-Fischer & van der Kolk 2000). They may assume these children are not interested in learning or do not have the skills to succeed, leading to relational disengagement through withdrawal of attention and/or learning materials (Birman & Tran 2017).

Aggressive behaviour is frequently linked to past trauma coupled with family violence

In many participant narratives about children behaving violently, children were not only struggling with past

trauma, but ongoing family violence. Typically, children, and particularly young boys, who had experienced violence, had problems integrating into social settings. They tended to bully other children and to scare them away, creating a cycle whereby the child lacked playmates. Children who behaved violently were frequently expelled. However, when educators gained insight into the traumatic events encountered by those children and how violence impacted upon their behaviour and learning, they sometimes supported them to persevere. In one such example, Adele, a kindergarten teacher, told me about Monir, a four-year-old Rohingya boy who was acting sadistically towards other children because he had 'seen as a very young child, things that he just could not process' (Adele).

Monir, his mother Rajuma, and several siblings were experiencing domestic violence, exacerbated by the strain of resettlement and fuelled by horrific premigration experiences fleeing the military junta in Myanmar. A picture of complex trauma emerged for Monir, with behavioural and linguistic regression, learning difficulties, impaired cognitive functioning and extreme fearfulness. Adele said:

With this little one, there was not just violence from their home country, but also, problems with settling in here. There started to be domestic violence. So, we have gone through the journey with the family, of the family moving away into crisis accommodation, not having supportive family around, and then the child - just changed at kindy for the worse. Behaviour changed, language changed ... We already had some red flags happening in regard to language and comprehension anyway and then it was ... a bit of a journey with mum because she is very fearful of the child becoming known to the doctor. So, what does that mean in terms of assessment and that sort of thing? So, it's taken a couple of months just to give her time to get her head around it (Adele).

Explosive anger and disproportionate reactions to slight provocation commonly occur in very young children from refugee backgrounds (Strekalova & Hoot 2008). Presentations of aggression through a child's use of their body within a physical space might represent their only form of expression, particularly if they have not yet grasped their first language or learned their own cultural mores due to the deprivation of normal familial and community supports (Hurley, Saini, Warren & Carberry 2013). Behavioural patterns presented by chronically traumatised children are actually efforts to minimise perceived threat and

regulate their emotional distress (Streeck-Fischer & van der Kolk 2000), and disruptive acts such as kicking, biting, throwing objects or fighting can be interpreted as cognitive disengagement because children do not understand what is expected of them (Birman & Tran 2017).

Monir may have been acting out the dramas that he was witnessing at home in his kindergarten environment. There is a link between exposure to violence and traumatic events in resettlement that precipitates a range of negative psychological outcomes in children (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick & Stein 2012). Consequently, when children are dealing with current beatings, they cannot heal from premigration trauma (Miller & Rasmussen 2010). Social cognition theories suggest that exposure to violence normalises the use of aggressive behaviour. When children like Monir, who have had prolonged exposure to violence, observe it being used as an effective method of problem solving, they are more likely to engage in violent acts themselves (Fowler, Tompsett & Braciszewski 2009). Most violence against children is perpetrated by victims who grow up to be perpetrators, thus repeating the cycle of violence (van der Kolk 2005). Monir was already displaying signs that he was on this dangerous trajectory.

Educators can create safe, stable environments to break the cycle of violence

Educators like Adele fulfil a crucial role in reducing child stress in resettlement. Adele worked consistently with Monir's family throughout the year to establish trust and build rapport. In doing so she gained understanding of important cultural perspectives and some of the likely factors producing his reactive behaviours. In partnership with Rajuma, she negotiated workable solutions such as: contracting a linguistically matched cultural support worker to help him settle; reducing, then incrementally increasing his kindergarten hours; and improving his overall health status through nutritional food and outdoor physical play.

Adele recruited an additional-needs assistant to support Monir in play 'because he would try and act out things that he'd seen or use [inappropriate] language that he has heard' (Adele). The one-on-one worker-to-child ratio enabled her to assess Monir's level of understanding and to contextualise his learning accordingly. Additional observation and planning enabled her to discover and build upon his strengths, scaffold his learning, and to fully engage him in the kindergarten program.

Adele helped Rajuma feel safe and supported during her stay in crisis accommodation and assisted her to

build friendships with other mothers. Adele organised for Monir's medical and psychological assessments to occur on the kindergarten premises. She advocated on Rajuma's behalf with professionals because Rajuma's history of oppression under a military regime had generated a debilitating fear of authority figures. She explained that this intensive level of support was a long-term commitment because Monir's two younger siblings were yet to enrol in kindergarten:

... So, we want to make sure that mum still stays part of kindy. We want to make sure that she still feels supported (Adele).

This case study demonstrates that educators who understand the nature of trauma and its impact upon young children can create early childhood environments that are safe, nurturing and supportive.

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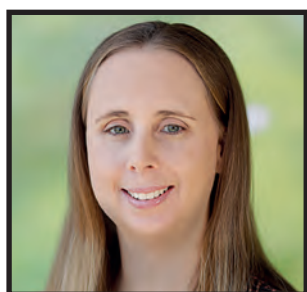
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Traffic Lights: understanding healthy sexual development and protecting children from harm

Children are sexual beings from the moment they are born and have a natural curiosity about their own, and other people's, bodies. From early on children are continually learning about sexuality and relationships from their family, and those who care for them, which is an important component of children's developing sense of themselves and of the world around them. Children's developing sexuality is often reflected in behaviour and play, and when early childhood teachers, parents and carers acknowledge childhood sexuality, it helps them to understand and accept childhood sexual behaviour and respond positively.



Angela Wunsch has over 14 years' experience working with children and families and she has a special interest in the area of early childhood.



Dr Claire Moran has extensive experience in the areas of teaching, research and curriculum development and her areas of expertise include children and young people's sexual development, digital technology and domestic violence.

Learning about sexuality

While parents and carers are the primary source of sexuality education, supporting children's healthy sexual development is a responsibility that is shared by important professionals such as early childhood teachers (Breuner et al. 2016; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2009).

The reality is however that children live in a world where their learning about sexuality also comes from television, music, the internet, computer games, advertising and their friends. Early childhood teachers, parents and carers can work together to ensure children receive positive messages as, generally, children who have accurate and clear information about bodies, relationships and sexuality are more likely to:

- feel positive about themselves and their bodies
- understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
- understand and accept physical and emotional changes
- be able to talk about sexual matters when it is important
- avoid or report sexual exploitation and abuse
- make informed and responsible

sexual decisions later in life, and

- enjoy their sexual experiences.

(Breuner et al. 2016; Robinson 2013; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2007; Finkelhor 2007; Kirby 2001; Queensland Crime Commission & Queensland Police Service 2000; Sanderson 2004).

Sexual development in early childhood

In order to respond positively to children's sexual behaviours and questions, it is firstly important to have an understanding of typical sexual development in young children. This then helps those adults identify and respond to healthy sexual behaviours and those that may be of concern, or harmful.

Under threes

Babies and young children learn by exploring and touching their bodies, being touched and cuddled by parents and carers, and by observing the roles and relationships of those around them. They are curious about their bodies and are learning the names of the different parts, including naming their vulva, vagina, penis, testicles, scrotum and bottom. As they are getting older it is common for children to have an increased interest in their genitals and the genitals of others

and they may be fascinated by watching others go to the toilet (Child at Risk Assessment Unit 2000; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012).

Three-to-five-year-olds

It is common for children in this age range to be very curious about themselves and they may begin to show an awareness of body differences by asking questions like, 'Why don't I have a penis?' Children are also often interested in where they came from and how babies are made. They may ask questions like, 'How are babies made?' or, 'How does the baby get out of the mummy?' They may also begin to role-play relationships and gender roles that they have observed around them; for example, playing 'mummies and daddies'. As children are approaching school age they have generally developed an understanding of acceptable sexual behaviour. Masturbating is a common and healthy behaviour that may occur in this age range and, while most children will have gained an understanding that this is a private activity, some children may continue to need redirection (Child at Risk Assessment Unit 2000; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012).

Five-to-eight-year-olds

Children in this age range are continuing to learn about sexuality by asking questions and exploring through play, including games at school and in the playground. Hearing stories about their birth or what they were like as a baby is of great interest to many children, as is the process of fertilisation, pregnancy and birth. However, some children may have learnt that these are subjects that are considered 'rude', preventing them from asking questions or being embarrassed about the topic. Social groups that develop in this age range typically consist of same sex peers with friendships starting to play an important role in their lives. Some children in the upper end of this age range, particularly girls, may be beginning to show early signs of puberty (Campbell, Mallappa, Wisniewski, & Silovsky 2013; Child at Risk Assessment Unit 2000; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012).

Is this normal?

Understanding children's developing sexuality is just one important component in helping ensure children are sexually healthy and safe. The next step in providing a positive environment involves early childhood teachers, parents and carers responding positively to children's sexual behaviours. This includes

sexual behaviours that are considered healthy as well as those that may be of concern or harmful.

The Traffic Lights® framework provides a useful way for early childhood teachers, parents and carers to think about sexual behaviours. Traffic Lights® is a strengths-based tool that provides responses which are age appropriate and has the overall aim of being positive and protective. It uses the categories of green, orange and red to provide information for adults to understand and respond to children's sexual behaviours (Child at Risk Assessment Unit 2000; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012).



Green indicates sexual behaviours which are healthy and form part of children's natural information gathering process. They are considered age appropriate and are balanced with curiosity about other parts of the world. These behaviours are also easily diverted and may constitute play between children of similar developmental age and stage. Green light behaviours provide great opportunities for early childhood teachers, parents and carers to help children learn, develop and feel good (Child at Risk Assessment Unit 2000; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012).

