EDUCATING YOUNG CHILDREN

Learning and teaching in the early childhood years

SPRING 2008

VOLUME 14

NUMBER 2

JOURNAL OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

PUBLISHED BY
Early Childhood Teachers' Association (ECTA Inc.)

ISSN: 1323:823x

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DESIGN
Graphic Skills Pty Ltd

PRINTING
Cornerstone Press

The ECTA Coordinating Committee and the ECTA Journal Editorial Panel wish to acknowledge the contributions of the children for the illustrations used for the journal cover and other ECTA printed material.

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Journal contributions
Articles and ideas for possible inclusion in the journal, following review by the editorial panel, are welcomed. See inside back cover for submission guidelines.

Advertising rates (GST inclusive)

	1 Issue	2 Issues	3 Issues
Full Page	$451.00	$407.00 per issue	$363.00 per issue
Half Page	$269.00	$242.00 per issue	$214.50 per issue
Quarter Page	$181.50	$148.50 per issue	$121.00 per issue
Eighth Page	$121.00	$88.00 per issue	$71.50 per issue

Inserts
$200 for an insert to be included. Written notification of intent is required, as there is a limit on the number of inserts per issue.

Dates for contributions

Published		
No 1	Last week in January	Autumn
No 2	Last week in May	Spring
No 3	Last week in September	Summer

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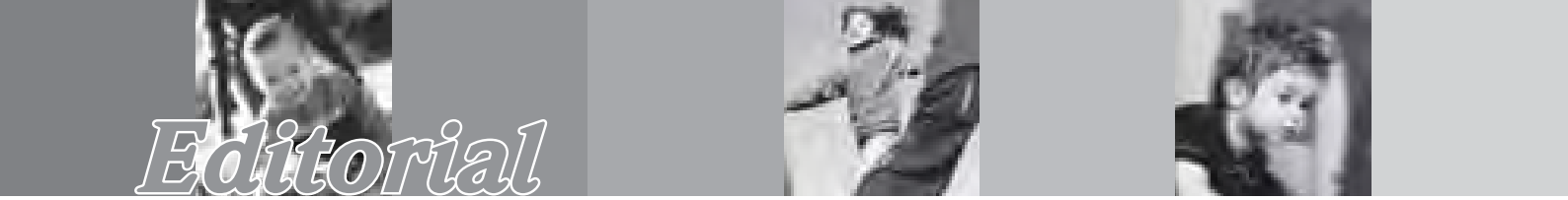

Editorial

From the President

Kim Walters - ECTA President

Since the last journal, ECTA has continued to advocate on issues impacting on early childhood across the state and country. The new commonwealth government is working towards all four-year-olds having access to 15 hours of early childhood education provided by a qualified early childhood teacher and is currently developing a new national early years framework. ECTA was represented at the COAG forum in Melbourne so that we can stay informed and provide feedback to the government on the development of these initiatives which will impact on all of our members teaching in child care and pre-prep settings. ECTA is also involved in the National Curriculum Development Paper Consultation and the College of Teachers proposed Continuing Professional Development Framework which will have a direct impact on registered teachers working in schools across Qld. I encourage all early childhood teachers to provide their own feedback on these issues via links on the ECTA website.

Each year ECTA awards a complimentary ECTA membership to an outstanding QUT early childhood graduate. This year it gives me great pleasure to announce the recipient for 2008 was Ms Kelly Peters.

This year ECTA nominates Rob Pratt for the National Awards for Quality Schooling. Rob subsequently won Highly Commended for Excellence in Teaching. Rob's submission focused on his passion and work with Environmental Sustainability.

As cassettes and VHS tapes are now a thing of the past, I recently volunteered to transfer the conference, teleconference and videolinq cassette and VHS tape recordings from 1985 to 2005 onto CD and DVD to secure them for archival purposes. This, I thought, would be a relatively simple matter of playing each cassette or tape as it was recorded onto the new medium. But I am having difficulty getting things done lately as every time I walk past the TV or cassette player I find myself pausing as I catch a phrase or topic of interest from presenters such as Gerald Ashby, Rosemary Irons, Mem Fox etc. Once I stop, I rarely continue on my way, opting to sit down and be inspired by the vast array of quality speakers who have participated in ECTA Professional development events over the past 25 years. I am about a third of the way through the 60 recordings and am looking forward to continuing to be inspired and enthused by the past and present leaders in our profession.

Conferences are a time to network with friends and colleagues and to make new connections. We were especially pleased to once again welcome participants from regional and remote areas across Qld to the Annual ECTA Conference.

Having worked in Central Qld from 1982 until 1987, I can still recall the physical and psychological boost I received from attendance at the Annual ECTA Conference. Each year I would drink up all the professional development as if it contained vital nutrients for my professional life, then return to Blackwater inspired with new ideas and strategies to improve the learning experience for the children.

Robbie and her team created a program with many high quality speakers covering a wide variety of topics. John Joseph gave a fascinating keynote address which outlined the major influence we as teachers can have on the development of the brain and subsequent learning of the children in our care. The DVD of John's presentation is included with this journal and is a must-see for all. Look throughout this and subsequent journals for articles from the presenters.

The State Coordinating Committee would like to commend Robbie Leikvold, Toni Michael, Pam Fulmer, Kerry Smith, Bev Egan, Ann Lock, Jenny Caswell, Wendy Hooker, Fei Yu and Naveen Lim for their tireless work throughout the year in bringing the conference together. We thank the administrators of John Paul College for the use of their wonderful school as the venue for the conference.

The conference committee has already began work on the 2009 conference. If you would like to join the Conference Committee and help select and liaise with presenters, coordinate trade displays and catering and/or help with other conference tasks, contact robbie@ecta.org.au.

