ECTA
EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

EDUCATING YOUNG CHILDREN

Learning and teaching in the early childhood years

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From the President

Kim Walters - ECTA President

Welcome both new and continuing members, to the first issue of Educating Young Children for 2008. For many 2008 will be a time of change. With a new federal government elected last year we await the impact this will have on early childhood in Queensland and across the country. The beginning of the year is a busy time for everyone as we begin settling in children and establishing relationships with families. Many of our members will have taken on a new position within their familiar setting or may have moved to a new setting or sector. These changes will provide additional challenges for you.

As your year begins, take a moment to reflect on how ECTA can support your teaching role throughout this coming year. Our dedicated committee members volunteer hundreds of hours each year to support early childhood educators across the state. Lynne Moore and her journal committee continue to produce this exceptionally professional journal which provides stimulation and challenge to our members as it encourages self-reflection whilst providing up-to-date information from the field. Gail Halliwell continues to expand the E-News and website with her web weaver team. The website and E-news provides information and links to current research and professional development activities provided by ECTA and others. Bronwyn McGregor and Toni Michael work together with the support of OLI's to organise the videolinqs which allow ECTA to provide key speakers to members across the state. These initiatives, whilst enjoyed by metropolitan members, provided our members in rural and remote areas with a link to their profession.

ECTA regional groups provide opportunities for members of the early childhood profession to come together for social or formal gatherings. Networking between educators is a prime focus for ECTA. During 2008 the state coordinating committee would like to expand our regional group network and simultaneously promote the concept of professional networking circles to our south-east Queensland members. Making time for networking with other early childhood professionals, I believe, is vital if we are to maintain our momentum and enthusiasm for teaching as our roles become increasingly demanding. Educators working within a large school setting can also feel isolated from other early childhood educators. Networking between Pre-prep, Preparatory and lower primary settings has been encouraged in the Early Years Curriculum. Networking between sectors within your suburban area or region is a key ingredient to developing positive transitions to school and within schools. We invite members to form their own networking group under the ECTA banner. If you would like to form a professional support group in your area please contact ECTA or go to our website which has all the necessary forms.

I and the state coordinating committee wish you well for the coming year and look forward to supporting early childhood educators across the state.

Kim

Editorial

From the Editorial Panel

Lynne Moore

Welcome to the first edition of the *Educating Young Children* Journal for 2008 and to a new Editorial team. This year we welcome Archana Sinh, Nebula Wild and Roslyn Heywood to the panel joining Angela Drysdale, Sue Webster and Mathilda Element. As a team, we will continue to bring to you three high quality journals featuring the stories, experiences and research of Early Childhood professionals from Queensland and beyond.

We enter the New Year with the knowledge that the new federal government has promised to provide 15 hours of preschool for all four-year-olds, for a minimum of 40 weeks per year and delivered by four year degree-qualified early childhood teachers. In addition, the government has committed to:

- an early years learning framework that is play-based, and focused on pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills;

- quality standards for childcare accreditation and continuous improvement; and

- the roll out the Australian Early Development Index to all primary schools.

While we cannot predict with certainty the impact of such initiatives, we can take these opportunities to unite as a profession in ensuring that the well-being of children and that of those who educate and care for them is not compromised. Your membership of a Professional Association such as ECTA, in such changing times is crucial in contributing to a strong voice on behalf of educators, children and their families.

We begin this journal with Cathie Robinson's timely reminder, as she enters her twenty-first year of teaching, to 'Never stop learning….' while Gail Halliwell reflects on the 'treasured wisdom and lifelong advocacy' of ECTA life member Lil Gwyther. Archana Sinh, our newest EYC panel member, is interviewed by Angela Drysdale, and shares her research into early literacy. We highlight our partnership with C&K by sharing some inspiring stories of learning. Once again we feature a number of articles written by the presenters of the 2007 ECTA conference, including Bronwyn Ewing, Caroline Fewster, Kym MacFarlane, Jennifer Cartmel, Christine Maher and Prue Walsh. In addition, Merryn Zeppel, a student from University of South Australia, explores the sexual assault

of children aged 0-8 years and Jill Burgess brings news from our colleagues in New Zealand. In keeping with our promise to include the voices of children Mathilda Element asks a group of 4-8 year olds to represent their 'ideal outdoor space' and finally the prep children of Gympie South State School and Hari Sinh contribute to our book reviews.

Are you wondering how you could contribute to the *Educating Young Children* journal?

Perhaps you could promote your centre or school by sharing a story, experience or project?

Perhaps the children could volunteer to review a book and receive a free book for their library?

Do you know someone who is doing something innovative in their centre?

Have you documented some children's learning that you could share with others?

Would the children like to see their art representations published in a journal?

Interested?

Visit the ECTA website at www.ecta.org.au to find out how you can contribute to the journal or email info@ecta.org.au

Never stop learning ...

Cathie Robinson
Preparatory Teacher, St Luke's Anglican School, Bundaberg

You will all remember your twenty-first as a time to have a great party, for the feeling that you are getting older, and for the excitement and anticipation of being in your first teaching year and start of your career.

As I find my way through my twenty-first year of teaching, I find many of those feelings are still around. It is a time when you look at your career and you reflect on your beliefs about how children learn and how they have changed over the years. I have always prided myself in the belief that you never stop learning and that you need to challenge yourself every day with new ideas and thoughts. Not that you always change your practices but you look at ideas and theories with an open mind.

This is my tenth year teaching at St Luke's Anglican School Bundaberg. Our school has strong links to the community and strives to offer many opportunities to our students. Dr Lincoln Harris, a dentist in the local area, offered a Teaching Excellence Scholarship to allow a teacher to attend professional development abroad. I applied to attend the Annual New Zealand Early Childhood Council Conference in March last year. At St Luke's we cater for children from Kindergarten to Year Twelve and with this, we have a large teaching staff worthy of receiving the Scholarship. It was with great excitement and pride I was the inaugural recipient of the Harris Dental Boutique Excellence in Teaching Scholarship.

With all expenses paid, I headed to Christchurch to attend the Conference, eager to learn as much as I could. The general theme of the four days was Men in Early Childhood.

Keynote Speaker Jan Peeters spoke of the need for Early Childhood settings to provide a men-friendly environment. The lack of men in Early Childhood Education is a universal concern that is being targeted by many countries. The European Council has set many targets for the percentage of men in Early Childhood. There has been some real success in Norway with 9% and Denmark with 7% of men in Early Childhood. The target is 20%. The New Zealand Ministry for Education has initiated a strong recruitment policy to encourage men to work in Early Childhood. The literature produced has images of men working with young children and highlights the important role men can play in Early Childhood. There are also stories from men working in the field discussing their experiences.

Sadly, over my many years of teaching in Australia, I feel we don't seem to be making much progress enticing men into Early Childhood. In any discussion about men in Early Childhood, it needs to be highlighted that it is not just getting men into the area. It is about giving men a gender-neutral environment, if they have a passion for working in Early Childhood Education. It involves the re-education of the general public, and some female Early Childhood professionals, that will always be the biggest hurdle.

Keynote speaker, Roger Neugebauer from America, spoke about *Early Childhood: A Global Perspective.* Roger and his wife publish *Exchange, The Early Childhood Leaders Magazine*, and they founded the World Forum on Early Care and Education. His address was extremely thought-provoking and opened our eyes to the problems children face globally.

Here are *Neugebauer's Six Lenses of Early Childhood.*

1. *Demographics – youthful nations and aging states*

In the USA, Japan and Australia there are three times the global average of people over 64 years of age – the implication being that there are fewer workers. Africa and Asia are becoming more youthful with 15-20% of the population under five years of age. The global average is 10%.

2. *Economics – rich children/poor children*

It takes 1.2 million dollars to raise a child in New

York – birth to 18yrs. In India, raising a child costs less than 1% of the income needed to raise a child in the United States. The number of early childhood age children has grown. Of the two billion children in the world, half are under five years old. This dramatically affects how they are catered for. The African and Asian Aids Crisis has created many children who have become sole caregivers. These children are treated like lepers. Koffe Anan has stated that half of the two billion children in the world have their childhood dramatically altered by poverty. Their collective future is compromised.

3. Sex – boys/girls

There has been lots of effort trying to improve education equity between the sexes. However, this has not resulted in much change as, in many countries, girls are refused education. Even with the caring and sensitive men of the 1980s, not much has changed. The work of the family falls on mothers. Even with increased awareness, less than 4% of people working with children are men.

4. Conflict

Many countries have become multicultural and this can be seen as a threat to society. An example is in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia. The once homogenous group now has many cultures represented and this has altered the traditional culture.

Across the world, there are 76 nations involved in armed conflict. For children in the early childhood years in these areas, life is very difficult. Children are suffering emotionally and physically.

5. Education – technical vs. natural

A ten-year study was undertaken in England and Norway to compare preschool practices. In England, academics are pushed and the education is direct, whereas in Norway the children play all day and there is no attempt to teach reading until the children are seven. When tested in Year Twelve, it was found the children from Norway had better results and better reading comprehension than their English counterparts.

The common feature found with children who are disengaged was that they were educated with direct instruction. In child-centred classrooms, the children were much more engaged. There is an increase in pressure to push academics from administration. Children are also becoming disengaged from nature – from protecting the environment to nature being a source of stimulation and relaxation.

6. Politics – advocacy vs. apathy

Early Childhood educators are traditionally very poor at advocacy for their area with it taking up less than 1% of their time. In Russia, there have been protests for freedom and the Headstart programs were kept up through advocacy protests. The Netherlands and Australia have had an apathetic approach to changes to childcare regulations. Advocacy involves keeping the differences alive but focussing on our common goals. To get men into Early Childhood, we need to be creative in our approach. If we want parents to gain an understanding of the benefits of play, invite parents into the room – let them experience play.

Roger Neugebauer and Jan Peeters challenged my thinking and broadened my awareness of the challenges that face children today. Children are at risk and, as Early Childhood professionals, it is our responsibility to be advocates for children and to make sure the world is a better place for them. To be able to advocate, we need to continue our education and knowledge of the world around us.

We spend lots of time working towards encouraging children to be engaged and inquiring, trying to inspire them to continue learning and challenging their ideas. However, sometimes we forget to inspire this in ourselves. In my Twenty-first year of teaching, I was fortunate enough to be truly inspired on my trip to New Zealand, not just by these speakers but by workshop presenters, delegates and centres we visited.

ECTA Life Member

Lil Gwyther

Lil Gwyther ECTA Life Member passed away in September 2007. We take this opportunity to remind readers about this woman whose life membership award honoured her 'treasured wisdom and lifelong advocacy' (*Educating Young Children* Vol 7/No 2).

Gail Halliwell, ECTA Web Weaver, had many years of stimulating and rewarding contact with Lil. She worked with her on advocacy issues and visited Lil at home on many occasions where they shared not only their continuing interest in improving what happens when young children are in schools, but also their love for their own children and grandchildren. It seemed then, that Lil would be particularly happy to know that we had asked her only son to write something that we could post on the website and print in the journal.

In her email correspondence with Ross Gail noted that:

- *your article will inspire others to keep on with advocacy - I'm reminded all over again about how Lil could gather and motivate people who shared her enthusiasm for good, effective early education that would enable young people to gain skills for life in real democracies. I value my memories of times with Lil.*

Ross noted that

- *it has been a lot harder to come to terms with mum's death than I thought it would be*

- *a big hole there a lot of the time. So it is really nice to be reminded about her warm friendships, as well as the inspiration she was to me too. Warmest regards, Ross.*

ECTA Life Member awarded 2001

Lil Gwyther

Prepared by her son Ross Gwyther

Lil Gwyther wanted to be nothing but a teacher from her very early years growing up on a dairy farm on the Comboyne Plateau in NSW. After graduating from Armidale Teachers College in 1934, she spent five years teaching in country NSW, and then taught during the war years at Canonbury Hospital School in Sydney.

After a whirlwind wartime romance Lil married Evan, an air force radio operator and fellow teacher, and in 1946 they moved to live in Brisbane. She returned to teaching at Ashgrove West Kindergarten, and subsequently became Director, spending a total of 20 years there.

During these years Lil supported and encouraged involvement of parents in kindy affairs as well as developing a passionate commitment to the continued wellbeing of her young charges. She saw and heard firsthand of the damage to some youngsters when they moved into the stricter and more formal environment of some primary classrooms.

This passion and concern led her to take up work in the Qld Education Department with Margaret Outridge, firstly developing a new screening survey for children entering school, and then visiting a wide range of primary schools as an early childhood advisory teacher. Under the regulations current at that time she had to retire in 1980 (very much against her will!).

Lil's years of practical experience, followed by a concentrated study of early childhood educational theories and approaches during her work in the Education Department, left her very committed to changing early childhood practices in Queensland schools.

Along with some other concerned teachers and parents, she helped to establish the Early Education Reform Group in 1980. EERG was aimed at public campaigning to achieve more child-centred and developmentally appropriate schooling curriculums in early primary school.

As Public Relations Officer for EERG for over 15 years, Lil talked at literally hundreds of local parents and teachers meetings in pre-schools, play groups, schools etc. During the mid-1980s she was on a weekly ABC radio talkback program with host Janine Walker, discussing young children's development and issues for parents.

In 1983 she joined with a group of educators and parents to establish the Pine Community School which has continued to operate for more than 20 years. Her work with teachers and principals helped to build the enthusiasm that led to the Multi-Age Association of Qld. She spent ten years serving on the Children's Services Council of C&K.

