



# ***Educating Young Children***

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

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Association

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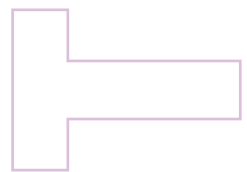
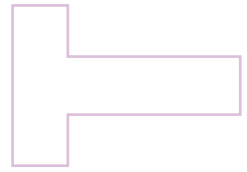
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# From the President

Welcome to the first volume of *Educating Young Children* for 2019. This issue will showcase the last of the collection of articles submitted by 2018 ECTA Early Childhood Conference presenters, along with a collection of articles sourced by the journal committee; many of which have a focus on pedagogy and best practice.



The journal committee are very excited to introduce Rachel Bushing in this issue. Rachel is from Pop Psychology and you can find out more about her on her website [www.LittleshopofPop.com](http://www.LittleshopofPop.com). Rachel will be a regular contributor to the journal.

ECTA strives to have a positive influence on state and federal policies that affect our members and colleagues. We do this by attending forums, focus groups, making submissions and building relationships with key stakeholders.

It is only with strong, mutually respectful relationships with the Department of Education that we can truly influence policy and make real change happen in the early phase of schooling. ECTA held such a relationship with Dr Jim Waterson, the previous Director General (DG) of Education. The ECTA Executive continues this professional relationship with Tony Cook, the incumbent DG. We have invited Tony Cook, the current DG to officially open the 2019 ECTA Early Childhood Conference. Both DGs have had experience teaching in the early phase of schooling.

One example of how a positive relationship has supported our members and colleagues in the past is the policy on Transition Statements introduced last year. ECTA is very proud to have been the initiator of Transition Statements being sent directly to schools, with the option of including Prep and Kindy teachers to contact each other directly (following the consent received from parents).

We hope this allows Kindy and Prep teachers to connect, when necessary,

knowing this will help provide the best possible outcomes for a seamless start to formal schooling.

The Transition Statements have the potential to be a vital tool for Prep teachers. We recommend strongly that Kindy teachers provide as much detail as possible and especially focus on recommendations about strategies and tools for transitioning each child.

As we move into 2019, the ECTA Early Childhood Conference Committee has finalised the forty-four presenters for this year's conference. Registrations are open now online via [www.ecta.org.au](http://www.ecta.org.au). The conference is a wonderful opportunity to touch base with old colleagues and make new connections with like-minded professionals. We are very proud to remain a fully volunteer run event; one of the only ones left in our industry. I invite you all to come along on 29th June 2019 to Sheldon Event Centre, Thornlands, Brisbane. Bring your colleagues with you, so that we can all learn and grow together.

Our first two webinars were a great success and we look forward to providing six more throughout the year, at no cost to members. The recordings of the webinars are placed in our Members Centre section of the website, along with PDF copies of all journals. If you do not know your log in details, please email [info@ecta.org.au](mailto:info@ecta.org.au) and I will send them to you.

Continue to make the difference in the lives of the young children you teach.

Yours in early education

Kim Walters

ECTA President





# ECTA Early Childhood Conference 2019

**Saturday**  
**June 29, 2019**  
**8.20am - 4.30pm**

**Registration and more  
information visit**  
**[www.ecta.org.au](http://www.ecta.org.au)**

**Keynote Address: Fiona Zinn**

***Learning in relationship: When we listen, what do we hear?***

*'I believe there is no possibility of existing without relationship. Relationship is a necessity of life.'* (Loris Malaguzzi) Children are relationship builders and meaning makers from the very first days of life. Their quest to explore, establish connections and make sense of their world is innate. When we understand children as competent learners and honour their right to respectful relationships, we recognise their agency, capabilities and interdependence. Recognising relationships as 'the glue' which holds learning in place supports educators to listen to, learn with and research alongside children. By recognising the impact of listening in relationships between children and adults we are able to support meaning making and authentic participation for everyone involved. Enhancing the role of the educator from this perspective recognises that all children develop, make sense of their world and connect to life within a 'context of relationships'. This keynote presentation will focus on how the way we listen to children and understand their relationships establishes the foundations for strong and connected learning in early childhood settings. It offers considerations on three important questions: How do we understand children and their relationships? When we listen to children in relationship what do we hear? How do we allow what we hear to shape what we do with and for young children?

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# ECTA Early Childhood Conference Program 2019



## Presentations Session 2

11.30am to 12.45pm

(Age Ranges: Birth, Toddler, Pre-Kindy, Kindy, Prep, Grade 1, 2 3)

| Presentation Title  | Ages | Presenter                  |
|---|------|----------------------------|
| Birth and beyond: Meaningful practice for babies and toddlers   | B-PK | Nicole Halton              |
| Building executive functioning through musical experiences  | K-P  | Sue Southey                |
| Connecting well-being, behaviour and play   | K-G2 | Niki Buchan/Bronwyn Cron   |
| Curriculum continuity conversations – Drawing the links from the QKLG to the Foundation Year Aust. Curriculum | K-G2 | Melissa Taylor Hansford    |
| Developing children's capacity for self-expression and creativity through the visual arts                     | K    | Libby Yee                  |
| Dream, draw, design, make: From STEM to STEAM in early years' education                                       | K-G3 | Sue Lewin/Andrew King      |
| Growth Mindset: What is it? Why do you need it? And how do you get it?  | P-G3 | Melissa Strader            |
| How to create an environment that encourages prolonged learning   | T-P  | Lukas Ritson               |
| Inclusion success: Teacher and parent insights on including a child who doesn't speak                         | K-P  | Karen Mavin/Sandra Chapman |
| Let's make fantastic fingers!   | K-P  | Ingrid King                |
| Make a positive impact on your future: Small steps can make a BIG difference to your retirement               | B-G3 | Alan Sher                  |
| Observing 'what is', the many lenses given by Steiner to observe and interpret behaviour                      | K-P  | Jackie Cox Taylor          |
| Phrasing and fluent reading: Everyone should sound like a good reader   | P-G3 | Sandra Perrett             |
| Provocations for play and inquiry: The role of the environment  | B-G3 | Fiona Zinn                 |
| The language of art   | K-P  | Archana Sinh               |
| Using technology for planning and collaboration   | K-G3 | Matt Tolchard              |
| Why wellbeing? Why now?   | B-P  | Viki Rozsas                |

## Presentations Session 3

1.45pm to 2.45pm

|   |       |                               |
|---|-------|-------------------------------|
| Be You Initiative: Let's grow a mentally healthy generation   | B-G3  | Susan Sharpe                  |
| Don't say 'Sound it out'  | P-G3  | Sandra Perrett                |
| Educator wellbeing: You can't pour from an empty cup!   | B-G3  | Christopher Phoenix           |
| Everyday steps to ensure your centre is safe, compliant and achieving best safety practice            | T-K   | Bill Dodd                     |
| Navigating Nundah: Transition practices after the school year has begun                               | P     | Jane Newman/Maree Frederiksen |
| Painting with young children  | K-G3  | Raquel Redmond                |
| Reimagining play within the standardised curriculum   | G1-G3 | Dr. Jodie Riek                |
| The 2018 Australian Early Development Census  | K-P   | Madeline Hagon                |
| The 'Scandinavian Way': Targeting executive function and repetition for language-literacy acquisition | K-P   | Olwen Forker                  |

## Presentations Session 4

3.10pm to 4.30pm



|   |      |                               |
|---|------|-------------------------------|
| "No play before school" and other rules that are harming our children                       | B-G3 | Madeline Avci                 |
| Building oral language acquisition and the frontal lobe – during that critical period       | B-PK | Olwen Forker                  |
| Creating Science: Great ideas for supercharging the science in your curriculum              | K-G3 | Dr. Joseph Ireland            |
| Digital technology in the early years   | K-G3 | Leanne Trace                  |
| Emotional Intelligence: What is it? Why do we need it? How do we get it?                    | P-G3 | Melissa Strader               |
| Every child can learn to read - systematic synthetic phonics for early years                | K-G3 | Karene Janke/Danielle Sanders |
| Exploring the natural world through creative dance  | K    | Linley Boyle                  |
| Finding the magic within: Teaching children self-care and self-regulation from a young age  | K-G3 | Roushini Devi                 |
| Incorporating Auslan (Australian Sign Language) into your program                           | B-P  | Andrea Bulley                 |
| Inspiring Educational Leaders: The practicalities of this significant role                  | B-P  | Tash Treveton                 |
| Printmaking for young children  | K-G3 | Raquel Redmond                |
| STEM + A Detectives   | T-P  | Niki Buchan/Bronwyn Cron      |
| The Connectedness Project: Using the anti-biased curriculum in early childhood education    | K-P  | Raphael Cooney/Sylvana Li     |
| The power of picture books: Story, books and the teaching of visual literacy in early years | T-P  | Megan Daley                   |
| We all clap hands together: Reimagining group time through song                             | B-K  | Jennifer Teh                  |
| Wellbeing and restorative practices in the early years                                      | T-P  | Kelly McBurnie                |
| Why can't children in prep hold their pencil properly and what you can do about it?         | T-P  | Sarah Cavallaro               |

# The power of play

In New Zealand, students traditionally start school on their fifth birthday. The transition from early child care environments to the primary sector can be emotionally a real shock to the system for both the child and their family. This can happen because children are often expected to go from an entirely free play environment into a structured, academic environment.



*Trace is leading Learning through Play in the Year One team at Hillcrest Normal School. She is a late bloomer that got her degree at 38 and has been teaching for eight years. She has a passion for empowering children in their learning journey. She has been doing Karate for the last nine months which has been a huge challenge; it reminds her every day how hard it can be to learn new skills. She loves spending time with her husband and two lovely teenagers - when they let her :)*

As an early years teacher in a primary setting, my journey to a 'Learning through play' environment was initially sparked by the question: 'How can I give the children more agency in their learning?' And then I had an 'aha' moment after listening to Nathan Wallis talk about the neuroscience of the brain. Once I really understood the neuroscience of a 5-7-year-old's brain, I knew I needed to change my thinking about what children could do/should be doing. This was a message that conflicted with common ideas about how and what is essential to teach children of this age.

I did six months of intensive research, reading, thinking, going to courses, listening to experts in this field and comparing this to what I had been doing. I knew that something wasn't right. I wasn't feeling the joy, and I was sure that kids weren't feeling it either. How can you be joyful when everything you do seems to be wrong? I know as teachers we don't set out to send children that message, but when children first start school they have to learn HOW to do everything, and of course they will make hundreds of mistakes.

This is where my reading of Carol Dweck's book *Mindset: the new psychology of success* (2016) had a significant influence on my thinking. Making mistakes is an integral part of the learning process. It is how you feel about yourself when you make those mistakes that is really important. I knew that this also needed to become a part of my teaching practice; I needed to explicitly teach

children about how they think about themselves as learners while they are learning.

I also felt that the model of teaching that I was trying to use wasn't working. I was looking for the key to unlocking the potential in all students, especially for those who found the structure and academia of school foreign and confronting. The reluctance of these children to write, their behaviours with others and their general lack of enthusiasm for subjects they found difficult was evidence enough for me that a change needed to occur in what I was doing, and in how I was being a teacher.

The answer I found was both easy and hard—PLAY! It sounds simple but actually implementing a play environment into a standard Year One classroom was not the norm. Unlike our early childhood colleagues, our environments, thinking, and experience are not in this area. There have been many challenges building my knowledge about play-based learning, and each one has been a great learning curve and made me even more confident that this is the best way to help our children learn when they first come to school.

Play rocked my world! It has become the basis of my thinking, planning and classroom environment. I thought about who I was being with the children. I thought about how I played. Did I play? There was definitely a fight between feeling like I needed to be doing other busy work (you know—"real" teaching in groups with books, etc.) compared to talking,

playing and building relationships with the children. I know there was a little bit of pushback from my own indoctrinated beliefs, but it was the idea that others judged me for not following the tried and true way that really stuck in my mind.

As time passed though, the positive change that I felt in myself and in the children became my focus. This was the kind of teacher I wanted to be. With the support of my principal and senior teachers, I spent a year trying different ways to incorporate play into my daily program. I ended up with a balance of both free play—led entirely by the children—and guided play where I set up play provocations with a specific learning focus in mind. The change in the energy and atmosphere in my class was amazing. By giving the children the opportunity to play, to use their strengths, take risks, collaborate, innovate and build relationships, they came to academic learning with a different mindset.

The challenge was how to do this in each single-cell primary classroom with a ratio of one teacher to 20 children, across an early years team of five? We started with a commitment to beginning our days with at least 45 minutes of free play. In Term One, we learned about the art of provocations or inspirations and set these up in our classrooms. When the bell rings to start the day, the children are allowed to play in any of the five classes or outside on the playground. Our role as teachers is to observe, take notes, add to conversations, thoughtfully complicate play (See right), create opportunities and support social and emotional growth. This allows us as teachers to also have time to talk and connect with families, build relationships, collaborate and learn from each other in a relaxed and informal way.

One example of how a provocation during play then became the basis of an art project came as we prepared for Mother's Day. I had some ideas in my mind but had not settled on which direction to go. In the past, this has been a major art project that could get a bit stressful for me. I would support small groups of children to complete their work and sometimes my own adult version of how things should/could look got in the way of the children's ideas.

One Monday morning I had set up a play provocation on the art table with some paint and some bits and pieces that I had in my craft cardboard. I had some very creative children who enjoyed making things. K had spent some time creating and then proudly showed me that she had made a bell by painting part of an egg carton and putting it on the end of a skewer. But she had a problem—the bell part kept

falling off the end. She had tried to use it a bead to keep it there, but it wasn't quite working. She thought J might be able to help; he was well known amongst his peers for being good at this kind of problem solving because he had lots of experience making and doing from his playcentre days with his mum. He suggested sticky tape, and I offered blue tack. K tried both and settled on the tape. When it was finished, it looked like the inside of a flower—and 'Bam!' I had a perfect idea for the children and their Mother's Day cards.

K agreed it was a good idea so I asked her to show the rest of the class how to make their own. I wanted this flower to be their own creation. She showed the

*Thoughtfully complicating play is something that we learnt from Viv Aitken who is an expert in the Mantle of the Expert (dramatic-inquiry) approach. We look for times when the children's play may look a little lost or where socio-dramatic play seems to have stagnated and get ready to think on our feet about how we can add to the play without shutting it down. This was a new concept for us and it took a while to get the hang of coming in at the right moment to kick start the role play again.*

*An example of a successful complication was when we introduced props into a 'line up and pay' role play that was getting monotonous. I came over and asked the entrepreneurs how I could get a real ticket as I had some paper money I had made. This prompted a flurry of activity to the craft table where some children made tickets and others came up with different kinds of 'money'. The game continued with lots of bartering and ended up with some competition also selling tickets.*



children who were keen to help others first so that she had a team to help her. My role was to support them—I provided the material, space and time (we did it over the week). It was a wonderful learning experience for myself and the children. This was just one of the times that I realised that providing an environment for the creative juices to flow is one of my key roles as a teacher. We all need time to mull over things—bounce ideas off each other, and share our strengths. I love being in the flow of things—it seemed like everything aligned that morning, and we were all in sync. The cards were beautiful and individual and from their hearts.

It has been a huge learning curve for our team. In the beginning, it seemed unnatural to not be taking reading groups or getting some other 'important' task done during this allocated 'Learning through play' time. However, as the year has progressed, we have celebrated this change and acknowledge that it is a valuable time for the children and for us. The team members agree that the main benefits of play are that:

- Slowing the pace and allowing ourselves and the children time to explore has shown deeper learning.

- Oral language is developed through relationships and real context. We are becoming confident in the stages of development for our children.
- Inquiry is more authentic because it is led by the children.
- The more we observe, the better we become at seeing the curriculum within the play and extending it.
- We weave the curriculum through provocations, guided play and thoughtfully complicating the play.
- We ended the year on a high when we looked back at all we had accomplished with the children. This change of focus has resulted in us enjoying who we are as teachers, and we have committed to continuing the journey through play this year. We are excited and invigorated, thinking about our next step.

## REFERENCES

Dweck, CS 2016, *Mindset: the new psychology of success*, Random House USA Inc, New York.