Orange indicates sexual behaviours of concern and may indicate that something isn't quite right. The behaviour itself might be healthy and normal, however it is the context in which it is occurring which is outside of normal, perhaps due to the behaviour's frequency or persistence. Orange-light behaviours are also characterised by knowledge or activity which is not what we would expect for the child's age and stage of development, play between children where there is an inequality in age, size and ability, or are behaviours that pose a risk to the health and safety of the child and/or others. Orange-light behaviours signal the need for early childhood teachers, parents and carers to pay extra attention and monitor behaviour as well as talking to the child and finding ways to help (Child at Risk Assessment Unit 2000; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012).

Red indicates sexual behaviours that are harmful or abusive, either for the child or for others. They are characterised by being excessive, compulsive,

coercive, forceful, degrading or threatening. Red-light behaviours may be secretive or involve bribery and trickery, or behaviours that are not appropriate for the child's age and stage of development or between children with significant differences in size and developmental ability. A child disclosing sexual abuse is a red light. Red-light sexual behaviours require early childhood teachers, parents and carers to provide immediate protection and follow up support (Child at Risk Assessment Unit 2000; True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012). This would also include documenting the child's behaviours and following reporting requirements outlined in services' child protection policies.

It's important to remember, however, that most children's sexual behaviour fits into the green-light category and is healthy and age appropriate. Orange and red-light sexual behaviours are less common. However, children with disability: and those who have experienced abuse or other disruptions to their development may be more vulnerable to developing, or being exposed to, concerning or harmful sexual behaviour (True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2012; Brennan & Graham 2012).

Responding positively

Early childhood teachers, parents and carers can provide an environment where children feel safe and comfortable to discuss sexual matters with adults they know and trust. Talking accurately and clearly, feeling confident and comfortable and approaching sexuality and sexual behaviours in a positive and respectful way will contribute greatly to children's sense of self and help protect their personal safety (Dillman Taylor & Munyon, 2016). It is also important to be familiar with child protection legislation and organisation policies and procedures for support and guidance when responding to children's sexual behaviours.

Accessing professional development opportunities, resources and support from colleagues are all important components to helping children to be healthy and safe, along with being inclusive and affirming diversity and communicating with parents and carers about the ways in which bodies, relationships and sexuality are addressed in the early childhood setting (True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2009). Important concepts for young children are feelings, bodies and privacy, types of touch, rules about touch, early warning signs, what to do and who to tell, and there are many resources available to assist (True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2007).

Learning about sexuality also occurs in early childhood teachers' everyday interactions with children in a number of ways, including modelling respectful relationships, using correct names for private body parts, providing opportunities for children to develop and practise interpersonal skills and helping children to communicate their feelings assertively (True Relationships and Reproductive Health 2009). Early childhood teachers have the opportunity to respond positively to children's sexual behaviours and development which enhances children's safety, self-esteem, health and knowledge.

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Growing children's emotional intelligence

Neuroscience is shining a spotlight on how early childhood teachers can support young children's self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and the development of their relationship skills, which lead to a positive impact on themselves and others: in other words, how teachers are helping grow children's emotional intelligence. Current neuroscience shows that, when children are out of balance emotionally, they have difficulty learning and that the primary role of the teacher is to help children become more balanced and more self-regulated. Teachers need to, first, use effective communication skills to support children as they regain emotional composure and, second, teach skills that help children stay balanced (Siegel & Payne Bryson 2018).



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Melissa Strader is an early childhood teacher who has worked with children across diverse sectors for over 20 years. She is a registered art therapist, an authorised

parenting effectiveness training (PET) instructor, and is certified in 'Choice theory' by the William Glasser Institute Australia.

In this article we discuss when and how to best support children and teach these skills to them. We draw on the use of practical strategies from neuroscientist Dr Daniel Siegel, insights about how the brain works from Daniel Goleman, and time-tested effective communication methods by Dr Thomas Gordon, which are now supported by current neuroscience.

Trying to convince a child to calm down when they are emotionally upset, or to use rewards, punishments or time-out are just a few of the roadblocks to effective support for a child, especially when one understands that emotional intelligence resides in brain areas distinct from IQ and personality traits. This vital distinction in brain areas was made by neuroscientist, Reuven Bar, during studies on brain injured patients and lost brain capacities. Understanding more about brain function can help educators understand children's emotionality as well as their own (Goleman 2011).

Young children often have difficulty controlling their emotions and behaviour. This can lead to educators themselves feeling out of balance, dysregulated and wondering how best to respond within the complexities of settings with numerous children, high expectations, and day-to-day challenges. Sometimes reactivity becomes habitual. The methods used to help children regulate their emotions and maintain balance can also be used successfully by educators to maintain their own emotional regulation.

Experiencing a wide range of emotions and their accompanying intensities is a normal part of childhood development, especially in the early childhood years. Therefore, it is inevitable that children will 'lose it' at times. Apart from developmental age and temperament, some children may have more frequent emotional outbursts due to sensory processing challenges, health issues, trauma, disabilities and, according to Dr Daniel Siegel 'caregivers who amplify distress or who are unresponsive', or who place undue demands on a child's capacity (Siegel & Payne Bryson 2018, p. 29).

Support through connection

In order to grow children's emotional intelligence, attuned responsiveness is key. When a child is flooded with emotions they are operating from the primitive, reactive region of the brain. It is difficult for them to access the rational part of the brain, the frontal cortex. They cannot 'hear' if an adult tries to give directions or teach a lesson at this time.

Deeply connecting with a child is paramount to supporting them to regulate their emotions.

Firstly, connection requires three helping attitudes:

1. empathy (putting your feet in the child's shoes)
2. being genuine
3. accepting that the child has a right to his or her feelings.

Secondly, using the skill of active listening shows a child that you hear both their emotion and what has happened for them. It involves reflecting what the child has expressed or is experiencing, clarifying your understanding of their experience and in doing so, letting the child know that they have been heard and understood. Deep connection occurs when a child feels heard.

Active listening allows emotional flooding to subside and, for the verbal child, provides the opportunity to articulate their unmet need and solve their own problem. It helps children regain emotional composure and return to balance more quickly. In addition to communicating our understanding with attuned verbal responses, teachers can offer a soothing presence through close physical proximity, affection, empathic facial expressions and gestures.



Examples

Child's situation	Roadblock responses	Active listening response
Child struggling to draw the picture she wants or to write her name correctly	Just keep trying; you'll get it. (Reassuring) Don't worry about it, I'll write it for you. (Advising/giving solutions)	You're really frustrated that you can't get the picture the way you'd like. Hmm, that can be tricky.
Child doesn't want to come in from playing outside.	It's time to come inside. (Directing) If you don't come in now, you'll miss out on the story! (Threatening/warning)	It's hard to stop what you're doing when you've been having so much fun. You do not want to come inside today.
Child complains that Susie doesn't want to sit with her.	Susie doesn't worry who she sits with. (Moralising/dismissing)	You're disappointed that Susie wants to sit somewhere else today. You'd like a friend to sit with.
Child cries when it is time for Mum to leave.	Don't cry. Mummy will be back this afternoon. We're going to have so much fun. (Reassuring/distracting)	It's upsetting saying goodbye to Mummy.
Child throws a block because his block tower has been knocked over.	We don't throw blocks in here. You could have hurt someone. (logical explanations) Now go and pick that up. (Directing)	You're so very upset that your block tower has been knocked over. You wish it were still standing. (Teacher can teach child how to use assertive communication skills once emotional flooding has subsided.) See later example.

Avoiding disconnection

Communication roadblocks are common responses that get in the way of effective listening and can lead to disengagement, preventing connection. Unfortunately, adults often inadvertently use some of these roadblocks when a child is distressed and end up either escalating the upset or causing the child to suppress or deny their feelings. Communication roadblocks may also discourage the child from expressing themselves or from accepting responsibility for finding their own solutions to their difficulties.

That is not to say that we should not use these forms of communication at all. However, it is helpful to become aware of how roadblocks can interrupt communication, prevent a child from processing their strong emotions or seeking solutions. This becomes particularly important when the child is grappling with a problem or is experiencing intense, overwhelming emotions.

While Dr Thomas Gordon (2000) identified 12 roadblocks to communication, for simplicity, they can be grouped into three broad categories (adapted from Dr Louise Porter 2006).

1. **Communication roadblocks that deny feelings** — These roadblocks send the message to the child to think rather than feel and are an attempt to avoid dealing with the feelings. For example, trying to distract a child, using logical explanations, dismissiveness, warning or reassuring them.
2. **Communication roadblocks that use judgement** — These roadblocks involve comparing children's behaviour with our own internal standards of right or wrong, or our own perceptions of a situation. For example, criticising, blaming, diagnosing, interpreting and even praising.
3. **Communication roadblocks that give solutions** — These roadblocks are when we offer children our solutions or tell them what they should do about their problem or upset. These roadblocks deprive children of the opportunity to resolve issues for themselves. For example, ordering, directing, interrogating, preaching, advising, moralising and threatening.

One of the keys to growing emotional intelligence is empathy. Children—in fact human beings in general—have a natural bias toward being egocentric and therefore seeing things from their own perspective. However, empathy is '... a skill that can be learned, an emotional muscle that can be strengthened, a part of the brain that can be developed' (Siegel & Payne Bryson 2018, p. 146).

Teaching young children skills

In addition to empathy being modelled through the use of skills such as active listening and avoiding the use of potentially harmful communication roadblocks, the development of empathy in children can be promoted through explicitly teaching empathy. When a child is feeling emotionally balanced, asking questions of children to encourage them to think about the perspective of others, discussing the viewpoints and feelings of characters in storybooks and teaching effective communication and listening skills are all tools that can promote the development of empathy in very young children.