During these years Lil was also active in a range of public campaigns, for example the Citizens Against Corruption, the Public Education Coalition, People for Nuclear Disarmament and Just Peace.

Lil's firm conviction of the importance of play-based early childhood led her advocacy in EERG for return to a prep year in Queensland schools, and the EERG campaign around this at last saw some success when the Qld Prep Year was introduced in 2005.

Lil's passion for, and delight in young children was evident to all. She passed away in September 2007.

> *Lil's firm conviction of the importance of play-based early childhood led her advocacy in EERG for return to a prep year in Queensland schools, and the EERG campaign around this at last saw some success when the Qld Prep Year was introduced in 2005.*

Lil Gwyther with her grandaughter

ECTA Interview

Archana Sinh

Archana Sinh is a new member of the Editorial Committee of *Educating Young Children*. Archana currently works at C&K College of Early Childhood, but she has taken a interesting and varied journey to this point. She describes her professional life as being punctuated by exclamation marks, question marks, commas and, at times a full stop. Here is her story...

What drew you to education?

I initially stumbled into it. I studied a Masters in Political Science and then completed a PhD in Political Science, International Relations. At this time I also taught Art, (without qualifications!) in India in a Protestant Anglican School. I did this for about two years.

Did this Art teaching inspire you to move into education?

I enjoyed teaching, I was quite surprised to realise that I learnt a lot while I taught. This growth was quite satisfying. At this point in time I was hooked to research.

To get back to teaching, after my marriage I moved to Papua New Guinea where my husband was working. Here I continued to teach as an Art teacher at a school called St Joseph's International Primary School, Port Moresby.

We then moved to Cairns and I decided to it was time to get my Education qualifications. I studied a Bachelor of Education (Primary) as an external student through University of New England.

When did your focus become Early Childhood education?

I had two boys during 1997-2000 and so my interest in young children grew. Up until this time, babies were a mystery to me. I started going to Childcare as a volunteer parent and young children grew on me.

As I value knowledge and I have an active brain, I knew I needed to know more. I enrolled as an external student for the Post Graduate in Early Childhood at QUT.

During this time we moved to the Gold Coast and then Brisbane at which time I worked as a Group Leader in a Childcare Centre.

We then moved to Sydney. Here, I was appointed as Early Childhood Teacher in a pre school room in a long day care centre. I did this for two years. I then went on to work as a Trainer/Assessor in Child studies at private colleges in Sydney. Again not content to stagnate and to fulfil my desire for mental stimulation I enrolled in Masters of Early Childhood at QUT. I am currently doing a short research project in Literacy in Early Childhood. After about two years of Training/ teaching I went back to work as a Director of a Childcare Centre at Sydney.

We then moved to the Gold Coast. I am currently employed by C&K College of Early Childhood as a Training Officer. We moved to Brisbane early this year.

You have lived in many locations and had many jobs within the educational profession. What impact has this had on you and the direction your professional life has taken you?

I think I have learnt a lot through all these experiences. Having lived in different countries and taught there as well, I feel my idea of what is education and teaching were at times challenged. Having taught in a diverse age range has also brought out some interesting insights into teaching and learning.

You said you are currently doing your thesis in Literacy in Early Childhood. What is your focus area and can you outline a brief outline of what impact it would have for an Early Childhood educator?

I have looked at a literacy resource document for under fives in NSW. The purpose is to gain an understanding of literacy per se and in Australian context. I hope at some stage we can have national policy in early years literacy for children prior to school, and a wider understanding of literacy in general, reflected in our language and literacy policy.

You come from a background of Political Science. Do you see a relationship between it and Early Childhood education?

I studied political change and theories related to that area. Education is about change in a society. I believe there is a very strong link in the two fields. In fact, I believe in a multidisciplinary approach to issues. Other obvious connections are areas like policy in education.

What punctuation mark do you think reflects your life at this point in time, and why?

At this point in time I would use the dotted line to wait and see, …

Early literacy understandings in an Australian context
Archana Sinh

We continue our profile of Archana Sinh as she shares her research into Literacy in Early Childhood in the following article.

There are many understandings to literacy in any given context. Within this paper I look at literacy in a historical perspective, literacy as a social practice, and literacy and bilingual understandings, with the focus on early literacy.

Historical perspective

Within an understanding of literacy in a historical perspective, there is a tacit acknowledgement that meanings attached to language and literacy change (Arthur, 2001; Lankshear, 1997; Lo Bianco, 2001). According to Jones Diaz (2002, p. 8), literacy within a setting is 'directly connected to historical, social, economic and political circumstances', thus building the social context of language within its immediate and past social setting and practices.

In Australian history, immigration, has had a strong impact on national identity, as can be seen in the *White Australia Policy* at the start of the Twentieth century, when a language policy played a significant role (Arthur, 2001). Another example is the influence of the English language on existent Indigenous languages, as discussed by Arthur (2001) and Eggington (1992). In brief, there was a decline in these with the advent of European migrant population.

Matters not related to language that influenced its understanding, like the change in immigration policy in the 1970s towards non-discrimination, resulted in tolerance for other language types at a social level. Within education, as discussed by Hill and Allan (2001, p. 156), most states in Australia adopted multicultural education policy by the early 1980s. Australia saw its first National Policy on Languages (NPL) in 1987 (Lo Bianco, 1987). NPL acknowledged the importance of multilingualism in Australian social and economic contexts.

The NPL was replaced by *The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, (ALLP) 1991, (Dawkins, 1991). This policy underlined the political and social climate of Australian education at the time. The

ALLP (1991) promoted the need for 'Proficiency in languages other than English' since they:

- enrich our community intellectually, educationally and culturally

- contribute to economic, diplomatic, strategic, scientific and technological development

- contribute to social cohesiveness through better communication and understanding throughout the broader Australian community (pp. 14-15).

There is no mention of early literacy, as in prior to school, within this document.

These leaps through history show a shift in policy while framing an understanding of literacy in an Australian context. On the one hand we have the intercultural language and literacy-related needs of Indigenous communities and immigrants from a non-English speaking background, living within a national policy that officially recognises only the literacy practices of Australian English. On the other hand, globalisation as an economic and cultural force, a changing communication network and technology advancement are pushing towards recognition of other literacies and languages for trade and financial reasons.

While the context is important to its understandings, it is also relevant to look at changes in theory of early childhood to provide clarity in literacy practices. An important change in theory has been the move towards Vygotskian understanding that looks at learning in a social context. This is seen reflected in practices that view literacy as a social practice.

Literacy as a social practice

Within the academic environment of educational research, there have been strong trends towards building an understanding of literacy within a social construct. Jones Diaz (2003, p. 6) said that literacy was not context-neutral. This has been variously supported in contemporary literature by Arthur (2001), Lankshear (1998), Cope and

Kalantzis (2000) among others. The basic shift in this approach was to acknowledge that literacy practices were context-based and that practices that emerged at home and in community settings needed to be understood to give fuller meaning to literacy practices. There was also an understanding that within the social domain where these practices occurred, there were differences in meaning that depended on the subcontext.

Within literacy as a social practice, an awareness emerged that, not only were family and community practices relevant to its understanding, but that they were also important in its construction. Literacy as a social practice also leaned towards looking at the construction of literacy by giving the power of its construction to the users, thus taking away any regulatory role. An important tool of this was through critical literacy practices. Thus, literacy as a social practice had an agenda of social justice.

Research that frames literacy and language within cultural contexts link understandings of bilingualism to identity and power. While other works discuss globalisation as a force in its own right. This becomes very relevant when bilingualism in Australia is considered from the national policy of monolingualism alongside a plethora of multilingual communities.

Bilingualism and literacy

There were 250 Indigenous languages before the white invasion. Since this time there has been a rich mix of other European languages, along with Asian languages and those from middle east and south Asia. In many Asian communities children grow up with more than one language, sometimes even more than two languages. How is the knowledge of these children used or understood? Aboriginal languages focus on oral literacy. Where does that understanding get used within the mainstream understanding of literacy policy?

Arthur (2001), while discussing literacy practices, mentions that while the ability to read and write is not a necessary component of bilingualism, literacy in the 'mother tongue' plays a significant role in 'family cohesion', religious, and cultural practices. Children growing up in bilingual families are exposed to print conventions in languages other than English which need to

be recognised by people in early childhood settings. For some children, differences in the script of home language and English is minimal e.g. Spanish, German. However, as discussed by Arthur (2001), other languages have a distinctly different alphabetical script like Greek, or a syllabic writing system as in Gujarati, Arabic or Chinese. Thus, writing symbols to make words in a certain manner or writing left to right is not the only literacy these children.

Some definitions of bilingualism stress competency in both languages. Recent research according to Arthur (2001) suggests a functional definition. According to this definition a bilingual person is one who can use two or more languages and make decisions about which language to use in a given situation. Arthur (2001) cites Gibbons (1991, p. 1) who suggests that bilingualism is 'the ability to communicate in two or more languages, and does not necessarily imply competency or fluency'.

While looking at bilingualism and some of its understandings, issues like acquisition of a second language become important. I discuss some views briefly. Arthur (2001), discusses how for many children in Australia, English is a second language, saying that language mixing is a common thing that happens when children are learning another language. She suggested that children will usually go through a silent period while learning a new language. Language will be learnt in a social context like the first language.

Jones Diaz (2003), while looking at identity issues of children who were from a Spanish speaking background, discussed how parents relied on family and community networks to reinforce the home language. Some parents also felt that they were unable to engage in effective communication with their children due to their children's loss of home language.

Some points for further investigation could include the perceptions of the community toward the need to learn a second language, and the possibility of involving the participation of the community along with policy makers to encourage a dialogue about literacy understanding from different perspectives.

In conclusion, I would say that while literacy is context-based there is no model that would be universally applicable in a learning environment.

It has to be context based to be successful. However, it would help teachers if they had some guidelines on cognitive aspects like the possible 'silent period', or even strategies beyond the transitional settling in period. It would be even better if teachers engaged in meaningful dialogue that included families and communities to negotiate an understanding of literacy.

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Stories from C&K

In 2006, C&K published Australia's first collaborative birth to school age curriculum entitled *Building waterfalls* — a living and learning curriculum framework. B*uilding waterfalls* acknowledges that adults and children share responsibility for the learning process through interaction, negotiation and collaboration.

C&K have found that attempting to slot *Building waterfalls* into an existing knowledge base or framework is problematic. It requires openness to new ways of doing and thinking, and a willingness to step into unknown spaces. There is a crucial belief that all participants — child and adult alike — have a responsibility to embody the capabilities, dispositions, values and qualities of character captured in the 16 Shared Understandings of *Building waterfalls* — all of which start with the capable and competent learner.

The C&K curriculum resource team regularly gathers stories from the children and early childhood educators at C&K centres that share their journey with *Building waterfalls*. These stories are shared in a regular newsletter called *Cascades* (see www.candk.asn.au). The stories shared, like the *ripples* found in *Building waterfalls,* are from colleagues in early childhood. They are honest stories about the personal journey of each contributor as they navigate their own way through *Building waterfalls*. Together, the stories provide insight into a myriad of ways of seeing, thinking and doing.

The stories that follow, explore these journeys.

Rain, crayons and capable children

Tracey Waterhouse, Director C&K Emerald South Community Preschooling Centre recalls an anecdote of what she viewed in the infants room one day, which illustrates the important role of the adult in listening, guiding and acknowledging children's ideas.

Staff at our centre negotiate curriculum with children of all ages, including under three's in a variety of different ways. One of the ways is through the children's art work, through the medium of drawing, painting and collaging – children can express their feelings, things that are happening around them, the everyday happenings, or express an idea. Often through careful listening and interaction with children while drawing/painting/collaging, children will often share those ideas – even if the art work is not recognizable to the adult as the subject matter being talked about.

'Sam is watching the rain outside through the door. 'Raining,' he comments, pointing outside, before going into play with other children. Sam later brought Tom to the door, 'Rain,' he says again, pointing outside. Tom looks out and watches the rain. Then both children engage in play within the room.

On the table are crayons and paper. Tom hits the page with a rat-a-tat sound with the crayons, making marks on the page. Sam is playing on the floor beside him, with a toy. He hears the rat-a-tat sound and stands up and watches Tom making the marks on the page. Sam leans in close, still watching, 'Rain,' he says to Tom. Tom smiles and continues dotting the page.

Sam repeats 'Rain,' and runs to the door. I ask Tom, 'Is that rain?' pointing to his drawing. Tom takes the drawing over to the door where Sam is standing. Tom looks outside, then holds his drawing out. Sam again says, 'Rain,' pointing outside. Tom points to his drawing, 'Rain.'

Both children return to the drawing table and start to make 'rain' on their pages and each other's pages. We talked about rain being wet, water and other things such as puddles as the children continued to draw.

Through their drawings, children can articulate to their level of interest. Sam was interested in the rain outside, and Tom expressed his interest through drawing. As educators, if we pick up on the cues given by young children, in this instance through direct verbal communication and through art, we can easily extend and scaffold their learning based on their interest.

We represent and share our understanding, knowledge and thinking in many ways.

(Building Waterfalls, 2006, p126)

Stories from C&K

Do whales poo?

Donna Doyle, a teacher at Condy Park Preschool and Kindergarten, considers and explores fully the possible ways in which children's ideas can evolve.