Wallis, N 2017, *The developing brain workshop*, The Learning Network, Auckland, New Zealand.

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# Whistle while you work—using music to transition through the day

Kirsty (early childhood teacher) sits on a small chair on the mat in her classroom. It's just after 11 am on a regular Tuesday morning, and her class of 24 pre-prep children are in the final stages of transitioning from outdoor play to indoor mat time. While a handful of children finish in the bathroom, the majority of the class are now waiting on the mat and Kirsty is very much aware of the array of variable behaviours before her.



Wendy Kerr has a long background in music. Her academic qualifications include a BA (Music), AMusA (piano), GradDip NR/MT and GradCert CI (Music and Sound). Trained in the techniques of Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy she worked professionally as a Registered Music Therapist (AMTA) for eight years in a variety of settings including special schools, SEDUs and private practice. She also has extensive experience as a piano teacher. She began Adventuring through Music and Sound in 2015 to help early childhood teachers better manage and develop music programs within their own learning environments. Wendy is a strong advocate in the use of live and improvised music - musical play - as a means of supporting the learning outcomes defined in the EYLF.

Some of the children have been waiting on the mat longer than others and are becoming restless; some of the children look tired, while others look excited and stimulated after their outdoor play. Kirsty silently picks up a small hand drum and holds it behind her back. Without saying a word, she begins singing, 'Who will play on my drum today' (sung to the tune of 'America' from *West side story* by Bernstein in 1957), 'Who will play on my drum today, who will play on my drum today, who will play on my drum today'. At the end of each line, Kirsty holds the drum out quickly for one of the children to tap before quickly hiding the drum behind her back again. She sings the song again, this time inserting a child's name at the start of the line instead of the word 'who'.

While the drum provides the children with a single focus point, the simple yet unpredictable nature of the activity helps to create an atmosphere of anticipation, which increases motivation to engage, and helps focus and sustain attention as the children expectantly hope for a turn. There is an immediate increase in the group dynamic as the children become aware of themselves and others through the shared activity of the song. Although singing through this little song three or four times has taken Kirsty less than two minutes, it has been an invaluable final step to ensure a smooth and successful transition into the next activity. As she puts the drum away, Kirsty notices that all eyes are on her: attentive, expectant and ready for 'what's next'.

The value of music and the role it plays within early childhood is widely documented, both academically and anecdotally. Early childhood educators know firsthand the benefits the use of a well-placed song can bring to the day. For example, transitioning both into and out of the day with a greeting or goodbye song is a familiar and popular way for many teachers to use music. Subsequently, it is an area well-resourced with popular, user-friendly songs and musical activities that teachers feel confident and experienced in using and leading. Extending that confidence and experience into other areas of the day, however, need not be as difficult or complicated as you may think. It is helpful therefore, when discussing how to encourage the use of music more naturally throughout the course of a day, to pair that discussion with the other great constant in any child's and educator's day—that of transitions.

Transitions form a significant part of early childhood. The *National quality standard* states that 'All children attending Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services experience transitions as part of the program, and as part of their individual development' (Early Childhood Australia 2016). It goes on to define these transitions as being either 'small', and occurring as a series of routine transitions throughout the day, or 'large', involving changes between more recognisable milestones such as beginning child care, changing rooms or centres, and beginning school. It is widely recognised



that helping children to negotiate and manage these changes, regardless of whether large or small, forms a significant aspect of the educator's role in scaffolding the child's learning environment and building connections between home, the classroom and community. In turn this presents the educator with a range of 'challenges and opportunities' to continue to extend, enrich and support the development of each child through the process of transition (Kennedy 2013). It is during this time that music can become a valuable tool in supporting and facilitating this process. In this article, we will keep our discussion to the 'small' transitions of the everyday.

If you can lead your group in a greeting, then you have all the skills you need to extend your musicality throughout the day. A little musical knowledge, however, will take you a long way. Be encouraged to 'keep it live' as much as possible when using music in this way, and lead from your voice. This enables you to have both the freedom to use music throughout the day at a moment's notice, and the flexibility to adjust the way you use that music to best suit your needs in the moment. Sing loud, soft, high, low, fast, slow, happy (major), sad (minor), and use pauses and stops with reckless abandon. You'll be amazed at the mileage you can get out of a single song.



Identify types of transitions and situations that occur throughout the day and recognise how you can use music to benefit the learning experience of your children. For example, do you wish to use the music to focus attention prior to beginning a new activity, as Kirsty did above? Introducing a single musical instrument, like the hand drum, can be very effective in achieving this. Perhaps you need the music to provide

an auditory cue to signal that it is time to pack up and prepare for the next activity. Take a simple familiar tune (*Frere Jacques*, *London Bridge*, etc.) and adjust the words to suit the action you're hoping to facilitate. This is an easy, effective and well-known way of helping children to learn what is expected of them, at that moment, by singing about it. Providing the opportunity for the children to sing about what they're doing helps them to process the association between the instruction and expectation with the actual task. Combine this with an added auditory cue of a triangle, bell or chime bar, and you double the impact gained through aural reinforcement and association.

Action songs can be particularly helpful in physically moving children from one space to another, or from a 'bunch' into a circle configuration. Bear in mind that the structure of the song should help to contain and direct the structure of the group, while at the same time moving everyone into the new space. *Following the leader* (Wallace 1952) is an obvious example for physically moving from one space to another, while using the tune of *Here we go round the mulberry bush* to sing 'This is the way we make a circle, make a circle, make a circle. This is the way we make a circle, sitting around the mat'.

Another significant transition point where music can be invaluable is when waiting, or turn-taking needs to occur, such as toileting or preparing for mealtimes. Using the tune *Old Macdonald had a farm* to sing 'Now it's time to wash our hands, off you go!' while gently tapping on heads to the beat (Duck, duck, goose style), or passing a ball or object around the group until the action stops on the word 'go', directs the movement of each child into the next task while maintaining the attention and interest of those children still waiting.

Finally, develop and know the repertoire you have so that you can be confident and flexible in using it. It is far better to have ten songs 'up your sleeve' that you can access at a moment's notice, which provide flexibility of use, rather than a shelf full of CDs. In no time at all, you'll feel confident and comfortable to whistle while you work.

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# Supporting children through transitions

The beginning of a new year sees many children experience an important milestone as they transition into either an ECEC service, move from room to another or leave an ECEC service to start full-time school. This new experience is a time of change that can create excitement and uncertainty. Research on transition identifies both the challenges and opportunities transitions present for children, families and educators (Dockett & Perry, 2007). We know that effective transition programs are based on strong relationships and communication between the child, their family, early education and care services, the school and the community (Queensland Department of Education, 2017). How the transition itself is accomplished sets the stage for the child's entire experience. In this edition of Conversations, we hear from key stakeholders on how they support children and families transition into their contexts



## Jamie Dunn

Jamie Dunn has worked in the early childhood education and care sector for over 12 years, as a diploma qualified educator for ten years before enrolling to study

her bachelor degree in 2016. Her personal beliefs focus on inclusion and early intervention and the importance of relationships. She believes strong relationships and ethics are the basis for all that we do in early childhood education and care.

### Tell us about your transition program

The transition program I used while opening The Crescent Early Learning Centre in Sydney, NSW involved first embedding our Key Educator relationships into our centre practice, which involved the educators familiarising themselves with attachment theory and the importance of relationships. While looking at the literature we discussed the Circle of Security and the relevance of creating the secure base for each of the children and their family that were transitioning into the centre. This was highlighted as the first point each of the educators would work on as the transitions into the centre began.

Embedding Key Educator relationships into the transition process also involved creating visual reference information for the child and their family to create an initial bond with the educators. Each educator upon the first orientation with the family would present information about the room (room routine information, items to bring to the centre etc.) as well as information about Key Educator relationships and two introduction posters about themselves as the

Key Educator. One poster would be for the family with the educator's qualifications and personal philosophy and the second poster would be for the child with age appropriate visual information about their Key Educator and simple facts about them - favourite food, colour, activity etc.

This process helped create an immediate bond and it was this bond that supported the family and child to feel safe and secure as they attended the centre and transitioned through the different rooms and then out of the centre and onto primary school education.

Now that I have moved to Queensland, I am working with a new team to establish a similar transition system embedding Key Educator relationships and the same deep connections.

### What challenges and opportunities do you face during the transition?

The main challenge that I faced at The Crescent was primarily the hard work of building relationships and the initial orientations with children and their families. These are often hard because everything is new and unfamiliar.

Once the initial connection had been established, I found the relationship would flourish and everything else would fall into place. Drop off transitions from home to the centre would become exciting opportunities to share what had happened since the child had seen me last. Transitions between activities would run smoothly as they were based on interests that I was able to notice through the deeper connection shared with both the child and the family.

The hard transition was when the child would move on from the centre and into primary school, but I felt proud knowing that the support I was able to give to the child



and their family instilled the confidence they needed to make that final transition and all the others ahead.

Now in Queensland, my challenge and my opportunity is to show my new team that after all the hard work is done, the possibilities are endless.

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## Dina Clarke

Dina Clarke is currently working in a Long Day Care Centre in Kedron. She has been working with toddlers for the past ten years. Her advice, and expert knowledge have been highly valued by all

the parents of children in her care. She loves her role as lead educator in the Toddlers Room, and quickly takes every child under her wing at the beginning of each year.

### **Tell us about your transition program**

New children and their families are welcomed into the service with an orientation day. The children are encouraged to come and have a half an hour play in the room to familiarize themselves with their new environment and the teachers that will be looking after them. We show the parents where the child's locker and pockets are and help them to understand the program, routine and layout of the room.

### **How do you support children, families and teachers?**

During the orientation visit parents have an opportunity to ask any questions they may have regarding the running of the room and anything else that they are wondering about. The children are greeted with a smile and are given time to adjust to their surroundings. A trusting relationship is formed over time and it takes someone that is caring and supportive of the children's needs to be there for them as they transition into the room.

### **What challenges and opportunities do you face during the transition?**

Sometimes we are faced with challenges as the children can take some time to adjust to being in a group environment but when given time, children will learn to trust and feel at ease with their teachers. Transitioning children gives us an opportunity to get to know new children and to build a trusting relationship. This is achieved by being there for them, listening to their needs and giving them time to adjust within the room.



## Angela Drysdale

Angela is the Head of Primary at St Margaret's Anglican Girls' School. She is passionate about the education of children with a deep interest in early

childhood education as it provides the solid foundation for all future learning. She has been awarded IPSHA Member's Professional Development Grant on two occasions and used these grants for educational experiences overseas, attending the Reggio Emilia Conference and visits to UK schools. She is the longest standing member of the Early Childhood Teachers' Association (ECTA) journal committee.

### **Tell us about your transition program**

I believe a key objective of our transition program is to assist families in their transition to the new school so that they feel like valued members of the school community. As a school, we are committed to an inclusive community, and this is reflected in our statements of belief for parents, students and staff. These belief statements include the questions, 'How do I want to feel every day when I come to school?' 'What am I doing to ensure others can feel this way?' The whole school community has a commitment to making everybody feel this way.

### **Orientation into the school community**

The transition program begins the previous year before the new school year starts. Parents are given a handout with ten top tips to help with a child's transition to Prep; parents are encouraged to do these things in the lead up to starting school. The school conducts an orientation day in early Term 4. Before this day, new students receive a photo of all current students and an accompanying letter telling the student that they are looking forward to them coming to orientation day.

Parents come to school for an orientation morning and students come all day. The students spend the day with all students who will be in the same year level when they commence school. All students participate in getting-to-know-each-other activities and getting to know the school environment. Students also are provided with morning tea and lunch, so they can eat with current students, get to know other students in an informal setting, the eating areas and procedures.

At the same time, new parents attend an information session conducted by me. At this session parents are informed about the school, school-based programs, school culture, how we support children in their

transition. The parents also share morning tea with other parents as a way of getting to know each other.

Before the school year finishes, new students coming to Prep are provided with another opportunity to visit the school. These new students (who do not attend our Kindy Program (Pre-prep)) come to Prep for an afternoon. They spend time in the class environment with the Prep teacher. The new students and parents then join our pre-Prep students and their parents after school in the playground for afternoon tea and a play. The Prep staff and key staff join in for afternoon tea.

After orientation day, new students receive a letter from a buddy. (The student and parent have elected to be a buddy.) The buddy will then make further contact and perhaps a catch up over the holidays before the school year starts. International students will be contacted by the buddy via email.

Students who are unable to attend orientation day are afforded the opportunity to have a similar opportunity on another day.

The days before school starts, all children can drop into school and meet their new teacher in their classroom. This eases the child into the school environment as it is an informal drop in to see the classroom, meet the teacher and meet other students as well.

## Parents supporting parents

The school also has parents who volunteer to be class-parent representatives. The details of the appropriate year-level class representative and the new parent's details are shared. This parent may choose to organise a year-level play date as well.

We also have one parent who is the liaison parent for international and interstate parents. The job of this person is to help these parents with any questions about day-to-day living and tips for living in a new place.

We also put international parents, whose English is a second language, in touch with another parent from the same country so this parent is able to communicate in their first language as they support their transition.

## Social events

New students are invited to a new student year-level morning tea with me. The students drink Milo and eat Tim Tams while talking about family, their new school and anything of interest.

One hundred days of school are celebrated by the Preps, with books about 100, counting to 100 and cupcakes.

Early in Term 1, a parent-and-child social event is held for pre-Prep to Year 3 students. It is a pyjama party for the children, where they have dinner and participate in

fun activities with teachers while parents mingle and meet other parents.

In Term 2, new parents are invited to morning tea with class-parent representatives. This is an opportunity for parents to clarify, or share, any concerns and touch base with class-parent representatives.

## What challenges and opportunities do you face during the transition?

The greatest challenge is communication, to ensure parents are well informed in all aspects of school life. A parent handbook is issued on 'drop-in' day. This year, parents who were new last year suggested a cheat sheet of events, activities and small description so they knew what to look for in the handbook or to ask other parents. We also need new parents to feel welcomed, so they feel comfortable to make enquiries and seek clarification.

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# Experiencing quality music making with young children: be brave, be bold, and 'let it go'

In many years of facilitating music workshops with early years educators, I consistently ask of them the same question, 'How many of you were told as a child that you could not sing?'

Frighteningly, also consistently, inevitably half of the participants raise their hands.



Sue Lewin is an early childhood educator, singer and song writer who has produced nine CDs for young children. Sue co-wrote the children's musicals *The Little Pirate's Adventures* with Roz Adamson, and *Dancing the Boomchacha Boogie* with prize winning illustrator and author Narelle Oliver. Both have been performed in Australia and London. She has presented workshops in many major early years conferences in Australia and was a guest speaker at the Warsaw University Early Years Conference. Sue's recent collaboration is with well-known children's musician Mike Jackson, on a new children's CD called *Oopsie Daisy*.

So, many educators already start off 'on the wrong foot' when approaching introducing songs, dances and instrumental experiences with children.

## Why is it important to use music with young children?

Early years educators should realise the importance of music for children. Through music, children gain another language, constructing their knowledge about the world.

As educators engage in the musical practices of *singing, listening, playing, movement/dancing and creating*, they will observe children gaining knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Children need sound intentional teaching that occurs regularly so that they are practising newly acquired knowledge and skills.

## Barriers and challenges to using music daily

Although we know and acknowledge the importance of music in the curriculum, in my experience, a large

number of educators are reticent to boldly use music in practice (especially their own singing voices) because of their own experiences as children or as adults. Researchers in the late nineties found that 'educators working in early years' settings in Australia do not feel confident teaching music—believing that they lack the requisite knowledge and skills to plan and teach music' (Commonwealth of Australia 1995).

As well as *knowledge and skills*, a lack of *self-confidence, repertoire and resources* can stop educators from being bold with music.

Added to that there are often other adults in the room in early childhood settings—unlike in other education settings, and there can be an element of embarrassment in singing.

I am a musician, and singing comes naturally to me, but am very well aware that many early years educators find singing challenging. This should not be a barrier. The key is to start simply.

