



# *EDUCATING YOUNG CHILDREN*

*Learning and teaching in the early childhood years*

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# Contents

## **Editorial**

From the Editorial Panel .....	2
From the President .....	3

## **The Prep Year**

Camp Hill State School .....	5
------------------------------	---

## **Teacher Talk**

House Gardening .....	8
Lunch Suggestion Recipes .....	10

## **Teacher Profile**

Nicole Chiplin .....	12
----------------------	----

## **Partnerships With Parents**

Maintaining Vital Links .....	13
-------------------------------	----

## **What's On**

### *Children and Families*

Aunties & Uncles .....	16
------------------------	----

### *Professional Development*

Ian Wallace .....	17
Conferences and Seminars .....	18

## **Feature Article**

Sugar and Spice and all things gender specific .....	21
Get 'Back to Basics' with food for kids .....	26
The Epidemic of Childhood Obesity - Part 1 .....	28
The Epidemic of Childhood Obesity - Part 2 .....	31
"Get Active" in early childhood education .....	34
'Good' Early Childhood Curriculum .....	37

## **Communications**

Media Watch .....	42
News from ECTA Regional Groups .....	43

## **International Perspectives**

Waldkindergarten .....	44
------------------------	----

## **Book Reviews**

Roos in Shoes .....	46
Healthy Children - A Guide for Child Care .....	47
Positive Food for Kids .....	48

## From the Editorial Panel

On behalf of the editorial panel I welcome you to our new look journal. We hope that it conveys our forward looking approach to change and our commitment to learning and teaching in the early childhood years.

This journal is loosely themed around the topic 'health and well-being', although you will notice that there are a range of articles that will be of interest to all. In continuing with our spotlight on the Prep year, Felice Eastwood shares her experiences as a Prep teacher at Camp Hill. In Teacher Talk we document a gardening project undertaken by the students at St Margaret's Primary School. The article, Maintaining Vital Links, written by Carolyn Atkinson from Amberley Community Preschool and Kindergarten, demonstrates just what can be achieved when technology is utilised to ensure that parent partnerships are maintained, in spite of deployment overseas.

In this journal we are pleased to feature a broad range of articles from authors who have been willing to share their research, writing and thoughts with you. Dr Mike Nagel, Head of Middle Schooling, Educang, provides some thought-provoking evidence and insights into aspects of the 'gendered brain'. Deb Browne, from Southbank TAFE, and fellow EYC editorial panel member, asks the question 'What makes a good early childhood curriculum?' Physiotherapist, David Martin, takes a look at the growing epidemic of obesity in childhood, and the value of increased physical activity. Robin Tilse and Aloysa Hourigan, from Nutrition Australia 'get back to basics with food for kids' and we take a look at the Get Active Queensland Children and Young People strategy.



Finally, I share with you my visit to a forest kindergarten in Germany. I hope that you enjoy reading our journal. It is the product of a small but very dedicated editorial panel. I look forward to seeing you at our conference in June.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Nagel'.

*In this journal we are pleased to feature a broad range of articles from authors who have been willing to share their research, writing and thoughts with you.*



## *From the President*

The quest for knowledge is a lifelong challenge that is assumed by people in all areas of endeavour. Few fields of work can say that those who take up employment know all that is needed to be known both for the present and for the future. As society meanders its way through vast numbers of changes in perception and attitude, as workplaces negotiate new patterns of employment, industrial relations and associated policy, as the generation of Baby Boomers makes way for Generation X and Generation Y, educators too must take up the challenge to ensure that we are meeting both the needs and the expectations of those who use our services.

From childhood, our society is taught to question and challenge. Schools acknowledge this and students are encouraged to speak out and up for what they believe to be right ... and for what they want. Teachers, along with other professionals such as dentists, doctors and lawyers, are no longer placed on a pedestal of professional respect as they were in days past. The vast majority of parents want to know not only what, but also how, why, when and how much cost is associated with everything that happens in the educational setting in which they are involved. Educators are expected to be articulate about what their program entails and why, and to be able to communicate this to parents, carers and others in a knowledgeable yet caring and supportive manner. All parents, but



particularly those who are of the Generations X and Y, have greater access to information than ever before with the wealth of internet knowledge so readily available to any home.

It is an interesting exercise to do an internet search of, for example, discipline, and to see how much comes forth with a negative view. No wonder parents are questioning

*From childhood, our society is taught to question and challenge.*

traditional information that is given by educators. The power of the written word is strong and the temptation to believe all that is read on the internet compelling. How much better informed do we need to be, to be able to counter misinformation and competently communicate the messages we know to be true?

*“Knowledge is  
of two kinds.  
We know a  
subject ourselves,  
or we know  
where we can  
find information  
upon it.”*

*Samuel Johnson  
1709-1784*

The less pleasant accompanying features of the knowledge and information culture are the lessening of emotional controls and the inclination towards litigation. “Rage” is experienced and reported everywhere – from the road to the surf, even rearing its ugly head in the classroom. “I’ll sue”, or “You should sue”, has become the catchcry of anyone who has experienced or hears of an unpleasant situation. The emotion attached to education makes this a harsh reality for many in educational settings.

We cannot neglect the need to continue to learn new things about our field and to revisit what we learned in undergraduate training. We cannot get left behind on the information superhighway. ECTA is all about professional development and continuing education, and about making sure that you and your team have access to a range of the best possible professional development programs available. The 2005 ECTA conference is set to be yet another great opportunity that you will not want to miss. Plan now to attend. We will look forward to seeing you there.



# *The Prep Year*

## *Camp Hill State School*

*Felice Eastwood*

When taking on the challenge of teaching in a Prep classroom there are many similarities to that of teaching in a preschool. It is not a formal learning environment. The prep program has no place for formal desk work that is carried out in traditional classrooms. Instead it provides for learning and development to occur within a play context.

*Prep play is purposeful, cognitively complex and is used as a springboard to further enhance children's learnings.*

The learning context of play and the provision of resources are similar to that of a preschool. Prep extends children through experiences in a variety of learning contexts. These include real life experience, focused learning episodes, investigations, routines and transitions to respond to children's interests. Prep play is



purposeful, cognitively complex and is used as a springboard to further enhance children's learnings. Prep implements an Early Years Curriculum that has been developed around the identified factors for success in schooling and monitors children using an early learning and development framework.

The parents and their child's introduction to prep at Camp Hill Infants State School is similar to that at the preschool. I conduct interviews for the first two days. Doing this gives me the opportunity to find out about the children who are in the class and any special needs that they may have. I take the opportunity to talk to the parents as a whole group while my teacher aide helps the children familiarize themselves with the room and facilities we have to offer. I find conducting a group parent session provides me with the opportunity to talk about my philosophy, the Early Years Curriculum, my expectations and general housekeeping issues. It also gives the parents the opportunity to meet each other.

Once interviews are complete, the children start in two gradual intake groups. This is terrific as it





# The Prep Year



helps me establish a relationship with them more quickly. For those children who haven't attended any day care situations, kindergarten or preschool facilities their starting day is not so daunting when it occurs in a small group. Our school is very supportive of the needs of young children and, as such, the children's first week of school is comprised of half day sessions. The second week of school sees the beginning of full day sessions.

As in any classroom the beginning of the year is always very hectic. The children and I work together to establish a daily routine as well as a weekly one so that every day there is something to look forward to, whether it be library borrowing, cooking or specialist lessons such as P.E. or Library. My children are very lucky to be able to access specialist lessons. They are provided at the discretion of the school.

Planning for the daily routine in my prep class is described in similar terms to planning for a preschool routine. Rather than allocate my sessions to curriculum areas I divide my day into learning contexts. However, there are many differences from the preschool context as the children are heavily involved in the planning and

reflection of the program; are encouraged to accept responsibility to persevere with their learning; and I monitor the children's learning as an integral part of teaching.

*My teacher aide and I help scaffold their learning by using a plan, do and review sequence. During this time we try to use the children's play to capitalise on teachable moments by challenging, supporting and extending their learning.*

Our day starts with a circle time where we set the scene for the day. During this time I involve the children in real life investigations. For example the roll is marked with the children's help at the beginning of the day. I work with the children to determine how many children have arrived at school and we use count-on strategies to determine how many children are absent or running late. Such an activity offers lots of opportunities to discuss mathematical understandings of number. We then move into outdoor time where the children are involved in developing their health and physical well-being through activities that have been co-constructed with the children. An example of this is allowing the children, as a group, to decide where the starting point in the obstacle course should be, the sequential order they need to pass through the activity stations and number of times they are required to perform a task before they can move on to another activity. After



# *The Prep Year*

returning to the classroom the children are involved in a transition activity time, which often allows for focused learning opportunities. Morning tea and lunch are held in the classroom as they allow for many informal social learning episodes. During indoor time the children and I plan, initiate activities and work together. My teacher aide and I help scaffold their learning by using a *plan, do and review* sequence. During this time we try to use the children's play to capitalise on teachable moments by challenging, supporting and extending their learning. Music and story sessions are times when the whole class enjoys working together. Often, these times allow for the development of oral language and early literacy concepts. Within our prep day the children have many opportunities to work as individuals, in small groups, and as a whole class group.

As a Prep teacher while planning my program I try to make a focus on the children making decisions, solving problems, developing thinking processes, developing effective communication, developing collaboration strategies, developing

a sense of self and a positive disposition towards learning.

As the year progresses the amount of time spent using these different learning contexts will vary as the children develop longer attention spans and more skills. To my surprise, each year the children are developing a greater ability to master many skills I once thought were attributed to older learners. Instead of waiting until later in the year to introduce the children to the notion of working together as a group, I have started right from week one providing the children the opportunity to share and work together in small group situations. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly children can take on these challenges.

Through taking on the challenge of being a prep teacher I have discovered that it is important to be open to new ideas and flexible to change while relating current educational theory to practice. Teaching Prep is a lot of hard work but is very rewarding!

*By Felice Eastwood  
Prep Teacher*



***The prep program has no place for formal desk work that is carried out in traditional classrooms. Instead it provides for learning and development to occur within a play context.***

# Teacher Talk

## House Gardening

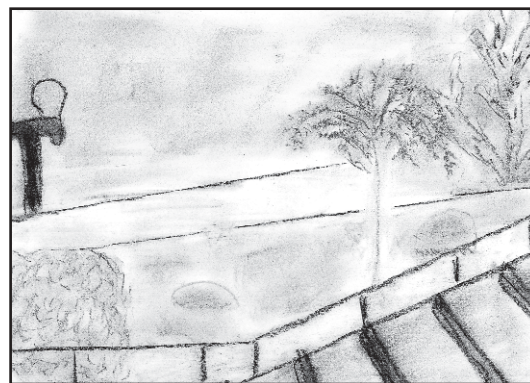
*St Margaret's Anglican Girls Primary School*



In 2004 Gardening was introduced at St Margaret's Primary School. The aim of the program was to instil a sense of ownership and respect for the school environment.

The students were grouped in House Groups (grades 1-7) and each House selected a garden for which they would be responsible. This program had social benefits as it provided the opportunity for students to work in multi-age groups. In this social context the students learnt to socialise, nurture, mentor each other and how to become leaders.

Through gardening, students gained an understanding of the needs of living things as well as the planning required to create a garden. This was an outcome of the Science syllabus.



*This program had social benefits as it provided the opportunity for students to work in multi-age groups. In this social context the students learnt to socialise, nurture, mentor each other and how to become leaders.*



# Teacher Talk

The garden will be developed in 3 stages:

1. Planning
2. Preparation
3. Construction.

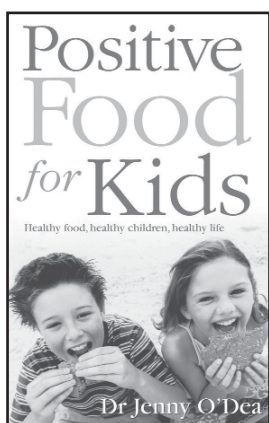
In the planning stage the students reviewed the garden site and conditions, identifying the light, aspect, soil type/ fertilising, water and wind.