My *Building waterfalls* journey has been slow but I have finally reached a place were I feel comfortable to continue to move forward. I want to share with you a story that was the point in my journey that has given me the confidence to go with the flow. I would like to thank Andrea, a colleague who has guided and supported my journey.

Our Poo Project started with Jack's favourite book *Rough Weather Ahead for Walter the Farting Dog.* There was a big interest in the book and it created much discussion, but I needed (for my own sanity) to move it away from the toilet humour the children had picked up on, making farting sounds with their armpits and blowing raspberries on their arms. I followed up with two books, firstly *The Story of the Little Mole Who Knew it was None of His Business*. The children were fascinated by the different shapes and sizes of the poos that different animals did in this pop-up book. I then went to the second book *Everybody Poos* hoping this would shift the children's interest but not really knowing where it might take us. The underlying message from this book was that anything that eats needs to poo and many of the children picked up on the message and remember it.

Who would have imagined these three books would have taken us to look at whales and elephants? There is a question in the book *Everybody Poos*, 'Do whales poo?' Some children suggested that whales must do poos because they eat. There was a lot of discussion about what whale poo might look like and what size it might be. Jack wondered if whale poo was bigger than elephant poo?

I asked the children how we might find out what whale poo looks like and whether whale poo is bigger than elephant poo? Maya suggested we would have to ask a whale expert about whales. The children decided we could write a letter to the whale experts, so I wrote down their ideas and we drafted a letter which we decided to send to one of the whale watching tour boats. Jack suggested we ask Australia Zoo about elephant poo because he had seen elephants there. Jack's Mum had taken photos of an elephant and elephant poo which she sent in for us. The children decided we should ring Australia Zoo. So the next day we did. At group time we looked up the phone number in the phone book and called Australia Zoo. The Australia Zoo photography department got permission to enter the elephant enclosure and emailed us some photos. They suggested we try the Queensland Museum for photos of whale poo. The children phoned the Queensland Museum who suggested we Google "whale poo", as we would be sure to get some hits. Andoni's Mum was on roster the day, she went home and researched on the internet and printed out some photos.

After collecting our information the children compared the photos and decided that they couldn't tell which poo was bigger because, as Mark described, 'whale poo melts in the water'. We researched these questions over a couple of weeks but the fascination with excrement went on for much longer and was drawn into our next few projects – life cycle of a caterpillar and sharks. It never ceases to amaze me how passionate the children are about their learning when they are following up their own interests.

We are competent and capable enquirers, thinkers, researchers, communicators and decision makers.

(Building Waterfalls, 2006 p 114)
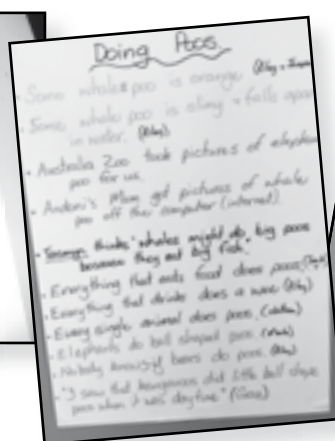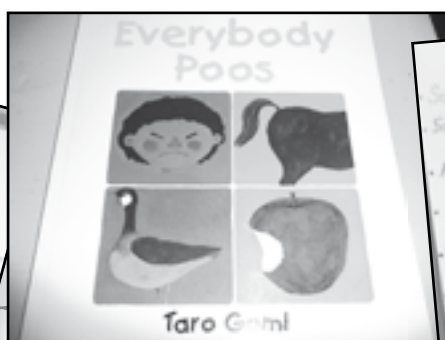
Stories from C&K

Connecting with the natural environment
Participate in shaping the learning and living environments

It's all about pulling your own weight in a team situation.
That's life!

These inventive children quickly find new ways of making the most of a new aspect in their environment.
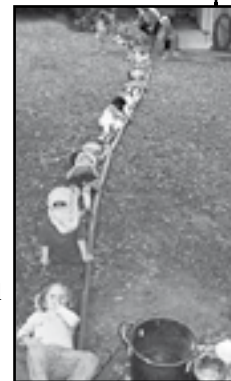
Can you balance your body like this?

We did it together!

Rich numeracy skills develop through being wholeheartedly engaged in everyday tasks and satisfying one's curiosity.

Clay used to mean mud to me

Ann Jenner has worked at Bundaberg Community Kindergarten for almost 17 years as an assistant. Ann shares a story that has challenged her in negotiating the curriculum with one particular child. She tells the story of how one experience lead to a lot of learning for both children and adults. It started with a beautiful clay experience.

I really enjoy my job but whenever CLAY is mentioned I shudder. For me it means mud everywhere from table tops to floors to bathrooms and an age of cleaning. Then Linda Stone (my fantastic director) and I saw a clay workshop advertised at a conference so, with a huge shudder and horror in my mind, we signed up. (We do almost every workshop together as we feel this helps us as a team.)

Well, it was brilliant and I could not believe that clay was such a clean medium to use, so as soon as we were back I was out getting a slab of clay and made clay cutters out of fishing line and pop sticks. I found an old table cloth. I was set and eager, and here is what happened with Joel

Joel sat moulding clay along with some friends and myself. He had made an animal with his clay (a round fat body, four limbs and a head). I asked Joel what he was making and he replied, 'I am making a turtle.' As turtles lay and hatch here in Bundaberg, I asked had he been to see the turtles come and lay their eggs. Joel replied, 'Yes.' I asked if the turtle if he had seen

was the same shape as the one he had made. After a moment he said, 'No.' I asked if he would like to see a model turtle again. He did. Joel then set about making another turtle. He made the body the same "fat" thickness. He then made the flippers by actually measuring each limb and adding it. He made its head and finally he got a clay tool and started making markings on its body. This had taken him an hour or more with other children drifting in and out. I was impressed at this work of art but, when he picked it up, I thought he was going to break it up. Instead, he turned over the turtle and started to copy the markings on the underside. I was blown away. This project of Joel's went on for days as he decided to paint it, make babies for it and his friends even made eggs. It was the focal point for the children and from there a small group of children moved on to sea creatures and one parent brought in a collection of prawns, crabs and fish for the children to paint, draw and print.

We are open and sensitive to new possibilities and perspectives. (Building waterfalls 2006 p82)

Beyond the cellophane seal:
Evaluating software and websites for early childhood

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Software and websites need to be carefully evaluated by adults to determine their appropriateness for children. The difficulty, however, is that adults do not always have the background to evaluate their appropriateness (Haugland, 1997). This paper provides insights into software and website evaluations for early childhood contexts. In doing so, it seeks to raise several issues that act as barriers to appropriate evaluation.

What the research is telling

Using software and websites cannot and should not replace human interaction or relationships. Nor should they take the place of activities such as reading stories together or sharing conversations with children (Leu & Kinzer, 2003). Used properly however, computers and software can serve as mechanisms for social interaction and conversations related to children's work. They serve as catalysts of social interaction among children whereby children prefer to work with friends rather than alone. Thus, software and websites need to demonstrate positive social values – cooperation, communication, sharing, friendship and caring (Sarama & Clements, 2002).

Children have been found to display more positive interest when working together. That is, they show more collaborative work, including spontaneous helping and discussing and building on one another's ideas (Sarama & Clements, 2002). Teachers can further support this learning by posing complex "cases" that engage students and invite questions. Through this process, students are presented with opportunities to access rich and timely content material, thus enabling them to record and measure real world, real time data. Here, the role of the teacher is to guide the students in analysing and making sense of their findings (Sarama & Clements, 2002). What motivates children is the desire to explore, experiment and discover their world. The richest and most effective communication is generated from teachers, adults and children working together – literally through interaction (Bergen, 2000).

The role of the teacher

Teachers must take time to evaluate and choose software in the light of children's development and learning. Appropriate evaluation includes looking for ways to use computers to support this development and the learning that occurs in other parts of the classroom; and with computers to complement activities off the computer (Haugland, 1997). They must carefully observe children using the software in order to identify both opportunities and problems, and make appropriate adaptations.

Choosing software is similar to choosing appropriate books for the classrooms – teachers constantly need to make judgments about what is age-appropriate, individually appropriate,

and culturally appropriate. Software in learning contexts needs to reflect and affirm children's diverse cultures, languages and ethnic heritages and the world in which they live (Holloway & Valentine, 2003). Effective teaching for enriched learning must always be the guiding goal when evaluating, selecting, implementing and using new technologies in classrooms.

Evaluating software and websites

Software and websites need to be carefully evaluated by teachers and adults to determine their suitability for young children. However, research indicates that the difficulty with the evaluation process is that most teachers do not have the background to evaluate the appropriateness of software and websites (Haugland, 1997). Teaching demands and access to computers means little time is allocated to previewing software and websites to determine their suitability for young children. Appropriate activity choices are made in other areas of the curriculum but, when it comes to computer-based activities, they fall short. For example, glitzy sites and software can be attractive and yet inadequate and inappropriate for the needs of young children (Haugland, 1997).

Using an evaluation framework to identify the appropriateness of software and websites is important for teachers. It provides a guide for determining what makes a site or software suitable for the needs of the diversity in early childhood contexts. The Haugland Developmental Software Scale and Haugland/Gertoz Developmental Scale for Software and Websites (1997) is a useful framework for guiding the evaluation process. This scale emphasises several key aspects for the evaluation process. A brief explanation of each aspect now follows.

- *Age-appropriate*

The content and concepts to be taught and learned from software and websites must have realistic expectations for the age for which they are designed. The teaching approaches used must link to the learning styles of children rather than having to adapt to the demands of the software or website or teaching approaches that are not consistent with children's learning.

- *Child control*

Children must have control of the flow and direction of the software and website to enhance meaningful learning rather than the site and computer controlling the child. That is, children can be the navigators, determining where the experience will lead and, through trial and error, learn the consequences of their choices.

- *Clear instructions*

Clear verbal and written instructions are essential. Children who are readers can navigate software and sites more successfully if instructions are clear and concise.

- *Expanding complexity*

Software and websites need to be an exciting world that is easy for children to enter. It is critical that software and websites have a low entry point and reflect the diversity of the children who are likely to enter.

- *Independence*

Through the teaching and learning cycle, teachers will initially guide and support children to use software and websites until such time that the children achieve mastery. Working with peers provides opportunities for successful computer experiences and also supports language and social development.

- *Non-violence*

Violence is sometimes used in software and websites to attract children's attention as some children see this as fun. The crucial role of the teacher is to provide suitable and meaningful learning opportunities for children.

- *Real-world model*

Software and websites provide children with concrete representations of objects found in meaningful situations. Children learn how the world works and believe that what they hear and see is true. Therefore, it is important that the information be accurate.

- *Technical features*

Software and websites must operate consistently so that children can explore, if need be, for extended periods and have the expectation that

their actions will produce reasonable results. Printing provides children with a tangible product from their computer experiences and allows them to reflect on what they have done. Software and websites need to operate quickly after loading. Long pauses can be confusing and cause frustration. Learning time is valuable so children need to be actively involved, not waiting and watching for something to happen.

- *Transformations*

Software and websites have the unique potential to give children opportunities to change objects and situations over and over.

- *Calculating the anti-bias deduction*

Software and websites can influence children's thoughts and ideas. Therefore, they need to reflect the diversity of the world in which children interact. Exposing children to the richness of the world prevents the onset of prejudice. Software and websites with people or animals must reflect issues of equity, for example, gender, role equity, culture and age.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of evaluating software and websites in early childhood. In doing so, it has also emphasised the role of the teacher with evaluating software and websites. Whilst software and websites should not replace social interaction with adults and other children, they can be used in ways that are supportive of learning over time. The crucial role of the teacher is to ensure that time and effort is taken with evaluating software and websites, much like that spent evaluating appropriate reading programs for early childhood contexts. Only then can informed judgments can be made about their usage. The briefly outlined developmental scale provides one way of guiding teachers with making appropriate discussions about the use of software and websites in the teaching and learning context.

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Rethinking Routines
Pushing the boundaries and making changes in our daily practices and 'routines' in Children's Services.

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Introduction

Rethinking routines and making changes in our daily practices and in particular 'routines', allows us to focus on respecting children and making them equal partners in the process of routine planning. The result is often a richness that does not exist when Children's Services staff plan alone.

Our experience of working in Children's Services for many years suggests the clock sometimes dictates when routines occur in the daily program. They are often referred to as 'production schedules' which move items through a series of events in linear, lock-step fashion, organising time to ensure that specific things get done (Wein & Kirby-Smith 1998:8).

Many schedules are inherited from previous Children's Services staff or organisations. They are sometimes described as 'a taken for granted' part of the day which is rarely challenged (Bond University Children's Service Reference Group (2004).

Danby (2002:29) suggests that Children's Services are operating "within the physical boundaries of space, resources and time, all framed and influenced by adults and institutional practice".

Often, the challenge in Children's Services is to design routines with children and the families that offer them a sense of security, predictable event times that are consistent every day, yet remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs and interests of each child.

Reflections on routines

Daily routines provide opportunities for children to learn more about themselves, the world and other people. So ... in the words of a song from Julie Andrews, "Let's start at the very beginning."

A Children's Services environment sends many messages to children and their families. We may ask ourselves – what impression does our own environment send to children as they walk through the front door? Do they see and feel characteristics that make them feel welcome? Are there characteristics that invite and cultivate children's curiosity?