*Choose good quality songs; the old favourites, which you know well. (Nursery rhymes are a good place to start—they have stood the test of time.) Practise them in front of a mirror or with a CD in the background (in the car while driving maybe). Sing them first incidentally with children while playing in the sand pit or painting and build up to small group singing as your confidence grows. Add actions later, once the children have learned the songs. Do not worry too much about your singing voice. The children will love the fact that you are singing and are enthusiastic and having fun with music. The more you sing, as with many other skills, the more your confidence and quality of voice will improve.*



## When to use music

### All the time!!!!

- singing a welcome song or goodbye song as part of *daily transitions* with the whole group
- singing phrases and songs to support children as they take part in *routines* such as tidying away or washing their hands
- a *dedicated time* for gathering of small or half groups of children to sing songs and participate in movement activities
- *incidental musical opportunities* that evolve from stories, children's interests or play projects
- *planned experiences* that occur typically during outdoor play when noise from musical play does not disturb other children.

### The benefits are clear:

- problem solving
- spatial skills
- mathematical ability
- short and long-term memory
- creativity
- thinking
- social development
- increased self-regulation skills.

## Using music as a behaviour management tool

Recently, a high school teacher was visiting the kindergarten where I was gathering the children together after outside play. I began singing 'Come on everybody, come on everybody, come on everybody, come over here' (Lewin & Stewart 2001).

Little people emerged from shrubbery and from swings and, in no time, were sitting near me, ready for the transition to morning tea. The high

school teacher was amazed that no loud voices or bells or nagging were required.

*My school music teacher used to say 'Easy availability is music's worst enemy', and this was in the days before Spotify, YouTube, supermarket muzak and video games.*

I try to use simple two or three note tunes to call to children or ask questions in the day. It is not long before the children start to sing back. It is a peaceful and sometimes humorous alternative to using a loud voice.

'Active music participation provides an invaluable context in which you can observe children's self-regulatory skills and support them to develop new ones' (Lewin & Williams 2013).

## What does a good quality music program look like?

There is so much choice of music for young children that it is difficult to wade through it to find music which is of a high quality, age appropriate and accessible.

## Avoiding using music as background noise

According to Doreen Bridges (1994), music should never be played continuously throughout the day. Children exposed to constant musical background noise become desensitised and will find it difficult to discriminate individual sounds. The use of music should be intentional and educators should think carefully about how they will support children to engage with music rather than using it as background noise.





I try to be purposeful and mindful about why and how I am using music in my teaching practice. Kodaly, a well-known music theorist, believed choosing good quality music for children was as important as choosing good quality food.

'For the very young, only the best is good enough' (Kodaly 1974).

A good place to start when selecting repertoire is with traditional songs and nursery rhymes. Doreen Bridges (1994) suggests songs that have the following features:

- short and repeated phrases
- an easily singable melody without awkward jumps
- rhythm that encourages body movements
- limited pitch range.

Best results are achieved by beginning with songs of limited range.

### Being bold and brave with music experiences

- Once the simple nursery rhymes and songs have been mastered and enjoyed with children, aim to increase your repertoire. I try and learn a new song

or music experience really well every few weeks, so that I have many 'poems in my pocket and songs in my heart'. My own children complain that I know songs about everything, but this is because I have built up this knowledge over years.

- Involve the other adults at the centre in the experience—if they are joining in then they are not watching you.
- Step out of your comfort zone—it is worth it.

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# Queensland Ballet's Tiny Dancers: ballet beyond the steps

Queensland Ballet (QB) is a vibrant, creative company which connects people and dance across Queensland. With a culture of creativity and collaboration, complemented by an active program of engagement with communities, QB has become the central hub for dance in the state.



*Queensland Ballet (QB) has a vision of becoming a leader of dance in the Asia-Pacific region. QB places great importance on early years' dance and works collaboratively with industry leaders to ensure we are at the forefront of development research and dance practices.*

## Putting our best foot forward

As part of a commitment to share the magic of ballet with Queenslanders of all ages, QB has offered year-round creative dance courses for 2–5-year olds since 2015. After two years of successful Tiny Dancers courses, QB re-evaluated the program and questioned how the company could enhance the Tiny Dancers course curriculum to ensure an in-depth arts experience that reached beyond just twirling and tutus was always prioritised. QB sought to train and empower Teaching Artists to embed key skills for early childhood development and school preparedness into each Tiny Dancers lesson.

In 2017, QB partnered with Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to unpack and incorporate the *Early years learning framework* (EYLF) into existing programs for young learners. This initial investigation involved an analysis of the Tiny Dancers program and three professional development sessions for EdSquad Teaching Artists.

QUT Associate Professor Sandra Gattenhof guided the QB team through the EYLF while assisting in the application of the framework to the Tiny Dancers curriculum.

This work with QUT was a pivotal point in our understanding of the power of dance, and the arts, in early years development. Along with the EYLF, the company's EdSquad Teaching Artists were also trained to understand and consider teaching concepts such as multiple learning types and language registers.

## Key learnings summary

At QB, there is a strong belief that ballet enriches lives and the literature, and the EYLF supports this belief. Incorporating dance in any capacity will give young learners an additional medium to explore and understand the world around them.

The knowledge gained from the company's time with QUT was invaluable and the learnings were immense. A summary of learnings, which are most relevant to a wide array of early learning settings, is listed below.

### Dance and numeracy

In a dance class, complex sequences and groupings of movement enable children to recognise patterns and relationships. Furthermore, counting out loud, clapping to the beat, moving to the rhythm and then putting this all together gives children new ways to learn about math concepts.

By understanding this natural integration of dance and early numeracy development, the Teaching Artists are able to recognise the importance of incorporating patterns, clapping and rhythms into each lesson while building upon the concepts each week to enhance learning.

Hopscotch is a great example of dance and numeracy skill development and is easy to incorporate into any learning environment.

### Dance and communication

Dancing is a beautiful way to enable children to express ideas, concerns and feelings. Communicating in this way, with the body as the tool,



lets young children find their capacity to share their thoughts in a new way, building confidence and an understanding of the power of language.

As a result of gaining a deeper understanding of dance as a means for communication, the company has added more opportunities for creative expression and exploration in lesson plans. As opposed to simply asking children to mimic the movements of the teachers, in each lesson, they are asked to communicate their own stories, feelings or ideas through movement.

Creative exploration through movement can be easily incorporated into an activity such as story time. Reading a book to young learners provides a time to explore movement—especially if the story is emotive, provocative and encouraging. This encouragement of movement can be done between each page, or as a follow-up to story time.

## Sharing the experience

For all Tiny Dancers courses, parents / carers are in the room. This gives the Teaching Artists an opportunity to extend the arts experience beyond the children. Teaching Artists are encouraged to switch between language registers throughout each lesson to provide take-home knowledge to the adults present.

An example of this would be one of the favourite rhythm activities:

- for the children:
  - 'Let's play a counting game. Who can count to 4? (practising counting to 4 all together) Now let's clap each time we say a number. You guys are too clever! Let's make it a bit tricky. This time, I want you to count to 4, but keep the number 4 in your head. Instead of saying 4, let's try and be completely quiet. No talking or clapping. Ready, one, two, three, shhhh'.
- for the adults:
  - 'Parents, this is a great game to play at home to help develop skills in counting and rhythm. You can change up the pattern of the rhythm to challenge your child as they become more confident with the concept'.

## Continuing the journey

This experience of providing Teaching Artists and staff with an in-depth and tailor-made professional development experience has opened the company's eyes to the importance of continued learning. As a result, QB has committed to ongoing professional development

for all of the company's Teaching Artists to ensure QB continues to provide world-class dance experiences for all learners.

In addition to continuing the company's own learning, QB currently is piloting programs in kindies to expand early years offerings beyond the walls of the studios in West End. This provides the opportunity to build knowledge around what makes for a rich and meaningful arts experience with children who may not otherwise have the opportunity.



# Parents as partners—loving the ‘unlovable’—and other bright ideas that are not as easy as they seem

There is theory, and there is practice. The art of our professions is to weave the two together to make a difference in people's lives. In thinking about the topic and how I wanted to contribute to this publication, I was inspired to write about what I wish I knew when I first started out working with parents. This is the space in which I think I have made the most mistakes, and it has not been for a lack of theory, or knowledge, or skill, or intention. It has been because actually following through on the seemingly simple task of partnering with parents is really very, very *hard*. I feel like it is an area in which, somehow the more I know, the less I know. I do very firmly embrace the idea that within these partnerships, magic can happen, and without them, our wands are more likely to misfire. So how can we make something so important work a bit better?



*Dr. Rachel Bushing is a mum of three early waking children who are all engaged in early years education, and a clinical psychologist with 17 years of practice with children and families. She is passionate about setting children out with the very best start in life and providing peer education and clinical supervision, which increases our capacity as mentors in children's lives, by reflecting, growing, and learning just as we ask of our clients. She runs a busy little private practice in Brisbane called POP Psychology, which has the aim of bringing the fun into therapy; she co-hosts the parenting podcast, 'Pop the kettle on'; and, most importantly, she takes pride in being imperfect.*

It really is very easy to get caught up in our own little bubbles, comfortable with our own terminology, interacting with our own 'tribes', and not pausing to ask what it is like from the other side. In fact, I am ashamed to admit my intense 'imposter syndrome' when given the brief for the article, upon hearing that the focus for this issue is on 'best practice, pedagogy, and working from a theoretical perspective'. Now, as a psychologist, I was not asked to speak on behalf of educators, obviously, but this simple phrase also had me admitting that in fact—and lean in close, I'm going to whisper here—I don't know what that means. I don't know what research to direct educators to. I don't know your theories. And, I didn't even know what 'pedagogy' meant.

So, like all good academics with a doctoral degree (read: time-poor mum with little access to research journals), I Googled. I still don't really know about pedagogy, but I now at least have the gist, and I gained a whole bucketload of humility. Forgive the digression; I just wanted to be explicit about how much I have appreciated my children's educators and acknowledge that I can be naïve about all that they know and do. I can't contribute with any more authority to the research on this topic, because there is already plenty. However, if you'll indulge me, I'd like to firstly summarise some of the literature and then follow up with my own personal 'hacks' to improving parent-professional partnerships.

We all know that research and best practice manuals heavily emphasise the importance of partnerships, and rightly so. The *Early years learning framework* (EYLF) emphasises that these relationships are an essential ingredient for positive outcomes (Department of Education and Training, 2012). Families, and not just children, are enrolled in a service, and it is important to respect and work *with* and not against the existing family structures (beliefs, rituals, routines, and expectations) in order to provide collaborative care. The stakes are high. Children take their cues for belonging and acceptance from their parents, and what a terrible sense of unease they must feel when there is palpable tension. It is quite the unwinnable scenario for the child; they may be forced to choose who they will align with and, taken to the extreme, it can impact upon their sense of security with either one.

My canvassing of the literature leads me to pinpoint the following three keys to effective partnerships.

## Collaboration

This is the planning part, and it looks easy enough on paper. It involves us developing shared goals and understandings, equally embracing a joint effort and working as effective partners toward the same aim. This is a dynamic, not fixed, process, and it is frequently revisited through both formal and informal processes. We want to stride arm in arm for the benefit



of the child. In my mind, it should look a little like a toothpaste commercial.

## Alliance

This is the relationship part, and we psychologists call it 'rapport'. There is a systemic therapy principle which states that we should strive to build an alliance with *all* members of a group, and also *none*. Put another way, in order to be effective collaborators, parents need to feel felt and understood by us, and we need to find ways to help them feel special, remembered, valued and validated. Oh, and we also need to have boundaries of professionalism, wherein they understand that they are not special and are part of a larger picture. I am reminded of great comedians, who feed off the energy of the crowd, adjusting things here and there based on the live feedback they receive, rather than just standing up and doing jokes to the crowd. That is a true alliance.

## Communication

This is the talking, writing, body-language part. There are some very helpful tip sheets (such as at KidsMatter 2019a, 2019b; Naptime Academy 2016; Stonehouse 2013) that discuss how to build phrases and use modes of communication which are likely to produce good outcomes with parents. All excellent tips to put into practice.

Reading through these guidelines, though, causes me to take a rather deep breath. It is because, as with all relationships, our professional working relationships can be fraught; they can be triggering; they can feel exhausting; and you may well be driven to avoid thinking, let alone doing, anything about them. These challenges include values, conflicts and underlying tensions which are not always articulated, as pointed out by Ellis et al. (2015) and Stroetinga et al. (2018). Besides which, you can't really learn how to have better relationships through reading a tip sheet. The devil is in the doing. The good news, though, is that it is actually in the midst of our more trying times that we have the capacity to learn and grow the most.

So I pulled out a big old drawing board and thought about some of the ways in which I encourage trainee psychologists to work on parent partnerships, on a level more deep and meaningful than the perfunctory 'make time to provide feedback'. That led me to a further three areas that I think we should focus on.

## Nurturance

John Bowlby reminds us that 'If we value our children, we must cherish their parents'. Attachment-based education and support is not only about the educator's relationship with the child, and their ability to provide a secure base. It is fundamentally about ensuring

that their other bases feel strong enough to provide emotional security too. If we can put our metaphoric arms around the parents, they will be better able to put their arms around their child.

Because, when a child is born, a parent is born. Not all parents have been nurtured in their early lives, or been shown how to have good relationships. Many parents are thrust into parenthood with few supports to guide and nurture their needs. Funnily enough, it is mostly the more-prickly parents who require the most support. It is not easy to 'love the unlovable' but, by gosh, we need to try. We all find a way to discover the treasure within the *children* who we find the most difficult, because we understand that is our job, and we see that they are a product of their circumstance. If you can manage to see that their parents are just over-grown versions of that little child (and I understand that some parents have engineered extremely sophisticated and complex ways of being tortuous), and that they are likely operating from a place of hurt or fear, it makes it much easier to find our empathy. 'Killing with kindness' can be a pretty disarming strategy. Try writing down three things that you like or admire in the parent. Try to see how they have come to their perspective, given what you know or can imagine about their prior life experiences. Try to see them as someone in need of love.

## Me time

Here is the rub. It is very difficult to 'love the unlovable', and it will bring up strong feelings within us. It is truly emotional labour of the most exhausting sort. It is vital that you have ways of seeking your own emotional support, having time out, and setting firm boundaries around your own working hours, job role, and capacities. There has been a lot of research around compassion fatigue (alternatively referred to as vicarious traumatisation) in psychology, and we have found that people exposed to traumatic material in their work, even indirectly, can show signs of emotional burnout and even symptoms of post-traumatic stress. It is very important that you use your existing support systems to allow you to stay as present and caring as possible, and use reflective supervision to explore whatever is brought up for you when interacting with difficult families or any harrowing stories you might be listening to.

## Flexibility

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. You catch more flies with honey. Insert here a great many other things that wise people have said. People very rarely change by being told what to do; changes can be embedded slowly but surely over time, through developing insights and reflecting on values. It is a bit like steering the *Titanic*, tiny incremental changes that add up to something big. Studies looking at parent-

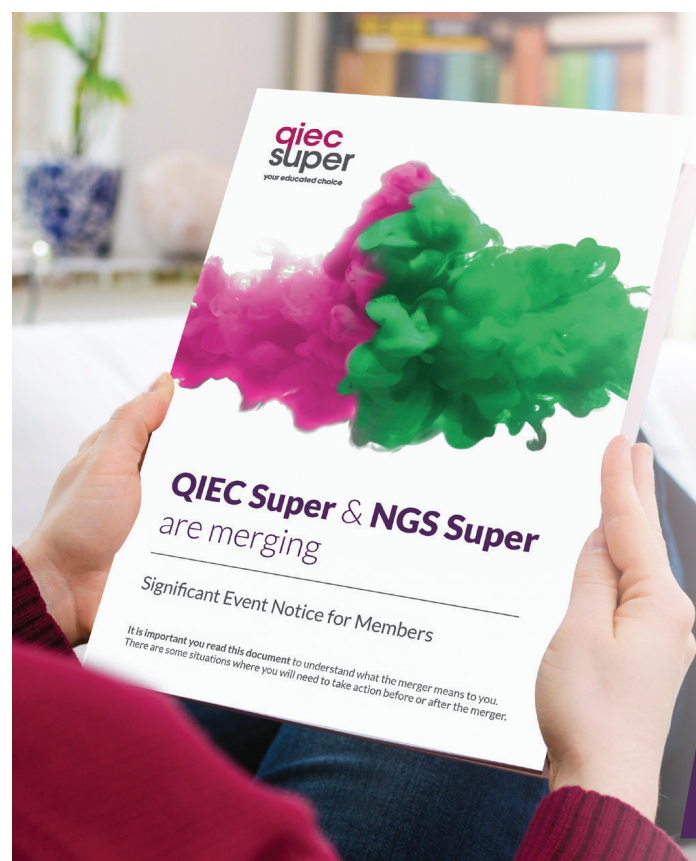
educator dynamics have found that values, congruence of our perceptions, and social strategies help to mediate the relationship, and therefore can be manipulated to improve it (Ellis 2012; Minke et al. 2014; Stroetinga et al. 2018). Relationships are dynamic and, if we don't seek honest feedback and work within the messy and tricky parts, then we run the risk of assuming a good relationship exists where it may not. Conflict, therefore, is inevitable in relationships, and learning to be flexible within a conflict is a worthy skill to pursue. It is possible for two people to be right at the same time: two ideas can seem in diametric opposition and yet both be valid. And just for one last bumper-sticker idea, we need to daily and hourly work toward accepting the things we can't change and focus on the things we can.