If you don't live in Brisbane you are not restricted from joining ECTA subcommittees or the State Coordinating Committee. I myself live in Gympie and Pam (Conference Committee) lives in Hervey Bay, whilst Roslyn (State Coordinating Committee) lives in Moura. Both join in on committee meetings via phone. If you would like to join the Educating Young Children Journal Committee, contact lynne@ecta.org.au. If you would like to join the Website Committee, contact the head web-weaver gail@ecta.org.au. If you would like to join the State Coordinating Committee, contact kim@ecta.org.au.

From the Editorial Panel

Lynne Moore

Welcome

We begin this journal with some photographic memories from the 2008 annual ECTA conference held in Brisbane. Beginning with a brisk Saturday morning and quickly warming up to a busy and professionally and personally rewarding experience for all delegates.

This edition revisits some of the presentations from the conference, beginning with '*The Brain Man'* John Joseph's popular key note presentation *'Learning with the brain in mind'.* Dr Louise Porter's article explores the benefits of a parent-driven model in achieving the best outcomes for children and highlights the value of a collaborative approach with families in engaging children in the learning process. Rob and Will Jones provide some compelling evidence to provoke our thinking about how educators promote and support the self esteem of children. Continuing this theme, Lisa Sonter and Leanne Hunter provide practical examples that engage children in the processes of learning and thinking in their article *'Engaging minds and hearts'.* Desley Affleck and Katie Pennell introduce two new literacy strategies *Story Swags* and *Hop into Reading* that are successfully contributing to children's engagement books and reading. Lisa Sonter returns to share a range of strategies for achieving balance and managing stress and Angela Drysdale and Nerida Higgins provide some useful strategies for supporting children with differences.

Teacher stories in this journal are provided by Angela Le Mare and Sharon McKinlay, providing a revealing and personal insight into the craft of teaching spanning the century from the 1960's to the present. We interview Robert Pratt, a recent winner in the 2008 National Awards for Quality Teaching, from Campus Kindergarten, to learn more about his successful approach to teaching and learning with children. Tennille O'Donnell shares her experiences as an early years teacher at Junction Park State School. We also keep up to date with our ECTA regional group in Gladstone, the *Smart Moves in Early Childhood* project from Education Queensland and the latest release from C&K celebrating 100 years of excellence and advocacy in early childhood.

Editorial panel L to R – Mathilda Element, Lynne Moore, Sue Webster, Archana Sinh (absent Angela Drysdale and Roslyn Heywood)

In International perspectives, editorial panel member, Roslyn Heywood shares her experiences at the World Organization for Early Childhood Education's seventh O.M.E.P (Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire) International Conference held in Hong Kong in May. Finally, our book reviews cover a broad range of titles and include reviews from as far away as the Thursday Island pre-Prep in the Torres Strait!

Lynne



A photo diary of the 2008 ECTA Conference

Bronwyn MacGregor

On a not too chilly Saturday morning on June 28th, ECTA conference delegates arrive.

Volunteers are on hand to usher them through to the Coleman Centre for registration.

Seats quickly fill ... and John Joseph, the keynote speaker, waits in the wings ready to engage and entertain us all with his insights into the brain.

This year delegates received complimentary back copies of ECTA *Educating Young Children* journals

Lesleigh McCloy (Logan City ECDP) and Ann Gold (John Paul College) signed on as ECTA members.

The 2008 workshop presenters and topics include ...

Ann Baker – Number development

Sue Southey – Multi Sensory music

Karen Schutz – Reggio Emillia

Will and Rob Jones – Self Esteem

Yvonne Winer – Story Telling

Kim Walters – Digital Folio Systems

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Lunch is a time to network ...

Pat Hansworth, Sally Maunder, Loula Savini
(Chapel Hill SS, Alex Hills SS)

Jane Wise, Di Barnes, Janene Stack
(Alderly C&K, St Ignatius Primary)

Catherine Donaldson, Lyndall Courtice, Rebecca Williams
(Bundaberg - Acorn Babies CCC, Bundaberg TAFE)

Glenda Turner, Judy Cuskelly, Pam Charlton
(Camira Kgtn, Charlton Highfields & District Kgtn – Toowoomba)

... spend up big at the trade displays ...




... or take in a lunchtime session ...

Naveen Lim – Prep, Early Phase of Learning Action

The changing role of teacher assistants/aides

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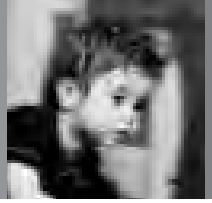

Before heading off to the ECTA conference afternoon workshops ...

Lisa Keegan, Paulette Holden, Sue Purcell and Robyn Hackett from Bayside Community College EC Centre enjoy the sunshine.

Dan Macready – VIDEOPRO Education accepts entries in the digital camera give-away competition.

As always, the day ends with the prize draws over wine and cheese.






See you all again in 2009!

Thanks to our 2008 sponsors.

VIDEOPRO BUSINESS CENTRE

Teaching in the twentieth century

Angela Le Mare

Angela Le Mare was an early childhood classroom teacher for about twenty years, both in the UK and in Queensland. During the 1970s she worked, mainly with young children, in special education. In the mid-1980s, she started working in teacher training and also wrote educational materials for the Curriculum Corporation (Canberra) and for DRUG ARM (in Brisbane). In 1991, she moved into child care training (distance education mode) with TAFE and worked in this field for fifteen years. She is now mostly retired but does some editing. For the last four years she has been a marker with the 3579 National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy, (previously the Queensland Years 3, 5 and 7 Literacy and Numeracy Testing). One of her current projects is writing about her teaching life.

Cambridge

I started my teacher training towards the end of 1959 at Homerton College in Cambridge. Life in Cambridge was very socially and academically stimulating. It seemed nothing was ever ordinary, even something as mundane as the babysitting I did to earn a little extra money. My first job, I discovered, was in the house of a very famous nuclear physicist. And was his son a young genius? It is the only time a child in my care has opted for a quantum physics text book for a bedtime story. Fortunately, this precocious five-year-old was able to put me right as I stumbled over the difficult words!