From a child's perspective, everything is interactive. Perhaps, then, children could have a chair and table to 'sign on' themselves each morning and afternoon with their family.

Children's arrivals are the times when families and staff are interacting together to begin the day. Jim Greenman and Anne Stonehouse in their book *Prime Times* state: "Helping children and parents arrive and separate should be prime times," and "the way children start the day may determine the quality of the day".

Here are some examples of thoughtful routines.

Planning for individual children could involve:

- 'phoning home' just like E.T. when you feel a little sad

- giving children a small backpack for 'my belongings' – to look after their toy from home.

Mid-morning and afternoon tea are times of refreshment – a break in the morning and afternoon to gain a snack and a little sustenance to carry children over to the next meal. The pace, atmosphere and the extent of children's involvement, which may include ideas they have enjoyed or initiated, can be indications of quality practices. These might include:

- self select snacks using tea bag squeezers to select the food

- napkins folded by children in many different ways

- children's choices – a song apron.

Eating lunch together in a group can be such a pleasurable experience – conversation, an attractive table setting and many learning opportunities as well. A few resources that children have suggested are:

- placemat puzzles – orange puzzle

- chef's suggestions

- 'Fabulous Fridays' – when children plan the lunchtime experience and invite staff to join them for lunch. RSVP is essential to ensure event management is 'fabulous'.

Rest time is a time where children learn to relax with others nearby! Sometimes it is difficult to remember when children have requested specific music, such as rainforest music, at rest time! Indeed, we may ask ourselves if rest time and rainforest music really go together. Maybe children would like to plan the rest time with staff.

These reflections on current practices in Children's Services provide an opportunity to reflect and revitalise routines – and also to look at routines from a child's perspective.

Two studies in Australia have clearly demonstrated the benefits of effective services in which (to quote from the first of these studies) "children are seen as competent informants on their own lives". (Alanen, 1992 as cited in Farrell, Tayler,

Tennent (2002:14) "Early Childhood Services: What can Children tell us?")

In the other study, a Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (CEIEC) team completed a twelve-week capacity-building, action learning project with the City of Melbourne Council: "Children's voices and diversity in early childhood curriculum; a collaborative action learning project" (CEIEC 2004:2).

These two projects have reflected the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to highlight and enhance current child-centred practice. Both studies reported the importance of listening to parents and children – the key stakeholders in early childhood.

Conclusion

When children plan routines with you, they are developing communication, literacy skills, social skills, thinking and reasoning and, most importantly, shared planning gives children a message that their ideas are valued and important in the Children's Services environment.

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Challenging traditional notions of practice through Circles of Change

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Kym has worked in the early childhood sector for thirty years. She has experience as an early childhood teacher and in higher education in the field of Child and family Studies in Human Services. She has extensive experience in working and researching practical issues with children and families from birth to eight years. Her research and publication work covers this area as well as a wide range of topics related to the disciplines of human services and education. Kym demonstrates a strong understanding of practice related issues in these disciplines. Her PhD research entitled "An analysis of parent engagement in schooling in contemporary Queensland" particularly relates to the notion of community engagement in schooling and the issues for parents that result from this engagement in the contemporary contexts.

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Chris took up her present position at Griffith University in 2006. This was following many years of hands on experience of working in the early childhood field as a teacher and director. Her years of practice have coincided with the many significant changes that have occurred in our understanding of child development, and the impact of the broader societal changes in the past five decades.

Back in 1995, Michael Leunig, the cartoonist, drew a cartoon on the back page of the Sydney Morning Herald showing a baby 'abandoned' by its mother at a child care centre. The cartoon had also been published in The Age a few days earlier. A furious debate ensued about working mothers and quality child care that struck at the heart of our societal mores. In truth, this debate was almost the culmination of a longstanding historical controversy about the experiences of infants and toddlers in formal long day care settings (Brennan 1998) that still exists in some form today. While such a debate is highly emotional, the fact remains that, as Australia experiences greater numbers of women returning to the workforce in the first two years of their child's life, it is imperative that a coherent and quality driven approach to the care and education of infants and toddlers be adopted. This is particularly important for disadvantaged communities like those in Logan City, Queensland (Australian Early Development Index, 2006). Griffith University, which is situated in this area, produces graduates to work in leadership roles in this very field.

The issues highlighted by the controversy about the care and education of infants and toddlers in group settings are not new to the staff from the Child and Family Studies Team in the School of Human Services at Griffith University. In fact, in 2002, the members of this team (Kym Macfarlane and Jennifer Cartmel) were facing quite significant issues with their students who were undertaking the Bachelor of Human Services in Child and Family Studies program. As one of the options for students in this program is obtaining work in leadership roles in the child care field, the practicum placements for these students were set in child care. In de-briefing sessions about these placements, students were telling their lecturers that they had no intention of working in this field, as the quality of care the children were experiencing was extremely low and that they

could not cope emotionally with the prospect of being part of such low quality practice. In view of this, the students believed that high quality practice in this field did not exist.

As professionals, we knew that high quality practices did exist. In fact, they existed across the road and around the corner! Therefore, we needed to establish a practicum model that was not only highly effective in preparing people for the contemporary field, but one that also captured quality practice and utilised it to influence the field and 'raise the bar' in the level of quality.

Consequently, we believed that we needed to develop a practicum experience that took into account the following points:

• All of our students needed access to high quality child care programs where they could experience established modes of highly effective practice with infants and toddlers.

• Students who were sent into this difficult field were equipped with skills that would assist them to deal with the problematic characteristics of the field and would give them the strength to cope with seeing and experiencing these lower quality practices. Thus, we believed that it was necessary to create professionals who could critically reflect and then 'think otherwise' (Foucault, 1984) about their practice and the constraints that they might face.

• We were part of a community of practitioners who, as they practised in the field, required significant professional support themselves in coping with some of these dilemmas. Therefore, we wanted to understand this issue and create a practicum experience that would bring the field and the future field (Maher, in interview, 2005) closer together. We wanted to develop a community of practice between the university, its students and the field in our region.

• Finally, we wanted to establish better links with community agencies to enhance learning opportunities for Griffith students and the wider human services and health care fields.

It was clear to us that our traditional methods of practicum placement were insufficient, even though they followed quite well-established educational guidelines and were indicative of practicums in other fields and sectors. Moreover, we identified the following shortcomings that required attention:

• Students often felt unsupported and isolated due to their solo placement across a wide variety of practice settings, not all of which were of high quality.

• Our students were given few opportunities to view quality and develop their own high quality practice skills.

• Students did not know 'what to do when they didn't know what to do' (Claxton, 2004). We needed a better approach to the development of students' skills in critical reflection.

• Our academic staff workload to establish these current placements was very high and yet the outcomes were quite unimpressive.

All of these issues led to the development of our Circles of Change model (CoC), which is an innovative approach to the problem of locating, managing, supervising, and assessing work-integrated learning placements for large numbers of students. We have reconceptualised work-integrated learning experiences by adopting a Learning Circle approach. LCs are self-managed learning groups, built on the fundamental principles of adult learning. The best adult learning encourages and supports the critical reflection on what we think we already know (Sumsion, 2003). In this way, LCs are proven to be a practical and effective method of learning and supporting change (Ministry of Education, 2003; Noble, Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2005). These Learning Circles have enhanced student learning by allowing us to engage in 'thinking otherwise' (Foucault, 1984) about how practitioners are prepared for the world of work in the childcare industry. 'Thinking otherwise' (Foucault, 1984; McWilliam, 1998) allows for new and perhaps previously 'disqualified' perspectives to become apparent. Such a process requires an exploration of multiple knowledges and understandings of how particular events and anomalies might have been otherwise. In doing so however, aspects of particular events that appear logical and reasonable might actually be viewed in another light. In fact, it is the understanding that there are multiple ways to interpret and understand practice that is an important facet of this process. Indeed, it could be argued that multiple

perspectives are in play and, as a consequence, multiple truths are possible (Macfarlane, 2006).

In our model, there are regular meetings of industry partners, academics and students, during which they work collaboratively to better inform teaching and learning initiatives and work practices to meet professional practice standards. Another advantage of the model is the consistency achieved by students, in that the work is with the same academic throughout the intensives courses and the CoC. It is important that the students get a sense of scaffolding, and continuity to move to the next level of learning.

> *A feeling of shared learning is established and an atmosphere where all opinions are equally important so students do feel that they can offer insights not only in the circle but while they are working with children. They see me as a learner too and … not as one who knows all. (Circles of Change director)*

This curriculum change has come about by considering certain aspects of curriculum development. Simply put, these aspects of curriculum are time, space, resources and people.

Time, space, resources, people

In terms of the practicum arrangements for our students, time is both an enabler and a constraint. To begin with, there are many program constraints about how much time can be allotted to student practicum. We had managed to establish our practicums over a four-week period, three days per week, and were unable to change this. We also had only a small team of people to work on placing students and so their time had to be used effectively. We decided that time would be saved by enhancing the quality of the experience. This would also ensure that the people involved (staff, students and professionals) would be more satisfied with the experience they had.

We based our model on evaluations of the "Master Centre" program developed by the Logan TAFE Child Studies team in 2001 (ANTA, 2001). This research indicated that the value of the program would be enhanced if child care staff employed in these "Master Centres" were included in group discussion sessions.

Consequently, we chose nine centres that, from our experiences, engaged in high quality practice with young children, particularly infants and toddlers. We asked these centres to take four students each, which was quite a demanding request and certainly not traditionally considered useful in infant and toddler rooms. In return for this request, we suggested that the university would cover the cost of releasing the staff in the centre (who were involved in supervising the students) to participate in a learning circle with the students and an academic facilitator. Instead of hiring extra academic staff to visit the students once during the placement, we arranged for our academic facilitator to visit once per week for three weeks. During these visits, this staff member would facilitate the learning circle using a specially designed model of critical reflection we developed, which was based on the notion of 'thinking otherwise' (Foucault, 1984). The model invites participants to deconstruct, confront, theorise and think otherwise (Macfarlane, Noble & Cartmel, 2005). It encourages students to navigate the theory/practice nexus in a safe and supportive environment and to reflect critically on their practice and the practice of others using theory and research as a base.

The Learning Circle model prompted us to develop and enhance university curriculum resources that enabled more effective practice to occur across the board.

Circles of Change:

- Saved time and money for everyone concerned. Academic practicum staff spent less time placing students and more time nurturing and developing strong relationships with individuals and the child care community. Therefore, there was less time spent troubleshooting. Centre staff had more focussed time with their students (even though there were more of them) and were not distracted when discussing practicum issues. As they were released for two hours but only needed to participate for one, they received an extra hour programming time at the university's expense, which cost the university no more than hiring the extra visiting staff they normally would.

To learn from each other – opportunities to articulate my ideas and to listen to the experiences of others … The discussions were time-saving … coming together every week could have been a time-saving process because lots of the discussions that happened in those learning circles were probably ones that would have had to happen one-on-one had we not had that situation. (CoC student)

- Allowed the field and the future field to engage. Students came to see the role of the supervisor from a different perspective. They were more able to understand the role and were able to identify quality when it was occurring and discuss the theory and research that was underpinning the actions of the staff at those times. This enabled a greater understanding of the demands of the role and the underpinning knowledge that guided the practices of the staff. Centre staff were able to see the students differently, understand more clearly what was expected of them and take into account their uncertainty. Personality clashes that had been a major part of previous practicums were more easily managed and, in fact, virtually eliminated.

I like to think it's for the future … I think to continue this process would give me some confidence about people coming into the field. (CoC Director)

- Allowed students to feel scaffolded and supported (Vygotsky, 1962). As academics, we were able to use Vygotskian theory more effectively and thus demonstrate its importance to students by practicing what we preached. Students were more able to have their queries and concerns dealt with in a very timely way because they could talk through these issues in the second hour when centre staff were not present. Students also developed closer working, and sometimes friendly, relationships with each other even when they did not originally know each other and these provided further support.

We know that we can get support even if it is from each other. We can bounce things off each other but then we know we can take it somewhere else. (CoC student)

- Encouraged students to engage in peer learning and support. Students often formed learning groups, which carried on after Circles of Change was complete. These learning groups often became well established and remained viable for students throughout the rest of the degree.

I don't know the moment it stopped being just about 'doing' prac and the learning circle, to being about our lives intersecting harmoniously. I will forever be grateful for a lecturer 'putting her practice where her theory was'. (CoC student)

- Increased outcomes for students. The mean mark for students increased by about six points over the period from 2002 to 2006. In the second hour of CoC, the academic facilitator engaged in microteaching with the four students, applying what they had learned in the field to what they needed to do in the written assessment. This process, costing no more than traditional tutorials, allowed a 1:4 ratio and encouraged students to be more engaged with the assessment they needed to complete. This has led to a very large increase in the quality of the work students present and also to a greater understanding of how to articulate the theory/practice nexus in an assessment piece.

If you are unsure, you have access (in the learning circle) to those who do know off the top of their heads and you have this knowledge instantly available for you to then go and extend on it and research it by yourself. Also, in the learning circle, you can ask for clarification on the spot and discuss experiences whereas, if you were to go off and look for clarification in a book, it is a much more lengthy process and you may not understand what the book tells you. The Learning Circle adds to the relevance of the experience. It simplifies the learning. It draws parallels between the learning circle and the course work. (CoC student)

- Enabled high quality critical reflection skills to be developed. The notion of thinking otherwise

is now embedded in all aspects of our teaching and is delivered and taught during CoC and course intensives. This notion, which underpins CoC, has allowed students to develop critical reflection skills that are part of their professional identity. Therefore, a particular type of professional is developed – one who considers lifelong learning and critical reflection a responsibility in order to maintain high quality practices for young children and their families.