Oh, and deep breaths everybody. You are reading this because you care and, from me to you, that alone means you are doing a great job.

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## QIEC Super & NGS Super are merging

From 6 May 2019, QIEC Super will merge with NGS Super – an award-winning industry super fund for those in non-government education, mutual finance and community focused organisations.

This merger is a positive and exciting step for members. The larger merged Fund will have a stronger presence in the superannuation industry with greater bargaining power with service providers, and it is expected to gain benefits from the merger that will underpin new products and services that can be offered to members in future.

## We're here to help

If you're a QIEC Super member, you may have questions as to how the merger between QIEC Super and NGS Super will affect you. The Significant Event Notice as well as a number of questions and answers are available on our website [qiec.com.au/sen](http://qiec.com.au/sen)

QIEC Super Pty Ltd (ABN 81 010 897 480), the Trustee of QIEC Super (ABN 15 549 636 673), is Corporate Authorised Representative No. 268804 under Australian Financial Services Licence No. 238507 and is authorised to provide general financial product advice in relation to superannuation.

# Our image as early childhood leaders

A visit to Reggio Emilia (Italy) many years ago stirred my interest in leadership. Considering both the Australian and Italian contexts, I felt at that time leadership was the missing ingredient necessary to support our practice at home to reach new levels of quality. Interestingly, it was around the same time that evidence to support the importance of effective leadership emerged (Rodd 2006; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni 2007; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart 2004).



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Although this research highlighted the need for leadership, understanding what leadership in early childhood education and care (ECEC) was, was not so easy. Few research papers were available on the topic, and certainly it was rare to find professional learning or courses available to support this thinking. Those who had been in the profession for a while understood leadership from their personal experiences, television shows and reading books about heroic figures such as the Mayor of New York leading the city through a crisis. These were considered the true leaders who had strong characteristics and traits (often men). It was not surprising that in 2005 an important research study by Louise Hard (2005) highlighted a resistance to leadership from the Australian ECEC sector. This research suggested that this resistance may be due to the traditional ideas of leadership (e.g. boss-style management) that many of us had formed, which certainly did not sit comfortably with ECEC.

The recognition of the importance of leadership as a component of quality ECEC, has meant an increased interest by researchers and new opportunities for learning about this topic. Times have changed and many reading this article, who have recently participated in study at university or been involved in professional learning, are likely to have experienced learning opportunities about leadership through a contemporary lens. These

changes have supported a revision of many of our internal constructions about leadership. So how has this shift in thinking supported your individual perceptions about leadership? Reflect for a moment and consider:

- What are your perceptions of a leader?
- Do you consider yourself as a leader?
- What do leaders do?
- How do they acquire this leadership?

I am sure that some of you, through this reflection, may have positioned the image of leader as your principal, centre director or coordinator. Although these roles are indeed leadership positions, all of us have the opportunity to enter into a leader-and-follower relationship, where under certain circumstances we are the leader and at different times the follower. Findings from a recent study that I conducted indicate a shift towards this leader/follower understanding, that we all have the ability to be leaders. However, my findings also suggest that some ECEC professionals struggle to understand what to do as a leader.

With this in mind, I highlight the elements identified in research by Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) that are known to lead to effective leadership practice. ECEC professionals can apply each of these elements into their everyday practice, regardless of their position, knowing that they will support effective



leadership. The elements also provide opportunity for all effective leaders to reflect upon their leadership knowledge and skills, either as a self-reflection activity or perhaps as an opportunity to generate a conversation at centre level on ways of improving centre leadership.

## Collective vision

Effective leadership begins with being clear and focused about our moral purpose: the purpose of early childhood (why we do what we do) (Fullan 2016), and the vision you have for your early childhood program at some point in the future. The vision is what you want to achieve and is different from your philosophy.

*Does your centre have a collective vision?*

*Do you know what the vision is?*

*Do you reflect on this vision monthly to consider the strategies designed towards achieving this vision?*

## Shared understandings, meanings and goals

For a quality ECEC environment, professionals are encouraged to discuss and agree on their understandings of current theories and evidence-based literature about children's learning, development and wellbeing, and develop agreed ways of practice.

*What are the theories and evidence important to your team, and why? How is this reflected in all of your centre practices?*

*Do you share, discuss and invite input from colleagues about the educational program?*

*Do you discuss how the agreed understandings, meanings and goals have influenced your decisions for teaching strategies and experience towards the goals of meeting children's learning objectives?*

## Effective communication and reflection

Context influences leadership. Consider the structures and systems applied in your service to support effective communication with one another.

*How do these systems support deep respectful reflection about practice?*

*When does your team have opportunity to meet, talk, enjoy time together and celebrate efforts?*

## Commitment to ongoing professional development

Effective leaders ensure their thinking and practice is reflective of current evidence-based practice and support the thinking and growth of others.

*How are you investing in your professional learning?*

*Do you attend the same professional learning topics or do you broaden your scope to ensure that you have*

*challenge your knowledge and skills by participating in different learning opportunities?*

*How do you bring new learning back into your centre environment, to share and reflect about practice with your colleagues?*

*As a team, how do you make necessary change in practice to adopt new learning?*

## Mentoring and assessing practice

Visiting Penn Green (UK) in 2016, I observed the potential of inviting a colleague to video people on an iPad during everyday practice, and then to later sit with others to reflect deeply about the practice.

*What systems do you use to encourage assessment of mentoring and assessment?*

*Would you be brave to use technology to support practice improvement?*

*Would you be willing to request honest feedback and support if it would support growth and change? Would you be willing to reciprocate?*

## Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership is a style of leadership that recognises that anybody can be a leader, and that leadership is more effective when shared with many and not held by one. Distributed leadership is considered to be a suitable match for ECEC (Heikka 2014; Waniganayake & Semann 2011). This form of leadership does not mean that a centre director is not needed; indeed, a positional role is still required to provide support and motivation. Instead, this type of leadership honours the various strengths and interests each individual has, and supports and trusts collective efforts.

*Think about how you share leadership.*

*Are you willing to support others to lead?*

*Do you believe that you need to know everything and be involved in everything to be an effective leader?*

*Do you support people to lead by providing time, resources and holding a belief that they will achieve?*

*Do you listen to your colleagues and value their input, even when your opinion may be different?*

## Community of learners and team culture

Effective leaders set positive work cultures that encourage collaborative and reflective learning communities. Consider how you:

- encourage a culture of being ongoing learners
- are transparent in your teaching
- are willing to be vulnerable and opening your

classroom to others to share ideas, reflect upon practice and be open to new ideas and ways

- encourage others to reciprocate
- provoke new insights with questions.

## Facilitating family and community partnerships

An effective leader recognises the importance of collaborative professional partnerships with families and community. Consider how:

- you support family and community partnerships
- you understand and know your local community
- the local community perceives the important work you do
- you link your program to the wider community.

## Leading and managing

Leadership and management are different. However, they are often considered to be interconnected. It is important to reflect upon how you lead as well as how you manage, and consider how this might look like in different contexts and different circumstances.

*How do you want to be perceived as a leader?*


*What strengths do you want to be remembered for?*

*Would these strengths and characteristics be observed in good times and in challenging times?*

You do not need to hold a positional role to be a leader. Leadership requires passion, a focus on moral purpose and a desire to influence others towards improved early childhood practice.

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### Why feedAustralia?

The universal battle against obesity is worsening. Strategies that aim to prevent the onset of obesity are recommended by the World Health Organisation and are also included in jurisdictional health plans across Australia.

feedAustralia has been designed to support these strategies, with childhood obesity at the forefront of its thinking.

Alarming, it is estimated that approximately 95 per cent of early childhood education and care providers do not adhere to the Australian Dietary Guidelines when providing food and drink to the children in their care.

With up to 67 per cent of a child's dietary intake consumed in long day care, child care settings provide a valuable opportunity to instil long lasting healthy eating habits in every child, every day.

To join the feedAustralia family, go to [feedaustralia.org.au](http://feedaustralia.org.au)  
Best thing is it's free, no costs to your service!

## feedAustralia's Online Menu Planning Tool

feedAustralia's online menu planning tool provides early childhood services with:

- An online nutritional database that includes more than 200 healthy recipes and snack suggestions with established energy, macronutrient profiles and serve size recommendations
- A translation of expert nutritional knowledge into everyday 'best food selection' equipping adults with the know-how, resources and confidence to provide healthy and nutritious meals to the children in their care
- Nutrition resources, including suggestions and tips to reach food group recommendations that align with Australian Dietary Guidelines
- A real - time assessment of menus against nutrient, energy and serving size data
- Analytics to support food ordering
- An automated assessment of menu compliance per child based on food combinations
- An alert in real time when a planned menu does not adhere with Australian Dietary Guidelines or child dietary needs (e.g. allergies)
- Decreased wastage by generating automated shopping lists and greater management of portions
- Translation of 2,000 foods typically consumed by Australians and frequented by child care services into food groups
- Suggested meal or snack substitutions/suggestions that will enable menu compliance
- Nutritional analysis of menus over time
- Dashboards that demonstrate performance against Government indicators

# Is Kindergarten the new Prep?

## The disappearance of play within the curriculum

Early childhood education in Queensland has been under continual review and scrutiny for almost thirty years, with an unequivocal shift of pedagogical control from teachers and school administrators to political policy makers. Reflecting on the newly revised Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guidelines (2018), it becomes apparent that parallels can be drawn between the development of formalising the Kindergarten curriculum in the past decade, and the recent formalization of the prep grade. Both early childhood education stages of learning have historically had their foundations steeped in experiential learning theories which often manifested in play pedagogies; and both have received attention by political parties becoming a priority on State Government agendas over the years. In an effort to see these parallels clearly, it is imperative that we first take a look back at the underpinnings of early childhood education in Queensland.



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### Play pedagogies in Kindergarten and Preschool

Heavily influenced by Fröbel's work, early childhood education in Queensland began to see a formalization and recognition of importance in the late nineteenth century through the Department of Public Instruction through the inaugural appointment of the role Instructress in Kindergarten. The expectation and training of early childhood teachers at this time emphasized the adoption of Fröbel pedagogical practices "consisting of play and the Froebellian gifts and occupations" (Logan & Clarke, 1984, p. 22). The emphasis on play as a pedagogy continued through the first half of the twentieth century in Queensland, with the Brisbane Kindergarten Training College (1937) noting in their Alumnae minutes the importance of learning through play activity ensured that "a child was given a chance to develop into a happy normal social being with the right habits and attitudes towards life".

The endorsement and advocacy for play based pedagogies continued into the public schools in the 1970s when the Queensland State Government opened state preschool centers,

although often not on the same site as the compulsory grades, offering two and a half full-day and/or half-day programs per week (Logan & Clarke, 1984). Even though they were under the direction of the public education system, educators within these services were provided with the autonomy and professional respect to develop their own curriculum delivered through play pedagogies. For almost a century these pedagogies dominated the work of early childhood educators in both the Kindergarten and Preschool learning environments, ensuring that young children engaged in learning through a very naturalistic and developmental approach.

### From play Preschool to academic Prep

The introduction of the first formal curriculum in the late nineties, the Preschool Curriculum Guidelines (PCG) clearly outlined that the intended purpose was "to describe, rather than prescribe, ways in which the teacher might promote play-based learning" (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 2). Language used within these guidelines appeared to promote and support early childhood educators in their role of pedagogues, rather than



signal the imminent approach of the standardising of curriculum. Eight years on from the introduction of the PCG, the Queensland Government announced that from 2007 onwards, the year before compulsory schooling would change from the current part-time offerings to a five-day full day program. In anticipation of this impending change, the guidelines were superseded by the new Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG). With this came not only an alteration in the program offering, but also in terminology. The voluntary grade was renamed from Preschool to Preparatory Year (colloquially known as Prep), thus indicating the new intent behind the change.

Unlike the Preschool Curriculum Guidelines that advocated play pedagogy, the EYCG listed play as only one of five contexts of learning deemed appropriate with the others being “real-life situations, investigations, routines and transitions, and focused learning and teaching” (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006a, p. 8). Whilst the EYCG communicated that it encompassed the early childhood phase of schooling, there was no guidance on how it was to be implemented in the compulsory grade levels. The focus was solely on Prep, thus indicating an increased focus on addressing the Queensland standardized curriculum. 2008 saw the release of the Melbourne Declaration of the Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) which became the foundational document in education policy, as it sought to address the “major changes in the world that are placing new demands on Australian Education” (p.4) indicating for the first time, that contexts beyond Australia are impacting education policy.

Only two years later in 2010, the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, n.d.) was introduced nationwide setting “the expectations for what all Australian students should be taught” from Foundation (Prep) through to Grade Ten. It was at this point many Prep teachers began to grieve the loss of “familiar resources such as painting easels, blocks, costumes and manipulative equipment [which had] been pushed aside for desks as teachers feel pressure to implement the teacher-directed, formalized learning of the scripted C2C units with accompanying worksheet-style assessments” (Scheu, 2016, p. 47).

## Standardising Kindergarten

This increased focus on standardizing the prep grade, was not the only area of early childhood education to change during this period. While the release of the Melbourne Declaration of the Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) was shifting the sands of foundation in formal education in Australia, it

also increased the political focus on early childhood education. Up to this point, kindergarten had been the last bastion untouched by political agendas and education policies, both here in Queensland and Australia. However, this all began to change in 2009 with the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) which was developed “to provide young children with opportunities to maximize their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2009, p. 5), aligning the field of early childhood education with the federal government's education agenda to ensure “the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion” (MCEETYA, 2008, p.4).

The following year the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guidelines (QKLG) were introduced to provide further interpretation of how the principles and practices outlined in the EYLF should be applied within the kindergarten setting in the year before Prep (Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), 2010, p.2). Like the curriculum trend seen in the Prep grade over the past few decades, Kindergarten in Queensland now had a formal curricula document which articulated the expectations of how a Kindergarten program should look and feel. The inaugural QKLG clearly outlined that learning in the kindergarten year should be “promoted through play, and emergent and planned learning experiences and interactions” (QSA, 2010, p.2). In this document, structured or teacher directed experiences accounted for one third of the curriculum, with a heavier focus being placed on play and emergent learning experiences. The promotion of play pedagogies within the QKLG was predominant throughout the text; with the word play appearing 151 times in the document. Likewise, there were complete sections within the QKLG such as *Interacting and co-constructing learning and, Intentional teaching practices* which clearly defined the importance of play in this year of learning. While the guidelines did not explicitly state that play pedagogies were the expected mode of curriculum delivery, it was implicit through the language of the document that this approach was the preference. This was particularly evident through all the support materials which provided examples of how teachers could implement the guidelines, on the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority website.