Then they designed the garden. This was recorded in a design book. Look for more information in upcoming journals regarding the fruits of the children's labour.



An interesting resource:  
 Starbuck,S;Olthof,M;Midden,K. 'Hollyhocks and  
 Honeybees:  
 Garden Projects for Young Children'.  
 Available through Early Childhood Australia

## Lunch Suggestion Recipes



*From Positive Food  
for Kids by  
Jenny O'Dea.  
Published by  
Doubleday  
RRP \$27.95*

### **Sandwich Suggestions**

Never underestimate the nutritional quality of the humble sandwich! A healthy sandwich can easily supply a third of a child's requirements for protein, iron, Vitamin C, niacin, thiamine and, if served with cheese, yoghurt or with a milk drink, it will provide protein, calcium and riboflavin as well.

Bread is a very nutritious food whether it is white, brown or wholemeal. It is a very unfortunate myth that white bread is a non-nutritious food. Sandwiches are best made from wholemeal bread because it contains slightly more vitamins, iron and zinc and much more dietary fibre than other breads, but white bread in Australia is fortified with iron and B vitamins and is good food both for children and adults. Some children who like to eat only white bread will get enough nutrients from it, but will also need another source of fibre such as wholegrain cereals or fruits and vegetables.

Bread does not need to be spread with butter or margarine – this is just a habit to which we have become accustomed. Try moistening

sandwiches with yoghurt, chutney, cranberry sauce or a small spread of light mayonnaise. Never sprinkle salt on children's food.

### **The Top Ten Tips for School Lunches**

1. Grated cheese – pre-grated packs, light and reduced fat. Toss a handful in the lunchbox every day
2. Light cream cheese and light processed cheese spread
3. Wrap breads – pita, Lebanese, lavash
4. Fruit snack packs
5. Cherry and grape tomatoes
6. Rice cream snack packs
7. Mini yoghurts
8. Mini custards
9. Chicken drumsticks
10. Wholegrain crackers

### **Toast Toppers**

Toast can be a nutritious meal provided the topping is healthy. However, salty spreads and jams provide too much salt and sugar, and few nutrients, so it's good to keep an eye on how often you use these.





# Teacher Talk

White or wholemeal bread is nutritious and can be toasted and topped with any of the following:

- \* Scrambled, boiled or poached eggs
- \* Grilled cheese and tomato
- \* Pizza topping – grated cheese, tomato, ham and onion
- \* Baked beans (high in protein) – with chopped ham or cheese
- \* Peanut butter and sultanas
- \* Chicken, chopped walnuts and mayonnaise
- \* Creamed corn and melted cheese
- \* Tuna, chopped apple and mayonnaise
- \* Cream cheese
- \* Meat from the night before (e.g. sliced lamb) and tomato
- \* Cottage cheese, pineapple and dates.

## **Recipes -**

### **Hummus**

6 cups cooked chick peas  
1/2 cup tahini (sesame seed paste)  
1 cup of lemon juice  
4 cups water  
1 clove garlic, chopped  
3 teaspoons ground cumin  
2 teaspoons ground coriander  
pinch cayenne powder

Blend the chick peas and tahini, lemon juice, water and garlic until very smooth. Mix in the spices. Chill overnight before serving to allow flavours to blend and develop. Use as a sandwich filling, or spread on Lebanese flat bread or crusty bread and serve with salad, chicken or meat on sandwiches. Hummus is also very handy as a dip.

### **Marinated Chicken Drumsticks**

5 chicken drumsticks  
1/2 cup water  
1 tablespoon brown sugar  
1 tablespoon soy sauce  
2 tablespoons tomato paste (no added salt)  
1 clove garlic, crushed  
1/2 teaspoon ginger, ground  
1/2 teaspoon paprika

Remove skin and visible fat from drumsticks, Combine all ingredients for marinade. Pour over chicken and marinate for at least two hours. Bake in oven at a moderate temperature for 20-30 minutes. Baste frequently in marinade.

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## *Lunch*

# *Suggestions*

# Teacher Profile

## Nicole Chiplin

Nicole is an Early Childhood Teacher at Junction Park State School. She is currently teaching a Year 1/2 composite. Nicole has taught in many different grades across the state.

Nicole started her career in Clermont State School where she taught a Grade 1/2/3 multi-age for two years. Nicole says that she was fortunate enough to be in a team teaching situation with an experienced teacher who supported her throughout these first years.

Nicole then taught a Year 1, Year 2 and a Year 2/3 composite at Clermont. Nicole remembers that there were many positive and negative issues linked with teaching a group of children over a three year time period. The positive things included the ability to watch and guide the continued development of a child over several years, while one of the negatives was that personalities of children and teachers may get a little frayed over the same period.

Nicole enjoyed country life – the social aspects, the friendliness and the support of fellow teachers in an isolated position – but applied for a transfer back to Brisbane to be involved in a larger city/school and all that entails.

Nicole has been teaching at Junction Park for four years. She has also taught Year 1 and Preschool. In her current 2/3 year level, Nicole says that she is now using the width of her experiences across the Early Years to facilitate a classroom that caters for the individual in a greater way than she has ever done before. She feels that she can follow the curriculum in a more productive way because

of her understanding of the outcomes below and above her year levels. Nicole feels that she also has a much greater understanding of children's social and emotional development, which allows her to better meet the individual needs of each child.

Nicole likes the diversity of her Early Childhood training as it allows her to move across a range of classes, continually developing her skills and keeping in touch with the many changes and innovations that occur in the Education Department.



*... ability to watch and guide the continued development of a child over several years*

# Partnerships With Parents

## Maintaining Vital Links

Carolyn Atkinson

Most early childhood professionals agree that the kindergarten and the home need to be engaged in a collaborative partnership in order to help children achieve their full potential.

Communicating with parents today is more and more challenging. As the numbers of working parents increase, the time they have available to become involved in the program, or stay and talk to teachers, is limited. Separated families and parents on deployment or extended business leave are also becoming more common.

For teachers there is the challenge of how to connect with families and share information in a meaningful way and how to encourage parent involvement with parents who are unable to be involved in traditional kindy activities such as roster. For management committees, it means innovational ways of structuring meetings to fit in with varied work schedules and heavier family commitments outside business hours.

Every centre has a different philosophy, varied resources and abilities among its personnel which can be utilised in order to maintain the vital links between the kindy and the family and between members of the family who may be separate. The challenge is how to make use of these factors in innovative ways to complement the program without placing more demands on staff.

Amberley Community Kindergarten and Preschool staff members addressed this issue, and have recently had their efforts at communicating with families rewarded by receiving runner-up for the W Keith Hayes Award for excellence and innovation. The staff members at Amberley Kindergarten excel in their communication with parents on deployment or extended business travel, and with families for whom difficult circumstances temporarily prevent their child's attendance at the centre. They are continually striving to improve their (previously non-existent)



*Most early childhood professionals agree that the kindergarten and the home need to be engaged in a collaborative partnership in order to help children achieve their full potential.*

# Partnerships With Parents



Murray Thorpe with the preschool children of the Amberley Preschool and Kindergarten

computer skills in order to utilize technology to aid regular communication with absent parents and families.

Due to the large number of families with one or two parents working shifts on the RAAF base close by, the centre is fortunate to experience a significant amount of involvement of both parents in their child's early childhood education. Their involvement varies widely, but includes dropping off and collecting children, staying on roster, sharing special skills and interests, and attendance at picnics and special events during the term. However, many of these parents are also deployed or away on business for weeks or months at a time. During these periods the remaining parent is busy with the children, often stressed and usually unable to become involved in the program.

Staff members strive to maintain close contact on a daily basis with parents to help determine the needs of the children in the group.

Acknowledging the extra support parents may need, they structure their programs to make themselves available for extended periods at pick-

up and drop-off times. One staff member includes the children in a group time, leaving the other staff member free to talk. This means parents wanting to talk or needing extra support feel relaxed about seeking it, and can do so away from the child.

*Due to the large number of families with one or two parents working shifts on the RAAF base close by, the centre is fortunate to experience a significant amount of involvement of both parents in their child's early childhood education.*

The recent international crises served as a catalyst and made Amberley Kindergarten staff members carefully consider how they could strengthen the family bonds, share information about their children's lives, and help the deployed partner stay in touch with the uplifting everyday occurrences which they regularly experience at kindy. Ideally, the method used would also give the deployed parent opportunity to comment on the program, or correspond with the staff or the group of children about some of their experiences.

With few technological skills and one old computer, correspondence was initially sent using





# *Partnerships With Parents*

hard copies. Children's paintings, drawings and comments were made into a book which was sent to the deployed parent. These were much appreciated by the parents who returned correspondence thanking the children and staff.

Recent acquisition of a digital camera for the centre has resulted in the staff now utilizing email and digital photography to acquire the same result. They can now send a snapshot of a child's day, experiences they particularly enjoyed, comments from the children, and information about their child's progress at kindy.

The immediacy of digital photography and email appeals to both the children and parents, as they can see, and consequently converse on the phone, about what they did TODAY. (In some cases it is still necessary to use hard copies as for security reasons some attachments cannot be opened.) Using email also enables staff to send the same message to both parents if needed, thus reducing the time and effort required.

The comments do not have to be lengthy to be meaningful to the parents or the child. A picture tells a thousand words.

Digital photography and emailing have also enabled kindy staff and children to remain actively in touch with a family whose child is currently undergoing chemotherapy. The family is also keeping in contact with the class through regular visits and phone calls. Photos of special events, friends and messages are included in the emails. The latest correspondence showed children at the centre taking part in the Footy Colours Day run recently to raise money for the Bone Marrow Institute of Australia in support of

the affected family.

Exchange of information between the kindy and deployed parents, and families temporarily separated from the centre, has encouraged empathy, understanding and support in the other children in the group. It has increased the self esteem of the children involved and given them the confidence to talk about their situation and their feelings. It has also resulted in a myriad of spontaneous learning experiences along the way, such as literacy awareness, knowledge of, and discussion about world events.

As dedicated early childhood professionals, we can make a difference by developing new and innovative ways of sharing those treasured moments which make early childhood special, and maintaining the vital links within families which are so important for a happy healthy childhood.

*By Carolyn Atkinson  
Amberley Community preschool  
and kindergarten*

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## Children and Families

### Aunties & Uncles



### EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN



***Mission: Building a better life for children, their families and the community in a spirit of mutual understanding and co-operation.***

The program, which provides mentoring and support to “at risk” children and their families, is based on a simple formula of community support and involvement. The child spends two days a month with their “auntie” and/or “uncle”, gradually forming a lasting relationship. The volunteer “aunties” and “uncles” are thoroughly screened (suitability card required, interviewed, assessed by a social worker experienced in child protection) before being linked with a child who needs support.

For the child, there are many benefits to having a stable friendship with a person who makes them feel special. For the family, a support system is in place to help them cope with challenging family responsibilities.

Very few programs are able to supply practical support to families before serious problems develop. Most programs are like bandaids that are applied once a family’s problems become insurmountable. Each weekend across South East Queensland, volunteers take their “niece” or “nephew” into their homes and hearts, providing stressed and “at risk” families with the benefits of an extended family.

The parties benefit from the program in the following ways -

- The children, many of whom have suffered from rejection, develop higher self esteem

through their long term relationship with their “aunt” and/or “uncle”.

- Parents feel supported by their community, and have someone to help them cope with the tough times.
- The volunteers benefit from the special relationship they have with the child, and enjoy the feeling of helping their community.
- The community becomes a safer place for the child and intervention by child protection agencies or the juvenile justice system is prevented or, at a minimum, reduced.

The program has run successfully in NSW for over thirty years and, in 1991, was established in Brisbane by Ann Thew, a former NSW volunteer. It is a very satisfying program in which to be involved. The child becomes part of your family – participating in family activities and outings. All that is required is an interest in children and a commitment to set aside two days a month on an ongoing basis to give a child quality time.