Role playing or using puppets can support children to use assertive communication skills rather than aggressive or passive responses. For example, the puppet pretends to knock down blocks and the child is encouraged to respond assertively. The teacher says, 'How would you feel if your blocks got knocked down?', and then the teacher encourages the child to tell the puppet, 'I don't like it when you knock my blocks'. Children can also be taught breathing, calming and mindfulness techniques to increase their emotional balance.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence is gained by developing a balanced brain, experiencing connection and cultivating empathy, so that children can handle life's difficulties and disappointments with greater composure.

To read more about specific strategies for promoting the development of children's emotional intelligence, we highly recommend Dr Daniel Siegel and Dr Tina Payne Bryson's books, *The whole brain child* and *The yes brain child*. For more in-depth understanding of active listening, roadblocks and effective communication, we recommend Dr Thomas Gordon's books, *Teacher effectiveness training* and *Parent effectiveness training*.

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From curriculum to cordial

Teaching is a craft which involves interpreting the knowledge, skills and attitudes outlined in curriculum documents to deliver it to the students, using age and developmentally appropriate pedagogies.



Correction: this feature was published in the last issue and credited incorrectly. Our apologies to Ms Brewer

Ellen has over 25 years of experience including learning support; as a Year 2 Net Key Teacher; and as an Age Appropriate Pedagogy Coach in Central Queensland, supporting schools with the introduction and implementation of AAP into the classroom. This has enabled Ellen to have a thorough knowledge of AAP and its implementation, as well as an understanding of the current systemic requirements to deliver the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum is separated into disciplines. However, it is important to remember that learning is not linear, but a complex process with many interrelated and overlapping ideas and concepts. As a result, it is essential that teachers have a thorough knowledge of the curriculum and pedagogy so that the learning experiences we provide to our students are engaging, rich and integrated.

With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum and the supporting curriculum into the classroom (C2C) resource documents, there was the notion that because it was Monday, term one, week three, preparatory teachers needed to be teaching specific lessons 'Using my Imagination' in English and 'Identifying Similarities and Differences' in mathematics. In the early days of these documents, I would apprehensively move away from what was stipulated on the department plan, always wondering how I would justify what was happening in my class when 'somebody' would ask, 'Why are they playing?' Fortunately, with an improved understanding of the Australian Curriculum, the introduction of age-appropriate pedagogies (Queensland Government Department of Education) and my participation in the 2015 pilot and 2016–2017 program, I now have the confidence to 'grab teachable moments' to create a rich, connected experience which engages the student.

One such experience occurred during outside time. I knew that in the following weeks I would be teaching measurement and the concept of capacity in mathematics, so I set up the water-trough with a variety

of containers and coloured water. My purpose was to converse with and observe the children identifying their prior knowledge, language and understanding of capacity as well as any misconceptions they may have had. It was in the initial moments of their presence at the trough that one child stated that it looked like green cordial and that they should set up a 'cordial shop'.

That was the moment, the beginning of what became a 'teachable', 'integrated and meaningful' learning experience. While standing with the children at the trough, I had already started making connections across the Australian Curriculum learning areas and the general capabilities. In mathematics, students would make comparisons using capacity, while in English they would be writing, using words and images to convey their ideas. They would be using their sound and letter knowledge for their writing, and developing their oral language skills to communicate clearly. They would be developing their creative thinking and their social skills. During that session, the students continued to explore and talk, with interest building around the anticipated 'cordial shop'. Through discussion and an occasional question or prompt from myself, the students continued to develop and problem solve through their ideas: 'How are you going to set up a cordial shop? How will you know it is a shop? Hmm! I think I might have some in the storeroom ...' and shortly afterward, with the addition of paper cups, there were the beginnings of a 'cordial shop'.

The learning experience, which started as a data-gathering activity, was

gaining momentum. Previously, I would have stopped any further exploration due to time constraints, feeling guilty that I was deviating from the C2C documents or, if by chance somebody in authority walked into the yard, would I have the language, the research or the confidence to explain why my students looked as if they were 'just playing'? Over the following days during outside time the children continued to develop their 'cordial shop' with students entering and exiting the learning area, depending on their level of interest. During daily reflections with our class planning board, discussions for outside time were focused on the 'cordial shop' from generating a basic list of requirements to how it was going to happen and who was going to organise and create. It was during these discussions that one child observed that the paper cups had become soggy after too many refills and that we needed plastic cups instead. BINGO! There was another curriculum link to science. The students would observe and describe the properties and behaviour of familiar objects; however, we were not learning about materials until term two, and it was only term one. Through using the photographs of the cordial shop, I now had my hook when it came to introducing the unit on materials

and an opportunity for the students to transfer their developing knowledge into other learning experiences, again reinforcing the notion that learning is a cross-curricular and interrelated process.

Throughout learning experiences, the teacher has an important role to play: building a rapport with and understanding the students in their class; considering their development, physical, social, emotional and cognitive abilities; and fostering their interests to support learning and development. Throughout the 'cordial shop' experience the students were active and given opportunities to explore. They investigated their interests and were engaged in learning. The students could focus on their goals and, because the activity was open-ended, they could work at their developmental level with support from the teacher.

The learning experience enabled the students to be agentic, collaborative, and creative (Queensland Government Department of Education). Using the planning board allowed the students to engage in language-rich and meaningful conversations which contributed to the direction of their learning. Collaborating, the students could develop their interests



as they had 'permission' to take control, articulating their thinking and making connections to other learnings.

There were other benefits too. Although the cordial shop initially focused on the students' mathematical understandings, socially and emotionally, the quieter students also began to contribute to the collaborative planning times. Through observing and conversing, there were other students identified as requiring extra support or needing extension. Allowing students to participate in the open-ended learning experience enabled me to be flexible, catering to the needs of the students.

Thorough knowledge of the Australian Curriculum is vital. Teachers need to be familiar with the achievement standard, the curriculum content and assessment tasks. Continually referring back to the documents on a weekly rather than a term basis is essential as it enables teachers to 'think off the top of their head', grab teachable moments and find the links back to the curriculum and assessment. It is when a teacher has a thorough understanding of the content and pedagogy that they can be flexible and responsive to the needs, skills, and interests of the children, having the confidence to create a dynamic program.

Valuing and reflecting on pedagogies is essential, and understanding different pedagogies is vital if teachers

want to support learning across the curriculum. That one moment at the water trough could have been easily dismissed; however, utilising that spontaneous learning opportunity, opened the door to many other learning experiences and the opportunity to implement additional pedagogies. Recognising the importance of spontaneous experiences, intentionally planning the learning, reflecting on pedagogical practices, providing time, space, resources and the opportunity to explore, question and problem-solve are crucial for student learning.

A teacher has a significant role. They can either provide opportunities for learning or stifle the learning by one simple decision. Interpreting the curriculum is essential; understanding the assessment is crucial. However, it is a teacher's knowledge of age and developmentally appropriate pedagogies, their skills to deliver the content and their courage to deviate from their plan which creates an engaging program and successful learners.

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Creating healthier family relationships through nurturing environments—five principles

The interest in and rise of individualisation, self-actualisation and self-fulfilment has had a profound influence on family life and mental wellbeing. Families are ever increasingly affected by significant social, economic and technological changes. This is evidenced with increasing divorce rates, disturbing parent-child conflicts and increases of stress, anxiety and depression in children and adolescents (Hiscock et al. 2018).



Jane Hanckel is an author, educator, and parenting expert who has a long-standing passion for innovating inspired education and educational community outreach initiatives.

My children took me on a steep learning curve about the world and the environments in which we raise children. My youngest child had extensive food sensitivities, allergies and asthma that were significantly remedied through a nature-based kindergarten, a rarity at that time. This led my partner and I to develop an innovative series of workshops and programs in 2008, integrating the principles I had come to understand as I raised my children, and from their Waldorf/Steiner education. These programs were successful in helping families transform the way they were raising their children to create healthier family relationships.

CASE STUDY

A young boy comes into the room. He has a small box of action-figure army toys. He ignores everyone and focuses repetitively on arranging these men. He feels closed, angry, impatient. He is four years old and has a vocabulary of only a few words. He doesn't interact with other children. He ignores his mother and younger sister when asked to join the activities of the group. Nine weeks later, at the end of our program, the same boy is visibly relaxed, talking and playing, and interacting with those around him. He is now smiling and includes his sister in his games. To his mother's delight, her son has started talking to her, is becoming part of the family again and has been accepted as ready for school.

Meeting for the program once a week for three hours, the children and their families moved from a place of high anxiety to increased harmony. Children at risk of being medicated or being removed from their families were healing. Within weeks of the start of our program, colleagues at the centre who used to shut their doors to block the sound of screaming children were now leaving their doors open to hear the sound of children's laughter.

We employ simple and effective methods to support dramatic changes and have created a framework of five key principles.

The five principles

1. Acknowledging the whole child and their development. In today's society, which has become very materialist and reductionist, we often see the child as a miniature adult, focused on cognitive capabilities. Through varied and balanced programs that consciously cultivate the child's physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual development, the whole child is honoured and that makes an extraordinary difference in their wellbeing.
2. Honouring the importance of imagination, creativity and curiosity. Children are born as creative, curious, imaginative beings with an interest in the world around them. If this is fostered and developed, they will grow into adults who have preserved this interest and desire to learn. Free imaginative, creative play is fundamental

for children's healthy development. Access to regular programs of arts, crafts, songs, games and stories support children's transformation.