## The parallel changes in Prep and Kindergarten

In 2015, the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) introduced the Age-Appropriate

Pedagogy Program (AAP) in response to the increased pressure to introduce formal education to children at a younger age (Cheeseman, Sumison & Press, 2014). The program describes eleven characteristics of age appropriate pedagogies: active, agentic, collaborative, creative, explicit, language rich and dialogic, learner focused, narrative, playful, responsive and scaffolded (Department of Education and Training, 2015). While APP did bring play pedagogies back into the fold of approved pedagogies, when compared to previous Queensland-specific early childhood curriculums mentioned earlier in this article, it can be seen that the value of play pedagogies in this first year of formal schooling has decreased from being the predominant feature (Preschool Curriculum Guidelines, 1998) to less than 10% of the endorsed pedagogies (Age Appropriate Pedagogies, 2015) in just over a decade. This is a concerning trend.

With the revised Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guidelines released in 2018, and now being implemented for the first time this academic year, it is timely to consider the trajectory the year before starting compulsory schooling is taking. In this reiteration (QCAA, 2018), it is noticeably stated the guidelines “provides specificity for children’s learning across the year before starting school” (p. 1), with perspectives focused on “promoting child development..., children as diverse learners..., and encouraging children to investigate ... through play and purposeful interactions” (p. 2). This is a clear shift from the previous guidelines which placed a heavier focus on play and emergent learning experiences. The promotion of play pedagogies has decreased significantly throughout the text; with the word play only appearing 42 times in the document. This is not to say that the new guidelines no longer value play pedagogies, rather it no longer provides the same level of support for teachers wishing to predominantly use this approach.

The time has come for early childhood professionals to continue their work as advocates for play pedagogies as best practice. Current scholarship in this field suggests “that a curriculum that emphasises child-initiated meaningful learning tasks is more likely to strengthen dispositions such as to seek mastery, to exert real effort in the face of difficulties, and to persist at challenging tasks—as well as many others usually alluded to in lists of goals and desirable educational outcomes” (Katz & Chard, 2013, p. 284). Play pedagogies provide these deeper learning opportunities because they allow “children to build connections across disciplines...

[fostering] intellectual growth, social connection and a joy in learning” (Tomlinson, 2009, p. 259). The new Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guidelines provides teachers with the opportunity to be the leaders in using play pedagogies to ensure our youngest citizens develop into critical thinkers, innovators and creators that will drive our country forward.

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# The quality of the engagement

I was recently asked what was my greatest strength as a teacher. That was easy—anxiety. The anxiety that wakes me at 2 am with the realisation that I did not answer that child's question well, or that when that parent said that ... they really meant ... the anxiety that continually drives me to improve my teaching. Perfectionism is a bad trait to have in a job where apparently we make 200 decisions every day. I would say it is closer to 2,000. Which is why when you multiply the number of interactions we have by our possible responses—there will always be situations where we could have done better. After 35 years of teaching young children and tertiary students, I am learning to forgive myself for mistakes, but I am passionate about the chance to improve the quality of my engagement because this is what produces the best outcomes for children.



*Carol is a passionate teacher who teaches children how to learn and adults how to parent. She has three decades of experience in kindergartens including Indigenous centres, and sessional lecturing and tutoring at university. With qualifications in early childhood and psychology, her interests include relationship-based practices, advocacy for gifted children and empowering parents. She incorporates the 'Calmer Classrooms' technique in her practice and firmly believes that how you connect with children will determine how well they learn. Aspiring to Child Whisperer status.*

We know many factors result in the best outcomes for children—the sensitivity and warmth of the adults, the level of education of the staff and the child-teacher ratio—but the strongest factor is what staff teach and how they teach it. These interactions that we have every day are most effective when they occur within intentional teaching.

Margaret Burchinal, senior research scientist at the University of North Carolina, is a statistician who has done a comprehensive review of the research on the measures of the quality of early childhood education. She says that there is a need to revise and expand these measures—it is not enough to be warm and sensitive. 'The evidence indicates that we need to focus on the content of instruction and teaching practices, as well as the extent to which teachers actively scaffold learning opportunities. We also need to continue to focus on the quality of interactions between teachers and children' (Burchinal, p.1).

Engaging well with children requires us to have a strong relationship with them. This is built before they start in your class. Detailed interviews with each family take time but produce rich information and build good rapport—vital in knowing the child and working as a team with the parents. Encouraging familiarisation visits, before children start, lets you learn more about them and strengthen the relationship with them. Having

a staggered start allows gradual easing into the class and more time to build meaningful relationships. Greeting the child by standing next to them and focusing on what they see—'You can see some children playing with playdough,'—allows you to be a support and collaborator to them, rather than another part of a strange situation.

Being sensitive to their needs is only possible when we know them. I keep the level of noise and excitement in the room at an appropriate level to suit the most sensitive child, and adjust it as they develop confidence and resilience. A calm classroom is only possible when the teacher is in charge—so straight away, how we teach is vital. Children cannot control their behaviour until they learn how. Controlling noise levels involves intentional teaching—you smile, speak calmly and gently and say 'That hurt my ears. Can you say it again a bit softer, like this?' Getting down to their level, and perhaps putting a hand gently on their back, helps children to focus on you. They will repeat what they shouted, in your volume. It is a miracle. A calm response from you—'Good job'—shows this is the new expected behaviour.

Every learned behaviour is a function of skills and practice. Be direct, be firm and tell them what to do. 'You were running inside; go back to the door and walk. Come on; I will help you'. Spoken warmly, you provide



a supportive encouraging environment to practise new behaviour (part of the curriculum—movement regulation). Take their hand if you feel they would accept it. Follow through. Every time. 'Try again; I'll help you.' Smile. Mean it. 'That's it. Good job.'

With this focus, spilling a drink is not an interruption to the program but an important part of it - a teachable moment. 'Quick, get the cloth'—let them wipe what they can, take your time; show them bits they missed (warmly and calmly). You have expanded their sense of agency and modelled accepting mistakes. 'Can you check if anyone got wet?'—the learning experience could go on forever. This is our specialised curriculum, taught by a skilled teacher.

Teaching skills takes time and practice too. We start every staff meeting with 'Mistakes I have made in the last month'. We also celebrate achievements, but we all love to learn what we could do differently. For years, I directed the children where to water in the vegetable patch. Only recently, did I stop to teach them to see whether the soil was dry or damp and make their own judgement.

Introverts have had to work hard to gain every social skill they have, so in a way it makes us more aware of them and helps us to teach them. It takes training and practice to be kind, confident and resilient. Modelling good relationships with staff and families is important but intentional teaching is more effective.

- 'You didn't look when I called you; let's practise that. You walk away and I'll call you and you turn around'. Do it two or three times—they actually think this is fun, if you get all excited when they do it.
- 'You said it so softly they didn't hear—can you say it like this—"I like blue the best!"...'Good—you're learning to speak strongly'.
- 'He doesn't like it when you snatch. You say "Can I be after you?" and he will say "Sure".'

Burchinal said the research shows that we should focus on scaffolding and intentional teaching: '*Scaffolding occurs when the adult caregiver talks with and models a learning activity for the child, making the activity fun through conversation that builds on and extends the child's interest and knowledge about the world*' (Burchinal, p. 1). Therefore, when the learning experience is part of identity, connectedness and wellbeing—modelling and intentional teaching is vital. The teaching of tone is unrecognised and underused. 'Can you say it again in a friendly way (strong way), like this ... ?' Children are excellent mimickers and

can learn assertiveness, humility and kindness by practising speaking assertively / kindly, etc. Even difficult behaviour can be intentionally guided—'Don't say no, say ok Ms Braunack'. Spoken with warm encouragement, this actually works—most of the time.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1969) states that the most morally advanced children were those who had opportunities for role taking—for putting themselves in another person's shoes and looking at a problem from that person's perspective. Children's literature can shape moral development. When reading a story, the children can take on the roles—'She's so scared, she's shivering—can you shiver?' Moving past the egocentric viewpoint and developing empathy can be as simple as that. Intentional teaching and modelling can occur throughout the program.

The quality of the engagement includes attention to detail. You can intentionally teach gender equity by changing half the construction vehicles in the story to female, half the animals to female—being aware of bias and adjusting for fairness. You can organise play to prevent children from sorting themselves by gender. You can address them as children, not boys and girls. The quality of the engagement involves being engrossed in the interaction, so you recognise what the child is learning and can build on it. The effects are far-reaching. As Vygotsky says 'The very mechanism underlying higher mental functions is a copy from social interaction; all higher mental functions are internalised social relationships.' (Vygotsky cited in Pound 2011 p.120)

Making every interaction high quality sounds like placing early childhood professionals under high stress until they realise that they can relax and take their time with those moments, because these moments *are* the program. They are teaching the curriculum. When we fail and make mistakes – model dealing with it and trying again. We are all still learning. Or when it is too late (2 am), remember children cannot develop a sense of justice unless they have experienced some injustice themselves.

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# Programming for play

Play is fundamental to all aspects of childhood and adolescent development. Why then does it currently feel so hard to uphold best practice in terms supporting and facilitating real play experiences?



*Madeline is a big advocate for reducing children's time in front of screens and providing them with a multisensory childhood by encouraging them to play outside. Both at work and through her own children she sees time and time again, the joy in children's eyes as they rise up to meet the challenges that nature provides. Madeline is the Director of 'Jump Up For Kids', a business that supports children and families to develop independence and resilience in their daily lives through Occupational Therapy assessment and intervention, outdoor play programs and professional development courses.*

This article will provide you with a model of play which can inform your practice to assist you in developing quality 'real play' experiences for children. It will empower you to advocate for the importance of play in children's lives and the resultant benefits. The 'Sandcastle' model of play developed by Dr Jenny Sturgess provides a clear understanding of what play is and what elements are needed to truly call an experience 'play'. It enables reflection on the areas we can influence in order to provide quality 'real-play' experiences for the children for whom we care. Examples of how this model has been applied in the development of the 'Jump up outdoors' program are provided. The focus of this program is on unstructured outdoor play and aims to address the decline in outdoor play over the last few decades and the significant risks this poses to healthy child development.

## What is play?

Let's begin by adopting a common definition of play.

Play is an episode of activity that is **child-chosen & viewed as play by the child**. Each play episode includes some or all of the following: spontaneous, non-literal, pleasurable, flexible, means-oriented, intrinsically motivated, meaningful, active and rule-governed. Play occurs across the lifespan and encompasses a range of types. Play occurs in different social contexts, different physical contexts and in a range of emotional or psychological contexts.

Every part of this definition is as important as the next, but let's look more closely at the **child-chosen** components and **viewed by the**

**child as play**. Consider the following examples:

- After a morning of errands, a young mother stops at a park so her toddler can have a play. The child is tired and cranky and does not engage in any games or play on the equipment. In this example, the mother is pleased she has been able to fit in time to play and is able to tick it off her list for the day. However, if we consider this example in the context of the definition of play, it is unlikely that the child would consider they have had a play experience; neither did they have much self-direction in the experience.

In contrast, let us consider the following:

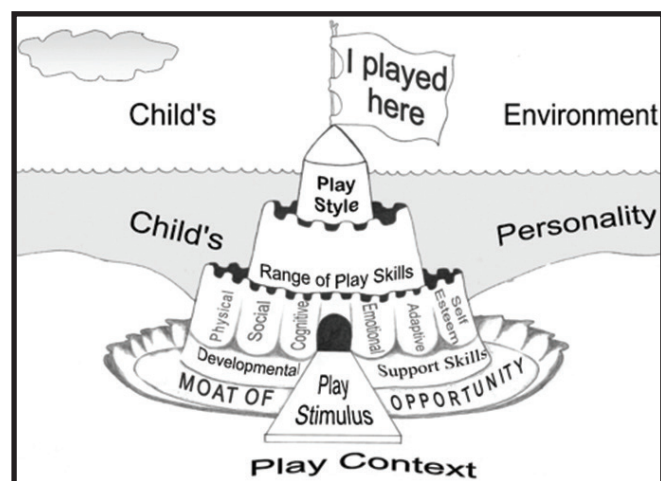
- You are in the midst of the morning routine and everyone should be putting shoes on and ready to walk out the door. Instead you find your child lying on the floor blowing a paper clip and a dust bunny down the hall ... without their shoes on. In this example, the activity is child chosen and the child would in all likelihood agree that they had played. This example is not meeting the needs of the adult; nevertheless it fulfils the definition of play.

These examples demonstrate that amidst our busy-ness and attempts to achieve results, we tend to focus on outcomes and then work backwards to try to mould the play experience to meet the outcome. Through this process, we often lose the very essence of play. However, if we allow children to direct their own play, then they are more likely to engage in a 'true play' experience, and as a consequence, will reap the well-researched benefits of play.

## 'Sandcastle' model of play

The 'Sandcastle' model of play (Sturges 2007) provides a model which allows us to preserve the integrity of play and achieve the required outcomes. If we can create a set of circumstances that allows children to truly play, the children use their current skills, extend their limits as they assess risk, and they engage with and learn from others.

The first five elements of the model represent aspects of the individual child, so are not within our direct control:



- **upturned buckets of sand**—developmentally determined skills that are supportive of play, such as social, communication, cognitive, symbolic, physical, organisational, adaptive, affective and self-concept skills
- **body of the castle**—specific play skills such as the ability to negotiate rules of play, use found objects to construct something fun, etc. Play skills develop with time, experience and nourishing environments
- **pinnacle of the sandcastle**—personal, playful style of the child including toy preferences, talkativeness in play, preference for type of play, etc.
- **the ocean**—child's personality which flows into the moat
- **the flag**—the child's ownership of play—integral component of the model as play is only play if the child perceives it as such.

The next four elements of the model, we are able to influence. Focusing efforts here can have the greatest impact on providing good quality play experiences. 'Jump up outdoors' uses these elements of the model as the framework when planning and developing an outdoor play program, as evidenced in the examples below:

- **the sky**—the physical environment in which the child lives and interacts.

The physical environment at 'Jump up outdoors' is outdoors and incorporates as much variety of natural elements as possible, including:

- **touch sensations**—prickles, mud, grass, dirt, tree bark
- **landscapes**—flat open spaces, hills, creeks
- **vegetation**—tall established trees, low grasses, young trees.

In addition, the unpredictability of the natural world infinitely increases the range of play opportunities. For example, one day a favourite play space was covered in prickles. The children avoided this area for a while, but it did not take long before a cardboard footpath through the prickles was constructed so that this favourite play area was back in use again.

We could not plan or orchestrate any of this but, by being outdoors in natural environments, unanticipated and unimagined adventures unfold as the children assess and manage the risks around them so that they can get on with playing.

- **moat**—set of circumstances that best supports a playful episode, including physical resources and time.

At 'Jump up outdoors', very little structure is provided regarding what to play and how the children spend their days. By removing structure, we are essentially providing children with time.

The other powerful component that helps fill our 'moat', are the physical resources. A collection of loose materials is available and the children have free access to them. Providing a range of loose objects further expands the play opportunities for the children.

- **drawbridge**—stimulus the child recognises as the stimulus to play. It is something spontaneous that the child recognises in themselves and/or the environment that they seize for play.

At 'Jump up outdoors' we have an 'orange hat rule' which allows children to play anywhere, so long as they can see a leader in an orange hat. As adults we aim to be as unobtrusive as possible. Children are great at lowering the drawbridge; they find opportunities to be playful in just about any situation, context or environment. Children are the masters of play and it is essential that they are provided opportunities to play in their own way (child-directed play).

Often, due to time constraints, curriculum requirements, our own stress etc., adults are quick to wrench the drawbridge back up and nip 'nonsense' in the bud. Instead we need to find playfulness within, model



playfulness for our children, and keep an eye out for those moments that children seize for play so that we can cherish them and nurture them.

- **the air**—social and cultural context in which play is occurring. Currently, the context of play is severely compromised, polluted by worries about risk, safety and the pressure to achieve outcomes.

The current context for play is a dismal picture and at times can feel overwhelming. However, if there is a big problem, there is always the possibility to make a big positive change. So I encourage you to start pushing back, armed with the 'Sandcastle' model of play, to

advocate within your circles of influence for what is in the best interests of children.

Think playfully, imaginatively and laterally. Remain true to the principles of child development and play. Keep your passion and resolve to make childhood a positive place for children. If we each commit to this, then it is like the natural environment itself; there is a myriad of possibilities.