Over my three years of study, we had three periods of teaching practice – two in large London primary schools and one in a small school in rural Cambridgeshire. The College's London hostel was in Highgate and, during the weeks of my first prac, I used to walk through Highgate Cemetery, past the grave of Karl Marx, on my way to and from the school.

During this first teaching practice, I was a bit worried to discover that School Inspectors would be visiting the school while I was there. My fellow student had no such worries. 'All you need to do,' she said nonchalantly, 'is to teach the children the difference between left and right. Then, you tell them to put their right hand up when they know the answer to your question and their left hand up if they don't.'

Surprisingly, it worked!

I was based with a class of seven-year-olds and I remember the teacher talking about Greek myths with the children. As part of the project, she was working on a dramatisation of the story of Persephone. This, after minimal rehearsal time, was to be performed before the rest of the school. The casting of the seven main characters was discussed: Persephone; her mother Demeter, the Corn Goddess; Pluto, the God of the Underworld; and four horses to pull his chariot. The rest of the children were to be villagers. Everyone was happy with this except for a bouncy, tow-headed boy called Rodney who argued at length for a starring role but eventually subsided into sullen acceptance.

The important day came. Everyone from the other classes trooped in and sat round the edge of the hall. The children were in their costumes; the props were ready. Rodney, clad in his peasant clothes, sat quietly with the group of villagers. Demeter came in and started waving her hands to ripen the corn. Persephone walked beside her. Then Demeter walked to another 'cornfield' off-stage leaving the terrain clear for Pluto to sweep in with his horse-drawn chariot, gather up Persephone and take her to the Underworld. When Demeter returned, she searched for her daughter and lamented her loss. She was too distraught to ripen the corn and winter came to the land. The villagers, on cue, started muttering to each other about being hungry. This had been planned as a momentary scene before the action shifted to the Underworld. Here we would see Pluto trying to persuade Persephone to eat the seeds of a pomegranate. Rodney had other ideas. He leapt up and scuttled away from the other villagers so he was standing 'centre stage'.

'I'm 'ungry,' he shouted in his broad London accent. "And it's all because Demeter won't ripen the corn so we ain't got no corn to make bread. And she won't ripen it because Persephone's been took off. And I know what happened. I was there –'

'Oooh Rodney, you weren't there.' The other villagers protested loudly.

'I was,' Rodney insisted. 'I saw Pluto come along and grab 'old of Persephone and he took her down to the Underworld. I saw it 'appen.'

'Ooh Rodney, you never,' the villagers yelled.

'I did,' said Rodney. 'I saw it all. Pluto, 'e come along in 'is chariot wiv all them black 'orses. And I'm 'ungry 'cos we ain't got no bread.'

Of all the Greek myths, the story of Persephone, enhanced by the soliloquy of Villager Rodney, is the one I don't forget.

Reading

My first teaching job was in my home town of Reading in the south of England. It was raining on my first day. Why do I remember the weather on a September day in 1963?

First thing in the morning, forty five-year-olds trooped into the classroom, took off eighty Wellington boots and put on eighty indoor shoes. At the end of the day eighty indoor shoes were taken off, stored in the shoe rack and eighty Wellington boots were put on eighty feet. Nothing in my training had quite prepared me for this frenzied transition but, when everyone had left, I thought, 'That all went well.' However, on my second day of teaching, I received several polite letters from parents who requested my help. They fell into two categories: the letters concerning the two left Wellington boots their child had returned home wearing and the others – yes – about two right boots. This was my first practical lesson in classroom organisation and, given the inclement climate, I learned quickly.

I was very lucky with this first teaching post. The experienced teacher who taught the other class of five year olds, kept a friendly eye on me. One of the ideas she shared was for helping children with reading by serialising a simple story on sheets of card. Each page consisted of an illustration and a few words and was sufficiently large for the whole class to see as a group. This was how it worked.

When the children arrived in the morning, they were always very keen to see the new page. They would walk over to the wall where it was displayed, share their emerging reading skills and then swagger across to my desk as if they had got the better of me. 'We already know what happened in the story,' they would say triumphantly. 'We read it by ourselves.'

Here is one of the stories. It has ten pages, each with a simple illustration that should not strain any teacher's artistic abilities:

This is Bear. Bear had a secret.

Bear had a secret in a blue box.

The box had a key. The key was on a red ribbon.

"Can I look inside your box?" said Panda. "No, no, no," said Bear.

"Can I look inside your box?" said Tiger. "No, no, no," said Bear.

"Can I look inside your box?" said Monkey. "No, no, no," said Bear.

Then Monkey took the key and ran away. Bear sat down and cried.

Panda and Tiger ran after Monkey. They took the key and gave it back to Bear.

"I will share my secret with you," said Bear. He opened the box.

Inside the box there were three jars of honey, one for Panda, one for Tiger and one for Bear.

This was an idea I used for many years, regularly making up new stories that reinforced some relevant reading vocabulary. The keys to a successful story were: an element of tension; some repetition of words; attractive illustrations that give a clue to the text; and a limited range of vocabulary.

I was married after my first year of teaching. I was still only 21. Life was rather different in those days. Because Cambridge was such a social city and had many more male undergraduates than female, almost every Homerton student was formally engaged by their third year of training .I moved to Cambridgeshire and began teaching in the tiny cathedral city of Ely.

Now, that was an experience.



Reflections on teaching

Sharon McKinlay

Sharon McKinlay is a final year Bachelor of Education (Pre-service early childhood) student teacher. Since 1997, she has worked as an assistant in a range of educational settings including childcare, kindergarten, preschool, primary school and high school. Until its restructure in 2007, Sharon was Director of C&K Millmerran Community Pre-schooling Centre.