As an entry-level practitioner, I have used many of the skills acquired in Circles of Change, including higher order thinking, a flexible framework for practice and ongoing critical self-reflection. (CoC student)

Furthermore, as community engagement is the key to our approach, CoC has allowed us to give something back to the community. Practitioners require professional development to enhance their practice but often do not have the time or opportunity for this. We recognised a need to engage the community and enhance the scholarship of the field, with an understanding that 'good practice is out there'. CoC has provided a mechanism for revealing it. The tacit knowledge of people in the field is valuable to our students (Osmond & O'Connor, 2004) and, at the same time, the model gives to practitioners participating in our Circles of Change, recognition of their expertise and some paid time for professional development in the form of reflection on the theory/practice nexus. It was essential to the success of this new approach to work placements, that staff in participating centres wanted to participate in our Circles of Change so that the program was developed collaboratively with centres and agencies working across the field of Child and Family Studies. The value to the field is evident since many are now prioritising practicum placements with Griffith's Child and Family Studies program to avail their staff of this professional development opportunity to support their own learning. The ultimate benefit, of course, is the provision of increasingly higher quality child care.

A variety of practitioners have come into the child care field. They've come from a variety of backgrounds and have a variety of pedagogical

knowledge and understanding … so it is important to have community scholarship because there's a lot of fragmentation. If we can bring that together in some way … we are all working for the same thing and we all want to improve the scholarship of the field and improve practice in the field. (CoC Director)

I found with the learning circles that it brought students, the centre staff and university staff together in a close bond and we were working together like none of the students have ever done before in the whole eight years I've been here. … (The students were) open with us. (CoC Director)

Circles of Change (CoC) demystifies the practicum experience for students, creating the possibility for enhanced learning outcomes. In CoC, students dialogue more with each other – they use one another to problem solve and produce experiences for children and families.

It was really important for me to develop a sense of groupness with the girls in the other room. At first, I was daunted by the idea, especially when I found myself alone when my partner pulled out of the course. However, once (the lecturer) came to visit us and we had our first Learning Circle, it became easier. She reinforced the notion of engaging with one another and working together to really develop our learning throughout our prac. (CoC student)

This dialogue enables peer learning to be maximised, producing experiences for students that would not be possible in isolated situations. Students can collaborate on their observation, decoding and planning in legitimate ways in the workplace, answering their own questions and problems via discussion and amalgamation of their research. What occurs then, can be defined as engagement in the learning process, which is increased by the collegial and collaborative space that opens up in the Circle and beyond. The engagement that takes place is often extended to learning groups that are formed by the students as result of the Circle and stay with them throughout the remainder of their studies.

Circles of Change gave me the confidence to talk things out to enhance my understanding of the subject matter. (CoC Student)

Circles of Change allows microteaching to take place. These Circles are part of a continuous process that is produced in the Child and Family program. Students attend an intensive for their two introductory core courses where they receive new information and content. They are then asked to apply the information and content in the practice setting within a matter of weeks. As this process is undertaken, the tutor and CoC facilitator, who has also been present in the classroom previously, scaffolds the students' negotiation of the theory/practice nexus by undertaking the CoC critical reflection model each time she meets with the students in the Circle. The tutor then assists the students with the application of the knowledge in the co-requisite courses to the setting and to their assessment task via this model. Thus, students' learning is enhanced by their ability to reflect critically on the application of their new knowledge to practice, in a safe environment supported by a familiar person.

The group facilitator made you 'think otherwise', because what I would see as an art experience, she would bring it back to the whole theory side of it and before I knew it, I was actually making sense. (CoC Student)

The Circles of Change model represents a significant breakthrough in the challenge to find better ways to prepare child care staff for quality services in a rapidly changing social and systemic environment. It has developed a process for students, which captures the best of critically reflective practice and collaborative learning and is a model for lifelong learning.

Circles of Change has been recognised by fellow staff, our institution and the broader community in the following ways:

• Circles of Changes received the Innovation across the Institution Award at the Griffith University Excellence in Teaching Awards in 2005. The project also received a Citation from the Faculty of Health in that year.

• Staff at Griffith University have acknowledged the benefit of CoC and the process now extends beyond the second year students in the School of Human Services to the general third year practicum where students manage their own debriefing and reflection process on campus.

It is within the broader community that recognition of this democratic model is most extensive and it has been taken up by a number of outside agencies. The three most obvious examples are those undertaken by:

• Queensland Community Services and Health Workforce Training Council. The Workforce Council Professional Skills Coordinator, Queensland is presently contracting the Child and Family (C & F) Studies team to deliver their professional development to children's services staff across the State;

• Queensland Health has contracted the C & F team to use Circles of Change;

• The manager of the Salvation Army's Communities for Children, Kingston, Loganlea and Waterford West project has contracted our team to undertake Circles of Change in her community consultation. This manager believes that the Circles of Change process used allows a democratic consultation to take place that enhances the level of information about the community that is received.

Conclusion

This paper has explored a new model of reflective practice in relation to what it means to reflect critically on work with young children and their families. The model is embedded in a new approach to practicum in Child and Family Studies in the School of Human Services. It has been argued that these new models of practice promote the development of a new kind of professional, one whose practice is less likely to be delimited by traditional grand narratives and fundamental truths, particularly those that promote purely romantic notions of work with young children and their families. The Circles of Change approach works to develop this new professional, as one who can respond more readily to the complexities of contemporary contexts.

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The sexual assault of children aged 0-8 years and the role of educators in identification, reporting and the support of victims.

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International and Australian statistics indicate that child sexual abuse is increasing and the youngest of children are targeted for abuse, including for the manufacture of child pornography. This paper investigates implications for educators; how they can recognise signs of child sexual assault; what to do when they suspect or children disclose sexual assault; how to support a child who has been a victim; and how to reduce children's vulnerability.

It is widely accepted that the prevalence of child sexual abuse is increasing in Australia and, according to the UN, worldwide. The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) recently published a report that investigated child sexual abuse allegations arising from family law proceedings. This report, compiled by Moloney, Smyth, Weston, Richardson, Qu and Gray (2007) stated:

> 3.2.3 Allegations of child sexual abuse in family law proceedings Hume (1996) investigated 50 cases in which child sexual assault allegations had been made in proceedings in the Family Court of Australia in Adelaide. The cases involved a total of 105 children (45 male, 60 female), 70 of whom (21 male, 49 female) were alleged to have been sexually abused. Of the 50 cases, 36 contained specific allegations of sexual abuse, 11 contained allegations that a child was at risk, and 3 expressed concerns about inappropriate behaviour that indicated the possibility of sexual abuse.

The AIFS report showed that a large number of children experienced incestuous abuse before or after parents separated. It also confirms Brown and Alexander's finding (2007) that child abuse cases now take up a substantial proportion of the Family Court's work when it was originally created for divorce and the allocation of property. There are concerns that, although judges are required to act in children's best interests and make major decisions about children's lives and safety, neither Family Court judges nor children's legal representatives have been required to have qualifications or expertise in child development or child abuse.

Sexual abuse occurs when someone in a position of power to the child or young person uses his or her power to involve the child/young person in sexual activity. This can include a range of behaviours such as: sexual suggestions, exhibitionism, mutual masturbation, oral sex, penile or other penetration of the genital or anal region or sex with animals (Children, Youth & Family Services, 2005 p. 5).

A new problematic trend that was discussed at the Catholic Education Professional Development Seminar in Brisbane 11th May, 2007 (Withington 2007), 'is the premature sexualisation of children and the frequency with which they act sexually in the preschool setting. Briggs (2007) confirms that:

> Early childhood carers and educators are noting Australia-wide that children, especially boys, are seeking or offering oral sex in child care centres and kindergartens. This suggests that they have either been used for sex or seen so much pornography or sexual activity that they are emotionally disturbed. Either way, this constitutes sexual abuse and should be reported.

The emergence of these disturbing phenomena reinforces the necessity for early childhood educators to be trained to handle disturbing behaviours sensitively as well as being vigilant for indicators of child sexual abuse.

Children reveal they have been sexually abused in a variety of ways. Very young children lack the command of language to explicitly describe what has happened or is happening to them. Younger children use terminology that is simplified and relates to their own perceptions of what has happened, or may use the terminology that the perpetrator has used. Older children may respond in ways that draw attention to themselves including disruptive behaviour, promiscuity, aggression and violence. Additionally, children

may be withdrawn and depressed and not participate in activities or interactions that they have previously enjoyed.

Below is a list of indicators that child sexual abuse victims may display. These behaviours often appear in clusters and may include:

• Sexual knowledge that is inappropriate for their age.

• Using dolls or stuffed toys in a representational sexually explicit way.

• Showing an unhealthy, obsessed interest in genitals and sexual matters.

• Acting sexually with other children or teaching other children to act sexually.

• Disclosing to peers what has happened to them.

• Withdrawing from previously enjoyed friendships.

• Displaying personality changes or unexplained emotional responses or anxiety traits.

• Being excessively clingy with trusted adults.

• Committing or threatening to commit acts of self mutilation, or showing suicidal tendencies.

• Behaving in a promiscuous sexualised way with older children or adults with intent to please.

• Drawing pictures that show emotional disturbance through colour or visualisations.

• Revealing offences inadvertently.

• Displaying physical discomfort in the vaginal or anal areas.

• Disclosing incidents which may be explicit, or vaguely represented.

• Parents may tell you their children are experiencing night fears, nightmares.
(Briggs & Hawkins 1997, p. 138)

Young children using limited language and communication skills may produce drawings that act as indicators of emotional problems and sexual abuse.

• Victims may use colour that reflects their emotional feelings; including 'angry' colours like black, purple or red which are stark and dramatic when used on white paper.

• Self portraits may appear armless (indicating helplessness) or faceless, or mouthless (when they are afraid of disclosing a secret).

• Self portraits are often immature for the child's age.

• Abused children may use phallic symbols or representations in artwork, or have an obsession drawing genitalia on figures, or sexually explicit pictures of sexual activity (indicators of sexual abuse, offender exhibitionism, or that the child has witnessed pornography or sexual activity).

• Children who are used for oral sex often draw the perpetrator with a huge grin while they present themselves as sad. There is often an egg-shaped mouth with sharp, exaggerated teeth.

• In contrast to the armlessness of self-portraits, offenders' arms and hands may be outsized.

The drawings of sexual abuse victims often give educators uncomfortable feelings that are usually reliable. It is important to stay calm and ask the artist who is in the picture, what is the person doing and where does this happen. It is important to note that the lack of indicators in art work should not be regarded as evidence that a child has not been abused.

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. Children with disabilities are at a very high risk because of the nature and circumstances surrounding their disability including: society's attitudes, intellectual capacities, lack of communication skills and opportunities they present through their daily care (Briggs & Hawkins 1997, p. 154).Certain 'at risk' children include those who come from dysfunctional families with a history of abuse and domestic violence. These children who are exposed to one form of abuse are significantly more likely to suffer other forms of abuse (Mullen and Fleming 1998, p. 3).

Educators need to be active listeners if the child directly discloses, encouraging the child to tell his or her story without interruption.

• Educators must not pressure a child into disclosing.

- Must remember their role is not of evidence gathering or investigation.
- Discussion takes place in private.
- Need to support child through validation that it is the right course of action, and that the child is not to blame.
- Acknowledge to the child that what has happened to them has happened to other children, and that they are not weak, stupid, naughty, gay or different.
- Discussion must be dictated by the child's lead. Young children have short attention spans, and typically do not remain on one topic for extended periods of time.
- Never ask a child to disclose a secret. Rather use questioning like "Who else knows the secret?" and "What will happen if you tell?"
- If the victim requests that the secret is perpetuated, the victim must be informed that the abuse has to be reported to 'special people that help children when this happens' (Briggs & Hawkins 1997).
- Educators must not make commitments to children that they cannot keep, such as a promise that the sexual abuse will stop (Barker et al 2001).

The SA Film Corporation's video/DVD *The Secret* offers a good example of adult-child interaction to guide teachers in discourses concerning child abuse. Educators must not respond with shock and horror if a child discloses or exhibits signs of abuse. We can help a child to disclose by being approachable, caring and sensitive, making it clear that we are willing to listen and help if help is needed.

Teachers should always report abuse to child protection authorities, not to children's parents. Parents may challenge offenders, giving them time to create an alibi. Offenders are plausible and usually try to convince the parent that the child is mistaken or lying; few parents have the confidence to say, "I don't believe you". If the offender is in the family, forewarning would provide the opportunity to threaten the victim so that s/he retracts the allegation.

It is important that all early childhood professionals confront their own attitudes, personal experiences, or reactions to abuse before it occurs. Updated professional training concerning reporting responsibilities and the indicators of child abuse is essential. (Dau, 2003).