3. Valuing children's right to connection to the natural world and healthy nutrition. In the way that humanity has evolved, connection to the natural world is diminishing. Particularly in the 21st century, we see that the majority of children are spending most of their time indoors using technology. Taking not only children but also ourselves back into the natural world is a phenomenal way of building up innate human strength and capacities. Providing access to healthy seasonal, local, organic, chemical free and wholefood is vital for health and the fundamental right of every child because they are building their bodies and their capacity for the future (Hanckel & Segal 2016).
4. Awakening and acknowledging what is individual in each child. In today's industrial model of education and early childhood, we have a tendency to believe that one size fits all, that what's good for one child will be good for every child (Scott 2015; Pukkinen 2012). What we have seen in the programs we have run within communities is that when you look deeply into the individual nature and multiple intelligences of children - their practical, emotional, intellectual, creative, and spiritual aspects - you see the huge potential of each child, which is not the same as the child next to them. Supporting each child to connect with a sense of purpose and meaning in their life, and providing an opportunity for them to connect with their joy, talents and many interests nurtures the most valuable resource for humanity - the passionate human mind and spirit.
5. Recognising that children need to be raised in healthy communities. Community experiences support children, parents and families to employ healthy habits and foster good relationships, which is essential in the modern world. 'It takes a village to raise a child ...'

Particularly in the early years, the child's environment is vital. Creating a calm, uncluttered, warm and nurturing play environment is one of the fundamental elements of our project. Every toy is made of natural materials; we do not provide any plastic. The colours and fabrics are also made of natural materials, soft, plain pastel colours. Pinecones, wooden tree blocks, knitted woollen crochet strings and other materials from nature are arranged in simple wicker baskets;



handmade dolls are wrapped in muslin and in simple cradles. The physical environment is calming and nurturing to the senses. Walking into the space, both the children and adults can feel calm and at peace, like walking through the dew-filled misty countryside in the early morning—you can breathe out and have space to 'feel'. The environment invites the children in, to come, sit and enjoy the peace, allowing the fountain of their imagination to rise to the surface of the

still pond. The environment and the program were created on the understanding that primary needs of children are love and warmth—'a garden for children' – where each child is nurtured with the same love and care given to a seedling.

As educators, redirecting our attention to a holistic model - by focusing on the principles previously described—is our most important task. As a society we have been sold the notion that our progress as a civilization is governed by economic forces that will produce a better world for all. If education addresses the whole human being—mind, heart and spirit—in a nurturing environment, children are much better equipped to contribute to our future on this fragile planet and much more able to develop healthy relationships within the family and wider circle. Our role is to share the awareness of the deepest potential in our children, ourselves and our colleagues – seeing and educating the whole person by integrating the inner life and the outer life to actualise individual and global awakening. Children, especially in early childhood, need space, time, connection to nature, free play and love to help them flourish intellectually, morally and spiritually. Flourishing children inspire flourishing families.

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Read the room: using musical activities to meet little people where they are at

As an early childhood music specialist who teaches various age-groups in a number of locations, it is vital that I maintain a flexible attitude and open mind, and heart. In all contexts I need to be aware that each child contributes their individual story to the group dynamic. This contribution might include: what they have just eaten; how much sleep they had the night before; excitement about a fictional character that they feel a strong affinity towards; their worries and upsets, including separation anxiety and interpersonal challenges; the effect of lethargy or hyperactivity on their ability to maintain focus and follow instructions; and, of course, their most recently acquired scrapes and bruises. These stories may be told verbally or behaviourally, and it is particularly in instances of the latter that music can support expression and aid connection.



Kath Lloyd is an early childhood music specialist, with a particular interest in interpersonal development. She has been a registered KMEIA (Kodály Music Education Institute of Australia) teacher since 2001.

Kath is the coordinator of the Early Childhood Music (ECM) program at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, teaching there as well as taking the Open Conservatorium ECM program into the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital school in South Brisbane.

Before I share a few examples of songs and musical activities that a carer might use to form a connection with a child, I would like to reflect upon why empathic engagement is such an important aspect of working with young children.

The magic words, 'I understand'

The simple act of enquiry demonstrates that you are seeking to understand a child's current thoughts, feelings and experience. Active listening to their responses communicates to them that you genuinely respect their perspective, and care about their wellbeing. Non-judgemental paraphrasing of their story indicates that they have been heard and empathised with. We may feel that we do not have the time to engage in this way with every child in our care, but in actuality, these moments of conscious connection are often fleeting—and yet have a profound impact on the quality of the learning opportunities which follow.

Meet a child at their level so that you might then take them to yours

To teach a child, we need to engage them. To engage a child, we need to firstly engage with them by reading their internal landscape and meeting them there in that place. Once a mental and emotional connection (including via physical interaction) has been made, the child will then be more likely to engage with us and our lesson or activity.

In other words, we can't achieve our learning objectives with the group if we haven't first connected with the individuals within the group. Young children's emotional states tend to fluctuate moment by moment—altering their perceptions, influencing their behaviours and impacting upon their ability to process and learn from activities. It is therefore important to maintain a sense of curiosity towards this ever-changing landscape, so that we might work with it rather than against it.

Motivation that is internally generated rather than externally imposed

When seeking to empathically engage with a child, we also create opportunities for them to inform us about their specific interests and the activities that they find particularly enjoyable and exciting. A child will respond more willingly to suggestions which tap into this understanding of their intrinsic motivators than those which stem from inflexible expectations of educational outcomes. This is particularly helpful to remember when working with a resistant child who is defiantly keen to assert their newly acquired sense of autonomy!

Therein lies the advantage of flexible child-informed programming over rigid formulaic pre-programming—it provides the space for teachers and carers to notice, to enquire and empathise, and to appropriately respond to the needs of the individuals *within* the group.

Using music to make connections

Rhymes, songs and musical games are a playful way to connect with the children in our care. They allow us to connect with individuals by drawing on aspects of both their externalised and internalised experiences. They also provide a means of connecting an individual to the group, and nurturing connections between each individual within the group.

REPERTOIRE (THEMES) TO CONNECT WITH CHILDREN'S INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EXPERIENCES	
Individual (external)	Repertoire that connects me to them might include the themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> what have they been playing? (their interests, games, toys) what are they wearing? (colours, patterns, animal prints) mirroring their actions and echoing their singing/vocalisations.
Individual (internal)	Repertoire that connects them to me might include the themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how they are feeling (energy, personality) what they are feeling (emotions, mood)
Group (external)	Repertoire that connects them to the group might include the themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the shared experience (weather, seasons).
Group (internal)	Repertoire that connects the group with them might include the themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a personal experience of a shared event (e.g. Christmas) sharing the current experience (being kind, making friends).

An example of a singing game that is a simple but effective means of connecting with a young child (in both one-on-one and group contexts) is the adaptation of the traditional song, *Row, row, row your boat*:

*Roll, roll, roll the ball,
To each and every one,
Don't forget to push it back,
If you want some fun!*

Particularly suitable for babies and toddlers, this activity can assist connection in a multidimensional manner. A large, colourful ball will capture the child's attention and distract them from any residual feelings of upset or resistance—more often than not they will be VERY keen to interact with it! When the ball is rolled towards the child,

their focus is fully externalised on to it, which can help to ease any social anxiety in a group context. When they push the ball back to the carer, the connection is reversed (from **me to them** to **them to me**) and their effort enthusiastically validated. In a group setting, this action is a means of welcoming them into the group (**them to the group**), and being validated by the other individuals in the group who are also learning to patiently wait their turn, and applaud each other's efforts (**the group with them**). This activity not only creates an opportunity for the carer to engage with an individual child—it also helps to build the children's awareness of each other, and creates a supportive and celebratory group dynamic.

For older children (three-to-five-year-olds), the traditional circle game *Here we go 'round the mulberry bush* can be used as a musical means for 'show and tell':

*Here we go 'round the mulberry bush,
The mulberry bush, the mulberry bush,
Here we go 'round the mulberry bush,
On a cold and frosty morning.
[alternative ending: So early in the morning]*

This is the way we [e.g. sweep the yard / wash our hands / stamp our feet] ...

By asking the children for their suggestions and accompanying movement for the *This is the way we* ... sections, the carer connects with each individual child. Their input is then validated by the group when everyone performs the actions. Different themes could be suggested by the teacher, for example, what they did on the weekend, what they think they might do on their holidays, or maybe they are going 'round the treasure chest—to stimulate their memories or forward/creative thinking, including tapping into their specific interests. The game is 'bookended' by the children holding hands in a circle and skipping during the *Here we go 'round the* ... sections: to create an inclusive group dynamic, and then closure following the turn-taking of individuals' input.

If we want the children in our care to engage with us, we need to engage *with them* by **feeling** where they are 'at'. As music is the language of feelings and emotions, it is a very effective way to connect with a child's internalised states and expressed communications. Using music, we can playfully take a child's experiences and perspectives seriously, and demonstrate to them that they are understood, respected and valued.

'Let us take our children seriously! Everything else follows from this ...' (Kodály).

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Being me: understanding and embracing children, exactly as they are!

This morning, as I juggled school bags and work bags on the way down the driveway and into the car, I happened to glance at my three-year-old, who had dressed herself. There she was—skirt over tracksuit pants, daisy headband, tiara and gumboots. Would I have dressed her like that? No. Did I mind that she was dressed like that? No (well, not really)!



Tash Treveton has co-authored several books. She started her career as an untrained casual and since then has studied and gained experience as an educator, educational leader and a nominated supervisor. She is happiest when creating natural, risky and engaging outdoor play spaces for children. Tash enjoys sharing the importance of outdoor play and does so regularly in her role as a licensed trainer for Claire Warden.