Introduction

Reflective practice allows me to take control of my learning. As Posner (1989, as cited in Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu, 2007) suggest, reflecting on my teaching will allow me to act in deliberate and intentional ways, to devise new ways of teaching and interpret new experiences from a fresh perspective (p. 161). Therefore, as I reflect on my teaching, I intend to critically evaluate my understanding and challenge my learning and teaching practices. By reflecting, questioning and challenging my practice, I will be documenting and analysing not only children's experiences and learning but my learning alongside the children and families within the community of learners. I will be maximizing my learning and accepting responsibility for my own professional development (Groundwater-Smith, et al., 2007). Through documenting my reflections, I am able to evaluate and challenge my understandings of providing an environment which is supportive, challenging and stimulating in fostering a lifelong love of learning for myself and the children that I teach.

Reflections on Philosophy

The philosophy which guides my pedagogy is one of possibilities (C&K, 2006): the possibility to question how theory is translated into practice and how practice informs theory. Possibilities: to create a nourishing classroom culture, to enhance the curriculum with materials, to bring myself to the teaching and learning process, to teach children to learn about learning, to dig deeper to learn with children, of learning happening in particular social and cultural contexts to include family's and children's input into the documentation process and making meaning (Curtis & Carter, 2008). Several possibilities lay the foundation of what I believe is a fostering learning environment; to live and learn together, to engage in deeper thinking, to make contributions, think critically, negotiate conflicts, bring joy and meaning to the teaching and learning process, to question what I am doing and why, on listening to children (C&K, 2006; Curtis & Carter, 2008). I believe there are endless possibilities to explore children's understandings, to gain fresh insights about children through listening to their theories which can be made visible through discussions, drawings and models. I value every child's contribution and ways of knowing in helping them to shape their construction of their identity.

There are many ways of viewing the world and multiple pathways to learning. When I first read C&K's *Building waterfalls* curriculum framework (2006), I felt a shift to participate in an environment that makes connections; to the child's voice, the parent's voice and the community's voice. My teaching philosophy stems from the constructionist view that children will create their own knowledge and bring their own knowledge to the classroom environment. I believe children must learn through hands-on experience. I also embrace socio-cultural theory whereby teachers co-create the curriculum with children so that both the children and the teacher are given the opportunity to challenge existing understandings of the world (C&K, 2006, QSA, 2006). I believe in the rights of children and I intend to achieve this by giving children the opportunity to explore their interests (Campbell & Page, 2003). I believe this will help foster deeper learning for the children, families, teachers and the community as a whole.

Reflections on practice

As teaching is a moral activity where I am faced with practical and ethical choices, reflection will help me weigh up the ethical implications. For example, here are some daily decisions that I am faced with: "What is worthwhile knowledge?", "How should classroom interactions be managed in ways which are fair and just?", "How should I best communicate with parents and colleagues whose values may differ?" Reflection gives me the opportunity to question taken-for-granted thoughts, feelings and actions as I

look beyond what I am doing in the classroom and question why I am doing it and for whom. Through this reflection I am able to teach in a more inclusive way for more children. Asking myself questions such as "What does it mean for me and my practice?", "How might I view or do things differently?" will allow me to make any necessary changes and recognize my professional development needs (Groundwater-smith et al., 2007).

Millikan (2003) argues that reflecting on practice provides educators the opportunity to construct new meanings and understandings. As a beginning teacher, my ability to self-reflect allows me to recognize what needs to be improved so that I can work on ways to develop these areas. A reflective journal is a tool for writing about my experiences and feelings and gives me an opportunity to evaluate the learning. Groundwater-smith et al., (2007) suggest that keeping a reflective journal on a regular basis is a form of self development, especially when focusing on questions such as 'What did my children teach me today?"

Reflections on professional development

It is my intention to continue seeking my own professional development by reading journals, attending workshops, conferences, meetings and networking with colleagues from various settings, not just the one I am working in. I also believe it would be valuable to attend conferences outside early childhood in an endeavour to widen my knowledge about the world. I believe that the more perspectives I listen to, that will challenge me, that will make me think about things, the better an early childhood educator I can become.

We face daily challenges with hearing a new idea about working with and alongside children (C&K, 2006). I believe to really hear another person's point of view is a great challenge – to be able to understand it enough to see it from their perspective. Listening to understand, really listening – not just remaining silent when another is speaking, but truly understanding what the other is saying and respecting what is said. That does not mean I have to agree or disagree with what is being said, but I value respecting what has been said. We can not all be the same - liking what each other likes, having the same desires, all agreeing with each other. If we were all the same then we wouldn't have the opportunity to make choices or have the desires that we want (Glasser, 1998).

Therefore, my professional development plan will be one where I view myself as competent and capable of possessing the attributes of a lifelong learner. My plan is to continue to be part of a wide network support group where I will not be afraid of asking my colleagues for help. Also, I want to learn with and alongside the children. As Eaton and Sheppard (1998, p.2) suggest, if we believe children are competent explorers, imaginative thinkers, creative problem-solvers, and able to see the wonder and beauty within nature and the environment, then we must give children opportunities to demonstrate that they are capable of making decisions, expressing themselves, making discoveries, posing questions, considering the views of others, testing their hypotheses, being curious, delighting in the unexpected and working collaboratively with others. If I am learning with and alongside children, I will also be participating in these possibilities.

Conclusion

There are endless possibilities to be explored as a teacher working with and alongside children, parents and the community. The more I learn the more I want to learn. The daily challenges and dilemmas that I will face will enhance the curriculum as I bring myself to the teaching and learning process. As the children are learning to negotiate conflicts, so too will I be learning with each new challenge and dilemma. Listening and respecting others' points of view, and attending professional development opportunities, will enable me to reflect on my practice as I work towards fostering a lifelong love of learning in a supportive learning environment.