*For further information on the program and how to become involved contact Ann Thew, Vice President Links Aunties and Uncles (Queensland) Lions Club on telephone 3216-2097 (after hours) or email [ann.thew@bigpond.com](mailto:ann.thew@bigpond.com).*

## *Professional Development*

*ECTA is proud to bring Ian Wallace to  
Hervey Bay and Mackay*

**Hervey Bay 22 October 2005**

**Mackay 5 November 2005**

**ECTA members no cost.  
More details to follow.**

*Ian Wallace, consultant  
psychologist, is one of  
Australia's foremost  
authorities on the  
treatment of ADD using  
behavioural therapy.*

Ian is a consultant psychologist, the Director of Forestway Psychology Centre, in Sydney. Ian is well known for his expertise in dealing with very defiant, disruptive and challenging behaviour in children and adolescents. Ian specialises in diagnosing and, more importantly, supporting children, families and teachers in dealing with severe disruptive behaviours, including ADHD, Oppositional Defiance, Conduct Disorders and Autistic Spectrum Disorders, including Asperger's Syndrome. He has provided consultant services for over twenty years to Australian and overseas practitioners, including paediatricians,

psychiatrists, doctors and other professionals. Ian is most recognised for his emphasis on practical strategies and his down-to-earth approach. Ian is most respected for his positive determination and willingness to work with severe disruptive behaviour disorders. Ian is the resident psychologist and regular guest on "Mornings with Kerri-Anne", on Channel 9. Ian's bestseller book, "You and Your ADD Child" (now in its ninth reprint), has become the practical handbook for managing everyday ADHD problems. He coauthored "Coping with School" and writes for KidsLife.com.au and Melbourne Weekly Magazine. Ian is an editorial board member and professional contributor for "Practical Parenting Magazine". Denise, Ian's wife, and he are the parents of a university graduate son and undergraduate daughter. Ian presents to television, radio, university, professional, school and parent support groups, speaking to thousands each year, in a practical, humorous and interactive manner. Ian's blend of practical advice, infectious, positive enthusiasm and determination in building strengths, leaves audiences empowered and enthralled.

## ***Professional Development***

### ***Conferences and Seminars***

#### ***Learning in the Garden Seminar***

*Presented by Growing Communities,  
Brisbane, Qld.*

***Monday 20th to Tuesday 21st June, 2005***

an opportunity for educators to walk through school and community gardens and familiarise themselves with the resources and programs developed to support "learning in the garden".

***For more information contact Growing Communities. Phone: (07) 3857 8775  
email: [growingc@bigpond.net.au](mailto:growingc@bigpond.net.au)***

#### ***Landscapes of Listening***

*Reggio Emilia Information Exchange  
Hilton on the Park Melbourne*

***9-10 July 2005***

A provocation and an opportunity to reflect on the relationships between learning, listening and teaching in the rich and diverse context of Australian society.

*Keynote speakers - Carlina Rinaldi & Eulalia Bosch*

***Cost: \$440***

*Expressions of Interest*

*Reggio Emilia Information Exchange  
442 Auburn Road  
HAWTHORN, Vic, 3122*

#### ***Provoking Encounters Transforming Thought***

***12-15 July 2005***

*St Cuthbert's College, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND*

*Speakers include Ellen Hall, Diti Hill, Deb Curtis, Margie Carter, Margaret Carr and Carlina Rinaldi.*

Relationships between adults and children are strengthened during encounters in which thoughts and actions are challenged and transformed. When provoking and transforming are seen as essential to the learning-teaching process, both adults and children engage in dialogue that is grounded in their past but relevant to their present and to their future.

***Registration of interest: [reprovconf@xtra.co.nz](mailto:reprovconf@xtra.co.nz)***





# *What's On*

## *Professional Development*

### *Conferences and Seminars*

#### ***Advance promotion for ACEC 2006, 2-4 October 2006.***

The organisation of the Australian Computers in Education Conference (ACEC) 2006: *Technology in the Tropics* to be held in Cairns (Far North Queensland) from the 2nd - 4th October, 2006 is well under way. This gala event will be staged at the internationally award winning Cairns Convention Centre – crowned the World's Best Congress Centre for 2004. Delegates can expect all the best aspects of ACECs from past years, but with some new initiatives and events which will be sure to be of great interest and professionally rewarding. Contribute to and learn from the presentations, debates and experiences in areas that span ICT in curriculum, E-Learning, ICT leadership, Computing studies and Network Design and Management. Speakers will be drawn from right across Australia and overseas, with keynote addresses which will challenge and entertain. Pre-conference workshops will help you keep that leading edge.

#### ***Register your interest now:***

the web site [www.acec2006.info](http://www.acec2006.info) contains a Register Interest tab where you can register to receive occasional newsletters and become aware of early specials, prizes and opportunities

#### ***Mater Children's Hospital and Education Queensland: Encouraging Diversity: Challenging the Concept of Difference***

Education Queensland's Staff College, Inclusive Education, and The Mater Hospital Developmental Group, have formed a partnership to provide learning and development opportunities for those working to support students with diverse learning and health needs. The partnership is presenting a 2005 series of twilight sessions (4.30 – 6.00pm) to provide latest understandings and to encourage collaborative responses to children experiencing difficulties at school.

For more information please contact:

***Clare Grant, Manager, Staff College,  
Inclusive Education***

***Phone: (07) 3237 0982***

***Fax: (07) 3239 6536***

***Email: [clare.grant@qed.qld.gov.au](mailto:clare.grant@qed.qld.gov.au)***

#### ***VALUES EDUCATION CONFERENCE***

***Monday 29TH August 2005***

***FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY TEACHERS, PARENTS, STUDENTS AND OTHER INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS  
TO***

- \* deepen understanding of the theory of values and values education - relationship between ethics, morals, values and spirituality***



# What's On

## ***Professional Development***

### ***Conferences and Seminars***

- \* explore ways of incorporating the common and agreed values into the curriculum
- \* explore the most effective ways of developing values in the whole school community
- \* prepare and support teachers, parents and students to take up values education
- \* share successful practices
- \* link the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools with other Australian Government initiatives.

**VENUE: HOLIDAY INN, ROMA ST, BRISBANE**

**THIS IS THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF FREE VALUES CONFERENCES. THE SECOND ONE WILL BE HELD IN CAIRNS AT A DATE AND VENUE, TO BE ANNOUNCED LATER THIS YEAR**

*Joint Council of Queensland Teacher Associations*

<http://www.pa.ash.org.au/jcqta>

### ***Kaleidoscope – Changing Images of Childhood***

*Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference*

*28 September - 1 October 2005, Brisbane*

Confirmed speakers

Dr Jackie Marsh - Lecturer in Literacy Education, University of Sheffield, UK

Professor Joe Tobin - Early Childhood, Arizona State University, USA

A/PROFESSOR MARGARET CARR - Associate Professor, University of Waikato, NZ.

A/PROFESSOR ANN SANSON -Associate Professor, Dept of Psychology, Melbourne University

**Register your interest at [www.eca2005.com](http://www.eca2005.com)**

### ***Making Meaning: Creating Connections that Value Diversity 29th Annual Conference of the Australian Association of Special Education***

*Brisbane, Australia.*

**23-25th September 2005**

*Details via our web-site [www.aase.edu.au](http://www.aase.edu.au)*

The Australian Association of Special Education is pleased to confirm the participation of Professor Robert Stodden as our International Keynote Speaker for the 29th Annual National Conference to be held in Brisbane 23-25th September 2005.

This international keynote address will explore current educational improvement initiatives and the impact of such initiatives upon students with diverse learning and behavior needs. While educational initiatives have focused upon improving educational outcomes for all students, questions continue to be asked about the role of special education personnel and special programs - this address will explore the intent of federal educational policies and the reality of school-level practice as students with diverse learning and behaviour needs pass through the four phases of learning. The speaker will explore implications for special educators in their quest to "find a place" and to "make an impact" within the current policy-practice climate.

# Feature Article

## *Sugar and Spice and All Things Gender Specific*

*Dr Mike Nagel*



*BEd, MEd, PhD*

Michael Nagel has worked in education for twenty years in a variety of contexts and with a number of experiences. Previously a lecturer in Cultural and Language Studies in Education at the Queensland University of Technology, Mike is now the Head of Middle Schooling for EDUCANG Ltd encompassing Forest Lake College, Springfield College and The Lakes College in Brisbane. During his career Mike has taught primary school

and high school in Canada, was the Director of a foreign language institute in Japan and worked for Education Queensland as a teacher and behaviour specialist. Mike's doctoral thesis, which looks at how children in Australia and Canada conceptualise various school experiences, is presently with examiners. His current research interests focus on how children 'see aspects of their world', incorporating neurological research within educational contexts, the importance of student voice in educational decision making and enhancing the total school environment for boys and girls. He is a Master Trainer for the U.S. based 'Gurian Institute' which focuses on gendered brain difference and why boys and girls learn differently. He has presented discussion papers, workshops and seminars nationally and internationally. Mike draws his insights and ideas from almost two decades of practical educational experiences on three continents; contemporary neurological research; and from watching his two children, Madeline and Harrison, grow up.

*Mike can be most easily contacted through email at [mike.nagel@educang.qld.edu.au](mailto:mike.nagel@educang.qld.edu.au).*

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*From the moment of conception to the first tentative steps into a preschool classroom, early neurological development takes place at a phenomenal rate. The capacity to learn, coupled with an innate sense of curiosity, is simply astonishing, and visible daily as children tend to make the ordinary, extraordinary.*

In the last decade, a great deal of medical and scientific research has provided new insights into the neurological and physiological differences of the male and female brain. Throughout an individual's life these differences become evident in various contextual settings, are influenced by experience and environmental stimuli and can now be verified through Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI's) and other research techniques. Such advancements in research pose some interesting points regarding early childhood education, especially as some states appear to be moving towards incorporating aspects of literacy and numeracy teaching earlier in the academic lives of children.



# Feature Article

From the moment of conception to the first tentative steps into a preschool classroom, early neurological development takes place at a phenomenal rate. The capacity to learn, coupled with an innate sense of curiosity, is simply astonishing, and visible daily as children tend to make the ordinary, extraordinary. Raising and educating a child is therefore inherently complicated and a challenge for parents, caregivers and policy makers. Given the vested interests of all parties involved in the development of a child, every person participating in such endeavour can claim some level of expertise. Furthermore, with a wealth of growing insights in childhood development, it becomes imperative to harness this mounting knowledge in such a way that it will ensure the well-being of all young children. This becomes even more critical as policy makers begin to delve into various aspects of pedagogy earlier and earlier in a child's life. A look at the developing brain offers some justification for this stance and suggests that consideration of neurology is warranted when planning early childhood initiatives.

The human brain, that mass of greyneess located between the ears, is arguably the most complex

*... it is also important to acknowledge that brain development is best understood as a spectrum of development rather than two poles being male and female. After all, each child is an individual living in a certain context with certain experiences.*

object we know. Consisting mainly of three layers, this part of our anatomy has long been a mystery with regards to how it operates and grows. However, with advances in neurological research and technology, researchers have been able to identify and theorise how the brain works and matures. When working with young children, some very interesting insights regarding overall brain development and gender emerge.

From the onset of life, the brain is busy setting up neural connections or synapses that seem to develop in fits and starts followed by periods of consolidation (Diamond & Hopson, 1999). It is these connections that allow the brain to interpret and pass information from one area to the other and during the early stages of life the neural connections of a child come to outnumber those of an adult. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the early years are a time for overzealous stimulation, but rather a period where a safe and supportive environment plays as much a part of learning as anything else. Developing the types of environments that might enrich an early childhood setting necessitates a number of vital considerations including notions of gendered brain difference and pedagogical timing.

There exists detailed and compelling evidence of how the brain is provided with its gender architecture *in utero* as a result of cellular, hormonal and chemical influences. (Blum, 1997; Moir & Jessel, 1989; Moir & Moir, 2000) There is also evidence to suggest that changes in this early developmental process can alter the makeup of the brain whereby we see boys who display greater feminine traits, girls who display greater masculine traits and children who can be referred to as bridge-brained – equal in gender attributes (Gurian, 2001; Moir & Jessel, 1989). Given these insights, it is also important to acknowledge that brain development is best understood as a spectrum of development rather than two poles being male and female. After all, each child is an individual living in a certain context with certain experiences. In other words, men may be from Mars, but there are differences amongst Martians. With that in mind, it is





# Feature Article

important to examine some of the above ideas in the context of early childhood education.