My three-year-old is one of the most strong-willed children I know. She is incredibly stubborn, has an innate need to be right, is 'bossy' and most definitely pushes my buttons at times. She is also hilarious, extremely loving and very generous. You know how many parenting gurus suggest giving children two choices and then waiting for the child to happily select one of those choices? That just doesn't work for my three-year-old. Without fail, she wants something completely different.

Why? Is she just 'being difficult'? No. Is she 'testing me'? No. She's just being her.

Several years ago, our team at Inspired EC was introduced to the concept of personality types. Sure, we had heard bits and pieces about it before, but nothing compared to what we were about to read. As we buried our heads in the book *Personality plus* by Florence Littauer, we quickly discovered how little we knew about our personality types and how they impacted the way that we worked as a team. We completed the quiz and quickly learnt which personality type/types we were. Reading some of the stories and examples described in the book was like reading about ourselves.

So, what does this have to do with children, and why did I tell you all about my strong-willed three-year-old?

Not all children are the same. They play in different ways, they learn in different ways, they speak in different ways and they behave in different ways. That's what makes them interesting. That's also what can make them challenging! Whether it's identifying their personality type or observing their love languages (Chapman & Campbell 2016) or just taking time to get to know a child's way of being, understanding and appreciating children and who they are at their core is crucial to providing early education and care that is meaningful and nurturing.

How do we really 'get to know' children?

Building a meaningful connection with a child starts from the minute they set foot into our service. How often are orientation visits centred around the adults? Discussions about the care requirements, policies and practicalities are obviously important, but we can become so bogged down in those details that we run the risk of not involving the child, of not taking the time to find out who they are, what they want or what they need.

Once a child is in our care, we can really see who they are, independent of their parents. Through observing children playing, discovering, connecting and simply being, we can gain incredible insight into their personality. As Plato said, 'You can

discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation'.

... we can become so bogged down in those details that we run the risk of not involving the child, of not taking the time to find out who they are, what they want or what they need

Let me tell you a story about Andrew. Andrew was four when he came into our service. At his orientation visit, his parents told us that he was quite shy and, at his previous centre, had often played alone. They were a little concerned about this and we agreed to keep an eye on his social skills and confidence in developing friendships. Over the next few weeks and months, we got to know Andrew and, yes, he did play alone. However, he seemed quite content playing on his own. In fact, several opportunities to connect him with peers had failed to appeal to him and we quickly realised that we were trying to make friendships happen when perhaps we didn't need to. We listened to our instincts and backed off and he later went on to develop one key friendship with a boy named Toby. Group experiences, where he may have been required to interact with other children, did not pose a problem for him, though he was capable of communicating respectfully and playing appropriately with other children. He simply preferred not to. Yes, he was a quiet child. But, get him talking about something that he found fascinating, and he came alive. He could share knowledge and ideas with peers and adults alike. It became clear that Andrew preferred to play independently, to spend his time creating ideas, researching and planning. Andrew stayed with us until he started school and was confident about the transition.

Several years later, I ran into Andrew's mum at the local shops. She told me how well he was doing at school and that he was still 'best friends' with Toby, and that he still preferred his own company and 'doing his own thing.'

It was reassuring to hear this, to know that we had understood (after our initial attempts to 'help') his personality and his preference for playing independently. We had correctly seen it, not as

something that needed to be fixed or overcome, but just as part of who he was.

Letting children be who they are

Children have a right to be who they are and to be valued for who they are. When working with children, it is important to work with the child we have in front of us, not the child we think they should be.

Take my three-year-old for example. She needs control. Her personality type is one that thrives on having control. This can be a huge challenge for me, as sometimes there are things in her day that she cannot control. From about ten months of age, she resisted getting in her car seat. She hated it. As soon as I would lift her, to place her in the seat, she would arch her back and scream and kick. Thinking it was just a phase, we persevered, as obviously there was no choice but to get into the car seat. As she got a little older, we discovered that if we let her climb in first and sit in the other seat, then she would happily get in her own seat. It meant leaving the house with a few extra minutes to spare, but it was worth it, as it worked well. She knew that she had to get into her seat, but she had a tiny bit of control over how that happened. Did it work every day? No. It was probably 70/30. And, to be honest, we still sometimes have this challenge in the morning. So, what makes it work or not? I have found the key factor of success is how much control she has had over other things that morning, before getting in the car seat. If she has been able to choose the pink cup instead of the green cup, it's easier. If she has been able to dress herself in a tutu and gumboots or a favourite T-shirt, it's easier. If she has had the opportunity to make decisions and do things 'her way', she is much more likely to climb into her car seat without fuss.

I guess it sounds like 'giving in', but that's just an adult spin on it. My mum likes to remind me that I was very much like my three-year-old, as a child, and that she took a 'pick your battles' approach and I suppose there are some similarities here. If I know that it is part of who she is—to need control—then I need to give her control where I can. (This works well when it comes to unpacking the dishwasher, as she doesn't want any help; she wants to do it her way, which works for me).

It is not about 'giving in'; it is about giving them what they need and letting them be who they are, even if that means wearing tutus and gumboots to the shops!

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Empowering children: building social resilience and emotional wellbeing in the early years

Resilience refers to the ability to successfully manage life. It incorporates being able to cope with challenges and stressful events in a healthy and constructive way. It is about the capacity to bounce back from negative experiences including adversity, tragedy or trauma. Children may be affected by minor and major influences, and traumas during their life. They need to learn coping mechanisms to deal with stressful situations and traumatic events that may impact on their lives. When children are resilient, they have a stronger connectiveness to their world and a healthier sense of identity. Children who are encouraged to self-regulate their emotions are better able to cope with the stressors that they may face in their environment. This means that parents, educators and teachers have an important role to play to empower children by building social resilience and emotional wellbeing in the early years.



Passionate about learning, Joanna Merton is keen to inspire others to continue to develop their skillset and to constantly be learning. With over 20 years' experience in the early childhood profession she has furthered her career to include roles as educator, trainer and assessor, professional development consultant and facilitator.

The aim of this article is to create awareness of the importance of empowering children by building social resilience and emotional wellbeing in the early years. Furthermore, key strategies to empower children and promote coping skills for children between the ages of zero and twelve will be addressed. It is critical to provide children with life skills that will support them as they journey through their lives.

The experiences and lessons we encounter throughout childhood can empower us to cope with the many challenges that may arise throughout life. I believe that between the ages of zero and six years is when the receptive cognitive abilities are most present, and children absorb information more readily than any other time in their lives. Resilience is important for children's mental health – it involves the ability to regulate and express emotions in a positive way. Mental health is closely linked to the social and emotional development and wellbeing of the child. *The Early Years Learning Framework* states that 'Holistic approaches to teaching and learning recognise the connectedness of mind, body and spirit' (Department of Education,

Employment and Workplace Relations 2009 p.15).

The theorist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) focused on the idea that childhood experiences are key factors in the development of personality, particularly if traumatic events occur during childhood.

There are many potential influences on a child's ability to build resilience in the early years. The routine interactions, experiences with families, relationships with peers, and the impact of the wider community shape the person that we will *become*. These factors influence beliefs, feelings, thoughts, values and views, and help shape a child's identity and how they view the world around them. As the *Early Years Learning Framework* for Australia states,

Children's identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. They are shaped by many different events and circumstances (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2009 p.7).

Life is challenging and stressful. There are many potential factors that

children may be exposed to during their daily routine. These may include:



Other factors may consist of:

- social and peer interactions (bullying)
- illness or additional need
- community influences (unsafe environments)
- family relationships
- exposure to social media
- relationship difficulties
- sudden changes to the routine or environment
- serious challenges such as parental unemployment
- feelings of isolation.

Factors that demonstrate that a child has a high level of resilience may include:

- self-confidence, self-esteem, self-concept and self-identity
- health and happiness
- emotional intelligence and wellbeing
- social competence and wellbeing
- the ability to regulate emotions
- health and physically activity
- healthy and happy relationships with others
- stronger and secure bonds are formed
- a sense of belonging

- ability to express empathy for others and the environment
- connectiveness with their world
- learner competence, school success
- building strong skills for lifelong learning.

Connectiveness with the family, early childhood environment, school, peers and the wider community are critical for a child to be able to build resilience and have a sense of wellbeing. Educators must build meaningful relationships with children and positive partnerships with families and communities.

Empowering children and developing resilience skills will support children when faced with challenging events and traumatic situations, helping them to overcome adversity during these periods of time.

High-quality relationships are paramount to building children's resilience and a sense of *belonging*. Educators can support children to build coping strategies and other valuable life skills to help them meet any challenges and traumas that they are faced with.

It is inevitable that children will experience some challenges and traumatic situations throughout their lives. Providing a safe and supportive environment can ensure that children are able to cope with these events and situations when they arise.

It is important to promote resilience strategies with children, and this can be achieved by:

- explaining what resilience means
- promoting supportive relationships with others
- focusing on autonomy and independence
- showing children how to recognise their emotions
- encouraging self-regulation of the child's emotions
- practising empathy for others and the environment
- providing opportunities for being involved in challenges and for risk-taking
- providing opportunities which foster decision-making, problem-solving and making choices
- role modelling appropriate behaviours and language when dealing with stressors within the environment
- having meaningful discussions which encourage children to share their feelings, emotions and thoughts with others
- reassuring children that we all make mistakes and can learn from these mistakes
- reminding children that you are there to support them

- building partnerships with family and community and bring awareness about resilience
- seeking professional advice and identifying support services in the local and wider community.