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2008 National Awards for Quality Schooling

Robert Pratt - Campus Kindergarten Queensland
Early childhood education for sustainability

ECTA member Robert Pratt was recently announced as a winner in the 2008 National Awards for Quality Schooling by The Minister for Education, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, at a ceremony in the Great Hall of Parliament House. Congratulations Robert!

Robert has led the transformation of Campus Kindergarten into an exciting ecological learning community where young students enthusiastically contribute to the health of their local environment. Through an integrated curriculum Robert provides practical ways for students to interact with the natural environment and engage in discussions that challenge their thinking and ideas about the world. The links Robert has established with the wider community, higher education institutions and professional associations have extended learning opportunities for students and colleagues. Robert's dedication, expert knowledge and willingness to share has improved environmental awareness in the local community and has laid a strong foundation for quality early childhood education. Robert shares his story with us.

Can you tell us about Campus Kindergarten?

Campus Kindergarten (CK) is situated on the grounds of the University of Queensland St Lucia campus in Brisbane. It operates as a Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland affiliated kindergarten and a long day care centre. It opens from 8.00am-5.30pm on week-days and caters for children from two and a half years to five years.

There are three classrooms in the centre; the pre-kindergarten for three-year-olds with 16 children per day, plus two kindergarten rooms of four to five-year-olds with 22 children per day.

Approximately sixty percent of children attending CK have a parent either working or studying at the university. The community and classroom demographic is both culturally and socio-economically diverse.

What is your role and the focus of your work?

My primary role is as the Co-ordinating Teacher in one of the Kindergarten rooms at Campus Kindergarten. I am responsible for managing a team of four staff within my immediate team as well as collaborating and working with other staff members at the centre.

My work as Kindergarten Co-ordinating Teacher includes classroom management, curriculum development and program implementation.

For the past ten years I have also introduced, co-ordinated, energised and promoted various

initiatives to support Education for Sustainability at Campus Kindergarten.

Can you share some of the challenges you face in your work?

Challenges faced in my work include:

- a constantly and quickly changing student and parent body (children attend Campus Kindergarten for a maximum of two years)
- ensuring all members of the Campus Kindergarten community are 'on the same page', particularly with regards their values regarding the environment
- negotiating rules and regulations that sometimes impede my ability to implement quality early childhood teaching practices
- accessing funding to support Education for Sustainability initiatives.

… And your achievements?

As well as successfully implementing an innovative and creative early childhood program for the past ten years, I have helped lead Campus Kindergarten through a process of cultural and philosophical change – particularly with regards to our Education for Sustainability initiatives. Key elements of cultural change have included:

- developing a culture underpinned by the key concepts of rights, respect, trust and responsibility – a philosophical base that supports teaching practices, that empowers children, teachers and families and engages them in initiatives that will contribute to a sustainable future
- the creation of democratic classrooms where all members (children, teachers and parents) have a voice and where their contributions are valued.

Specific Education for Sustainability initiatives that the children have been engaged in include:

- making connections with nature - community based native plant regeneration projects, vegetable gardening, chook raising, frog pond, possum, bird and bee boxes
- implementation of waste reduction initiatives – reducing, re-using and recycling programs, worm farming, composting
- promoting efficient use of natural resources – installation of water tanks, strategies to reduce energy and water consumption developed with children.

Throughout the ten years that these initiatives have been included in Campus Kindergarten's teaching programs and daily classroom practices, I have sought to promote them within the CK community and in the broader community. I have conducted information sessions for parents and staff and given formal presentations at conferences both locally and internationally. I have also engaged in research with academics from the Queensland University of Technology, Centre for Learning Innovation and School of Early Childhood. Our findings were published in various papers including the United Nations Handbook of Sustainability Research in 2005.

Learning together at Toowong State School

Tennille O'Donnell

Tennille O'Donnell is currently a teacher at Junction Park State School at Annerley in the south of Brisbane. Tennille has worked at Junction Park since the beginning of 2007. In her first year she taught a Year One class and this year has moved to a Prep class to give her a greater understanding of the Early Years Curriculum.

Tennille is a contract teacher who is hoping to secure a permanent position with the Education Department in the near future.

Tennille came to Junction Park with experience in the Early Years after working in Toowoomba Child Care Centre for three years. In the child care centres she worked as a group leader/ assistant. Tennille decided that she thoroughly loved working with young children and returned to full time study at the University of Southern Queensland.

Tennille enjoys teaching because she feels that she can really make a positive difference to the lives and families of young children. She enjoys the energy level of young children and the challenge of providing meaningful, scaffolded learning experiences to a wide range of abilities and cultures.

Tennille enjoys working at Junction Park because, with a student population of 400, she feels it is like a small community supported by the staff, parents and local community. Tennille finds that the small staff gives an intimate feeling to the school and work situation. She loves the size of the school because it allows for familiarity between parents, teachers and students. It is also a well organized school with a great, friendly feeling.

Tennille attended the ECTA conference for the first time this year after hearing from many friends that the conference is an interesting day. Tennille felt that it was well worth giving up the first day of her holidays to receive specific Early Years Professional Development, attend the workshops and network with like-minded friends.

'Knock Knock'

Gladstone Regional Group of the Early Childhood Teachers Association

The weather had turned cool and wet, yet still over 60 early childhood teachers, music specialists, group leaders, assistants and mothers gave up their Friday night or Saturday morning to attend the recent Early Childhood Music Workshops hosted by the Gladstone Regional Group of the Early Childhood Teachers Association. Sue Southey – Music Consultant, travelled from Brisbane to present *Knock Knock* a workshop on her latest CD for children *Knock Knock*. Participants examined strategies for engaging young children in creative movement experiences as well as consolidating basic musical skills. The activities were presented through processes that engage children's auditory, kinaesthetic and visual modalities. Singing and laughter could be heard throughout the room and school as participants were engaged in discovery and learning though music. Sue managed to present a workshop with just the right blend of theory, plenty of practical, some brain thought (group work) and more practical to finish on a high. We know from comments made on the night and morning (and from those who I have spoken with over the following weeks) that many kindergartens and schools have been "Knock, Knocking" and revisiting "Crackle and Pop". The early childhood professionals who attended have come away with a greater understanding of music and how to get young children to "feel" it.