As noted earlier, the brain has three areas of prominence - the brainstem, the limbic system and the cerebrum. The brainstem or region closest to the spine is where fight-or-flight survival responses are activated. The limbic system or central part of the brain processes our emotions. Finally, the cerebrum is the region where processing environmental stimuli, thinking and consciousness exist (Wolfe, 2001; Hardiman, 2003). It is also important to note that brain maturation generally occurs from the bottom up which means that those regions responsible for survival and emotive processing mature sooner than the regions responsible for conscious thought (Giedd, Blumenthal, Jeffries, Castellanos, Liu, Zijdenbos, Paus, Evans & Rapoport 1999). The important point here is that this rate of maturation is different for boys and girls which has implications for how boys and girls deal with emotion; girls tend to 'act in' and boys tend to 'act out' (Blum, 1997; Giedd, Vaituzis, Hamburger, Lange, Rajapakse, Kaysen, Vauss & Rapoport 1996; Jensen, 1998; Kitchenham, 2002). In the confines of a typical learning environment this often leads to educators reprimanding boys for misbehaviour and conversely missing cues when girls are upset or angry.

A second area that often creates problems for boys in particular is evident in the apparent predisposition of boys to be active and restless. It would seem that

***In the confines of a typical learning environment this often leads to educators reprimanding boys for misbehaviour and conversely missing cues when girls are upset or angry.***

boys need to move and both parents and teachers alike can attest to this. However, many educators attribute this desire to move as a behavioural issue when in fact it may be a biological imperative. Serotonin and testosterone offer interesting parameters for looking at a boy's predisposition for movement.

Serotonin is a type of neurotransmitter or chemical messenger that carries out communication in and between the brain and body. Serotonin is also linked with processing emotion and acting as a calming mechanism (Gurian 2001; The Society for Neuroscience 2002; Strauch 2003). Both boys and girls have serotonin, however, for boys their level of this important chemical is substantially lower than that of girls resulting in boys having a greater disposition to fidget and act impulsively (Gurian 2001).

Testosterone, on the other hand is considered by many to be the primary hormone distinguishing the human male as such and driving many of his biological functions. In itself, testosterone is the male growth hormone and has been linked with aggressive behaviour. It is important to note that aggression is arguably a product of many factors. However, there is sufficient evidence identifying the significant role testosterone plays in exacerbating a predisposition for aggressive behaviour in boys and that the behaviour and moods of boys are "very dependent on the interplay of hormones and the brain" (Gurian 2001, p.18; see also Hawkes, 2001). Often these moods and the emotions attached to behaviour can actually hinder learning. Indeed, understanding the interplay of emotion and cognitive functioning is quickly becoming an important consideration in educating children and adults alike.

For many years it was often believed that emotion and cognition worked in isolation from one another and that people were able to learn because understanding and feeling were separate (Caine & Caine 2001). Current research suggests that emotions play an integral role in learning whereby emotion and cognition are inextricably linked



# Feature Article

(LeDoux 1996). It appears that emotions can actually slow down or shut off most thinking in the top of the brain and the potential for learning (Goswami, 2004). This occurs when stress or highly emotive situations arise and the brain stem and limbic system work to override higher order thinking processes. The implication of this for parents and teachers is that learning environments must strive to be safe, supportive and as free of stress as possible. Furthermore, providing a variety of developmentally appropriate experiences helps to alleviate stress and anxiety for both boys and girls. This is a very important consideration for all educators during a time when it seems that there is an agenda of doing more and doing it sooner driving education, with the belief that schools must somehow make or 'prep' children for Year One and beyond; too much too soon may actually stress children whose innate disposition to learn is not driven by a curricular agenda.

As noted earlier, there is a growing body of neurological research that identifies brain maturation as actually occurring in stops and starts, suggesting that learning is influenced by this maturation process (Diamond & Hopson, 1999). In other words, there appear to be 'windows' of opportunity for learning. While this might suggest that educators can enhance learning in knowing how and when these 'windows' open, a far greater consideration lies in the fact that encouraging or teaching children to do something prematurely might actually hard wire the brain inappropriately. As an example, consider how many children 'learn' to hold a pencil incorrectly. At a time when their brains are not ready to manipulate the fine motor coordination necessary for correct penmanship, many children are encouraged to take up rudimentary writing. The end result is that these children have now hard wired their brains in such a way that trying to 'fix' this learned skill becomes next to impossible; in a sense the 'window' for learning to write was forced open too early. Consider then, the possible ramifications of embedded beliefs that early childhood education might best be founded on the idea that we must academically 'prep' children for the rest of their

educational lives beginning in year one. We do not have to make children ready to learn for year one. Infants are born curious and ready to learn; this is as much about survival as it is intellect. Policy makers would do well to keep this in mind when teasing out what an early childhood curriculum might look like and remembering that preparing for future years is as much about individual difference and the actual learning environment as it is about promoting skill development.

Some years ago and with great vision, Languis, Sanders and Tipps (1980) identified the importance of the interplay between a child's experiences and the learning environment in the context of neurological

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# Feature Article

development and early childhood education. Contemporary neurological and educational research also acknowledges the importance of the learning environment due to the role emotions play in learning. In fact, the environment itself may be of greater significance than the curriculum. If young children have supportive, safe and stimulating experiences in an educational context, they will be better prepared to take full advantage of future learning opportunities. As a species, human beings are not 'completed' quickly. Children mature slowly, learn gradually and develop bit by bit. Neurologically speaking, this can take longer than twenty years. Consequently, education would do well to ensure that what is presented to young learners is not a hyper-linear pathway to the future but, rather, opportunities for both boys and girls to learn in a stress-free way that suits their gender and neurological make-up without asking too much too soon.

By Dr Mike Nagel  
Head of Middle Schooling  
Educang Ltd.

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# Feature Article

## Get 'Back to Basics' with food for kids

*Robin Tilse - Aloysa Hourigan*

The processed food industry is continually creating and heavily marketing new food products aimed at children and adolescents. Twenty-first century family life is hectic, and the time saving meal and snack ideas being marketed readily appeal to both parents and kids. These often highly processed foods are making up the larger proportion of what many children are choosing, or are being given to eat. Does this allow children's diets to remain well balanced, and provide for healthy growth and development? The simple answer is - NO.

You don't have to look far in Australian society these days to see we have a very serious problem in our country when it comes to the health of our children. The number of overweight children and adolescents is now thought to be approaching 30%, and estimated to be rising at 1% per year. This generation of overweight and obese children we are seeing emerge in Australia, may well be the first

*All children and adolescents, irrespective of their weight, need to eat foods that give them a wide range of nutrients to allow their bodies to grow, develop and reach the maximum of their potential not only physically but mentally.*

generation ever to have a life expectancy that is less than that of their parents. As a society we all have a responsibility to correct this. It is also important to realize that it is not only the overweight children we are concerned about. All children and adolescents, irrespective of their weight, need to eat foods that give them a wide range of nutrients to allow their bodies to grow, develop and reach the maximum of their potential not only physically but mentally. Highly processed foods cannot provide this. We need to get 'back to basics' and start nurturing the healthy development of our children through food.

### ***Where can we start?***

#### ***Encourage Fruits and Vegetables***

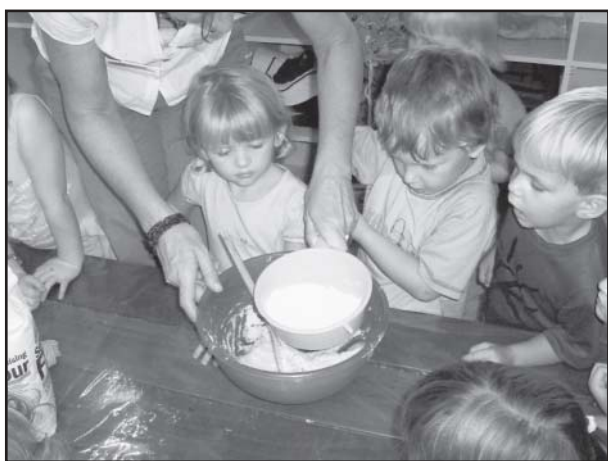
Parents and community settings, such as playgroup, kindergartens, childcare, schools and sporting venues, need to ensure children are given every opportunity to eat healthy foods. As parents we need to get back to basics, and make sure our children are eating from the five food groups every day. Do a quick mental check each day and be sure kids eat fruit; vegetables/salad; bread or grains(rice or pasta); dairy (milk/cheese/yoghurt); and, meats(meat, chicken, fish, eggs, legumes, nuts). Nutritionists are particularly concerned about the vegetable and fruit intakes of many children and adolescents. Eat 2 and 5 - is a good way to remember. We all need at least two pieces of fruit and five types of vegetable or salad everyday.

#### ***Limit 'Extra' Foods***

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating shows that we should limit foods such as lollies, crisps, muesli bars, sugary cereals, chocolate, cakes, fruit straps, cereal snack bars, chocolate dips, cream dips, biscuits, soft drinks, sports drinks, pies, sausage rolls pastries, fried foods,



# Feature Article



crumbed/battered foods, takeaway pizza and hamburgers, and chips. These are all examples of foods that Australian children and adolescents are eating to excess. Take a look at how the “Extras” add up: If a child’s daily food intake included:

- \* A bowl of chocolate puffed rice cereal (1 extra);
- \* Small packet of chips (1 extra);
- \* A can of soft drink (1 extra);
- \* Small handful of sweets (1 extra);
- \* Sausage roll (2 extra serves)

This would be classed as six serves of extra foods.

Nutritionists would recommend children only have one serve a day of these foods, leaving kids lots of room to include healthy foods such as fruit, vegetables, breads/grains, dairy and meat products and WATER. Better still would be to leave the Extra Foods out of kids diets on daily basis, and save them for special occasions like birthdays and outings. There are already too many occasions in their lives where kids have opportunities to eat these Extra foods.

## ***What can we do as a community?***

Again community settings, such as playgroup, kindergartens, childcare, schools and sporting venues, should be restricting the access children and adolescents have to these unhealthy foods. Ways to achieve this would include:

- \* Establish a healthy foods policy in your community setting.
- \* Offer only a healthy choice of snacks and meals based around the five food groups and encourage water consumption.
- \* As adults set a good example, by eating healthy foods based around the five food groups and drink water.
- \* Help support the education of children and adolescents about the need for healthy food and the effects of poor food choices.
- \* Actively discourage the eating of Extra foods.
- \* Encourage kids to be physically active - and be a role model for them.

## ***Let’s make it easy for our children to make healthy food choices.***

*By Robin Tilse and Aloysa Hourigan  
Nutrition Australia.*

*For Further Information and Support or to become a member of Nutrition Australia (Qld) contact:*

*Nutrition Australia (Qld)*

*Ph: (07) 3257 4616*

*Fax: (07) 3257 4616*

*Email: [qld@nutritionaustralia.org](mailto:qld@nutritionaustralia.org)*

*[www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)*

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# Feature Article

## The Epidemic of Childhood Obesity

David Martin    Part 1

The health of Australia's children and adolescents now, and in the future, is under threat from preventable illness. According to recent studies the most prevalent health issues affecting children are preventable: obesity, dental disease, emotional and behavioural problems, bullying and learning delays. These conditions often present together as comorbidities, each interrelated and reinforcing the other. Overweightness and obesity are serious, chronic medical conditions, which are associated with a wide range of debilitating and life threatening conditions. It is time we understood why this is happening to our children and decided to do something about it.