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# Revolution of being

The word '**interconnectedness**' is frequently seen and heard in today's language when we talk about sustainability. When we truly understand the meaning of the word, it can catalyse intrinsic self-motivated actions for a life that is about being more. 'We must realise that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more' (United Nations 2000). We are in the midst of a worldwide movement that is reshaping the knowledge, skills and experiences offered in schools in order to shift away from the old paradigm and narrative that enables unsustainable behaviours. This is a shift to an ecological worldview and transformative learning. At the core of an ecological worldview is our ability to understand our place in the world and our relationship to people and the 'greater community of life' (United Nations 2000)—our **interconnectedness**.



Sherry's work with children commenced 30 years ago, working with children's charities. She later founded 'Professor JellyBean' which provides interactive science workshops for children. With the support of her daughter Marissa Ward, they established 'The Roar Initiative Inc' which engaged local youth members in environmentally sustainable and socially responsible endeavors. This work was the catalyst for the development of the Earth Action Plan, a whole school approach for sustainable development. She believes there is great potential for schools to stakeholders with the values, skills and knowledge to embark on a journey for a sustainable and equitable future.

'A word has the power to change your life. For more than a decade, technology has brought words into our lives more than ever before. No longer are words just what we hear, write or read—they have become what we create and how we interact with the world around us' (Parker n.d.).

In order to move forward, it is essential that we question why is it that when we are faced with an insurmountable amount of words and imagery that provides meaning and evidence of the destruction of our environment, the loss of ecological diversity and human suffering, that we cannot see it in a way that makes us interact with the world differently?

An example of this would be words published in *BioScience* and co-signed by 15,364 scientists from 184 countries that 'we are fast approaching many of the limits of what the biosphere can tolerate without substantial and irreversible harm' (Ripple et al. 2017). We may not all read *BioScience*, but that is not to say that we are unaware of the messages prevalent in society today regarding ecological crises.

Instead of acting in a timely and appropriate manner, social anthropologist Kay Milton states that we choose to manage our emotions and that we are most likely 'to act to feel better' (Milton 2008). In order to feel better, many will consume resources in the form of products, which ultimately leads to a greater negative environmental, economic and social impact.

Joanne Macy, an environmental activist, explains our inactions as a way to deal with our grief and despair for our planet.

*'When information is presented that could shake the false security we have constructed for ourselves, we tend to react in a number of ways:*

*disbelief: ignore there is a problem*

*dispute: argue the facts or attempt to convince that our current political and economic systems will solve the problem*

*double life: push the true knowledge way back in our minds and live a life as if nothing has changed' (Macy 1995).*

Our current reality, and our understanding of it, can immobilise our imagination to envision a path toward sustainability. This paralysis is detrimental to forming an ecological worldview. Environmentalist, Ed Ayres explains our reaction in the following way:

*'We are being confronted by something so completely outside our collective experience that we don't really see it, even when the evidence is overwhelming. For us, that 'something' is a blitz of enormous biological and physical alterations in the world that has been sustaining us' (Ayres 1999).*



An early example of an encounter **outside of the collective experience** may have been that of the indigenous people during the arrival of Captain Cook's Endeavour on the morning of April 28, 1770 into Botany Bay. The reaction of the local indigenous people to Cook's vessel, was not what would be expected as there was no pattern of recognition; Joseph Banks, who was the scientific advisor on Cook's Endeavour voyage, noted the following in his journal:

*'These people seemd to be totally engag'd in what they were about: the ship passd within a quarter of a mile of them and yet they scarce lifted their eyes from their employment. At 1 we came to an anchor abreast of a small village consisting of about 6 or 8 houses. Soon after this an old woman followd by three children came out of the wood; she carried several peice[s] of stick and the children also had their little burthens; when she came to the houses 3 more younger children came out of one of them to meet her. She often lookd at the ship but expressd neither surprize nor concern. Soon after this she lighted a fire and the four Canoes came in from fishing; the people landed, hauld up their boats and began to dress their dinner to all appearance totally unmovd at us, tho we were within a little more than 1/2 a mile of them' (Banks 1770).*

Is our current ecological crisis something so completely outside our collective experience that we don't really see it and are unable to find another way of moving forward? 'Our habitual focus of attention determines the structure of our neuronal ensembles' (Sewall 1999).

When psychologist Laura Sewall talks about neuronal ensembles, she is talking about neuroplasticity, which describes how experiences reorganise neural pathways in the brain.

*'The idea of neuroplasticity is simply that the brain changes in response to experience. It changes in response to our actions. It changes in our response to our relationships. It changes in response to specific training. These activities will shape the brain, and*

*we can take advantage of neuroplasticity and actually play a more intentional role in shaping our own brains in ways that may be health promoting, and ways that can cultivate well-being' (Goleman 2013).*

It is reassuring to know that if the majority of educational institutions provided a more intentional role in education for sustainability (EfS), then it would be highly probable that sustainable behaviours and attitudes would become the social default. The law of large numbers states 'The frequencies of events with the same likelihood of occurrence even out, given enough trials or instances' (Rouse 2012). This is to say that a large population of unpredictable people or students would collectively behave in a very





predictable fashion, and therefore it's likely to predict the outcome. The likely outcome of intentional EFS would be a collective ecological worldview.

An ecological worldview is a holistic and systematic way of looking at the world and our relationship to it: 'The cognitive dimension of the ecological worldview entails perceiving the ways that natural and social systems function as **networks of relationships**' (Barlow 2012). A child develops a network of relationships with the Earth from the moment they are born and continues these into their adult life.

*'A child makes a dramatic entrance into this world and within a few seconds calls upon the Earth for that first breath of air. At that moment, the newborn child develops an intimate relationship with the Earth; for without clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, the right kind of food, and space in which to live and grow, the child cannot exist' (Waidner 1992).*

It's not often that we question what our worldview is. An individual worldview is affected by new behaviours, attitudes, skills and values; it is a way we perceive the world that will ultimately guide our experiences within the world. Concurrently, it will be our experiences that shape our worldviews. It is a process of sensing, understanding, and how that affects the way we act: our **BEING**.

This is important to consider as educators because what types of experiences are students in educational systems receiving that enable them to perceive things differently? Does their school experience allow them to see themselves and their place within the Earth community as part of an interconnected relationship?

There is no denying that we are less present in the real world, and the future is unpredictable. Our challenge for the future will be to develop an ecological lens by which we view and filter the world. It's said that humans are the only species on the planet capable of conceptualising the future and then setting forth and creating that future. Education for sustainability, as a transformative learning process, is pivotal to ensuring a sustainable, ethical and regenerative future.

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# Early Mathematics

Children need the knowledge and skills to fully participate in the 21st century life, and this is acknowledged by governments worldwide—as noted by the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT) in 2014. Policy-makers recognise that quality early childhood education and care creates the foundations for lifelong learning. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) early this century reviewed early childhood education in its report *Starting strong*, acknowledging that 'Childhood (is) an investment with the future adult in mind', (OECD 2001, p. 38).



Angela is currently the Head of Primary at St Margaret's Anglican Girls' School. Her interest in the implications of education in the early childhood years led her to complete her Master of Education (Research) with this age group. The findings in her case study on teaching mathematics suggests it is advantageous for teachers to have an awareness of how foundational concepts of mathematics link to bigger mathematical ideas and their implications for the way teachers promote the foundational concepts of proportional reasoning. The methodology used in this case study was 'teacher research'. She has a great interest in this approach for teacher professional growth and curriculum planning and its contribution to the establishment of professional learning communities.

Australia has responded to these calls by prioritising the educational programs prior to school and in the first year of primary schooling: the development of the Early Years Learning Framework by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in 2009, the *National quality standard* for early childhood provision (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) in 2011 for childcare and kindergarten years, and the inclusion of the Foundation Year (preparatory and preschool) in the *Australian curriculum*. The development of the *Australian curriculum*, not only prioritised a national curriculum, but also acknowledged the importance of the year prior to Year 1 by creating a curriculum for this year, identified as the Foundation Year. The development of these documents (*Early years learning framework*, *National quality standard*) and the inclusion of the Foundation year in the Australian curriculum are each testament to the nation's commitment to early childhood education and acknowledgement of the importance of providing a quality education for children in these age groups (prior to school and first year of school). These documents acknowledge the need to provide quality mathematical experiences children in these early years (Clements & Sarama 2016).

An ever-growing body of knowledge, related to young children's capabilities, has impacted on our understanding about the education of this age group and young children's

mathematical proficiencies. Previous thinking included the view that young children have little or no knowledge of mathematics. In the sixties, the work of Piaget recognised that children were mathematically curious and able to actively construct mathematical knowledge, but young children were viewed as 'incapable of abstract and logical thinking until concrete-operational stage around age seven' (Hachey 2013, p. 420). A growing body of research has moved away from the belief that young children, because of their stage of development, have limited capacity to learn mathematics (Askew 2016). Recent research has found that children can show mathematical competencies 'that are either innate or develop in the first and early years of life' (Clements & Sarama 2016, p. 77). Moreover, explicit quantitative and numerical knowledge in the years before formal schooling has been found to be a stronger predictor of later mathematics achievement and school success than tests of intelligence or memory abilities (Claessens, Duncan & Engel 2009; Duncan et al. 2007; Krajewski & Schneider 2009). There is some discrepancy in the research about when children have the capability to reason; however, there is agreement that children in these early years are capable learners and they need opportunities to develop their mathematical proficiencies (Boyer et al. 2008). Early years teachers need to ensure all students have access to rich and challenging mathematical experiences. Research has found that the skills that normally develop



during adolescence can be developed, with purposeful teaching, in younger students in school settings (Hilton & Hilton 2013). Therefore, teachers need to offer mathematically stimulating and focused activities, 'based on research-informed knowledge of children's mathematical development' (Bruce, Flynn & Bennett 2016, p. 543; Siemon et al. 2012b).



Listed below are the key mathematical concepts that are common to early childhood mathematics experiences but more importantly lay the foundation for more sophisticated mathematics in the older year levels. Early childhood teachers are familiar with presenting mathematical experiences that support children in the development of these concepts. However, we need to offer experiences many times, in different ways, and question children's thinking in order for them to be able to use numbers flexibly and develop their own mental image of numbers; that is, children need to develop number sense. Number sense is being intuitive with numbers; it is how children use and relate to numbers. Therefore, they have a conceptual understanding, rather than a procedural understanding, of number.

**One-to-one counting** occurs when a child calls number values by name, knowing the last number named is the total or the cardinality, and answers a



*how many* question (Reys et al. 2012). This can be tricky for young children who have learned number naming without the act of counting objects. It is a prerequisite to counting and patterning.

**Patterning:** the key to patterning is for a child to understand the difference between repeating patterns (what part is repeating) and growing patterns. Growing patterns links to number patterns; e.g., if you know 2 and 3 make 5, then 20 and 30 make 50.

**Counting sequence** remains the same: each number has a position (7 is between 6 and 8); look for patterns in the sequence; count on and back from any number. Build up to counting in 2, 3, 5, 10. Count forwards or backwards by 3 from any starting point (by the end of year 2).

**Ordinal number** parallels this development.

**Understanding of 'more' and 'less':** that is 1 and 2 more and/ or less

**Spatial representations of number:** by exploring different representations (dot patterns), rearrange collections but quantity stays the same



**Relative size of numbers** is identifying gross differences (3 and 10) and small differences (9 and 10)

**Trust the count** is when children understand that the count is a permanent indicator of quantity and can be rearranged but the quantity will remain the same. When students recognise the group, they can then count on rather than counting from the beginning. Understanding trust the count contributes to the concept of addition and counting groups as one.

**Subitise** is closely aligned with trust the count, when children recognise small collections of numbers (1-5) and can do so without counting; that is, it is said they can subitise.

At the early stage of mathematical thinking or additive thinking, children do not trust the count, understand that *skip counting* tells how many, and grouping makes



no sense to them (Jacob & Willis 2003). To move to the next stage of thinking, children need to develop each of these concepts, as one-to-one counting and trust the count are key foundational concepts relating to the first stage of thinking (Siemon et al. 2012). As the child progresses through this stage, the child recognises *equal size groups* or the *multiplicand*, but does not understand that the *number of groups* can be counted, and the role of number of the groups in multiplication (Jacob & Willis 2003). The student progresses from one-to-one counting to trust the count and can count using repeated addition and skip counting.



**Repeated addition**, in its simplest form, is a counting-based strategy of counting in groups especially counting with materials (Siemon et al. 2011). If it is used with a multiplication, it involves adding of the same number; e.g. if Tom has 3 bags with 5 marbles in each, Tom would count:  $5+5+5$

**Skip counting** is a higher form of repeated addition and relies on knowing number-naming sequences and instead of counting by 1s, counts by 2s, 5s, 10s or other amounts.

**Partitioning** is the physical separation or renaming of a collection in term of its parts. It can occur in additive terms (e.g. 8 is 5 and 3), in multiplicative terms; parts are equal double (8 is double 4) or half a quantity or collection into equal parts (with concrete objects).

**Additive part-part-whole** is the knowledge of numbers to 10 (8 is 2 and 6), that is part + part = whole. Also, in relation to larger numbers; that is, those numbers of which it is a part (part-whole) (e.g. 6 is 1 less than 7, 4 less than 10, half of 12). Part-part whole knowledge is a key factor for mental strategies and place value.

The concepts and relationships described above contribute to a child's well-developed sense of number. It is therefore vital that teachers ensure that students are offered many explicit learning experiences so that

students develop a strong foundation on which to build mathematics for current and future learning.

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# Mindfulness-based education

## Changing the conversation on behaviour guidance, school readiness and the role of early years educators

To say that the group of children I was about to have in my class were wild would be an understatement. These children were like a pack of hyenas—loud, irrational, sometimes violent and often unpredictable (also, thankfully, sweet and lovely and wonderful too!). I work in an early years centre and one of the brilliant benefits of being the kindy teacher in this kind of service is the opportunity to develop a relationship with your future class ... and in this case, establish some serious strategies in advance. Eighteen months ago, I remember watching this particular group of children at 'rest time' howling and rolling around the room, some children standing and running around, others calling out to each other across the small space.



*Hannah Powell is an early childhood educator who has been working with young children and families in South Brisbane for the past decade. She is passionate about the early years sector and in particular advocating for children's freedom in play and their access to the natural environment.*

This was so different from every other group of children we had seen at this stage in their early learning journey, and the experienced and talented teachers in the room were genuinely lost as to how to work with this motley crew. I knew then that we'd have to do things differently, or none of us would survive in a few months when they graduated into my room. As most early childhood educators would, I started furiously researching ideas on how to create a calm, kind and respectful classroom, hoping to glean something I'd missed in the past. My colleague and I brainstormed for weeks leading up to the transition and began putting together a range of approaches and strategies we felt these children needed.

Eighteen months later, and these same children were almost

unrecognisable from those first few tumultuous weeks. They were able to calm their bodies and minds, to better regulate their emotions and to communicate their feelings (even if it meant shouting loudly 'I'm so angry!' and quickly running off to our little quiet area as opposed to acting on this big emotion).

### How? Let's paint a picture ...

A sole scented candle is lit as children enter their darkened room, walking along a rope to find a space on a colourful crochet square. As they sit, they follow their educator's slow and purposeful movements, swaying to the meditative music in the background. Once everyone has found their space, they are encouraged to close their eyes and take three soft, slow breaths together. Once they are feeling calm and relaxed, they are





transitioned off by having the opportunity to paint or draw how they're feeling that day—and reminded that there's no right or wrong, that all feelings are valid and allowed.

In my kindy class, we begin our day with a variation of this kind of experience every day, and every day the change in the children's energy, volume and focus following this is palpable. This time together is short and powerful. It is a time to connect and re-align with where we are in space right now and just being present.

It may sound wishy-washy, a bit hippy-ish, to be introducing mindfulness and meditation to children—particularly as children are far better at being present in the moment than adults—but the reality is that mindfulness is about providing far more than simple presence.

Though children are incredibly capable of reaching deep states of focus and calm during uninterrupted child-led play (one of the many reasons this type of play is so valuable), they are still developing many skills and strategies to work with other areas of difficulty—emotional resilience, self-regulation and communicating their feelings—otherwise known as emotional literacy (Nieminen & Sajaniemi 2016). These three areas form the foundation for future relationships, self-esteem and cognitive abilities and, if taught correctly, are a very strong predictor in later academic success (DeSocio 2015; Meiklejohn et al. 2015; Siegel 2009).