All schools and early childhood centres should have information readily available about specialist services for abused children and families (Briggs & Hawkins 1997, p. 148). The contact details for child abuse notification for Queensland are:

Queensland - Brisbane

Department of Families - Project Axis
07 3224 8045

Crisis Care - 24 hours
07 3235 9999

Crisis Care - outside Brisbane
1800 177 135

Education centres and educators need to provide a stable, supportive environment where victims may feel safe and build confidence in others. This can be facilitated through:
- building a relationship of trust and confidence
- planned activities that encourage self expression
- offering opportunities for therapeutic play (finger painting, clay, mud, woodwork, soft dolls and sand play)
- creating activities to promote success
- praise for effort and achievement
- respecting victim's personal space (find alternative to touching for reassurance and interactions)
- planned whole class activities (sport creates team building)
- maintaining routines to foster predictability, consistency and structure
- utilising behaviour management strategies (sticker charts, classroom rules, playground rules)
- utilising appropriate modeling, redirecting and prompting to preempt antisocial behaviours.

Education is the best way to reduce children's vulnerability to child sexual abuse. The book published by Family Planning Queensland, *Everyone's Got a Bottom* ($16), is a good start for children in

early childhood centres, given that children learn (a) the correct vocabulary for body parts, (b) that they own and have to take care of them, (c) that their bodies (including their mouths) are private, (d) we can say no to inappropriate touching and (e) we don't keep secrets about touching. The book is beautifully illustrated and children enjoy it.

> *International studies show that the most effective child protection programs are those which are taught by parents and educators in a collaborative partnership (Briggs & McVeity 2000, p. 18).*

New Zealand's early childhood safety curriculum *All about me* (2007) was planned with this in mind. This enables an educational, supportive bridge between school and home to be established to inform, educate and dispel myths about the issue of child sexual abuse. It is important that parents are informed about what is being taught, why and how they can reinforce safety strategies at home.

> *Curriculum planning should include programs to develop self esteem, confidence and assertiveness that promote personal safety skills in children. Educators need to empower children with knowledge, skills and confidence to reject sexual misbehaviour involving bigger, stronger and more powerful people. Developing a positive self-image is at the root of confidence building and self-protection (Briggs & Hawkins 1997, p. 159).*

Child protection books for parents should be made available in a library, as well as suitable books for children that parents and children can read together (Briggs & Hawkins 1997, p. 224).

Educators and parents working together can inform, educate and empower children, helping them to protect themselves.

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Curriculum planning should include programs to develop self esteem, confidence and assertiveness that promote personal safety skills in children. Educators need to empower children with knowledge, skills and confidence to reject sexual misbehaviour involving bigger, stronger and more powerful people. Developing a positive self-image is at the root of confidence building and self-protection

Stemming the decline in playground activity

Prue Walsh
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Prue Walsh is an early childhood professional whose work specialises in advising on early childhood facilities. This work covers site assessment and design of buildings and playgrounds in early childhood centres. Prue's initial training and subsequent work as an early childhood educator means that in approaching her work, children's needs and development are seen as paramount. Apart from advising on individual child care services, Prue has also been involved in the development of public policy documents, most significantly the Best Practice Guidelines in Early Childhood Physical Environments.

1. Introduction

Australia has one of the world's most user-friendly outdoor play environments: climatically, culturally and in terms of resources richness. Yet, as a community, we see less and less outdoor play. Even in our own field of early childhood teaching, there is a worrying lack of focus.

It is well recognised that outdoor play provides opportunities and experiences not available indoors. As early childhood professionals, we need to ask where children will have the opportunities to experience seasonal changes; to notice the weather; to observe the wildlife; have the space to run and move with speed; find nooks and crannies to share with friends; have the materials to manipulate and alter to fit in with their play schemes; and find the spaces that will excite and motivate them on to new levels of learning-through-play.

One would expect that early childhood playgrounds would be able to provide such opportunities but, unfortunately, many playgrounds are not designed to deliver this. Not through lack of good will, more a case of insufficient depth of understanding of the planning and design which underpins playgrounds that support children's play and development. This depth of understanding exists at many levels, in training with other disciplines, in Government documentation and amongst many childhood educators.

This paper looks at the principles underpinning the design of playgrounds based on research and known effective practice. These principles that acknowledge child development interaction underpin effective playground design and can be applied in a site specific context.

2. The role of physical environment in teaching

Over the past 20 years there has been a rapid period of expansion in the number of early childhood centres. The quality of the outdoor areas <u>as playscapes</u> can have a positive or negative impact on the users.

A lot is asked of an outdoor teaching program, not just the traditional competency development. Teachers are also required to provide environmental education, to counter obesity concerns by increasing the children's physical activity, to ensure playground safety and understand changes in legislative requirements. There is a barrage of information (some factual, others limited, others constraining) often based on a limited perception of the implications of the overall physical environment. Often implementation of these requirements has not been carefully thought through in terms of the physical environment and can impact negatively on the layout and level of play provision within a playground. At best the intent of some of these program aspects are sound but may do not effectively address the implications to available space.

Using the wrong information can lead to adverse impacts on children's play. Factual information on settings is not easy to find (or evaluate). For example, as teachers, where do you go for definitive information on safety, on development of children's risk assessment skills, of whether seven square metres is adequate outdoor space, of what is "usable" space — and so it goes on.

In terms of child behaviour, there is an obvious link between the physical environment (the settings) and outdoor play opportunities. This has been well recognised in the research findings (for example) of Kritchevsky & Prescott, Weinstein & David and in the work at Reggio Emilia. Unfortunately, the emphasis on individual aspects, without keeping an overview of the entire playground, is leading to a real decline of understanding in outdoor teaching practice, particularly with new graduates — leading to a critical need for more mentoring by experienced early childhood professionals on how to create more an effective outdoor program.

In the literature (and in government policy), the word "environment" tends to be loosely defined and the clear distinction that needs to be drawn between physical and social environment is not fully perceived. Looking hard at the physical environment is central to the Reggio Emilia (1998) publication *Children, spaces, relations: Metaproject for an environment of young children*, where it emphasised that understanding of the play outcomes is dependant on an in-depth understanding of the space/behaviour interactions:

> *We should make the maximum effort to be more aware of the space and the objects we place there knowing that the spaces in which children construct their identities and personal stories are many — both real and virtual.*

Good design [of space and the objects we place there] must be based on the users' needs. The setting should be <u>supportive</u> of the users' needs; in this context Vygotsky (1981), talks of scaffolding to encourage reaching the next developmental stage. This is also what a supportive outdoor teaching program does. Or, in other words, there is an interaction between a supportive setting and a supportive teaching program. There is the potential for teachers to shift and rearrange play items using loose parts and different settings, but this also reflects the initial planning and design. Unless we can define the type of usable spaces that we need, we cannot transfer our intent effectively to other disciplines, such as architects, town planners, legislative review committees etc.

3. Physical environment of playgrounds in context

Interaction with teachers and individual centres over the last 20 years shows just how common it is to have a pattern of continual frustration — particularly in terms of the playground provided, the implications to teaching practice, and the constraints it is placing on meeting children's needs. I suspect many people who work in the field of early childhood will have experienced this.

The positive aspect of my work has been that, after the playground has been redeveloped, to see how the children are using the space. I also hear from the teachers about children's expanded usage; the joy they have in observing developmental patterns they have not noticed before; the greater emphasis being given to the outdoor program; the motivation of all the staff; and the achievement of skill levels beyond what many of them have perceived as being possible. I wish all teachers could have this experience.

If not, why not?

3.1 How well is your playground working?

When assessing what needs to be done in the playground, the most pertinent questions teachers should be asking are two-fold: <u>child usage</u> and <u>physical environment</u> (which involves the interaction of course).

Firstly, the issues relating to child usage. Some of the basic questions are:

- Are the children running around aimlessly?
- Are they remaining focussed within an activity or distracted?
- Is there a high level of antisocial, aggressive behaviour?
- Are you finding that there are children who are withdrawn, not participating and who actively seek to go inside?
- Are you finding that it is much harder for your staff to manage the children outside?

If there is a negative response to some or all of these, it is a clear indication that the playground is failing to meet children's needs from both a design and programming perspective.

After assessment of the child usage, the physical environment needs to be analysed. Some of the most pertinent questions a teacher should ask are:

- What size is the playground?
- What shape is the playground?
- Can you visually and physically readily access and support children within the space? In particular, are there changes in levels which limit supervision and competency support?
- Do you have items that can be adapted and altered by you or the children to fit in with the play scheme?
- Can children experience different forms of space: open, encapsulated, elevated?
- Can children access and independently utilise every item within the playspace?
- Is the space invitational, visually attractive and enticing to the children?
- Do you have a well-designed storage shed that can be safely accessed by staff and older children to seek loose parts, play equipment, junk materials?
- Are there climatic intrusions, like too much sun or cold winds?
- Is safety dominating at the cost of play?
- Do you have a separate (but connected) toddler/baby outdoor playground?

If there are negative factors in the setting, what do you do?

In practice, many teachers who are experiencing frustration with their playgrounds are extremely creative in coping with constraints—particularly from a programming perspective, which at times is a true inspiration.

There is a real downside to frustration: a high-level of burnout of creative, sensitive and capable teachers; or that their energies are being directed towards indoor programming at the cost of outdoor programming; or seeking ad hoc alternations and implementations within the playground area. All of these reactions are costly to the individuals involved, the centres they run and in the long-term to the wider community.

4. Finding solutions

The solutions required need to be achieved on two levels:

- The first is ensuring the potential of the existing playground has been met from a planning perspective.
- The second is ensuring that easy manipulation of the environment can occur by the teachers to assist teaching practice geared towards meeting individual children's needs.

To demonstrate this approach, I am using a recently completed inner city playground on the south side of Brisbane.

CASE STUDY #1: KURILPA COMMUNITY CHILDCARE CENTRE

Description:

This was an existing centre, catering for 58 children (2½ to 6 years old). The existing playground was to be extended and facilities upgraded (due in part to the Queensland prep year). The area involved was 480sqm (or 8.4sqm/child).

If you were given the challenge to redevelop this playground, you should consider the process outlined here. The original playground is shown in the first of the two diagrams. What sort of outdoor teaching program would this playground support? Does this look like a playground with which you are familiar?

CASE STUDY #1: BEFORE AND AFTER SKETCHES

BEFORE

AFTER

4.1 What happened here?

In consultation with the staff, the following concerns about the existing situation were expressed.

• The existing playground was only just larger than the regulatory minimum of seven square metres per child. As can be seen from the plan, it had a large shady tree, sandpit, large softfall area with a low deck, but insufficient lawn area. They even had a verandah and storage shed.

• The teachers were concerned about the quality of play, the level of distraction and even the antisocial behaviour. They felt, particularly, that the older children were bored and this was contributing to the negative behaviour.

• The next step was to find out what the teachers did and didn't like about the current physical setting. They really understood their playground.

Positive features identified:

1. They found that the change in level of the pathway between the fence and what was the climbing equipment area was actually a wonderful get-away point where children thoroughly enjoyed riding around on wheeled toys.

2. The verandah's large space and its siting between the playroom and playground were seen as beneficial to running an outdoor program.

3. Provision of large shade trees and an excellent stand of paperbark trees adjoining the fence.

Negative features identified:

1. Activity-related features: too few pockets of space for groups of children to congregate in recognition of the type of spaces needed for children's social development; insufficient open running space; the sound flexideck climbing structure had insufficient softfall surface around it to be able to interlink with moveable equipment (e.g. trestles and planks); insufficient nooks and crannies for children to get away; little to inspire children's creative, imaginative play.

2. Movement-related: there were tree roots exposed that were acting as a trip hazard; problems of natural progression and flow of play occurring; and intrusive access all around the sandpit.

Clearly, this feedback came from committed teachers who had very skilfully assessed the playground.

4.2 Developing solutions

After assessment of user needs, the planning process began. Prior to my visit they had been successful in acquiring an extra 3m strip of land adjoining the carpark area. This had prompted the teachers to seek my help in assisting them to design a playground aimed at maximising play usage within a constrained playground space.

Initial planning decisions agreed upon were:

• shifting the deck to an expanded softfall surface area and linking it with a larger deck

• shifting the sandpit to an uninterrupted space adjoining a compatible play facility, in this case, a large, low bench seat placed around the tree to support a progression and flow of play, integrating it with a ramped, wheeled vehicle track

• creating more open space

• maximising use of the tree by means of a bench seat

• introducing a raised garden bed and increasing the trees/shrubs by 100%

- installing five taps to add a play dimension as well as watering plants and cleaning up after messy play

- creating a small amphitheatre/stage (i.e. maximising use of a change in level)

- creating a narrow watercourse and digging patch

- upgrading the storage shed to allow for easy supervision viewing and access to loose parts

All of these changes were discussed carefully with the staff and agreed upon.

5. Feedback after redevelopment

This playground has now been in place for over twelve months. Has it delivered on the potential?

The most heartening feedback was that the facilities incorporated were being well-utilised in a multitude of different ways. Extensive use of the watercourse, particularly during the hot weather was noted; the upgrading of the climbing equipment with the cubby space underneath being a markedly preferred play space; the provision of a larger softfall surface which was producing a far more challenging obstacle course, often constructed with the children; the inclusion of the low deck around the big tree that invited dramatic play and instigated almost daily uses, including group stories/ setting up of different play facilities as intended; the retention of the bicycle path with improved drainage was a very much preferred space; the interplay between the sandpit and the adjoining low tree bench were emphasised; the proximity to the storage shed and ease of access to movable equipment. This was just some of the feedback teachers gave.