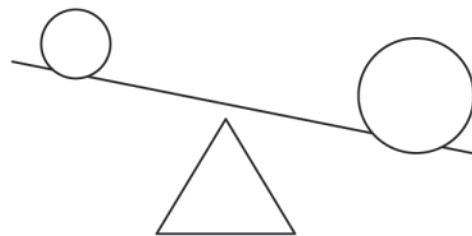
***Overweightness and obesity are serious, chronic medical conditions, which are associated with a wide range of debilitating and life threatening conditions.***

### Background

Large increases in obesity rates among Australians have the potential to erode many recent health gains. Recent studies estimate that 67% of Australian men and 52% of Australian women, aged 25 years and over, are now overweight or obese and we are passing this trend on to our children. In the ten-year period from 1985 to 1995 the level of combined overweight/obesity in Australian children more than doubled, whilst the level of obesity tripled in all age groups and for

both sexes.<sup>1</sup> In 1995, the proportion of overweight or obese children and adolescents aged 2-17 years was 21% for boys and 23% for girls.<sup>1</sup> There is no reason to believe that the rapid rise in the prevalence rates is not continuing.

The underlying cause of the obesity epidemic is energy imbalance. Weight gain and obesity develops when the energy intake from food and drink exceeds energy expenditure from physical activity and other metabolic processes. On the Seesaw below Energy in > Energy out.



We expend 3000 kJ/day less than our grandparents but have increased caloric intake by over 10% and the continuing trends in these behaviours are not encouraging. Average rate of weight gain is a 0.17% mismatch between intake and expenditure over ten years.

Some simple trends suggest relatively simple solutions. Children's fruit and vegetable consumption has decreased over the past twenty years and their physically active time has also decreased, while time spent in sedentary activities such as television watching and computer games has increased. Data from the NSW Child Health Survey 2001 found 40% of children, aged 5-12 years, reportedly watch two hours or more of television or videos a day on average and 15% are reported to play computer games for an hour or more a day on average. Such sedentary leisure



# Feature Article

time pursuits are now widely available to children and are replacing more traditional active pastimes. Finally, consumption of energy-dense foods (including sweet soft-drinks and snack foods with a high sugar content) has increased.

*It is now clear that there are numerous health benefits to be gained by individuals and the community as a whole through the maintenance of a healthy weight throughout life.*

#### **Future health risks**

Children or adolescents who are overweight or obese are more likely in the short-term to develop gastrointestinal, endocrine or certain orthopaedic problems than children of normal weight and more likely in the longer-term to develop cardiovascular disease. Medical conditions including hypertension, dyslipidaemia and even type 2 diabetes are showing increased prevalence in obese children. Other problems such as musculo-skeletal discomfort, obstructive sleep apnoea, heat intolerance, asthma and shortness of breath greatly affect their life style.<sup>3</sup> However, the most immediate consequence of being overweight as perceived by the children themselves is social discrimination. This is associated with poor self esteem and depression.

Low self esteem associated with being overweight may prevent participation in physical activity and

therefore practice in physical skills, resulting in an overweight child missing out on developing basic motor skills most of us take for granted. Issues of social acceptance, athletic competence and physical appearance are well known to obese children and affect their sense of social and psychological wellbeing. Obese children with decreasing self esteem are also more likely to smoke and drink alcohol compared with those whose self esteem increases.

On this graph (Mathers 1999) you can see that already the cost of obesity and associated physical inactivity combine to outweigh the well published mortality burden of tobacco related illness in women. A proportion of the burden of high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol is also related to the problems of being overweight. As the proportion of people who are overweight or obese increases, so too will the number of years of life lost due to these conditions.

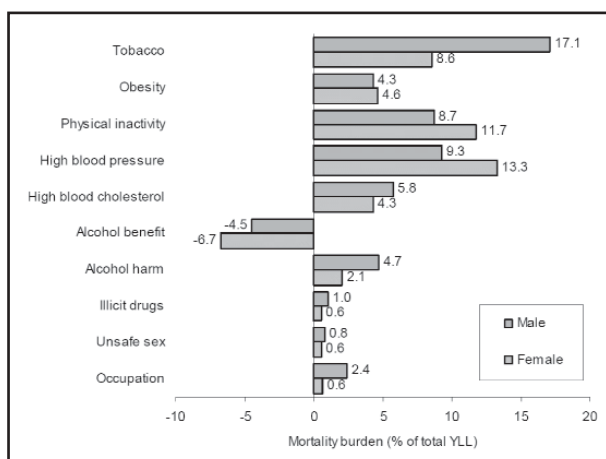
It is now clear that there are numerous health benefits to be gained by individuals and the community as a whole through the maintenance of a healthy weight throughout life. Obesity develops over time and, once it has done so, is difficult to treat. Obese children have a 25-50% chance of progression to adult obesity and it may be as high as 78% in older obese adolescents. Obese adults who were overweight as adolescents also have higher levels of weight-related ill health and a higher risk of early death than those obese adults who only became obese in adulthood.

“By providing practical support programs on fitness and nutrition for overweight children, we can break the cycle of childhood obesity transferring to adulthood,” says Dr Philip Morgan from the University of Newcastle.

#### **Factors contributing to the problem**

With genetics and lifestyle both playing important roles in determining a child's weight, obesity in

# Feature Article



children and adolescents is generally caused by inadequate physical activity, unhealthy eating patterns, or a combination of the two. On the genetics side there are now over 40 genes that have been linked with obesity. These are not thought to make people obese but, rather, allow susceptible individuals under the right conditions to become obese. It is the large range of environmental influences, such as the technological, social, economic and environmental changes in our society that has reduced physical activity and increased food access and passive energy consumption to accelerate this process.

Increases in sedentary activities (e.g. TV, video games), increased use of the motor car for transport, an increase in the consumption of high fat and high energy foods, fears regarding security, altered family structure, time restraints and perceived cost have all been cited as causes of this epidemic. In order to make a difference for our children these issues need to be looked at and addressed individually.

Unhealthy eating habits may also play a part. Examples such as "not hungry eating", eating above when you are full, and eating for comfort - which is linked with depression and poor body image, lead

to the body altering the set point telling us how much food the body needs. This unbalances the energy equation further in favour of ingested energy at the expense of expended. This excess ingested energy is stored by the body as fat.

The second part of this article will address what we can do to help our children break the cycle of chronic obesity in childhood.

***"By providing practical support programs on fitness and nutrition for overweight children, we can break the cycle of childhood obesity transferring to adulthood,"***

by David Martin  
Paddington Physiotherapy & Podiatry  
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# Feature Article

## The Epidemic of Childhood Obesity

David Martin      Part 2

For any intervention to be possible in the struggle against the growing epidemic of childhood obesity, it must have two separate arms with one common aim. That is, we must educate the children, we must educate the parents and we must aim for a behavioural change.

*For any intervention to be possible in the struggle against the growing epidemic of childhood obesity, it must have two separate arms with one common aim. That is, we must educate the children, we must educate the parents and we must aim for a behavioural change.*

Parental education strategies should include healthy food choices, activity options, obesity trends, as well as supportive behavioural change strategies. The emphasis should be on behavioural goals not weight loss *per se*. Weight loss may not be appropriate for a growing child but a decrease in rate of weight gain may be highly desirable from a physical and mental health point of view. There are no quick fixes and small behavioural changes that are conducive to a healthier energy balance are the way to go. Subtle increases in energy consumption and decreases in energy intake are often all that is necessary to make a difference. It is vital not to set unrealistic goals that

only set the scene for failure as the benefits are best seen gradually.

Overweight and obese children need support, acceptance, and encouragement from their parents and carers. Parents and carers should focus on their child's health and positive qualities, not the child's weight. Overweight and obese children should not be made to feel different but, rather, feel included, especially in physical activities.

### *Decreasing sedentary behaviour*

It can't be emphasised enough that this needs to be a family affair. Our lives today seem to be more and more about convenience and saving time. Modern devices that remove the impetus for movement should be considered in a new light. Both adults and children rely heavily on gadgets and services which reduce physical activity – lifts, escalators, remote control devices for garage doors/TVs/videos, internet shopping, take-away food and home delivery, which all reduce physical activity. Every opportunity to walk instead of drive needs to be pursued – to school, to the bus, to the shops.

Research shows that Australian children now watch between 20-30 hours of television every week, and don't even have to move to change the channel. Remote controls are a great invention, but only serve to take away opportunities that encourage children to move more. Whilst this may sound trivial, the frequent number of times we use such devices can make them important in the energy balance equation.

Hundreds of studies have linked the number of hours watching television with childhood obesity and this is a problem that needs addressing by parents. Recently, it has been proven that people's Basal Metabolic Rate (energy consumed by the body at rest) is lower when watching TV than



# Feature Article

when asleep! Limits need not only to be placed on the time in front of TV and computers but this time needs to be replaced by other activities. This will require planning within the family. There are, of course, all the safety concerns and time pressures of the modern world to contend with and there is no universal answer to this other than to say that time out with our children is a high priority for their well being. Parents need to lead by example, and show that physical activity needs to be fun not a chore. A Pedometer (which counts steps taken) can be a good monitoring device to easily and accurately monitor activity level for people who are in desk jobs – like school!

## ***Modifying energy intake***

The focus here again, needs to be on behaviour change and fat restriction rather than dieting and calorie counting. Again for success this needs to involve the whole family not just one individual member. Breakfast provides an opportunity to have a satisfying low fat, high fibre meal that decreases the desire for high fat snacking later in the day. The issue of snacking is one to address as there are many low fat choices that can be made available to hungry children.

Snacking in front of the TV should be discouraged because the habit of associating junk food and television is a very hard one to break, especially if developed in childhood. Shopping needs to reflect choices in healthy grazing for the whole family. Plan for healthy snacks and provide healthy options such as fresh fruit and vegetables, instead of snacks that are high in fat, sugars, and low in essential nutrients. Soft drinks, fruit juices and cordials are full of empty calories and we should emphasise these as food and a source of energy which needs to be burned to our children while encouraging the use of water to quench the thirst. Having sit down family meals is helpful for managing portion sizes and children need to be encouraged to set the levels of how

much they feel like and not be forced to finish everything on the plate. Encourage the avoidance of using food to comfort children and avoid using it as a reward; also discourage withholding food as a punishment.

Dieting in children is not the answer. Dieting leads to decreasing the Basal Energy Expenditure and reduces the body's awareness of the signals that tell us that we are hungry and full. Diets are a negative experience that leads to a yo-yo effect in weight and are associated with a sense of failure.

***Physical activity plays a major role in maintaining a healthy body weight and that's why it is so important to encourage children to be active.***

## ***Increasing physical activity***

Physical activity plays a major role in maintaining a healthy body weight and that's why it is so important to encourage children to be active. Children are often quite happy being active, they just need ideas and opportunity. It is important that activity for a child is a positive experience so that they are not discouraged at a young age. For instance, if the child is not coordinated at ball catching, it might be important to encourage practice of this skill – but in a non-threatening environment, not in a competitive team environment. Activity doesn't have to be a structured sport, but the important ideal is that children are given encouragement and the opportunity to participate.



# Feature Article

Encouraging children to be active at a young age is setting up an invaluable lifestyle for the future. Of course, children are also encouraged by example. If the adults surrounding children are active then children can observe that activity and sport are not just for kids! So parents and teachers need to set a good example. Whenever you can, walk instead of driving to the shops; take the stairs instead of the lift; organise social meetings with friends around activity. For example meet them in a park with play equipment.

## ***Physical activity suggestions***

Be more physically active, or 'move more'. It is recommended that Australian adults accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Children should be active every day in as many ways as they can, and there are additional benefits in more vigorous activity. Ensure a safe environment for children and their

***Exercise benefits children's cardiovascular and respiratory systems as well as having positive effects on increasing their bone density, enhancing motor skill development, balance, social skills and aspects of mental health including self confidence, body image and motivation.***

friends to engage in active play, e.g. running, ball sports, co-ordination based play. Encourage 'active commuting' such as walking to school, the bus, or the shops when appropriate. Several parent groups in the Brisbane region have started "Walk to school" groups with good reported success.

Evidence from controlled trials (although these trials are heterogeneous as regards the age groups and settings studied) highlights the potential for school-based programs that promote physical activity, modify dietary intake and reduce sedentary behaviours. However, recent qualitative research indicates that differences in outcomes will only be achieved if sustainable changes involve all generations, tackle the widely held beliefs regarding eating and activity,<sup>5</sup> involve population-wide health promotion messages, and dispel myths such as children's overweight being just "puppy fat".