Strategies to empower children:

Books and stories

Sharing age-appropriate stories and books with children can be a way to engage young children in resilience activities. A useful list of may include:

Hey warrior by Karen Young (addresses anxiety)

Brave little bear by Xenia Schembri (aimed to equip children with self-protective behaviours)

The very busy spider by Eric Carle (about a spider on a mission to build a web)

Where the wild things are by Maurice Sendak (about a boy who misbehaves and is sent to his room. He dreams he is in control of a kingdom of wild creatures)

Would you rather? by John Burningham (about the consequences of choices)

Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day by Judith Viorst (about a boy who dreams that nothing goes right. His mother helps him to understand that we all have days like that and that things will get better)

My guiding star by Niki Burton (an ode from a child to their carer).

Managing emotions

When a child is sad or frustrated, it is important to acknowledge their emotions and ask open-ended questions about how they are feeling. Encouraging children to talk about their emotions promotes an opportunity for the child to self-regulate their feelings.

An emotion chart may be used so that children can express how they are feeling and identify the emotions that they are experiencing at an early age.

Art therapy or representation through drawings and art can support the child when they are going through challenging situations or traumatic events in their young lives.

Encourage empathy and respect for a range of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is important to work together with communities to strive for engagement in learning life skills.

Introduce protective factors to children so that they have the awareness that they can communicate with a trusted adult if there is a situation that may not feel right to them.



Drawing by Sybella Hinze (8 years) – building resilience after her Omi passed away. Sybella told me it's a picture of her sister Charlotte, Omi and herself in Omi's garden picking the flowers which she helped Omi plant and water. One of her favourite memories of Omi.

Mindfulness techniques

Mindfulness has become a key focus in early childhood and school settings. Mindfulness has benefits for children and can be achieved with breathing activities, meditation and yoga, which are all calming activities that children may engage in.



Nature walk

A glitter jar can encourage children to remain calm during stressful situations. Fill a jar (child-safe) with glitter and water and allow the sensory experience to work its magic.

Get back to nature. Encourage children to go on a nature walk, sit in the garden and show gratitude for the physical environment.

Advocating for positive relationships with children and building partnerships with families is critical for the social and emotional wellbeing of the children. Children should be empowered to learn how to deal with stressful events and traumatic situations that they may experience during their daily routine. Providing meaningful activities and experiences for children can support them to build social resilience, emotional wellbeing and to problem-solve for themselves. Resilience should be fostered in all children.

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Care factor: moving from surviving to thriving

Have you ever found yourself in the lunch room, heavy with thoughts like 'I am just keeping my head above water'? Maybe you have found yourself day-dreaming about escaping it all to live on a remote island in the sun.

It was in my 29th year that I found myself in such a lunch room with an 'escaping' dream. Having spent years working in a fulfilling career, I was shocked when the realisation came over me one day—I was totally burnt out. I wanted to deepen my understanding of burnout, as I felt myself and those around me had only just touched the surface of this deep topic. And so, pursuing a long-time dream, I quit, packed up and drove off with no plan except to investigate this experience further.



Sonia Moloney is an education and engagement consultant at Pathways to Resilience Trust. She has a background in social work and sensorimotor art therapy, which has included case management, counselling, therapeutic intervention, group work, and the provision of education and training. Sonia works with a therapeutic, trauma and attachment-informed approach, using Bruce Perry's Neurosequential Model of Education.

'What puts us at risk of burnout is that the words sound so intense and harsh ... We are reluctant to call it burnout'—social worker.

I interviewed as many people as I could about their understanding and experiences of burnout and self-care. I had no set questions or process to follow, but themes very quickly emerged during these conversations. Educators, nurses, parents, social workers and business owners alike made it clear; burnout was a shameful concept. Hard to recognise or see coming and difficult to admit, burnout uses silence to keep people trapped on a treadmill.

We have 'responsibility for the kids in all ways ... The pressure is to develop the whole person in the child, not just the academic side'—teacher.

These conversations led me to realise that a large proportion of people are, put simply, pretty stressed. Especially those who are in the profession of caring for others. Educators juggle the increasing pressures and expectations placed on them, with the many roles they play in the lives of children, families and communities. The result is feelings of exhaustion, compassion fatigue and ongoing stress.

I heard stories from those who felt their stress levels had risen but never quite reduced. They talked of battling

a regular flu, experiencing significant anxiety and even longer-term stress-related illnesses such as high blood pressure.

With this happening in our bodies, we are too often left wondering, 'Where did my care go?', 'How can we offer children the care and support we wish to when we are struggling to experience this ourselves?'

'Self-care is selfish in the same way breathing is—it literally exists to keep you alive' (Sihlongonyane 2016).

If you can visualise yourself on an aeroplane during a safety demonstration, they will ask you to 'secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others'. We can look at our approach to wellbeing in the same way. If we do not care for ourselves first, then we will not have the ability to care for others.

'Within every moment of conflict is the opportunity for magic. Self-care is about being able to feel, to express, in all manners'—life coach.

My investigation into this topic led me to understand that many of us think we are doing a pretty good job of our self-care, until we realise we are not. I certainly thought I was. I took time off when I was sick, I took walks on the beach after work. I'm doing self-care, right? Yet hearing the large number of stress confessions, particularly from

graduates and those new to their respective industries, indicated that perhaps the walk on the beach was actually quite superficial. Talking with so many dedicated professionals about how massive their 'tired' is, how far gone their care factor was, I couldn't deny it any longer: cancelling all plans to stay home and recover on the weekend, and the sick days after the illness was present, were completely reactive and not at all proactive.

Over the next few years I remained curious about this topic, researching, noticing, becoming aware and experimenting. At times, it felt like it was a fine line between absolutely vital and a little cliché, but the alternative wasn't pleasant. Each time I discovered another speaker or technique, it brought me back to the same starting place. The phrase 'self-care' gives us a pretty great clue. We start with 'self'.

'Neuroscience research shows that the only way we can change the way we feel is by becoming aware of our inner experience and learning to befriend what is going on inside ourselves' (Van der Kolk 2014).

This includes a two-step approach, one of which is mindset. We know that our thoughts create our feelings, which create our actions. We also know we have the capacity to directly influence and change our thoughts, our mindset, our attitude and therefore our capacity to cope with overwhelming stress (Kordich, Hall & Pearson 2004).

When we address self-care with not only a mindset approach but a body approach too, it is then we open

up to real change. One such approach is the use of creative arts therapy.

'The awakening of inner perception. Gradually one becomes aware of subtle body sensations, inner urges, impulses and ideas that begin to shape a more genuine source of identity than the conditioned 'shoulds' of learned behaviour ... Trusting one's inner guidance can reveal ... unexpected wisdom and abundant healing' (Elbrecht 2018).

If you find yourself merely surviving on that treadmill and not sure how to get off, rest assured there are possibilities for learning how to change. There are professional development opportunities with a focus on increasing awareness of how the body responds to stress, how mindset influences wellbeing and how to embody this in order to change our path of self-care to one that says, 'I am thriving'.

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Teaching Food

As educators, you are perfectly placed to inspire young children on their food journey. And how you teach them about food and nutrition could benefit that child for their entire life.



Kate is a dietitian with a passion for improving the eating habits of families and communities. She created 'Foost' to teach easy ways of eating more fruits and vegetables. Kate runs cooking and nutrition incursions for children as well as professional development for educators and sessions for parents, helping to reduce stress and fussiness around food. She has a keen interest in the non-diet approach to eating.

The food a child eats is important both now and in the future. Diet affects our physical, emotional and social health. Research shows that dietary habits strongly track over time, so what a person eats as a child predicts their nutrition intake as an adult. Food is a physical necessity - but also a pleasure of life

The latest *National Nutritional Study* highlights that many improvements can be made to our children's eating. Educators are under a lot of internal and external pressure when it comes to food - pressure from the government to improve the statistics, often pressure from parents to report on intake and pressure from within yourself to help the children the best you can.

However, these pressure can lead to strategies that may not be supporting a child's long term relationship with food. This pressure, which stems from love, can lead us to focusing on 'getting food into children' in the moment rather than children learning to like foods and having a positive relationship with food so they continue to choose healthy foods for life and not just when coerced.

Just like reading or maths, food is a learnt process and some children learn faster than others. Before we teach children to read, we teach them their letters. Before we teach maths, we teach numbers. When it comes to eating, we need to teach food. For the greatest impact in young children food education should trump nutrition education.

Children are born with an innate preference for sweeter and saltier foods, so these foods tend to be accepted quicker. More bitter and less sweet foods, like vegetables, take longer to learn to like. In addition to this, children have more heightened taste buds than adults. Teamed with a need for control (in a world that is mostly controlled by adults), we can begin to understand why some fussy eating is a part of childhood. But as educators you can ease the journey for families and assist in the education process that is food.

Stages of learning to eat:

1. Build familiarity and trust (food acceptance)
2. Acceptance (willingness to try)
3. Choosing to eat (willingness to consume)



So what is the most powerful way we can help the children in our care learn to be less fussy? To learn to enjoy a wide variety of foods whilst having a positive relationship with it so they become adults who eat and enjoy a wide variety of foods? Through Positive Food Education.

Positive Food Education (PFE) is an approach to helping children learn to love a variety of foods, including vegetables, whilst having a positive relationship with food so that the benefits of healthy eating stay with them for life. There are four components to PFE: Eat Colourful, Eat Mindful, Positive Environment, Positive Behaviours and Beliefs.

Eat Colourful

To build familiarity and trust, children need positive exposures to food. The focus of PFE should be on fruits and vegetables, as consumption rates across the population are low and increasing colourful eating has significant health benefits.