### **So what does teaching mindfulness actually involve?**

It is essentially about teaching children emotional literacy through awareness: teaching children to be able to tune in to their feelings, to slow down and quiet their mind on purpose, to be aware of their breath and the sensations they are experiencing. This allows them to build a stronger understanding of their thoughts and emotions as well as being







able to just experience them without any judgement or trying to change them (Siegel & Payne Bryson 2012; Porter 2016; Hawkins 2014). These are the core elements to emotional intelligence and resilience (Walton 2016), as well as being essential for developing healthy reciprocal relationships (Hinnant & O'Brien 2007; Viglas 2018).

To be truly effective, however, it is essential to practise what you preach—mindfulness works best when educators are working on their own internal stability (Parks 2016). Working on understanding the benefits of stillness and the breath, of pausing in the moment before acting, of appreciating beauty, will allow educators to be more present and patient with children as they work through the big emotions that flood them often, as well as give them the language and personal insight to share perspectives for growth and acceptance.

## Breaking it down

*Resilience = awareness of emotions + allowing them without judgement*

*Self-regulation = awareness of emotions + being able to experience these without impacting negatively on others*

*Emotional literacy = having a variety of labels and vocabulary for emotions + being able to identify and express these in the moment.*

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# How to: Practical guides for implementing mindfulness in (and out) of the classroom

These strategies and approaches can be taught during group experiences, used as transitions between activities, and also utilised during times of heightened emotion and conflict, to bring children back to a space where they are ready to proactively resolve issues within themselves or with others:



Protect children's rights to uninterrupted child-led play—the state of being children during play falls into the category of what's called 'flow'. Coined by psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, it is characterised as 'the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the activity' (Cacioppe 2017; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi 2009).

Using the senses to bring presence—when we are fully present with our senses, we are training ourselves to be fully present in our lives. You can use a huge range of ideas and approaches for helping children tune in. Some of the ones that we have found worked well include:

- touch—having something with an interesting texture to look at or feel and a specific objective—i.e. placing a weighted bean bag on their lap and asking them to take three deep breaths while thinking about how the weight feels on their thighs before passing it on to one of their peers, giving themselves a tight hug and then gently caressing their cheeks
- scent—scented candles are an amazing way to help calm and focus children, but you can also use scented bean bags, a cup full of coffee beans, a flower, etc.
- sound—allowing the children to pass around instruments that resonate, such as a singing bowl or bells, creating sound together through collective humming or chants
- sight—using balls/jars filled with glitter that they can shake, and watch the glitter fall to the bottom, finding a space in nature that inspires awe, finding natural items to look at and observe
- taste—during shared meal experiences, discussing the flavours they can identify, slowing down the eating process and encouraging chewing to extract every different flavour in the food.
- Emotional literacy—being able to identify and label emotions has been documented as the most effective way to develop emotional intelligence and emotional resilience (Siegel & Payne Bryson 2012; Porter 2016; Hawkins 2014). This can be taught through:
  - modelling language and a wide vocabulary to describe emotions (i.e. not just sad/happy/angry—things like frustrated, annoyed, disappointed, etc.)
  - pointing out different emotive words and the correlating character expressions or contexts during shared story reading
  - playing emotion charades (there are emotion cards you can buy, or you can just print pictures of emotions for the children to act out and their peers to guess). We also did this with one of the babies from our centre: she was spending time in our room to be



with her brother, but as a group we played 'feelings detectives', each giving her a hug around the circle and watching her facial cues and listening to her sounds to know whether she liked or didn't like what we were doing

- doing body scans to 'check in' and feel what emotions they may be experiencing without trying to change them or judge them—even verbally accepting them—I've asked my children to feel into their emotions, put their hand on their heart and say aloud 'It's ok; you're ok'
- painting or drawing feelings—this can be an excellent group experience or transition where different colours represent different emotions or invite the children to create their own representations.
- Movement—yoga is both fun and therapeutic and can be done in a way that is engaging. The children love being able to achieve poses that they found really challenging at first, and encouraging children to challenge themselves by not only reaching the poses but HOLDING them helps develop core strength and focus.
- Environment—creating inviting quiet spaces and filling them with resources that aid calming and recentering—and then discussing the use of this space with the children often, as well as referring them to it when they are feeling heightened, as one way they might like to process their emotions. Please do not EVER use this as any kind of punitive or time-out space, however. It is not disciplinary; it is therapeutic, and the children will only choose to use it if they know it is theirs when they need it, not because they have been forced into it.

## What it is and what it isn't

- It is not about forcing children to sit through long-winded boring meditation and breathing exercises.
- It IS about offering age-appropriate, interesting and enjoyable meditation experiences, techniques and approaches—Nieminen & Sajaniemi (2016) recommend keeping it short and FUN.
- It is not about using 'mindfulness' as a buzzword and suddenly writing all your observations on teacher-led mindfulness practices.
- It IS about knowing your class and utilising opportunities to develop mindfulness skills and strategies together and documenting that journey.
- It is not just about meditation and breathing.

- It IS about educators having a deep and thorough understanding of how mindfulness and emotional literacy impact on children's abilities and sense of self and utilising these understandings in everyday interactions and experiences with the children.
- It is not just for the children.
- It IS about educators practising what they preach, implementing the ideas and approaches themselves, modelling these for the children.
- It is not about just sitting still.
- It IS about creating joint attention (inner and outer)—this can happen when looking at a beautiful leaf, when moving together, when discussing feelings.

## So what? A quick re-cap of what it's all for and how it applies to you:

Increased self-regulation and emotional intelligence equate to increased self-esteem and sense of agency over body and emotions, which leads to increased confidence and self-respect, and results in increased empathy for self and others. This means a calmer, happier, more empathic class in general and a group of children who understand that they are the agents of their own learning and the masters over their bodies and emotions.

Mindfulness practised by educators increases educator patience, awareness, clarity and empathy for children—teaching from a space of understanding and compassion—allowing educators to enact a pedagogy of relationships and listening.

It is so important that we are advocating for greater opportunities for our children to be mindful—are we ensuring they have long periods of uninterrupted play and can get into their flow? Are our environments designed in a way that they can access and use all the materials they need when in their flow state? Are we teaching them skills and strategies to empower them with emotional literacy and the ability to experience their emotions without judgement?

Our curriculum frameworks—EYLF and QKLG—provide us with both the time and the pedagogical backing to be allowing children to develop these valuable skills and strategies before they head off to school and, in doing so, provides a firm social and emotional foundation not only for their years at school, but for them to call on for the rest of their lives.

## REFERENCES

NB. References can be found in previous article: *Mindfulness-based education*

# Partnerships for mental health and wellbeing

Connecting with families is essential for early childhood educators because families are children's first educators and play a primary role in fostering children and young people's mental health.

Both the *Early years learning framework* and the *National quality standard* emphasise partnerships too. Educators know how important connectedness and partnerships are for mental health and wellbeing.



*Early Childhood Australia's Be You team is a highly qualified and experienced multidisciplinary team of professionals committed to promoting and supporting positive mental health and wellbeing in the early years. Together, with Be You partners, Beyond Blue and headspace, the ECA team support educators in implementing the Be You Professional Learning and continuous improvement processes across early learning services and schools.*

Educators can make a difference to children and young people's mental health and wellbeing: families trust early learning services and schools to access support, resources and information when required (*Be You Professional Learning module, Partner with the Family Partnerships Domain*). Families expect early learning services and schools to promote and support positive mental health. The Young Minds Matter survey (*Be You Professional Learning module, Partner with the Family Partnerships Domain*) identified that 40.5% of emotional or behavioural problems among children and young people aged 4 to 17 years were first identified by an educator.

When educators and families develop a connection, they can form collaborative partnerships. These partnerships can help educators gain a better understanding of the most effective ways to support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing and resilience. Collaborative partnerships are a strong mental health protective factor for children as they decrease the possibility of them having mental health issues when they encounter stressful or difficult events in their lives.

## **A partnership is a collaborative relationship with shared responsibility and a common goal**

In a partnership, each person is valued and thought of as equal. They contribute their own views, skills and knowledge. Everyone communicates

openly and decisions are made together. Effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect, and shared responsibility for children and young people's education (*Be You Professional Learning module, Partner within the Family Partnerships Domain*).

Many of the influences on mental health and wellbeing are so interrelated that the most effective approach to supporting and promoting positive mental health is one that involves everyone in the learning community: children, young people, educators and families. All contribute in different and complementary ways to a child's learning, and partnerships reflect an awareness of the interdependence of these groups and individuals and the wider context in which children live and learn. Growing mentally healthy minds works best when everyone gets together.

## **Strong partnerships lead to an enhanced experience in early learning services and schools**

Children feel secure and accepted when they observe the warm relationships between their family and educators. Children's sense of identity and wellbeing will be strengthened through observing mutual trust and understanding between educators and their families when their culture is acknowledged and respected. Children will feel more confident and positive.

When families and educators work together respectfully, it often leads to families developing an increased

appreciation of the significance and value of early childhood education, and may enable parents to address any concerns they have about their child's learning and development more quickly.

## It takes time to build partnerships

Effective partnerships depend upon initial engagement. All families are unique and have their own expectations and the degree of connectedness will vary, so educators need to be able to work sensitively and effectively. Some families may be reluctant to engage due to their fear of stigma because of their circumstances (*Be You Professional Learning module, Include, within the Mentally Healthy Communities Domain*).

There are many things that support partnership building: communicating effectively, making time, having empathy, being non-judgmental, understanding, and a willingness to participate in sharing ideas, knowledge and expertise. Acceptance of others' points of view and differences allows connections to develop. It's not always easy, but it's worth the effort.

Positive relationships between educators can better equip them to support families, children and young people. This, in turn, contributes to building a positive learning community (*Be You Professional Learning module, Connect within the Mentally Healthy Communities Domain*).

The start of the year can be a great time to reflect on how welcoming your service is. The first feelings and experiences you have when you walk into a service will depend on how people begin to build relationships with you, the initial interactions and how the environment feels.

Review your environment in terms of inclusion and respect. Reflect on communication with families—think about how to share information about the curriculum, the child or young person's learning and information supporting parenting and family wellbeing, most appropriately within your unique learning community.

Examining factors that might get in the way of engaging families is important, as they may become barriers. Educators may be unsure of interacting with families who may appear difficult to engage with initially. We need to explore who are the families we are not engaging and why not?

Service or school structures or policies may also inhibit the development of partnerships. Time, patience and individual skills, knowledge, attitudes and values can also impact on interpersonal perceptions between the educator and family. Professional reflection may be needed to identify this.

## Seeking input from families and educators to maintaining positive partnerships

Consider ways to strengthen partnerships if gaps are identified in your learning community. (For example, learn and share aspects of culture held by families, undertake professional learning activities that promote the development of partnerships with families, engage in reflective practice and professional conversations about your everyday interactions.) (*Be You Professional Learning module, Partner within the Family Partnerships Domain*).

Maintaining empathy, de-personalising conflict or disagreement, communicating and reflecting on what's happening are all strategies that can be used to assist in maintaining partnerships when things get difficult. Extra support from another educator or mentor can be beneficial at times to keep communications solution focused (*Be You Professional Learning module, Partner within the Family Partnerships Domain*).

## Your role can be very demanding in a partnership, so it's important to understand the boundaries

Educators do not always have the knowledge, expertise or availability to address some concerns that families may raise. When a concern about a child's behaviour is raised, it is helpful to take a strengths-based approach by acknowledging the positives with the child. It can also be a means of having a positive discussion instead of a negative one, which is unhelpful for everyone involved (*Be You Professional Learning module, Assist, within the Family Partnerships Domain*).



Knowing how to access appropriate information about providing support in your local community is always



useful. Be aware of when you need to discuss referral options with families: your role is to observe and support children and young people—not diagnose mental health issues. Early learning services and schools can best support children and families by having strong partnerships with families and external community agencies, which can assist in supporting the individual and provide mental health expertise (*Be You Professional Learning module, Assist within the Family Partnerships Domain*).

## For strong partnerships with families, it's helpful to reflect on, and maintain, your own wellbeing

While other people often determine much of your work environment, individually you can take steps to protect and enhance your wellbeing. Be aware of what you find stressful when considering how best to do this. Check out tips for self-care, including strategies for managing stress, in the *Mentally Healthy Community, Understand module* and in the *Your Wellbeing Fact Sheets*.



Remember to be kind to yourself and others. Things can feel very demanding.

## Be You Professional learning support

Engaging in professional learning with Be You will assist and support early learning services and schools in developing partnerships within their individual learning community.

The Be You vision is that every learning community is positive, inclusive, and resilient—a place where every child, young person, educator and family can achieve their best possible mental health.

Be You is led by Beyond Blue with delivery partners Early Childhood Australia and Headspace.

Be You is a flexible *Framework* for whole-setting learning and improvement that you can adapt to work for you, individually and your unique learning community. It has the greatest impact when whole learning communities implement Be You collectively. The professional learning consists of 13 modules grouped under five domains. Educators can start wherever it suits them or their service—the framework is not linear.

The Family Partnerships domain consists of two modules:

- Partner—Partner with families through positive relationships (What partnerships look like; Developing partnerships with families; Connect, Collaborate, communicate and Partnerships and social emotional learning)
- Assist—Assist families to foster mental health and wellbeing (Your role in supporting families and parenting; Self-care and stress management and Responding to concerns).

You are supported with the professional learning and continuous improvement process by Be You Consultants, Be You Essentials for getting started and National Check-In events to network with educators throughout Australia. Be You also offer useful Resources such as Tools and Guides, Wellbeing Tools and the Always Be You resources, so your learning community can embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and ways of responding.

## More about Be You

Check out some of our blogs - [beyou.edu.au/resources/news](https://beyou.edu.au/resources/news)

Join Be You and become part of growing Australia's most mentally healthy generation



# ADHD – What do you need to know?

Did you know that at least 7% of children in Australia are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)? In June 2014 the *Australian Bureau of Statistics* stated that there were 4.4 million children under the age of 15 years, so that means that approximately 308,000 of these children were diagnosed with ADHD.



*Paula Burgess is founder of Beyond the Maze an organisation that provides a safe and supporting environment for people and families living with ADHD. Paula found there was very little support in Australia for her and her son with ADHD, so Beyond the Maze was born. Her passion is to educate as many people as possible about ADHD so there can be a better understanding of what it is and how to work with children with ADHD. Paula has shared her challenging experiences with specialists, schools and friends in her book 'Beyond the ADHD Label; One Mother's Struggle for Change'.*

With these statistics there is a very good chance that you will have at least one child with ADHD in your classroom. Chances are that they won't hold just an ADHD diagnosis either, it will be combined with another diagnosis as ADHD is rarely diagnosed on its own. As an educator it can be hard to know how to manage a child with ADHD and they can seem out of control in the classroom.

As a mother whose life was turned around when my son was expelled from day care, I devoted hours of my life to understanding ADHD and then went on to study ADHD coaching so I could educate others and help both educators and parents with this very confusing maze that is ADHD.

## So, What is ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, known as ADHD is not a behavioural disorder, it is a neurodevelopmental disorder where the neural pathways in the brain fire differently to a neurotypical brain. Most people think of children with ADHD as these overactive, boisterous boys who are running about and not paying attention. There are many ways that ADHD can present, and hyperactivity is just one of them but many children don't display hyperactivity. ADHD also isn't just in boys, it shows in girls as well.

Many people ask me "Can you grow out of ADHD?" No, ADHD is there forever, once people with ADHD get older they simply develop better strategies of managing it.

## ADHD has three different classifications such as:

- *Inattentive ADHD* – a child with Inattentive ADHD often gets diagnosed in the early years of schooling as they are starting to fall back on their work. As they are not displaying any hyperactivity traits they may get missed earlier on.
- *Hyperactive ADHD* – the name says it all. These children are the children that have a problem with staying still and need to be on the move all the time. They also have trouble controlling their behaviour, so they get into trouble more frequently.
- *Combined Type ADHD* – This is a diagnosis that combines both above traits. They usually hold six symptoms of each type of ADHD to be diagnosed combined type.