5.1 Keys relating to improved function

In terms of <u>activities</u>, the key was flexibility of the setting. The playground now had an abundance of open-ended activities which could be adapted or changed. The principle that I work on is:

> *If a play element cannot be used in 20 different ways, why have you got it?*

In terms of <u>efficiency and effectiveness</u>, staff members were also finding the day-to-day

management of the outdoor play program far easier to achieve. It was easier to set up a range of movable equipment which could be used in defined areas and on specific items. Behaviourally, they found that children's play was more focussed, more cooperative and sharing. There was far less negative behaviour.

A teacher reported to me that it freed up the teachers, making it much easier for them to observe the children. They were also able to have a high-level of one-to-one interaction in terms of listening to or supporting children with their endeavours. They stated that the combination of the physical environment and the social environment were better able to meet individual children's needs.

5.2 Children's response to the redevelopment

This was interesting. Perhaps you would expect the children to be grumpy about the dislocation caused by the playground redevelopment. Not so. The feedback was that, during the period of construction, the children had responded very positively to seeing the playground being reconstructed. Observations and questions were asked; there was joy in looking at bobcats; carpenters at work and talking to them. They even made an indoors project about the development. This was a great response. A teachable moment well-maximised.

> **The final outcome of redeveloping this playground was that it was stemming the decline in outdoor activities.**

6. Playground parameters for redevelopment

Redevelopment of playgrounds is not easy — it requires a depth of thinking and collaboration because in reality, as Hart (1994) said:

> *Most people who care about child development know nothing about design, and most people who design know nothing about child development.*

Too often, I have seen playgrounds where the main plan has been to purchase fixed equipment from a supplier without any child development or programming knowledge; or of getting the

playground designed by a landscape contractor or a landscape architect — none of whom have any training in early childhood. Often a committed early childhood educator takes the situation in hand for this reason. At best, this results in some inspired interaction of physical environment changes and teaching practice (i.e. a wonderful vegetable garden, the provision of a shade tree with attractive, flowering petals). But not always.

Absolutely, the worst approach to trying to fix the playground shortfalls is to place elements in it in an ad hoc fashion; these just add layer on layer of compromise until the playground becomes unworkable. Here are just a few of the many stories that flood into my work on a weekly level: the tree that was planted has suddenly spread so far that the lawn does not survive; the weeping willow tree has blocked the sewerage line and shifted the paving in the process; the teacher who developed the vegetable garden has left and now the garden is in rack and ruin; or the mulched, softfall surface added for safety reasons didn't have the base preparation and it has flushed down and blocked up against the fence; or the storage shed that has been put in is structurally not strong enough to provide the needed shelving for access to stored items within it. For effective implementation it needs to be remembered that it is a team effort. It should be remembered that a landscape contractor is not necessarily a playground designer; that a fixed equipment supplier is just that and not a playground planner. It is essential to find the right team to work together collaboratively.

A desirable playground will consider all of the factors summarised in this figure:

Characteristics of a playground

1. Playscape is a rich play environment that ignites the will to explore and learn in each child.

2. Space (15m^2/child) to allow sufficient variety of play opportunities.

3. Organisation of space into quiet, active, open, nature areas with clusters of elated activities within each.

4. Access/partial access/supervision needs require both rapid access routes (a child in difficulties) and uninterrupted play (especially in quiet play like a sandpit).

5. Design objectives

- Scale: An appropriate scale of elements helps children develop a mastery and control over their environment and a greater sense of self-esteem. Scale also affects a child's feeling of well-being and safeness. Adult-scaled items also need to be considered both to acclimatise children and to assist adult use.

- Sensory stimulation: All senses have a role to play when children are exploring their environment: sight, touch, taste, hearing and smell. Being able to engage all of their senses heightens children's awareness, their skills of observation, their willingness to explore and their sense of enquiry, as advocated in Reggio Emilia "the use of soft qualities, light, colour, materials, smell, sound, microclimate".

- Variety and diversity: The greater the variety and diversity of play facilities, the richer the potential for accommodating children's varied interests and developmental levels. Variety enhances the potential of the play environment to attract and elicit a play response from every individual child, as it provides freedom of choice designed to match their interest level.

- Invitational space: Invitational space encourages and supports children's active involvement and participation in the daily happenings of the centre. It shows that their wishes are respected with active participation encouraged. This is best achieved through interaction between the physical and social environments.

- Play value: Play value is best assessed by the capacity of play elements to sustain children's usage at a daily level over several years. An essential component of play value is the complexity of the activity so that layers of interest exist (discovered as the children's interest changes).

- Flexibility: Flexibility is the property by which manipulation of elements within the environment can occur. This is particularly useful for fitting in with children's own ideas as well as teachers being able to change elements within the environment to enhance the play value and the capacity of elements to sustain children's interest. When selecting items for a play area, the question that needs to be asked is: can you work out 20 different ways of using this one play element. It is an essential provision for enhancing play value and the capacity of elements to sustain children's interest.

- Giving children choices: Keeping children constructively occupied for the time they use the centre is one of the key objectives of a good early childhood program. If children become bored, overtired, or frustrated, their behaviour will become disruptive. But choice depends on the amount to do.

- Safety and supervision: Good planning and design is needed to ensure that play opportunities are managed safely. Whilst this means meeting the safety regulatory standards, it also means being able to assist children's usage by providing supervision and support from both the physical environment and the social environment. Children need to learn risk assessment skills.

The benefits to the child can be profound, affecting the overall development of children that includes aspects of social, cognitive, physical and emotional development. These not only benefit the individual child but flow on to the wider community.

7. Delivering solutions

An exciting playground is only delivered through putting a great deal of effort into the process.

In the case study above, a measured approach was taken. There was no "single' portion of the playground which was used to its maximum advantage (even the excellent shady tree).

The process is usually a professional interaction between the staff (site-specific child behaviours and teaching program shortfalls) and an experienced designer with a play and child development background. It takes into account:

Step 1: Assessing the site characteristics, its strengths and weaknesses.

Step 2: Assessing the usable space, organisation of space and access routes.

Step 3: Assessing the play opportunities according to the desirable characteristics of a playground summarised earlier.

To the extent that a playground falls short of delivering these characteristics, then both the users and the teaching program will be adversely affected. Imaginative loose parts can overcome some (not all) disadvantages.

Finally, I do not want you to see this approach to development of a playground as one which stops and starts with the implementation of the plan. That would be an underestimation. It is an ongoing process but the planning provides the scaffolding needed so that the play provision can be provided through an enriching program.

To quote from Reggio Emilia (1998):

As you can see, the world is a never finished sketch. Always brazenly and wonderfully fresh.

Aim to define and understand what the physical setting can do for you. In terms of Reggio Emilia/Vygotsky: you can deliver improved outdoor teaching programs — if you approach it in the right way.

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My ideal outd

After reading Prue Walsh's exciting article, ECTA members were inspired t
The responses of this mixed group of 4

There's a pool with animals in – whales, dolphins and octopuses – and you can swim with them. There's triple swings, a big slide, a ladder to go up high. You can go to the zoo and see a parrot on your way, you can ride zebra – it's all free! You can climb on everything – swings, slide, everything! Mya
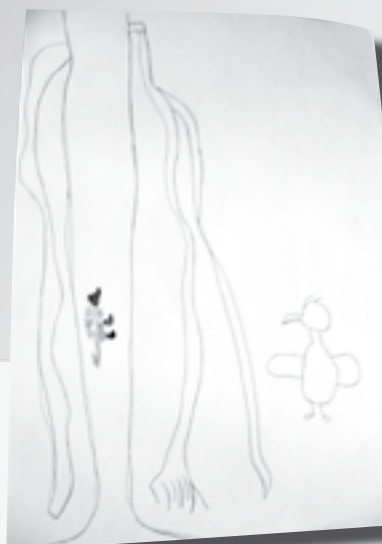
It doesn't cost any money! There's an echidna and a bird and you can hold the animals and pat them – it spikes its spikes out when you try to attack it though! The tree vines are good for climbing and swinging. Max

There's a slide and
swimming pool an
to be careful. The

It has lots of trees and
water. Louisa

It's a place we've all been (Bell Bird Grove) – the rock place. We've got secret bases that no-one knows about, they can be for kids or adults, there's a creek you can climb in and splash and an elf home on some rocks made out of sticks. It's really pretty there. Siarah

There's a secret arch room in the sky, and a flower you can swing over – you have to jump quickly! You can also climb up a ladder and reach all the ropes. There's a swimming pool as well and it's for grown-ups and kids. There's also a secret door and a secret fairy room as well. Maeve

It's a
bars,

...oor play space

...to ask the children they teach about their own ideal outdoor play spaces.
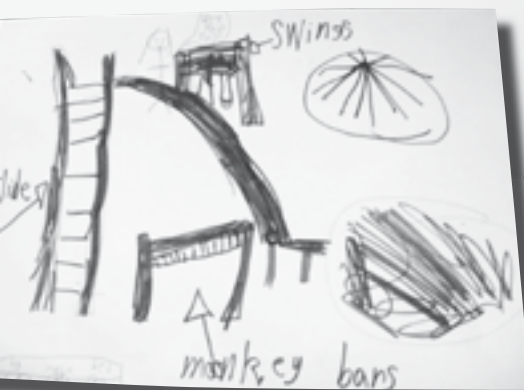...-8 year olds were insightful and varied.
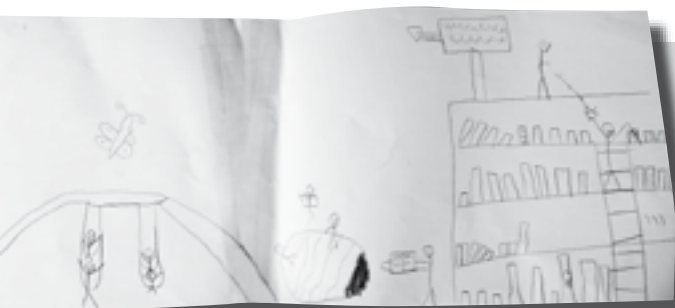
...d double swings – two people can swing together – and a
...d a library, but the ladder is wobbly and the sign warns you
...re's butterflies and it's hot and sunny. Melou

It's sunny and there's a bird there, it's fun all the time. There's a slide and a swing and a pond, lots of trees. There's (my teacher) and me feeding the ducks. Maddison

...d a creek with lots of

It has lots of trees to make it nice, it's quiet and peaceful. Alexander

There's two swimming pools – one for kids and one for adults. There's a ladder going up to the library where you can read and do fun stuff and write stories and then you go up another ladder and there's a rocket and a ship you can go for a ride on! There's a massive slide going down into a massive pool that's only for kids 5-16 years old. There's another slide just for babies. Jasmine

...water park with a water slide, water monkey
... and a big pool you can slide into. Sophia

Milestones in cultural democracy: destinations and new beginnings

S. P. Alai, K. Curu, T. Eliu, L. Kaufononga, S. Khalil, H. Mafileo, S. Matakaiongo, V. Toleafoa-Poliko
Edited by Jill Burgess - New Zealand Childcare Association

A New Zealander of Scottish and Danish descent, Jill Burgess has been working in the field of early childhood teacher education since 1999. She has had a long-time interest in bicultural practice and cultural democracy in New Zealand early childhood settings.

Jill has worked in settings across the education spectrum, and in the early childhood field in New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and New South Wales. In 2003 she was asked by Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/NZ Childcare Association, to become the principal writer of a team of Pasifika early childhood educators, who first scoped and then developed a programme for the National Diploma in Teaching (ECE, Pasifika; Level 7). Jill currently holds the position of programme leader, as well as being a member of the Pasifika lecturing team sited in Waitakere, West Auckland.

In the Summer 2006 issue of this journal, we published an article by Jill Burgess introducing New Zealand Private Tertiary Institution, Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association's programme for the Level 7 National Diploma in Teaching (ECE, Pasifika).

In November 2007, the inaugural cohort of students completed all requirements for this important early childhood teaching qualification. One group of graduands, excited at the prospect of being registered teachers, reflected on the learning that now supports them in this new role.

Teaching competencies

Paula Alai and Kelera Curu recognised they had gained the knowledge identified in NZ Teachers Council's (NZTC) *Graduating Teacher Standards:- professional knowledge on how to teach; content and pedagogical knowledge; and knowledge of relevant New Zealand curriculum documents* (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1996, 1998, 1999, 2005, 2006). In addition they have critiqued theories and learnt practices of first language maintenance and bilingualism to support children from Pasifika cultures (Foster-Cohen, 2003). They understand how contextual factors influence teaching and learning (Gordon & Brown, 2004), and how graduating teachers use professional knowledge, to plan safe, high quality teaching and learning environments (Perry, 2005). They have learnt principles, purposes and processes of assessment (MOE, 2005).

As graduating teachers they believe themselves able to promote learning by knowing how to communicate assessment information appropriately to children, parents, caregivers and staff (MOE, 2005). They have developed positive relationships with members of learning communities (Keyser, 2006). "We uphold the NZTC Code of Ethics (NZTC, 2004)   and we are committed members of the profession," they said.

Academic and applied learning

For Sili Khalil and Lolita Kaufononga, the diploma challenged and motivated personalities; it encouraged the development of relationships to support them on their journeys as graduand early childhood educators. The diploma has equipped them to work with children from any ethnicity, not just with Pasifika children. New Zealand values partnership and equity which allows all ethnic groups to teach their own cultures (MOE, 1998).