Food education begins away from the table. This can include reading positive stories about fruits and vegetables, arts and crafts involving fruits and vegetables (use fruit or veg scraps as stamps or paint brushes, drawing fruits and vegetables, colouring in fruit and vegetable pictures), memory games with fruits and vegetables, making vegetable soup out of playdough, pretend play, gardening, cooking with fruits and vegetables (cooking skill is strongly linked to diet quality in adults). For older children, they can write recipes, use fruit and vegetables to practice fractions, do homework tasks and research a fruit or vegetable to make a presentation. Talk about senses beyond taste, what do ingredients smell, feel or sound like? Do they crunch when you eat them? Remember these experiences need to be repeated and positive.

Eat Mindful

Children are born with an innate ability to eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. This is a highly valuable skill that we want them to treasure. Intuitive eating (listening to one's own hunger and fullness) is at the heart of mindful eating.

Feeding is a shared responsibility with educators, parents/carers and children. It is the parents' (or sometimes child care centre's or school's) responsibility to provide the food. It is then the responsibility of the educators/teachers to choose the location and the timing. It is the CHILD's responsibility to choose whether to eat, what



and how much. When we see eating as a shared responsibility and respect each others' roles, feeding becomes much less stressful.

Positive Environment

Creating a positive physical, social and emotional environment for children to eat in will assist their food journey. We can shape the physical environment by putting up images of fruit and vegetables on the walls and by creating a warm, lovely space for eating (this can be outside or inside).

We can create a pleasant emotional environment by eliminating pressure. Never force a child to eat or try a food. Try to focus more on creating a nice environment, than on what food is being eaten. The children can help set the table, pick some flowers and create some mealtime conversation cards.

By eating with the children, whenever possible, limiting diet talk in front of children and eating fruits and vegetables in front of children, you are creating a positive social and emotional environment. A *Don't be rude* to food rule can help create some positive peer pressure. This means that if you have something yummy, you can tell the class: 'Mmm...these plums are super delicious'.

Positive behaviours and beliefs

Understanding food is a learned process. Rather than thinking of children as fussy, believe that they just haven't learnt to like certain foods yet. There is no need to preach nutrition as teaching food is far more effective. If you do want to teach nutrition, try using the Go, Glow and Grow ideas. Bodies can 'Go' with grainy foods, 'Glow' with colourful fruits and vegetables, 'Grow' with dairy and protein (meat, fish, nuts, eggs and beans).

Remember, it's just food. Good luck on creating some Positive Food Education experiences for your children.

(note: if you are overly concerned about the food intake or relationship with food of a child in your care, please refer them to a Paediatric Dietitian or Speech Therapist who specialises in problem feeding).



Title:

The Animal Anti-Bullying Survival Guide

Author:

Lauren Trott

Illustrator:

Lauren Trott

Publisher:

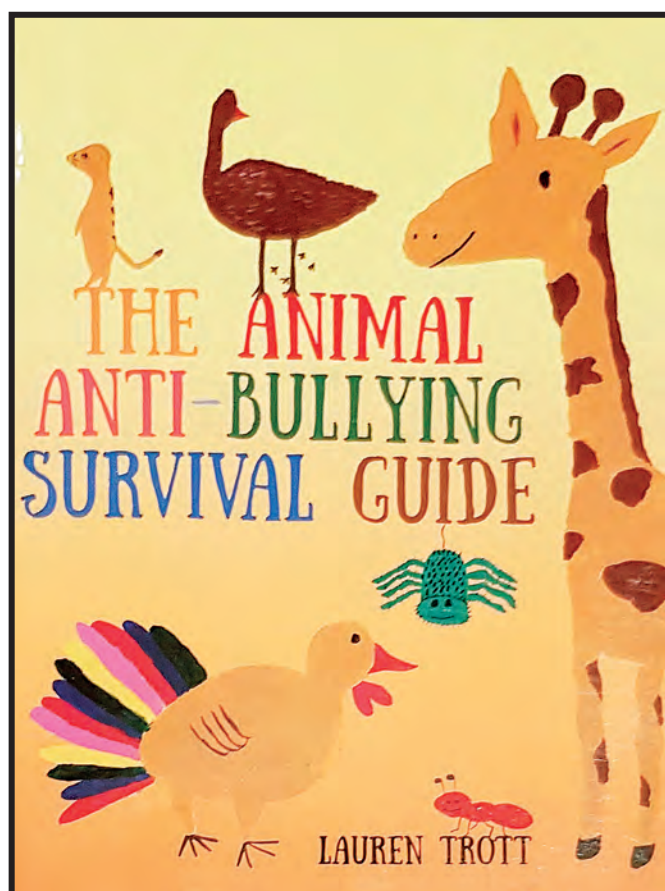
Self published

ISBN: 9781684187447

Reviewed by:

Jamie Fraser Gympie West State School

This beautifully made picture book by 11 year old Lauren Trott engaged my Year One students from the beginning. The students enjoyed the connections it made with animals and found it at times humorous especially "The Turkey Sensor." The students could relate to the strategies and it made them think about situations they had been in. It also opened up discussion of when they might be able to use the strategies and what each strategy meant. It fitted in well with our school's High Five program. It is a lovely, kid friendly approach to bullying and has some beautiful messages within it. "Sea Otters hold each other's hands when they sleep so they don't drift apart. Hold your loved ones close and don't drift apart."



Title:

My Storee

Author:

Paul Russell

Illustrator:

Aska

Publisher:

EK Books

ISBN: 978925335774

Reviewed by:

Jamie Fraser and friends

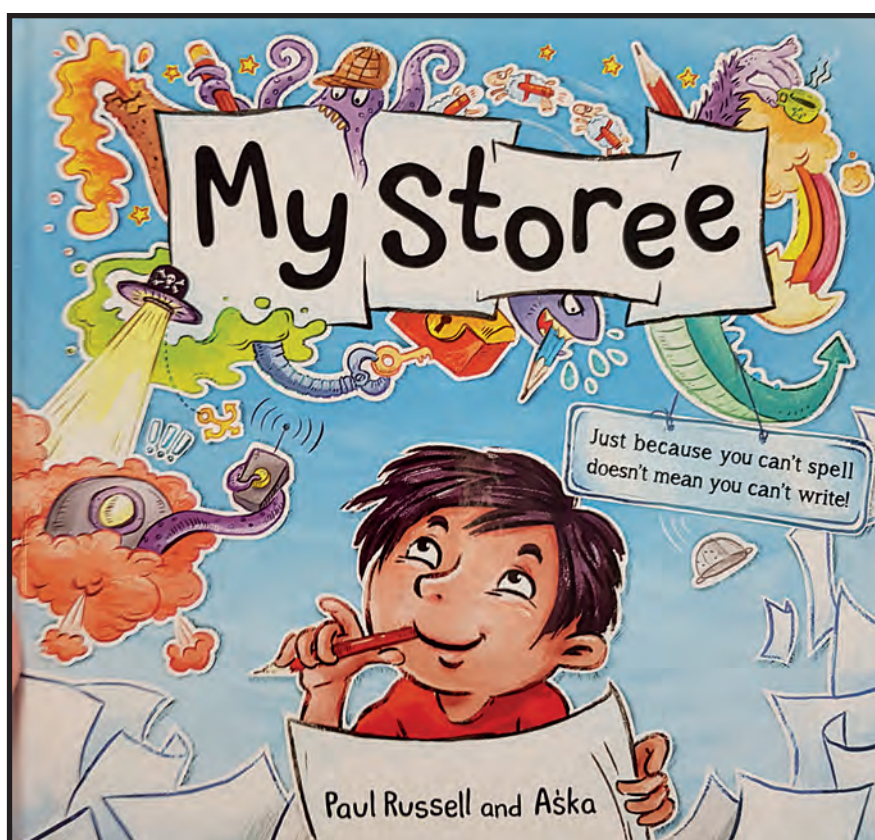
This story draws on the author Paul Russell's own experience with dyslexia and how he was inspired by a teacher who believed in him. The book begins with a young boy who has a mind full of ideas for wonderful stories. Once he begins to write them down at school though, he finds out there are too many rules during writing time. His wonderful stories become covered in red pen from his teachers and his creativity and love of stories quickly disappears. With the arrival of a new teacher who inspires and creates a safe environment, the young boy rediscovers his passion for story writing.

The author highlights that although you may find the rules of writing difficult, with the right inspiration and support you can still create the most magical stories. The book's illustrator Aska brings the story to life with vibrant and fun illustrations. My Year One students found this story engaging and loved the message "Just because you can't spell doesn't mean you can't write!" I found those students who were at the more independent level of reading were able to engage at a deeper level with the text as they noticed that although the spelling wasn't always correct, it was still a great story, making connections with the author's purpose.

Some of the children's thoughts:

Sullivan- It gave inspiration even if we don't write our words correctly.

Ethan- I liked that even though he couldn't write properly, he still wrote great stories!