You might ask, but what signs am I looking for with ADHD? ADHD presents differently for everyone which is why sometimes a doctor may mis-diagnose ADHD and later it become a different diagnosis. In general, ADHD has the following traits:

- Excessive fidgeting
- Can't sit still
- Talking excessively
- Problems waiting turns
- They may butt into games
- They may make careless mistakes

- Don't seem to listen
- Get bored easily
- Forget things
- Hyperactive
- Impulsive
- Disorganised

The above just mentions a few. You might be reading this thinking, I see this with many of my children in the classroom, how do I differentiate between normal child behaviour and ADHD? Well, to answer that question, these traits are more regular. They continue for more than 6 months and don't seem to go away. They may reduce sometimes but they still don't go away entirely, and the behaviour is excessive for their age.

## What challenges can ADHD pose in the classroom?

Having a child with any special needs in the classroom poses its challenges and ADHD is no different. Children with ADHD can range from having learning difficulties to being gifted so it is important to keep them engaged as much as possible, so you are able to assess them and their abilities like any other child. Boredom to a child with ADHD can be disastrous.

If they don't find a topic engaging, then this is where they can start to become disruptive in the classroom and can go as far as acting out aggressively towards you or other children. Equally as important as keeping them engaged, is ensuring they get whatever help they may require. If a child with ADHD is struggling they will be very frustrated. Frustration is the cause of many emotional outbursts as they take time to learn how to deal with frustration.

Developmentally, people with ADHD are approximately 3 years behind their peers. However, this isn't across all developmental areas, which poses another problem. You could have a child in your classroom who is excelling academically and might be a year or two ahead of their peers but socially it is obvious they are 3 years behind; effectively you have a 7-year-old student with the social skills of a 4 – 5 year old. This can be tough to manage. Have a think about those 17-year-old learner drivers with ADHD who are at the developmental age of a 14 year old - scary!

## Five tips you can use in the classroom

1. First and foremost, I encourage you to **communicate** as much as you can with your parents. Most parents want the best for their child and they will work with you if they know you are willing to work with them, not against them.

Remember to give the parents some positive feedback as well. Coming from a mum who knows her child has his challenges it is nice to hear some positive things as well.

2. While on the topic of positivity – **reward and compliment** your children with ADHD as much as you can. They hear things all the time about what they are doing wrong, so hearing encouragement and support will do wonders. Studies show that for every negative thing that people hear, five positive things are needed to replace that.
3. **Keep the child engaged.** Find what they like doing and keep them focused on that. If you can see that they are obviously disengaged from their work, then you could simply ask them a question around what they like doing to trigger that way of thinking.

For example: if they are struggling with a question around an English subject then you could ask them to write about something they like. For example: Minecraft is very popular with children with ADHD, so you could ask some questions around that.

4. **Keep the child busy.** As I mentioned before, boredom is a big problem for these children and it can end up being a bigger problem. Give them something to do for you to keep them busy. This will not only keep them busy, but it will also help them feel important.
5. **Let them walk around & allow movement breaks.** If you require the children to sit on the floor to listen to instructions, a story or for some other activity then allow a child with ADHD to walk around or stand up. There still must be boundaries around this however, they must still listen to you, they cannot disturb the other children and they must participate in the activity. Most children with ADHD will engage so much more when you allow them to do this. It may not be as scary as you think.

Movement breaks are important not just for children with ADHD but all your students will benefit from this. Even if you take 30 seconds between activities to jump up and down or move around, this will help the brain switch from one task to another task.

Having a child with ADHD in the classroom can pose challenges but they can also be the most charming children you teach. Work with them as much as you can, recognise their

strengths, work with the parents and provide them with as much positive feedback as you can. These kids are our world changers, you will play a part in that!



**Title:**

# See Hear

**Author:**

Tania McCartney

**Illustrator:**

Jess Racklyeft

**Publisher:**

EK Books

**ISBN:** 978 1 925355 67 5

**Reviewed by:**

Cassie Mutimer

This flip format picture book is a sequel to *Smile Cry* and brings the characters of Piglet, Bunny and Cat to life again on a sensory adventure.

The simple text and beautiful illustrations makes this book perfect for young students to further explore their senses. 'See' encourages the reader to look beyond the everyday and use their imagination to see what might be hidden in those gift wrapped surprises, between the pages of a story book and floating by in the clouds.

The students were excited to get out magnifying glasses and explore the tiny insect world, lie on their back and imagine shapes in the sky and it led to many interesting discussions about what we see might be different to what others see, how our homes differ, what friendship looks like to each of us.

By flipping the book we then enter the world of sounds and we are challenged to stop for a moment and listen intensely for those sounds we can hear around us.

What does a song in your heart sound like?

What does happiness sound like?

This is a perfect way to challenge the students to think and listen beyond their immediate world. The illustrations are soft and fun and add to the lovely nature of the text. There is magic all around. Can you see it and hear it!?



**Title:**

## Lessons of a Lac

**Author:**

Lynn Jenkins

**Illustrator:**

Kirrili Lonergan

**Publisher:**

EK Books

**ISBN:** 978 1 925335 82 8

**Reviewed by:**

Cassie Mutimer

*Loppy is a LAC - a Little Anxious Creature - who is trained to always be on the lookout for danger and to use scary talk like "I don't think I can" or "I'm never going to be able to".*

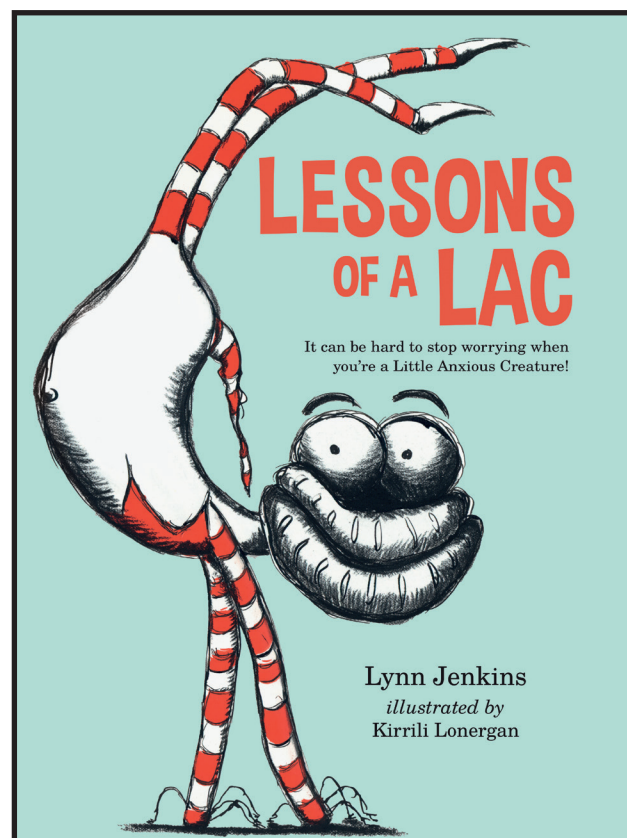
The LAC's enemies are the Calmsters and they live on the other side of the mountain. Curly the Calmster and his friends are taught to be calm and peaceful and think positive thoughts.

When Loppy goes off to spy on the Calmsters his mind starts racing with all thing things that could possibly go wrong. When confronted by Curly his heart beats faster, his breathing becomes more rapid, and his whole body goes stiff as he prepares to go into battle.

Curly, however, has a different plan and helps Loppy to put a positive thought in his head - "Just because dangerous things MIGHT happen, it doesn't mean that they WILL happen." For the first time ever Loppy feels calm and goes back with Curly to their villages to spread the word.

This story sparked an interesting conversation with the class about how, when we are faced with new things at school and they seem too hard, we are like Loppy LAC and think we aren't going to be able to do it. But, if we can be a little more like Curly the Calmster and put a positive thought in our head, it may not be so bad.

The class had a wonderful discussion about whether we thought we were more like Loppy or Curly and ways we can help each other to be more like Curly when things seem tough. If you have a group of anxious learners having stories like this provides great opportunities for discussions, learning and understanding for all students. It has also provided the Calmsters in the class an insight into why their peers may feel anxious at times. This is a great story that will become a firm favourite for the beginning of the year.



**Title:**

# Australia: Illustrated

**Author/Illustrator:**

Tania McCartney

**Publisher:**

EK Books

**ISBN:** 9781925335880

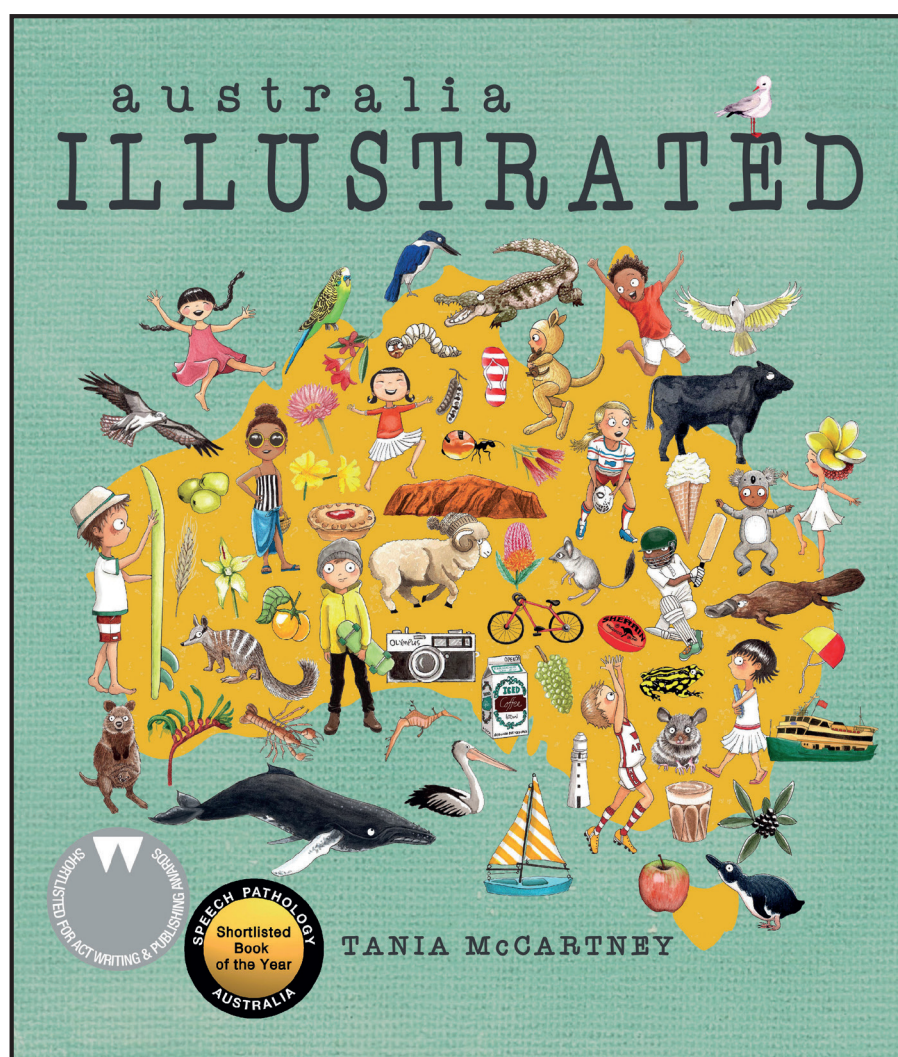
**Reviewed by:**

Sue Webster

I cannot believe I have been missing out!! This is the second edition of *Australia: Illustrated* and I am very disappointed that I have only just found this book. I love it!

It is a delightful look at Australia at its finest – its typical foods, destinations, sayings, and a state by state look at not so typical activities and dangerous creatures. This is a book that children and adults can 'paw' over and discuss the interesting places and ideas that make Australia so unique. I can imagine families making plans to visit many of the exciting areas of Australia that are depicted in this visual reference guide.

The illustrations are vibrant and fun and include water colour, ink, digital art and mono-printing. I can see many hours spent with this beautifully illustrated book in my future, as one viewing does not even come close to satisfying my curiosity about what else I will find between these wonderful pages. A must buy for home and school.





**Title:**

## Eric Makes a Splash

**Author/Illustrator:**

Emily MacKenzie

**Illustrator:**

Anne Kerr and Rhanee Tsetsakos

**Publisher:**

Bloomsbury

**ISBN:** 978-1408882962

**Reviewed by:**

Cassie Mutimer

Eric is an anxious Panda who worries about all the things that might happen when he is faced with trying new things - eating a new sandwich filling or climbing the high spider web-climbing frame. His faithful friend Flora is beside him every step of the way, encouraging him to use his imagination to help him overcome his fear. When an invitation to a pool party arrives, Eric goes into to his "worrying whirl" and has to face many worries - getting wet fur, water in his eyes and even sinking to the bottom.

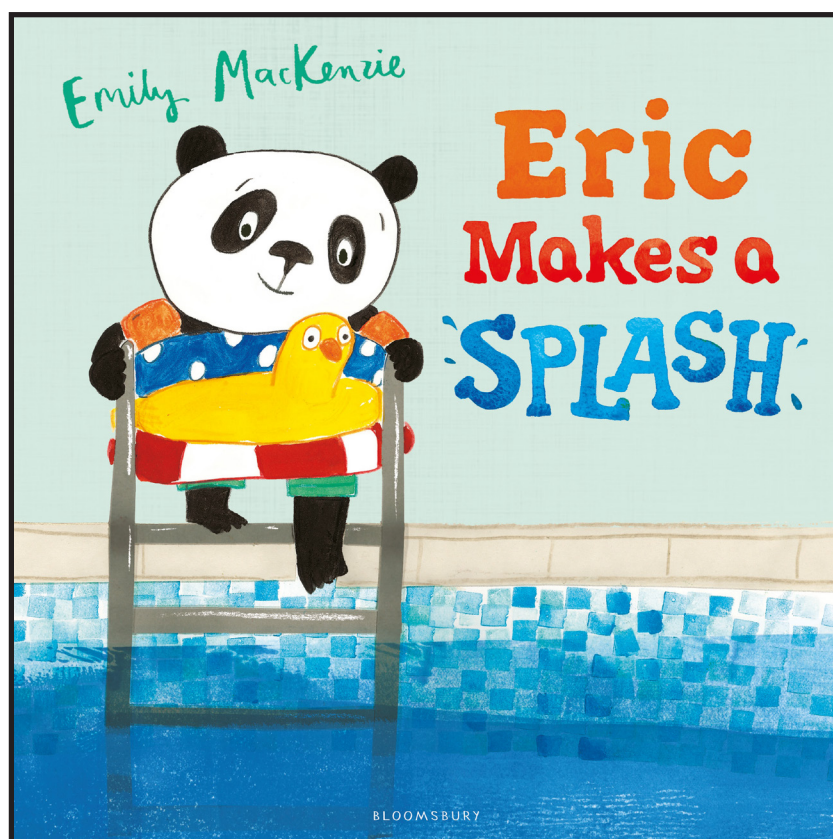
Flora encourages him every step of the way, helping him solve each problem. When the day of the party arrives even his imagination cannot help him, so Eric has to look deep within himself and with the help of deep, brave breaths, is able to make a splash. Feeling proud he looks for Flora only to find that she needs his help; a lovely conclusion to a delightful story.

With school swimming lesson season fast approaching for our Prep class, we were really excited to see a book about swimming. With a few anxious students in the room this story was a perfect introduction in how to overcome your fears and led to some really thoughtful comments from students about facing your fears.

"If you are scared of something, you need to try again and learn from your mistakes and get better and braver", Esme

"If you are really scared, don't think about it too much - just do it, then you'll say wow! that wasn't too bad", David

This is a beautifully written and illustrated story that addresses many lessons for younger students. My class thoroughly enjoyed it and it has become a favourite in the reading corner. I would highly recommend this book to teachers and parents that may have children that are not risk takers and worry about what might happen. It provides a unique opportunity to discuss fears and the ways we can overcome them.



## 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](mailto: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.