## ***Conclusion***

Exercise benefits children's cardiovascular and respiratory systems as well as having positive effects on increasing their bone density, enhancing motor skill development, balance, social skills and aspects of mental health including self confidence, body image and motivation. These benefits are best seen when exercise combined with dietary education of both children and parents is aimed at implementing a behavioural change. By addressing the energy imbalance we can help our kids become healthy today so they can actively participate in tomorrow.

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# Feature Article

## ***“Get Active” in early childhood education***

There has been a lot of coverage in newspapers and other media in recent times about inactivity and childhood obesity. Some of the statistics are showing the issues are not only in adolescents and primary schools but also very much in early childhood as well. You might wonder why there should be any need to encourage children to be active. Surely the problem is not keeping them moving, but rather keeping them still!

The Australian Medical Association estimates that 20% -25% of Australian children are either overweight or obese, with a similar number being physically inactive. This is alarming when we know that all major cardiovascular risk factors can begin in childhood. Studies show children may develop fatty streaks in their aortas from as young as four years of age and that physical activity, particularly weight bearing exercises such as hopping, skipping and jumping, as well as diet, help to maximise the attainment of peak bone mineral density mass – an important factor in preventing osteoporosis and fractures in later life.

***The Australian Medical Association estimates that 20% -25% of Australian children are either overweight or obese, with a similar number being physically inactive.***

Apart from the long-term benefits, it is now well accepted that physical activity enhances brain development in babies and mental performance throughout life. It helps to build stronger muscles, improves coordination, helps to ease tension and to make us feel better about ourselves. You probably already accept it is important to

educate, encourage and motivate children to participate in regular, physical activity because the habits they establish in childhood carry over to adulthood. The challenge, however, is to incorporate more healthy physical activity into the everyday lives of our children and ourselves.

As a consequence perhaps, a range of organisations (government and non-government) have recognised the importance of the first seven years of life in determining attitudes and skills for physical activity. This article reviews the work of one government agency, Sport and Recreation Queensland, and their foray into the early childhood sector for the very first time.

In October 2003, the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport, Terry Mackenroth launched the Children and Young People Strategy. The strategy has four intervention areas targeting people who work and volunteer in sport and recreation organisations, schools, families and early childhood.

The early childhood part of the strategy includes three great resources and a workshop. The resources, described in more detail later, are for parents, carers, teachers and other early childhood professionals. The workshops, being delivered by The Gowrie Queensland, are mainly for family day carers and professionals, though preschool teachers are welcome to attend.

The content of all the initiatives recognises that play is an essential part of the early childhood program in any setting. At a recent Sport and Recreation Queensland meeting, a Development Officer from Sport and Recreation noted that many people think children are already very active. He pointed out that if you look at children in the back yard, at a childcare centre or in a preschool they look very active, but this does not mean that children will naturally engage in the ideal range of physical activities. The following information is based on the discussions.





# Feature Article

*Just as we start the learning process to speak, read and write from day one, we should start establishing daily activity routines at an early age to help children become strong and healthy as they grow.*

In Australia, some of the fundamental motor skills (the building blocks of physical literacy) like throwing, catching, striking and kicking are often lacking.

The meeting reiterated that early childhood years are the most influential in establishing habits and setting the foundation for continued learning throughout life. Just as we start the learning process to speak, read and write from day one, we should start establishing daily activity routines at an early age to help children become strong and healthy as they grow.

As adults, we have a large influence over the play patterns of pre-primary children, for example, research has shown children participate in fundamental movement skills for longer periods of time when an adult is present. Although there needs to be a balance between directed and undirected activity, interaction and encouragement from caregivers lead to better outcomes in throwing, catching, striking and kicking.

#### **What can we do?**

- \* Provide a safe environment.
- \* Do not restrict movement for more than an hour

- at a time, unless the child is unwell or asleep.
- \* Be aware of the importance and the need for physical activity in early childhood to develop feelings of physical competency as well as physical, social and intellectual skills.
- \* Make movement fun and non-competitive.
- \* Encourage movement through play activities.
- \* Provide outdoor and indoor space for children to move freely as well as equipment that encourages large muscle activities that are developmentally appropriate for different age groups and different abilities.
- \* Use creative themes and games to assist young children to learn movement skills and be physically active.
- \* Once children have developed basic skills, provide guided instruction of more complex physical skills of throwing, striking, kicking, running and jumping.

The Get Active Queensland Children and Young People strategy early childhood projects inform parents, teachers, carers and others working in the early childhood area about the benefits of and need for physical activity for young children.

#### **Resources:**

*Move Baby Move* is designed to help parents and carers incorporate safe, active movement into their babies' daily routines to promote normal growth and development. *Active Alphabet* is designed for toddlers and their parents and carers to use together to learn basic active movement skills while also learning important health and safety messages.

*Let's Get Moving* is for children from three to six years of age. It provides parents, carers and preschool teachers with active movement ideas as well as an activity to engage the preschoolers in physical activity. The resource is a fun way to encourage children to learn a range of skills such as jumping, twisting and catching while also learning important health and safety messages such as wearing a hat and eating healthy food.

# Feature Article

*The resource is a fun way to encourage children to learn a range of skills such as jumping, twisting and catching while also learning important health and safety messages such as wearing a hat and eating healthy food.*

Although not directly available to the public just yet, many are in their first print run and are still being evaluated, copies of the resources have been sent to early childhood centres and preschools as examples, and to public libraries and toy libraries for loan. A number of hospitals and other Queensland Health services are distributing *Move Baby Move* across the State. If you are online, the full text of all three resources can be downloaded from the Sport and Recreation Queensland website [www.sportrec.qld.gov.au](http://www.sportrec.qld.gov.au). For further information contact Jeff Wood on telephone 3237 1359.

#### **Workshops:**

*Moving with Young Children* is a series of workshops for professionals in the early childhood sector. Content includes support for including physical activity in an early childhood program and information about the benefits of physical activity. The Gowrie Queensland has recently been granted the licence to run another series of workshops across Queensland. For information on how to access these courses contact The Gowrie Queensland on 3252 7174.



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## ***‘Good’ Early Childhood Curriculum***

### ***Theoretical Perspectives and Practical Strategies***

***By Deborah Browne***

#### ***Introduction***

In a ‘good’ early childhood curriculum, it is more important that young children be curious and active in their own learning than to be given specific information and facts (Perry, 1997, p. 76).

Perry’s (1997) statement is one that encourages reflection by early childhood teachers and leads to questions such as: What is curriculum? What makes a good curriculum? How do early childhood teachers choose a curriculum approach? What impact does curriculum have on the early childhood environment and for the individuals involved in that environment? This paper will discuss these issues and identify the implications they present in early childhood settings.

#### ***A Focus on Early Childhood Curriculum***

Curriculum is described by Stonehouse and Duffie as “everything professionals do to support children’s well-being and learning, the intentional provisions and offerings they make in order to create possibilities and opportunities for children to engage with” (Stonehouse and Duffie, 2002, p. 19). Curriculum includes (but is not limited to) how early childhood teachers: implement developmentally and culturally appropriate practices; plan and support children’s interactions within the physical and social environment; communicate with children and foster children’s communications with their peers and others; support children’s transitions in the day and between settings; and understand and respond to children’s behaviour. Defining what makes a good curriculum is more challenging than defining what curriculum is. There are many views on what makes a good curriculum. MacNaughton (2003) makes links between the curriculum position of early childhood teachers and their philosophy, goals, and approaches to planning, observation and assessment. MacNaughton (2003) highlights three main curriculum positions that early childhood teachers assume. These include: conforming to society; reforming society; and transforming society. By analysing these curriculum positions, early childhood teachers can gain valuable insight into and understanding of their own curriculum position.

MacNaughton (2003) describes the conforming to society position as a technical and rational one with specific

objectives. Lambert, Clyde and Reeves’ publication emphasises this approach with statements such as “In the light of my situational analysis, philosophical theories and values, my curriculum objectives would be... to help young children develop skills for tomorrow’s world...intellectual skills...decision making skills...general physical and mechanical skills...organisational skills...skills in the care of dependent persons...emergency skills...verbal communication skills” (Lambert et al, 1987, p.20).

Lambert et al. (1987) discuss the teacher’s values as being derived from their knowledge of child development, their perceived needs of the children and their philosophy.

***Defining what makes a good curriculum is more challenging than defining what curriculum is.***

Lambert et al. go on to state “this is the point at which curriculum planning ends and program planning begins” (Lambert et al., 1987, p.21). In contrast, early childhood teachers who take a reforming or transforming approach to curriculum, view curriculum planning as continuous. Use of the word ‘program’ implies the early childhood teacher has a position of power and control in planning daily activities. The documentation of these plans are likely to be presented in a boxed format. Active involvement by children in the curriculum is limited and MacNaughton (2003) raises concerns that teachers who assume this position frequently consider a dominant culture, reinforce stereotypes and underestimate children’s thinking.

A reforming approach to curriculum is characterised by “a practical approach ... in which resources and pedagogies are selected in and through the process of working with children and on the basis of broad principles and flexible approaches” (MacNaughton, 2003, p. 160). The emphasis for this position is moved from ‘learning occurs as a result of achieving objectives’ (the conforming position), to ‘learning occurs through participating in processes’ (MacNaughton, 2003). The early childhood teacher who takes the reforming society



# Feature Article

position acknowledges that more than observation is required to understand the child; the child should be engaged in sharing their own knowledge about self, and teachers should attempt to interpret behaviours from the child's perspective (MacNaughton, 2003). Teachers' knowledge of child development and knowledge of individual children contribute to a curriculum based on interests and strengths (MacNaughton, 2003). Sources for such an emergent curriculum, as described by Nimmo (1994), include the children's interests, the teachers' interests, developmental tasks, things in the physical environment, people in the social environment, curriculum resource materials, unexpected events, living together, and values held in the community, school, family and culture. Nimmo emphasises a need for curriculum to be negotiated between teachers and children, and for teachers to assess the "potential of any interest for in-depth learning by both the individual child and other members of the adult-child classroom community" (Nimmo, 1994: pp. 208-209). The documentation of collaborative work is integral to the process. Not only does it aid teachers in understanding and making meaning of the children's learning, but it also enables early childhood teachers, children, families and the community to recall, clarify, elaborate and reflect on their learning (Nimmo, 1994).

MacNaughton (2003) points out some concerns with this approach, including equity issues where there are narrow cultural perspectives and dominant voices and meanings may prevail.

*In this approach, early childhood teachers take a shared responsibility for supporting children's development within a context of relationships and society.*

The third curriculum position described by MacNaughton (2003) is the transforming of society position. Junjuck and Marshall (cited in MacNaughton 2003) summarise the approach as one where teachers

*... the child should be engaged in sharing their own knowledge about self, and teachers should attempt to interpret behaviours from the child's perspective*

whose curriculum intentions are transformative and whose interests are emancipatory struggle to create environments that are enabling, democratic and just. (Junjuck and Marshall, cited in MacNaughton, 2003, p. 182).

In this approach, early childhood teachers take a shared responsibility for supporting children's development within a context of relationships and society. This curriculum position is considerate of democracy and fairness through feminist, anti-bias and multicultural perspectives (MacNaughton, 2003). Nimmo (cited in MacNaughton, 2003) discusses the planning and reflecting aspects of this approach: Grounding our curriculum in the dynamic intersection of children's questions and our own passions and skills involves planning and reflection. This curriculum is not pre-planned or received from outside experts. Rather it emerges from an intimate knowledge of the particular children and community. (Nimmo, cited in MacNaughton, 2003, p. 197).

A significant aspect of the transforming position is that, as a part of reflection, early childhood teachers ask the question "whose knowledge is in my curriculum and whose knowledge should be in my curriculum?"





# Feature Article

*This requires early childhood teachers to have a good knowledge of child development as well as recognising a need for teachers to get to know and understand individual children and the contexts in which they live.*

(MacNaughton, 2003, p. 195). This move away from a focus on child centred curriculum to a focus on the child within the context of relationships curriculum is an approach supported by the New South Wales (NSW) Government and the publication by the NSW Department of Community Services of the Curriculum Framework (Stonehouse and Duffy, 2002).