If you have the chance to attend one of Sue's workshops please do as you will walk away with a feeling of renewed life and eagerness to share music with your class. If you are even luckier and have the chance to organise a workshop with Sue, please do as she is a pleasant, easy to please presenter to work with.

It was with great surprise that I turned on my computer only the next day, and received teaching notes and workshop notes that Sue promised she would send! Much better service than I could ever give! Thanks Sue. That didn't go unnoticed by us here in Gladstone.

Originally, just one workshop had been planned for Saturday. However, due to popular demand, the Gladstone Branch of ECTA organised for Sue to lead a second Friday evening workshop. Our sincere thanks go to Sue who literally stepped off the plane and into the classroom to lead the workshop.

Gladstone ECTA would like to thank Kin Kora State School for providing us with such a fantastic venue and Debbie Hancock from Koolyangarra Kindergarten for providing Sue with accommodation and transport. Sue joined our small ECTA (Gladstone) committee (Liz Fallon and Debbie Hancock) for dinner Friday evening and lunch on Saturday prior to Sue catching her flight back to Brisbane. ECTA-Gladstone Regional Group wouldn't be able to host such wonderful workshops without the support of ECTA. It is through their financial assistance that we can bring such talented people to our region at a cost local early childhood people can afford.

Our special thanks must go to all the teachers, assistants, and group leaders who gave up their Friday evening and Saturday morning to attend our workshop to further grow as teachers and carers of young children. Our children's future is assured with such dedicated teachers in our local community.

For details about becoming a member of the ECTA-Gladstone Regional Group contact Liz Fallon, President refallon@tpg.com.au



Supporting children with differences The importance of partnerships

Angela Drysdale and Nerida Higgins

We appreciate difference in others. Difference may be observed among children as milestones pass. For many parents and teachers, where to go to understand and support these differences is an unknown journey. This article attempts to travel the unknown road and highlight signposts that one might find on this journey.

Before a child starts school

Before a child starts school, have the child's vision and hearing checked – a behavioural optometrist will check if your child's eyes are teamed and moving well. For a hearing assessment contact your local GP or the Australian Hearing Association.

Areas of Concern

Many new forms of treatment may have been developed but the secret of medical research success to date has been preventative care, early detection and treatment. In education, early detection of difference allows the child to build a strong base in his learning journey. Early detection in intervention can improve the outcomes in children.

What to think about

Educational Field

Seek advice from your kindy, preschool or classroom teacher if your child has:

- poorly articulated speech for his/her age
- difficulty in communication
- no definite handedness
- poor coordination
- considered immaturity
- reoccurring health or behaviour/social problems
- literacy difficulties
- numeracy difficulties
- learning issues.

Medical Field

Consult your General Practitioner with any issues of concern. A history of allergies, asthma, persistent ear, nose and throat difficulties or frequent bronchitis are fairly common characteristics of children with developmental behaviour and/or learning difficulties. Being aware and keeping track of your child's illnesses, helps you to seek advice from a specialist.

The following points highlight some areas of awareness in considering difference:

- difficult or premature pregnancy
- serious and/or persistent illnesses (e.g. ear infections resulting in the need for grommets)
- developmental delay in crawling, sitting, walking and other areas of gross motor development may be seen as clumsy motor development
- resistance to activities such as construction, drawing, puzzles and other manipulative equipment
- developmental delay in the acquisition of language (talking)
- limited social confidence and interaction

Parent Observations

Some observations might include:

- restless, fidgety and unable to sit still
- listless motionless and may go unnoticed in a group
- lack of motivation to do activities or complete them
- does not listen consistently or needs you to repeat requests often
- does not follow your directions even when repeated
- cannot remember directions or requests
- resists reading or writing experiences.



Parents will have other concerns reflecting medical, and learning issues. Children who have school learning difficulties usually have more than one area of concern.

> *Most children with learning difficulties who have behavioural problems develop these problems at their frustration at not being able to learn. Some however, have a history of abnormal behaviour which began in early childhood or even in infancy. The patterns of abnormality are often modified or have disappeared by the time school age is reached but if they were once clearly noticeable they remain important in planning help for the child with a problem. (Sass 1989;111)*

In the primary years, children may present with difficulties when learning reading, writing and mathematics. Within the educational setting, the teacher can address these issues and suggest avenues of assessment and intervention. Some avenues, with a list of the areas they often support, might be:

Educational Occupational Therapist

- visual perceptual difficulties (see checklist)
- handwriting issues
- gross and fine motor development
- body awareness

Speech and Language Pathologist

- difficulties with speech
- issues with the development of language for communication
- issues with the development of language for understanding
- social language and how to communicate with others
- language for problem solving and thinking and imaging

Psychologists/Counsellor

- general intellectual ability
- educational assessments
- information processing style
- attention and concentration ability
- memory – verbal/visual, short-term and long-term
- therapy for many issues in the development of social skills
- effect of Social & emotional problems on learning
- giftedness

Educational Physiotherapist

- gross motor development
- skills necessary for participation in motor activities
- sensory integrative therapy

Behavioural Optometrist www.acbo.org.au

- ability to see clearly at near and far distances
- ability to coordinate the eyes so that they work as a team at both near and far distance
- ability to change focus easily from near to far and vice versa
- ability to use both eyes together at all times
- ability to track smoothly
- ability to sustain comfortable focus all day long

Audiologist

- hearing assessment for regular acuity
- hearing assessment for auditory processing

No child is too young, or too old, for specific assessment of developmental skills. Early referral by teachers and parents will ensure timely assessment and, hopefully, intervention.