Title:

Outdoor Learning Environments – spaces for exploration, discovery and risk taking in the early years

Author:

Helen Little, Sue Elliott and Shirley Wyver

Publisher:

Allen & Unwin

ISBN: 9781760296858

Reviewed by:

Sue Webster

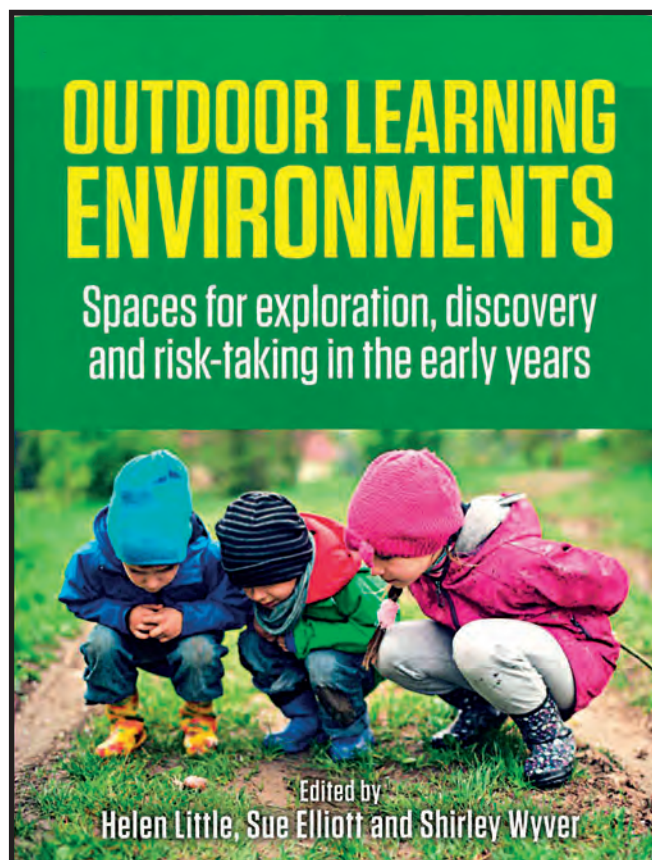
Outdoor Learning Environments is written by early childhood lecturers and early childhood program directors for professionals to explain and explore the importance of outdoor play for young children.

This text provides a shared language and framework for educators working in early childhood. It also highlights the benefits of active outdoor play and the importance of the risk taking involved in this type of play, ideas that are often overlooked.

The book is split into several chapters. The first looks at pedagogy and outdoor environments. It looks at developing a child's appreciation of the natural world and the value of risk taking in physical activity. It covers settings that promote young children's health and wellbeing, caring for the environment and the natural plants and species in the environment.

The next chapters focus on designing the outdoor learning space with attention put on planning, applications of standards and regulations, understanding and listening to children's voice, thinking about the cultural perspectives and looking at the outdoors and beyond our own play spaces.

This book is filled with recommended readings and factors to think about when planning your own outdoor space. It is informative and useful for educators and policy makers and a must read before starting the process in your own setting when wanting to encourage physical activity and motor skills development in an outdoors area.



Title:

Paddy O'Melon: The Irish Kangaroo

Author:

Julia Cooper

Illustrator:

Darryl Dickson

Publisher:

Exisle Publishing

ISBN: 9781925335637

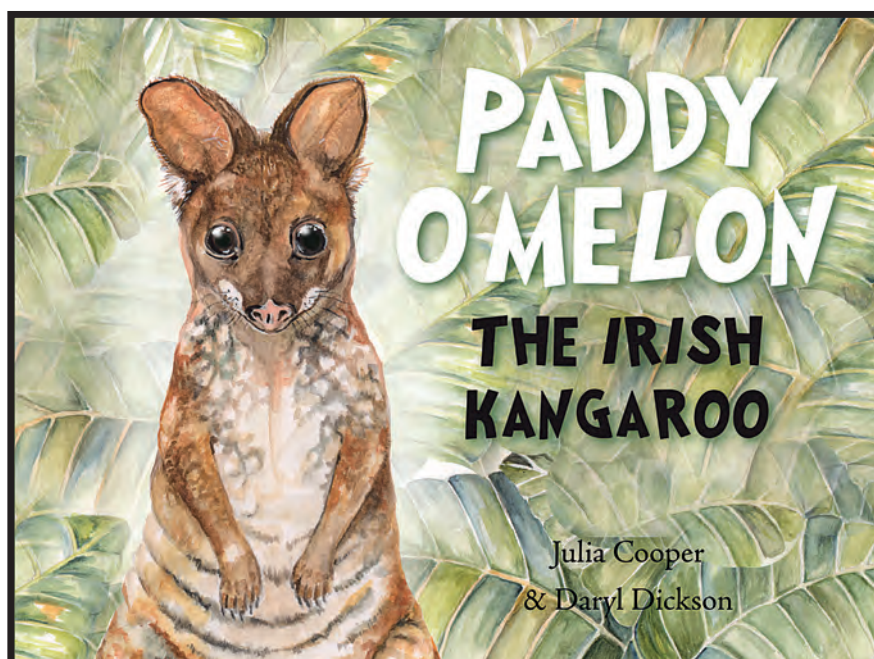
Reviewed by:

Julie Jones

Paddy O'Melon: The Irish Kangaroo is a story that will resonate with all those who care about the Australian rainforest and the animals that inhabit it. It tells the story of a little joey who is separated from his mother when trying to hide from two dogs who have been let off their leads in the rainforest. The joey is rescued and adopted by an Irish family, the O'Melons who now live in the rainforest and look after animals who have been injured or orphaned. The family name him Paddy O'Melon the Irish kangaroo and welcome him to their family. The story revolves around Paddy wanting to find out what type of animal he really is and going on an adventure where he comes across many rainforest animals from Queensland. This includes green tree frogs, a ringtail possum, flying foxes and finally the cassowary who tells him he is really a red legged pademelon who belongs right where he is with the other pademelons. Yes, at last Paddy has found his real home and his mother!

I read this story to our kindy group of 22, and although we enjoyed it I feel it would be particularly suited for primary age children as it is a book with quite a few words. *Paddy O'Melon* includes some universally important themes such as being brave, not giving up, finding out who you are and the sense of belonging that comes with family, as well as appreciating and caring for the animals that live in our rainforests.

The author Julia Cooper was passionate about wildlife, working as a wildlife keeper, carer and guide, as well as sharing her knowledge on local ABC radio. Julia was born in England and such was her commitment to Australian wildlife that she became an Australian citizen before sadly passing away at the age of 33 from an auto-immune disease. Special mention must be made of the detailed illustrations by Darryl Dickson which depict Australian rainforest animals in all their beauty. There are some detailed teaching notes on Exisle Publishing's website, (<https://exislepublishing.com/product/paddy-omelon/>) which would be a great resource for use in the classroom.



Title:

Parent and Child – the two-person family

Author:

Kathleen M. Waddington

Publisher:

Balboa Press

ISBN:

978150430713051895

Reviewed by:

Sue Webster

A lovely book written from a very personal perspective. Kathleen, a nurse, shares her experiences through the often-rocky path of heading a two-person family.

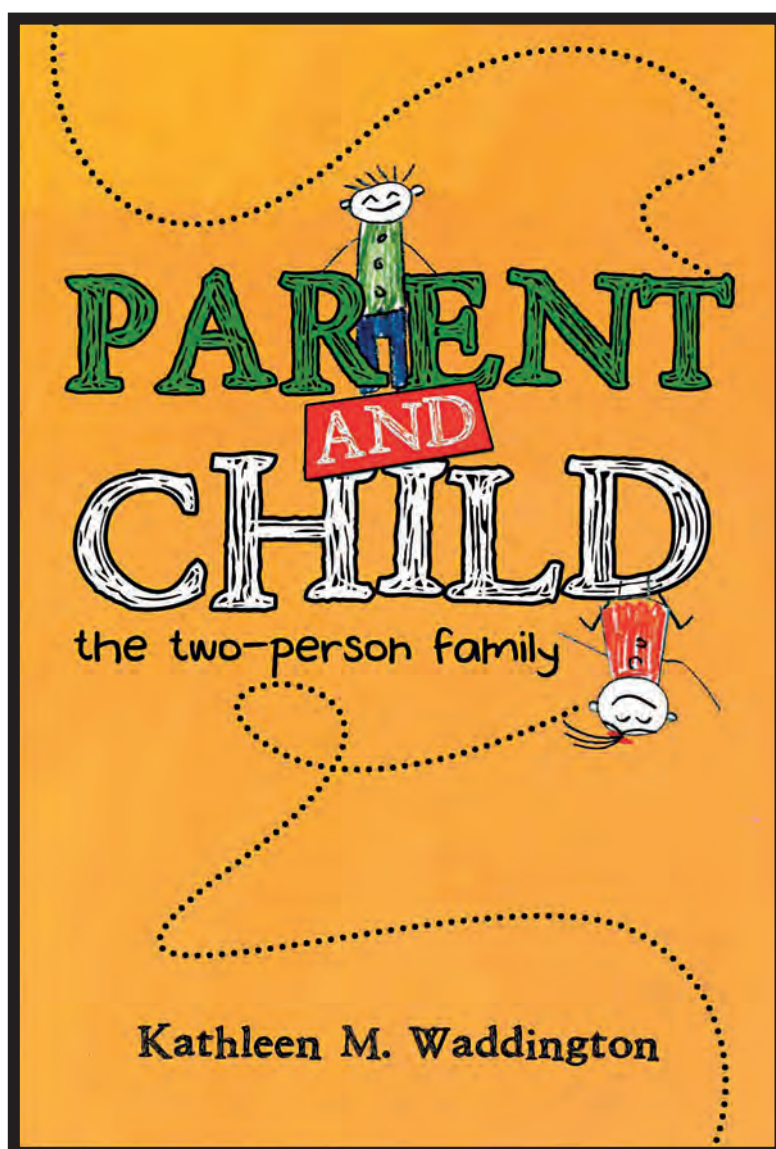
Like many others, Kathleen's family unfolded not in the way she may have anticipated but none-the-less, a positive one. Whether it is by choice or circumstance, many adults end up looking after their child alone. Kathleen talks of the challenges and opportunities of single parenting.

Kathleen shares her personal experience and offers practical advice for raising a child by yourself with chapters titled Perseverance, Building Inner Strength and Moving Forward.

She addresses topics such as Time Spent Together, Conflict of Roles and Discipline to help raise a child and topics such as Managing Stress, align your Energy and Letting Go to help parents see a positive path forward.

Kathleen challenges the views that often make single parents feel inadequate and speaks of the advantages of being a part of the two-person family.

This book allows for reflection and provides a personal and positive 'vibe' to live by.



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.