Reflecting on Perry's (1997) statement, where a good curriculum is implied to be one where children are curious and active in their own learning, the curriculum position I would aspire to as an early childhood teacher is the transforming of society position. This is one where "curriculum plans imply that the child is a learner who is active and knowing, but who always inevitably acts and knows within specific discourses (frameworks for making sense of the world)" (MacNaughton, 2003, p.194). Taking this position has implications for practice in the early childhood setting.

#### **Implications for Early Childhood Settings and Useful Strategies for Caregivers and Teachers of Children Aged 0 - 5 Years.**

Understanding what is developmentally appropriate practice forms the foundations of early childhood knowledge for caregivers and early childhood teachers. Gonzalez-Mena identifies "developmentally appropriate

practice includes figuring out ways for children to be actively engaged when learning – engaged with objects, ideas, their teacher, and their peers" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2001, p. 84). This requires early childhood teachers to have a good knowledge of child development as well as recognising a need for teachers to get to know and understand individual children and the contexts in which they live. In practice, early childhood teachers need to develop their knowledge of child development through formal education and continuing professional development. As Krogh notes "skilful, knowledgeable teaching cannot take place if the teacher lacks child development information" (Krogh, 1997, p.32). Theories such as Piaget's cognitive stages of development and Vygotsky's ideas on socially constructed knowledge contribute to early childhood teachers' overall knowledge on development and guide them in negotiating the types of provisions that are made within a curriculum. Learning a single or small number of theories of child development is insufficient and limiting and, as Krogh (1997) points out, theories can be changing trends and have particular cultural relevance. A single theory does not provide multiple perspectives, which are essential in a good curriculum.

As previously noted, there is a need for teachers to get to know and understand individual children and the contexts in which they live. A transforming approach to curriculum recognises that observing children is inherently problematic. MacNaughton (2003) raises two issues for early childhood teachers to reflect on. Firstly, does the observer empower the child to democratically exercise the right not to be observed, and secondly, are multiple perspectives being sourced to provide a more accurate description and interpretation of what is being observed? In practice, an early childhood teacher who is assuming the transforming approach to curriculum will consider these concerns and make use of strategies in an attempt to negotiate this problem. Strategies may include asking children for permission to observe and document what is occurring in language, such as: "Do you mind if I write some notes about your play?" "Can I take some photos to document what you are doing here?" MacNaughton (2003) emphasises a need to respect children's right to say no and, in the event of this



# Feature Article

occurring, the observer should not record the event. If children agree to have their play documented, multiple perspectives and understandings can be gained by asking the children: "Have I got it right that you are ...?" "So you are...?" Children then have opportunity to clarify with the observer what they are seeing. Another strategy for gaining multiple perspectives as mentioned by MacNaughton (2003) is to talk and reflect with other teachers and caregivers who are witnessing the same events, and to talk with colleagues and family about what is being observed so that multiple checks for understanding and interpreting observations can be made. These strategies can be implemented with children aged from birth to five years and, as children develop increasing language skills, early childhood teachers will find discussions with children about their play become increasingly complex.

Early childhood teachers who take a transforming approach to curriculum see children as existing within social contexts where there are unfair and unjust conditions for some individuals and groups within society. Their approach is to work with children to identify how they can work together towards fair and just outcomes. Stremmel and Fu (cited in Stremmel 1997) identify that individual and cultural respect is developed through communication and processes required in negotiating and co-constructing curriculum. Stremmel advocates for teachers to develop practices and strategies based on knowledge of child development within a sociocultural context; the learning patterns, culture and life experiences of individual children; the value systems of differing cultures; knowledge of other disciplines (e.g. education, history, cultural anthropology, and philosophy); and pedagogical reflection on what is in the best interests of children's development (Stremmel, 1997, p. 372; Fu, 1993; Gambarino, 1992; Van Manen, 1991; Williams 1994).

Stremmel (1997) argues co-constructed curriculum and inclusion of family and cultural values should occur within every classroom. Early childhood teachers who take a transforming approach would incorporate these with democratic consideration. Stremmel suggests some practical strategies to take, including "mutually directed activities - collaborative conversation, story sharing, art activities, cooking activities, and project work - provide

contexts in which adults and children can negotiate and share power as equal participants in meaningful learning" (Stremmel, 1997, p. 14). Other practical strategies could also include, for example, speaking with children about fairness and asking the more dominant individuals or groups of children how can others in the group be fairly supported to contribute and put their thoughts or ideas forward. Porter stresses "when you negotiate with children ... children will be more motivated to act as agreed because they participated in deciding what was to be done and you are not imposing anything on them" (Porter, 2003, p.83).

*Early childhood teachers who take a transforming approach to curriculum see children as existing within social contexts where there are unfair and unjust conditions for some individuals and groups within society.*

The social and physical environment that early childhood teachers create is representative of their approach to curriculum. MacNaughton and Williams (2004) discuss a need for teachers to consider the arrangement of the physical environment and positioning of equipment to encourage sense of security, safe exploration, thinking, and social interaction. Ensuring indoor play spaces are well lit, ventilated and at a comfortable temperature, eliminating hazards, making all areas visible, creating an aesthetically pleasing environment, stimulating senses with smells and sounds, ensuring children always have access to drinking water, and providing areas for children to interact with others are strategies suggested by MacNaughton and Williams (2004). MacNaughton and Williams (2004) highlight curriculum issues of equity,



# Feature Article

## ***Consideration for supporting children in transitions throughout the day and giving children power to negotiate when they transition between areas, routines or experiences enables children to be active decision makers and is integral to good curriculum.***

access and participation in relation to culture, gender, and additional needs. They suggest the type of equipment available and where it is positioned has the power to challenge children's thinking and perceptions of what is normal. For an early childhood teacher taking a transforming position to curriculum, the issue of equity in the environment is particularly significant. Reflection and seeking multiple perspectives (including children's perspectives) therefore become important strategies in identifying whose needs the environment is serving, whose needs are not being met, and how the environment can better support equity in relation to culture, gender, and additional needs. Consideration for supporting children in transitions throughout the day and giving children power to negotiate when they transition between areas, routines or experiences enables children to be active decision makers and is integral to good curriculum. Practical strategies suggested by Greenman and Stonehouse (1997) include providing large uninterrupted blocks of time for play and flexible meal routines where a meal, such as morning tea, is offered for a period of time and children participate in the routine when they are ready.

By Deborah Browne

### **Conclusion**

Perry's (1997) statement is one that encourages reflection by early childhood teachers. This paper has discussed differing positions relating to curriculum and supports a

transforming approach where children are engaged and actively involved in democratically negotiating curriculum with early childhood teachers and other stakeholders. Useful and practical strategies have been suggested in relation to implementing 'good' curriculum.

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# Communications

## Media Watch

**In January 2005, media coverage communicated community concerns regarding the provisions of long day care. Concerns focussed on care for children in 0-2 years age groups, costs of childcare, and location of childcare services.**

Thompson, T. (2005, Jan 24). Childcare sites fail to meet real needs.: Centres are springing up everywhere, but not always where they're needed most. *The Courier-Mail*. p. 1.

Thompson, T. (2005, Jan 24). Owners say staff wage costs to be passed on. *The Courier-Mail*. p.2.

Thompson, T. (2005, Jan 24). Shortages hit families hard. *The Courier-Mail*. p. 2.

**The 2005 start of the school year saw student, family and community concern with air conditioning classrooms, condition of school buildings, and road safety surrounding schools. Media coverage reported on issues including asbestos in classroom buildings, which schools should be air-conditioned, the cost of installing and running air-conditioning, and the need for increased supervision of school road crossings.**

Alexander, M. (2005, Feb 2). School kids forced to run for their lives. *The Sunday Mail*. p. 12.

Alexander, M. (2005, Mar 6). Asbestos fears grow over demountables: Scandal of kids taught in 'tinnies'. *The Sunday Mail*. p.27.

Allen, E. (2005, Feb 25). Pupils may take a holiday from heat. *The Courier-Mail*. p.7.

Giles, D. (2005, Feb 20). Aircon kids stalled: School raises cash but there's no power. *The Sunday Mail*. p.20.

Gregory, J. (2005, Feb 24). Parents pull kids from class in asbestos row. *The Courier-Mail*. p. 7.

**Media reports in February 2005 alerted us to increasing public liability and the impact on playground designs and outdoor activities for children. There was concern that spaces for children's play are becoming boring in order to manage risks or hazards.**

Harris, S. (2005, Feb 27). Red tape entangles frolic in the snow. *The Sunday Mail*. p. 42.

Lawrence, E. (2005, Feb 27). Sorry kids, but fun is banned: Public liability nightmare creates dull towns. *The Sunday Mail*. p. 42.

**In March 2005, the media reported on the case of a child care worker who was dismissed for "shouting at a child who was about to bite another child" (Knowles, 2005). The Industrial Relations Commission became involved and the worker was awarded 10 weeks pay.**

Knowles, D. (2005, Mar 6). Sacked! For daring to shout at a boy who was about to bite another child. *The Sunday Mail*. p. 11.

**Children's lunch boxes and healthy eating policies of schools and childcare services received media attention in March. Topics for discussion included the banning and confiscating of some junk foods, communicating service policies with parents, making healthy food choices, and obesity.**

Patterson, K. (2005, Mar 3). Lunchbox police: Teachers confiscate junk food in the fight against obesity. *The Sunday Mail*. p.3.





# Communications

## News from ECTA Regional Groups

Fitzroy, Ashgrove, Mackay and District and Hervey Bay groups have all received ECTA funding for regional professional development initiatives. They are to be congratulated for actively supporting their members. Each group also applied for and received a \$50 petty cash grant.

Thank you to the following groups who have returned registration forms - Cooloola, Fitzroy, Ashgrove, Mackay & District and Hervey Bay. All other groups are reminded that registration is required yearly. We encourage them to return regional registration forms as soon as possible so that they may receive free copies of Educating Young Children, DVD's etc for the 2005 year and qualify for regional professional development funding and petty cash grants. Forms are available for downloading from <http://www.ecta.org.au/deliver/content.asp?orgid=1&suborgid=1&ssid=112&pid=652&ppid=0>. Groups wishing to apply for professional development grants must do so at least 6 weeks before the date of the intended event so that prior approval can be granted. No funding will be issued after the event.

Fitzroy Group will be holding workshops for parents and teachers facilitated by Andrea Ashford during term 2. It is hoped that through the workshops they can promote effective parenting support, highlight the importance of early childhood education, promote the Fitzroy group and provide networking opportunities to professionals in the region. The workshops will be held at the CQU campus Quay St. Rockhampton.

Hervey Bay group will hold an afternoon workshop on Digital Documentation in the Early Years facilitated by Kim Walters. The workshop will be held at the CQU Wide Bay campus 4-6pm on 1 June 2005.

Fitzroy group are organising a full day conference on Friday 8 July at the Holy Spirit College Baxter Dr. Mackay. The day will feature Sue Galletly providing a workshop on literacy understandings, Lyn Duncan will introduce the new maths syllabus with an early childhood focus and Kim Walters will develop understandings with regard to digital portfolios and using digital cameras through a presentation and hands on training workshops.

Cooloola regional group have organised a hands on training day to learn how to create digital portfolios to be presented by Kim Walters at St Patrick's College Bligh St Gympie on Thursday 28 May.

If you are interested in any of the above professional development events please contact the appropriate regional group. Contact information is available on our website <http://www.ecta.org.au/deliver/content.asp?orgid=1&suborgid=1&ssid=112&pid=635&ppid=0>

Each regional group has their own webpage where they can advertise events and communicate with their members.

Registration as a regional group has many advantages in return groups are responsible for communicating information about regional happenings to the coordinator via email on [kim@ecta.org.au](mailto:kim@ecta.org.au) and providing all the necessary completed application forms.