For teachers, the best outcomes are achieved by involving parents as partners in the journey. For parents, the best outcomes are achieved by involving teachers as partners in the journey.

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History in the making

Children score a century

It has taken 100 years, but it has been worth the wait. The book, *Playing for Keeps*, has just been published and provides an in-depth look into one Queensland organisation that has touched the lives of more than one million children and their families.

C&K, formerly known as the Creche and Kindergarten Association, is Queensland's oldest and largest community based early childhood association. C&K's story is one that has not yet fully been told, but one that deserves to be as it is inextricably linked to the history of this state and profiles many leading Queenslanders who have influenced early childhood − both statewide and nationally.

Highly respected author Helen Gregory takes the reader on a journey from the dusty streets of Fortitude Valley in 1907, where children were left playing unattended in the streets, through to the war years where the threat of enemy invasion forced many kindergarten and childcare centre closures, to the era when the political childcare hot potato was dished up and served to satisfy the corporate appetite, to present day when the cumulative echo of children's voices past, present and future have finally been heard by the astute political cognoscenti.

Along the way we meet some interesting characters and leading experts who have left their indelible mark on early childhood. There's Dr John Bostock, Queensland's first psychiatrist and C&K president, two of Queensland's first woman doctors Eleanor Bourne and Lilian Cooper, the determined Josephine Bedford who was an unyielding early childhood advocate, and many, many thousands of Queenslanders who became united in a common vision to ensure children received the best early start to life.

C&K early childhood education and care general manager, Jan Cullen, said *Playing for Keeps* was a literary testament to the hardworking, dedicated people who were unwaveringly committed to the importance of quality early childhood education and care.

"*Playing for Keeps* illustrates that many of the issues facing early childhood education and care today are challenges C&K has confronted in the past and successfully weathered," Ms Cullen said.

"Our accomplishments and continued progress are a reflection that our core mission of putting children first is not just a 'lofty idea', but an essential one for a fully functioning, healthy society," she said. "Our work is validated not only by the latest early childhood research, but by our mere existence.

"*Playing for Keeps* is a book that I encourage all Australians to read.

While it comes from a Queensland perspective the issues it raises are relevant to all. Its publication is a timely reminder to politicians of all persuasions that investing in children in not a luxury. It is an essential. "

For more information contact C&K 3552 5333.

Playing for Keeps retails for $34.95 (including GST). Copies are available for purchase from C&K's website: www.candk.asn.au

About C&K

Founded in 1907, C&K is Queensland's largest and oldest community based early childhood services provider. We are the only statewide early childhood association recognised and funded by the Department of Education, Training and the Arts. C&K has approximately 400 centres and services across Queensland including kindergarten (pre-prep programs), child care, family day care, in-home care, outside school hours care and Indigenous programs.

Each year more than 18,000 families access a C&K service.

As a community based association, all profits from C&K's centres and services are reinvested in providing quality care and education for young children.



Smart moves in early childhood

Sue Monsen

The Queensland Government is committed to supporting and promoting the health and wellbeing of Queensland's young people and to ensuring increased student participation in regular physical activity. *Smart Moves* is an Education Queensland initiative that will increase the time students spend in quality physical activity. Primary school students will participate in at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity aimed at moderate intensity.

Active classrooms improve health and enhance academic learning

It is generally accepted that increased physical activity has positive effects on health. What is less recognised is that physical activity also benefits academic learning.

There is a substantial body of evidence indicating that children who participate in regular physical activity tend to perform better in the classroom, and that allocating time for daily physical activity does not adversely impact on academic performance. In fact, children who undertake physical activity tend to perform cognitive tasks more rapidly and have enhanced brain functioning. *Active Education: Physical education, physical activity and academic performance* (http://www.activelivingresearch.org/alr/alr/files/Active_Ed.pdf) provides a reader-friendly example of this research.

Research also indicates that regular physical activity has a positive effect on children's attitude, self esteem and classroom behaviour.

Energisers are brief, discrete activities that invigorate the body and brain for optimal learning. Incorporating Energisers into your classroom can greatly enhance the impact of learning because it focuses the learner on the lesson and raises the energy level of the class. North Carolina PE (http://www.ncpe4me.com/energizers.html) has some great ideas for Energisers.

Early childhood is the formative years for developing physical skills

Physical activity in early childhood should have a focus on play but can easily integrate other elements of learning such as language and maths skills. Basic play-based activities that call for children to move over, under and around, or reinforce colour, shape and size are ways to combine physical activity with academic endeavours.

Gross motor skills are the foundation for the development of other aptitudes including fine motor and social skills. Tracking the movement of a ball can assist students to track words across a page, and cooperative games can develop and reinforce pro-social behaviours.

You can watch examples of early childhood physical activity on the *2008 Year of Physical Activity Suncorp Sunwise Smart Moves Challenge* webpage (http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/physicalactivity/suncorp-sunwise.html) including Balance Jump and Climb Obstacle Course (Prep), Catching and Bouncing (Prep) and Motor Skills Challenge (Yr 1).

Perceptual Motor Programs (PMP) contain activities designed to assist students to move and play in a controlled and coordinated manner. The focus is on confidence and motivation, development and enhancement of movement skills in fun, non-threatening and inclusive activities. Your PE teacher will assist you to develop PMP ideas and activities with your class.

You can facilitate physical activity with young children

Smart Moves is a physical activity program as opposed to sport, physical education or coaching. There is no expectation for generalist teachers to acquire the expertise to deliver specialised skills. The focus of *Smart Moves* is participation through games and play, and classroom teachers need to be confident and competent in managing these activities.