These graduands affirm that the Treaty of Waitangi (through Article 3, the principle of equity) gives Pasifika people the right to speak their language and practice their culture, equal rights to be in New Zealand, and equal status with Maori and Pakeha alike. (http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt. nz/treaty/). Active promotion of the Treaty of Waitangi is a valued teaching competency.

Sili and Lolita believe that Te Whariki, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, lays useful guidelines for all involved in the education of

young children (MOE, 1996). Through the recent document Nga arohaehae whai hua: Self review guidelines they have learnt how to evaluate and review the work they do (MOE, 2006).

"Young children deserve this standard because they cannot advocate for themselves."

Pasifika perspectives

Heimoana Mafileo and Siutaisa found they have gained a depth of understanding about how Pasifika people look at education - their perspectives or views.

Pasifika perspectives on education are both political and cultural. Education should be a liberating process in which individuals and communities empower themselves to deal with concerns they have identified and want to work on collectively to change. Although Pasifika education processes can pit child-against-child in competitive situations resulting in winners and losers, at the same time, they encourage participation, collectivity, cooperation and reciprocity (Laban, 2001).

Pasifika ways of educating children are often symbolised in cultural metaphors. For example the traditional method for making the Tongan kakala (special floral neck-garland) is a metaphor for such a process – and the metaphor becomes a quality tool for learning and implementing learning opportunities for Tongan children (Thaman, 2002). Metaphors like this add different perspectives to the official documents of the Ministry of Education in New Zealand (Koloto, 2005).

Pasifika educators gain strength from their cultures, poetry, stories, art and traditions. They gain strength using Pasifika languages in classrooms in order to help language and cultural maintenance in New Zealand (Laban, 2001).

A field-based programme

Vaosa reviewed the field-based programme in regard to her teaching practice in her centre. When she first started with TTPOOA/NZCA, she was not fully aware of the requirements of this diploma. Some work colleagues attended teacher education programmes with no connection to centres and at first she thought that to do assessment tasks – observations, reflections and regular tutor visits – was too much to do while working 15 hours each week as a centre staff member. There were also weekly in-centre tasks including discussion with liaison teachers to assist in assignments. "After a while, I got used to it and I could see the benefit of it for me as a teacher-in-training."

Vaosa noticed she has grown from an unsure teacher to a confident, competent teacher. "I have developed deeper understanding of the development of children, birth to five years. I have planned, implemented and evaluated learning opportunities to enhance children's language, culture, social and emotional skills, physical and spiritual skills, that value children as most important human beings. This is the aspiration the NZ early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki, is founded on:

> For children to grow as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society (MOE, 1996. p.9).

Vaosa experienced how special services help children with special needs. She is now developing her role to focus on 'inclusion', to ensure that "children with disabilities are actively involved and accepted in the total program" (Gordon & Browne, 2004, p.117).

She learnt to relate to children at their level, interacting with them during activities such as story-telling, cooking, family play, in morning greetings and afternoon good-byes. 'To be effective in my practice, I need to understand my role, and to understand my role I need to be working in a centre where I can do things. Field-based training has given me the opportunity to work alongside children and teachers and attend classes to gain the theoretical side of knowledge to put into practice each week. The more time I spent working in my own centre, the more I gained confidence to relate to parents, whanau and the whole community.'

Vaosa felt able to say that if she wasn't working 15 hours or more in a centre, she wouldn't have gained the confidence she has in herself. She believes field based training allowed her greater opportunity to put her knowledge into practice with children.

Developing a personal pedagogy

Finally Tetiare Eliu reflected on the importance of respecting children through quality genuine

interactions and close attachments between child and caregivers, noting that children who have secure attachments with both their parents and caregivers develop better language skills (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). She reflected that respecting children means being at their level and responding to their expressions, gestures and needs. Infants learn through adults talking constantly talking to them, using eye and full-face contact as much as possible. Infants have every opportunity to watch and hear how language is produced.

> Educators have a key role in extending and enhancing children's learning and development through relationships and interactions that are responsive and reciprocal, positive and encouraging (MOE, 1998). Collaborative practice is the way we work together. When everyone has authentic opportunities to learn and contribute to learning, we become a learning community (MOE, 2006).

Sharing a song after their last class; from left Sili Khalil (Tokelau), Heimoana Mafileo (Tonga), Lolita Kaufononga (Tonga), Siutaisa Matakaiongo (Tonga), Kelera Curu (Fiji), Vaosa Toleafoa-Poliko (Samoa), Silimaua Paula Alai (Samoa)

Mori cultural symbols and tools are also important for Pasifika people in New Zealand: Siutaisa Matakaiongo and Tetiare Eliu (Aitutaki, Cook Islands) make and use traditional Mori clay flutes - koauau
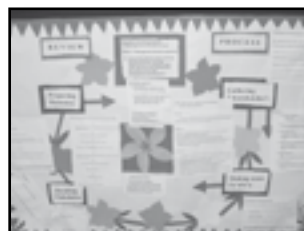
Kakala as a framework for self-review

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Title: How Do Dinosaurs Go to School?

Author: Jane Yolen & Mark Teague   **Illustrator: Mark Teague**   **RRP: $19.95**

ISBN: 9780007258185   **Published by: HarperCollins Publishers Australia**

Reviewed by: Kim Walters and the Prep Class Gympie South State School

Emily

'This dinosaur is on the moon in the Science Centre in the class. He is leaving the wasps and the rabbits in their containers and not letting them out. He is being a good dinosaur.

The book asks us – Would a dinosaur ...? This covers many antics with the dinosaurs trying to get to school in various ways and what they might get up to whilst at school such as roaring in class. We are then told what a dinosaur would really do at school. The dinosaurs become perfect students doing all the correct things such as putting up your hand, tidying up, helping class mates etc.

After the second reading the children were asked to review the story for the EYC readers.

Each child had their own favourite dinosaur mainly chosen because of the colours and patterning or his antics. The illustrator has used bright colours and various pattern combinations on the dinosaurs which the children all commented on. All the children except for Joshua liked the illustrations.

Lachlan

'This dinosaur is going outside and cleaning all the mess up.'

Joshua; I didn't like the paints. They weren't funny.

Matthew B: I liked the pretty dinosaur in it with the blue stuff.

Mitchell: I liked the painting in the book.

Paige: I like it because it's pretty. I like the dinosaur with the blue spots.

Rory: I like the yellow dinosaur because it's very bright.

Eugene: I like the yellow dinosaur because it was yellow and black.

Matthew H: I like the brown one that's on the car because it's silly.

Nathan: I like the spotty one. I like the spots on it.

During our review several of the children commented on liking the story-line.

Mitchell: I liked the tidy up chair.

Emily: I liked when he cleaned his desk.

Rory: I like when he ran up the stairs to beat the bell.

Jordan: The dinosaur that was skipping out of the door.

Emily: They teach us to help people.

Matthew H: When I went to the park, I just said 'give me a break' to the bullies.

Jordan: Stop it, I don't like it Bully.

Nathan

'Hidey-Go-Seek Tiggy is what this dinosaur is playing. He is running on red grass.'

The discussions around the colours and patterns on the dinosaurs led to a discussion about fossils and how scientists use them to determine the shape, size and texture but they can only guess about the colours.

Some of the positive behaviours such as being helpful and cleanliness related well to our virtues program. It was easy to turn the discussion toward a reflection of the children's behaviour. We discussed helping our friends, tidying-up time, bullying, raising your hand, looking after insects in the science area, having patience etc. I would recommend the book to anyone wanting to introduce virtues or encourage positive behaviour in their early childhood classroom or expanding /an interest in dinosaurs.

After reading the book several times over the week the children were asked to draw a response to the story.

Hayley

'This dinosaur is sitting in front of the class. He is listening to the teacher and sitting quietly.'
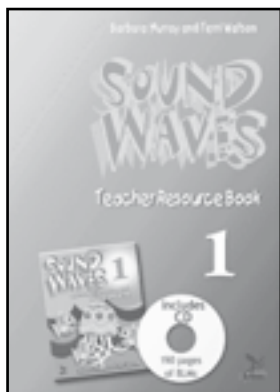
Title: Sound Waves: A Whole School Phonemic Approach to Spelling

Author: Barbara Murray and Terri Watson
ISBN: Various (see www.fireflypress.com.au)
Published by: Firefly Press   RRP: Student Workbooks $12.95, Teacher Resource Books $39.95,
**   Support Materials from $4.95**

Reviewed by: Mathilda Element

Firefly Press is a Queensland-based educational publisher with a range of curriculum texts for teachers of primary-school aged children. This review looks at the *Sound Waves* series, a program designed to teach spelling, reading and word study skills.

Sound Waves is interesting in that it focus on sounds (phonemes), using the 44 sounds in the English language to build in children a flexible yet concrete understanding of how words work. The program consists of student activity books, teacher resource books and support materials. The student activity books are designed for each grade level, but perfectly adaptable for multi-age classrooms or individualised instruction. The set-up is such that a unit of the same sound will always be on the same page, so children of differing levels could be work on the same theme with more challenging content (e.g. the 'f' 'ff' 'ph' sound, represented by a fish icon, is always on page 20). This way, the program is very adaptable to developmental needs.

Personally, I found the teacher resource books very useful for their wide variety of games, songs, chants and hands-on activities related to the sounds. The children in my Prep-Year 3 multi-age class loved singing the songs and using the charts to help them with their own creative writing and spelling. The benefits that I saw were that the phonemic approach doesn't lock children into rigid ways of thinking about words, which helped many struggling readers and writers. These books can be useful for any classroom teacher, regardless of whether they are using the workbook program.

The *Sound Waves* program is appropriate for teachers of children in the early years of primary school (extending into upper primary), and is available from the publisher and educational bookstores.

Title: A to Z in Australia
Author: Leah Upton   ISBN: 0 646 454 177
Published by: Woodie Stuff Australia

Reviewed by: Hari Sinh - aged 7 years 8 months

Letters: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

This book deals with the alphabet. However, this book is different from other alphabet books. This book has two parts.

Part 1: This part teaches 2 to 5 ages the alphabet with pictures. For all the letters of the alphabet there are words and illustrations that tell something about Australia.

Part 2: This is also written in alphabetical order. In this part there are facts about the Australian words given in Part1. For example, for letter H, Part 1 gives the word 'heron'. In Part 2 there are some interesting facts about herons. This part the older children can also read.

These two parts equal the book, which is a VERY, VERY fun way to learn the alphabet and some information on Australia.

I liked the book and illustrations but I found it a challenge to write about it because it is a fact book.

Recommended Ages: 2 and over   *Recommendation:*   I would recommend this book 4 out of 10.

Guidelines for contributors

The ECTA journal committee welcomes all contributions and ideas for possible inclusion in the journal. These guidelines should help you to prepare your contribution.

Style

In order to maintain a uniformity of approach within the journal, the *Macquarie Dictionary* and the *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* (6th edn) are preferred as the bases for reference. Australian spelling is used in preference to American.

- All numbers up to twelve should be written as words; figures are used for numbers 13 upwards (e.g. one, eleven, 18, 200). Exceptions are where numbers appear in a table, list or refer to a measure (e.g. Anne was seven years old when she walked 5 kilometres to school).
- Examples of dates and times: 15 February 2006, 1900s.
  If very few numbers are included in the article: She left at ten o'clock. If precision is required: She left at 7.25 am in order to catch the seven-forty train.
- Money is usually written as numerals (e.g.20c or $0.15, $120 and $88.15) but words may be used in approximations such as 'he made millions of dollars'.
- Titles should be in italics e.g. *The Australian* rather than 'The Australian'.

Language

Your submission should be written in a style that is jargon-free, easy to read and without the assumption that your audience has any prior knowledge of your topic. If you use an acronym, include the full reference the first time e.g. Early Childhood Teachers Association (ECTA).

Avoid stereotypical, sexist, ageist or racist language. An internet search for 'The Language of Disability' will assist you in this specific area (e.g. 'uses a wheelchair' instead of 'wheelchair bound'.

Specific terminology

We are presently compiling a standardised list of frequently used terms. Examples are:
- day care (rather than daycare or day-care)
- child care (rather than childcare or child-care)
- preschool (rather than pre-school)
- the Preparatory Year or Prep (rather than prep)
- Year One, Year Two/Three (words rather than numbers)
- 'the staff members are' (instead of the awkward singular noun 'the staff is . .')
- programme (rather than program, unless the latter is correct in the specific context)
- five-year-olds (i.e. age with hyphens)

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

Referencing

Ensure you include references where relevant. The preferred ECTA Journal style is that used in the *Style Manual*.
Example from a book: O'Hagan M 2001, *Early Years Practitioner*, 4th edn, Harcourt: London.
Example from a journal: Bredekamp S (2006), 'Staying true to our principles', *Educating Young Children*, Vol 12 No. 2, Spring 2006, Australia.

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

Length of contribution (maximum)

• Feature Article: 1200 words • Book review: 300 words • Regular article: 650 words

Form of submission

Your contribution should be submitted via email to info@ecta.org.au
Photographs may be submitted digitally – minimum three megapixels on the highest resolution. Art works should be scanned. Photographs require a release agreement. A hard copy should also be included. Author release forms must be signed and a hard copy forwarded to ECTA GPO Box 3254 Brisbane 4001. Where original artwork or material has been submitted it will be returned at the contributor's request. All contributors will be sent a copy of the journal.