Groups are reminded that audited statements at the end of the ECTA financial year (30 September) are only required if more \$500 or more income has been received during the year. All groups however need to return their BAS statement once per year. Form available on the website. Groups wishing to keep a small float of less than \$50 for coffee cake etc. may do so with out bookkeeping requirements.

*By Kim Walters  
Regional Contact*

# International Perspectives

## Waldkindergarten

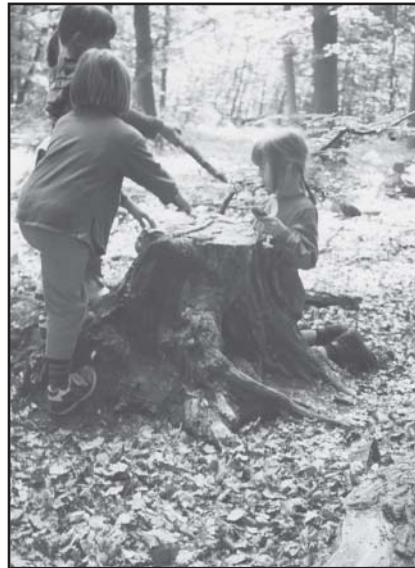
*Kindergarten of the forest, Flensburg, Germany*  
*Lynne Moore*

*'Give to the children nature,  
then they use their fantasy'*

Have you ever entered a children's space and been totally struck by the ambience of the moment? If you know that feeling then you just might begin to imagine the total sense of wonder that I experienced on a visit to the Forest Kindergarten in the town of Flensburg in Northern Germany.

Forest Kindergartens originated in Denmark in the 1950s and quickly expanded throughout Germany where now there are some 350 kindergartens flourishing in forests throughout the country. A kindergarten of the forest is exactly that - there are no walls, no roofs, no buildings of any kind! The children are brought to an allocated gathering spot by their parents each day - in the case of the Flensburg forest kindergarten, a sandpit in the city forest Marienhoelzung. Regardless of weather - sun, wind, rain or snow - the children walk to a special space in the forest where they create, build, dig, hide, imagine, listen and simply 'be'.

There are no materials or resources since it is considered that the forest will provide all that is



needed. During winter the children bring their sleds! During rain the trees provide shelter and in extreme conditions a small forest hut is available. The mobile phone is turned on at the beginning and end of the day.

The children, between the ages of three years to six years, spend three hours in winter and four hours in summer in the forest completely free to pursue their interests. During my visit this included a long-running project to dig out a large pit; an investigation to unearth animals living beneath the bark of trees and a range of rather involved and carefully orchestrated imaginative play episodes.

The day begins with a common morning circle. On this occasion, there was a birthday to celebrate. Each child in the circle was invited to give a gift - a flower, a leaf or a twig from the forest - and sing in celebration. The children then walked with their food-laden backpacks to a well known space in the forest - this changes from time to time depending upon the children's interest. The walk is an experience in itself. It is not rushed. There are times of silence and times of great chatter and social harmony. The teachers, of



# International Perspectives

*... the lack of mandatory curriculums at the kindergarten level, coupled with a long tradition of encouraging alternative educational concepts, such as the Montessori or Waldorf school philosophies, and Germany's special romantic relationship with the woods, help explain the success of forest kindergartens.*

which there were three, and 16 children, follow the children's lead. On this day the older children broke away from the group and without supervision took an alternative track about 50 metres away, through high grass. All that could be seen were their heads bobbing up and down along the top of the grass line! This was



obviously a daily ritual in respect of the older children's need for greater independence. Trust was very evident. Once in the forest the children stop for an early morning meal break consisting of various combinations of German sausage and bread, before immersing themselves in all of the possibilities that the forest has to offer.

The teachers find a tree and sit with their backs to it in a star shape so that they can see all of the children. There is no interaction. The children approach the teachers when needed. At the end of the morning the children gather with the teachers in a circle and a story is told, sometimes using props from the forest or a scarf or small doll that a child has bought with them. The children then begin the walk back. The walk is calm and unrushed with frequent stops to allow the younger children to catch up. No one complains and every one waits with great patience and respect. Unlike many European countries such as France, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, Germany has no national standards for kindergarten, which includes multi-age groups of children from three to seven years. German kindergarten isn't mandatory. Children start school at age seven but, by law, every child is entitled to attend regardless of income. Kindertagens can be public or private initiatives that are subsidised by municipal and regional governments. Most children participate. According to Professor Schafer (<http://www.gvnr.com/68/1.htm>) the lack of mandatory curriculums at the kindergarten level, coupled with a long tradition of encouraging alternative educational concepts, such as the Montessori or Waldorf school philosophies, and Germany's special romantic relationship with the woods, help explain the success of forest kindergartens.

I look forward to returning soon!

For further information check the web at <http://www.waldkindergarten.de/>.

By Lynne Moore

Early Education Consultant  
C&K



# Book Reviews

## *Roos in Shoes*

**Title:** Roos in Shoes

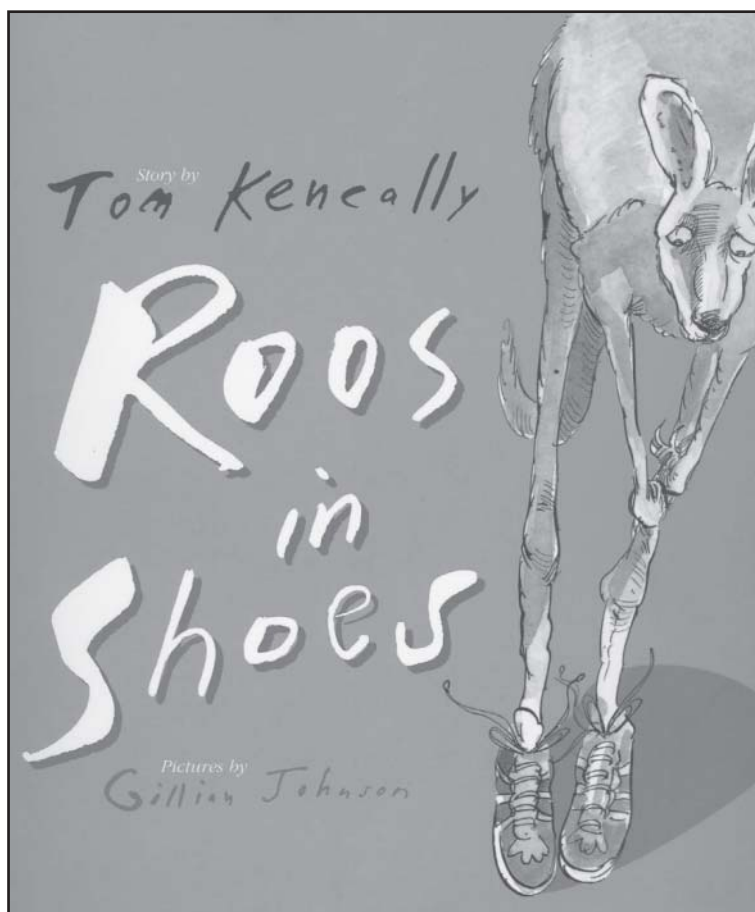
**Author:** Tom Keneally

**Illustrator:** Gillian Johnson

**Publisher:** Random House

**Rec. Retail Price:** \$16.95

**ISBN:** 1-74051-865-9



Tom Keneally has written an interesting and humorous environmental tale of saving our lands from the power companies.

The tale is presented in well-constructed rhyming verse. It follows the story of the Drewes family, who live companionably in the Australian Bush with many kangaroos as neighbours, as they come to odds with a power company. The roos come to the Drewes' aid with a 'scheme' to show the power company how ridiculous it is to build their towers close to families. The tale depicts a 'typical' out-of-town country lifestyle.

The tale ends happily with a feeling of 'justice being served' with emphasis on all living together on our wondrous land and coming to others' assistance.

The illustrations are coloured line drawings in suitable bush tones but with a humorous edge.

The text and concept would suit older Early Childhood classes.

*Reviewed by Sue Webster*

## *Roos in Shoes*



# Book Reviews

## *Healthy Children - A Guide for Child Care*

**Title: Healthy Children - A Guide for Child Care**

**Author: Coralie Mathews**

**Publisher: Elsevier**

**ISBN: 0 729 53749 8**

This text book addresses the new child care competencies developed by the Australian National Training Authority and provides the knowledge needed to achieve the competencies covered in each health-related unit. The wide range of topics covered will give students a broad understanding of each subject.

With the emphasis on positive health experiences, the text covers disease prevention and the child carer's role as community health provider. The text begins with a brief encounter of the history of child care in Australia before focusing the attention on child health today. The book investigates 'the role' of child care and early childhood educators in child health. It uses realistic examples of how child care provides a health service to families. Families are reflective of today's society representing 'family' in various models and in different living situations.



An interesting section to the book has been the inclusion of 'choosing to have children'. In this chapter the book explores the human reproductive system with simple but factual information and moves into the area of contraception. The infectious disease chapter would be useful to early childhood staff and families in identifying illnesses and supporting the management of children/staff with the illness.

The final section of the book investigates other aspects of healthy children including nutrition, child safety and accident prevention and child protection to name just a few.

The book covers many areas and therefore gives a brief insight into the many areas of health.

This book appears to be a useful resource and guide for a new practitioner to the field of early childhood or a simple read for the Family Library in early childhood environments.

*Reviewed by Lisa Palethorpe  
Management Services Coordinator C&K*

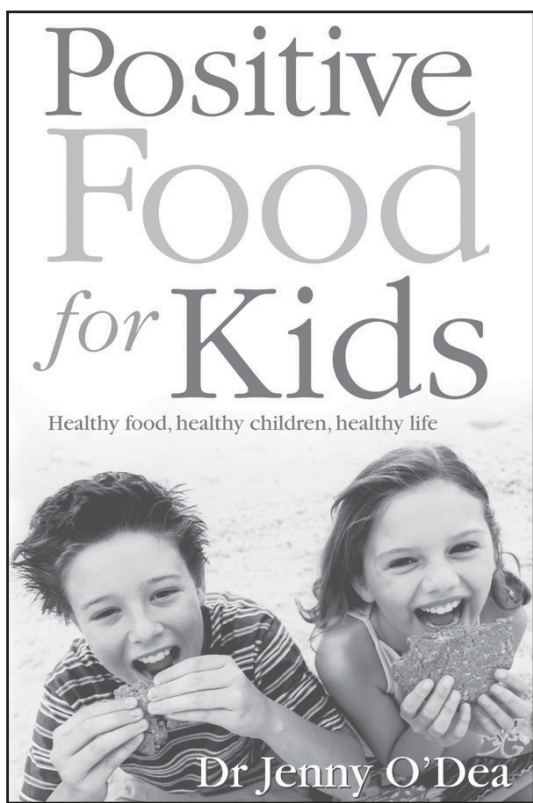
# Book Reviews

## *Positive Food for Kids*

**Title: Positive Food for Kids**

**Author: Dr Jenny O'Dea**

**Publisher: Doubleday**



It is back to school time again and thousands of parents around Australia face the prospect of retrieving soggy sandwiches and squashed bananas from the dark depths of their child's schoolbag.

It is a dilemma many parents contemplate over the next few weeks as they try to plan appetising and nutritious meals that keep their children interested.

With over 20 years experience as a dietitian, nutritionist and mother of two, Dr Jenny O'Dea's new book *Positive Food for Kids* is packed with practical information on how to feed your children healthy food that they will enjoy. Jenny's book includes 101 Healthy School Lunches, Top Ten Tips for School Lunches, The Big Lunchbox Mistakes, Healthy Breakfast Ideas and much more.

Jenny conducted a study of over 5000 children and their eating habits. This book is in response to her findings, some of which are alarming, with one in six children admitting they had not eaten any fruit or vegetables in the last three days.

*Positive Food for Kids* is a practical guide for parents in helping to provide healthy choices for their children. It is an excellent reference and provides valuable information on topics such as parents as role models, your child's healthy weight, the importance of variety in food and how to teach young children the many benefits of a healthy diet.

*Reviewed by Sophie Carter*

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(1 January to 31 December 2005)

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Home address \_\_\_\_\_  
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