You can improve your confidence to safely organise, manage and motivate your class in physical activity through two FREE professional development opportunities:

The *2008 Year of Physical Activity* teacher workshops are scheduled for 22 regional locations throughout

Semester 2. Participants will get up and get moving in these very practical workshops on physical activity. Sessions will include a focus on generating ideas for integrating physical activity into Key Learning Areas, and modifying physical activity for students of all ages and abilities. Teachers will leave this terrific workshop with plenty of ideas, a physical activity equipment kit and a DVD demonstrating the integration of physical activity into Maths. You can register through the Professional Development page of the *2008 Year of Physical Activity* website.

Physical Activity – Effectively managing your class is an on-line course that aims to provide teachers with an understanding of the basic concepts and practical skills for creating and facilitating physical activity with students. It will assist teachers to modify and adapt activities for the safe and inclusive participation of all students. It will be launched at the beginning of Term 3 through the Education Queensland's Learning Place.

Smart Moves: Your turn

Your willingness to fully embrace *Smart Moves* will have a real impact on the health and academic learning of future generations. You can be a champion of change and create a culture in your school where students make physical activity a regular part of their day, everyday and take up lifelong healthy habits.

Go to http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/healthy/physical-activity-programs.html for more information on *Smart Moves* and the *2008 Year of Physical Activity*.

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Learning with the brain in mind - the early years

John Joseph

Between 1998 and 2008, John Joseph has presented keynote addresses, conferences and workshops to more than 300,000 people, representing more than 3,000 schools and hundreds of corporations across 17 countries. Week after week, he facilitates workshops for student groups where he challenges young people to learn about learning, behaviour and emotions. John uses stunning computer-generated graphics and actual brain dissections to engage kids. He has facilitated the dissections of more than 100,000 sheep brains! Little wonder that people refer to him as "The Brain Man!" John has presented sessions to teachers, students, parents, judges, business leaders, accountants, the medical profession, community service organisations, government departments and tertiary education staff. He has written more than 100 published articles, five books and a number of CD Roms. His websites generate over 100,000 downloads every month. John is currently Director, Focus Education Australia Pty Ltd and Director, Mind Webs Pty Ltd.

"The distance between a new-born baby to the five-year-old is a chasm. Between the five-year-old to me is just one small step." Tolstoy

Tucked snugly inside the skull lies the brain, an organ of about 1 1/2 kilograms of light-pink matter interspersed with white fatty matter, that is designed to learn. In my opinion, the mind is the conscious aspect of the brain's thinking process, existing interdependently with the brain. Neuroscientist, Susan Greenfield defines the mind as,

> *'... the seething morass of cell circuitry that has been configured by personal experiences and is constantly being updated as we live out each moment' (2000, p 15).*

Together, the brain and mind combination intertwines our experiences to construct our lives. They are the interface between our inside world and the outside world.

At birth, the brain is less than 1/3 of its adult weight yet it has already undergone significant growth and development. Within a day of the mother's egg being fertilized by the father's sperm, it has divided into two cells. Two days later, it has divided into 64 cells in a sphere-shaped construction that by three weeks has again divided with the middle layer destined to become the cells of the brain. Working at a prodigious pace to meet its requirements of about 70 - 90 billion neurons by mid gestation, the fetal brain produces about 500,000 tiny neurons per minute! By 6 months gestation the rate has slowed to about a mere 250,000 per minute! Produced in the middle section of the brain, the cells must migrate upwards and outwards towards their final destination. Following trails and ladders laid down by cells called radial glia, they even stop occasionally for the glia cells to nourish the travelling neurons.

The travelling neurons are destined to form the cortex (Latin for bark) a pinkish outer covering of six layers of neurons. What happens next is simply amazing. The 100 billion or so nerve cells begin to blossom with branches, known as dendrites (to collect electrical and chemical messages from other cells) and sprout longish cables, known as axons (to send electrical and chemical messages to other cells) so they can establish functional interconnections between each other. While is evidence of learning (interconnections between nerve cells) from experiences within the womb, these experiences pale into insignificance when compared to connections that occur once the child is born.

During the first two years of life, the brain will nearly double in size, underscoring the significance of environmental influences in shaping each brain. The first of the two main

factors contributing to the growth spurt is the construction of those interconnections between cells – synapses (the tiny gap between the end of an axon and junction points on dendrites from other nerve cells). The synapses construct the interconnections by crowding onto every possible tiny space on the wispy dendrites, which in turn grow at amazing rates to increase surface area in the brain for even more synapses. The second major growth factor is a fatty white substance that accumulates around the axons of these cells – myelin. Myelin insulates the axons that pass electrical impulses from neuron to neuron. Myelin helps to construct neural pathways that eventually become habits.

At birth, the spinal cord and brainstem are just about fully myelinated. That's important because those brain parts manage temperature, heartbeat, and reflexes such as suckling. Long neurons, such as those travelling from the brain down to the bladder will take two to three years to myelinate, coinciding with the end of toilet training. The final parts of the brain to myelinate are the frontal lobes.

In the young child's brain, learning is primarily achieved through a staggering growth of new synapses (functional interconnections) while in the older child's brain, learning is largely achieved through the strengthening or weakening of existing synapses. Thus, the early years provide a strong foundation from which each brain will develop. As children construct long-term memories, slight modification of their brains takes place. Since every child has a unique set of learning experiences, every child also builds a brain as unique as a set of fingerprints.

Growth and pruning

An overproduction of synapses occurs in the young child's brain due to the novelty provided by almost every experience. In other words, the neurons form too many connections at first. Many of these synapses are vigorously shed in a process known as paring back or pruning as the young brain eliminates redundant and improper sites that are underused or obsolete. The interconnections that are active and generate electrical pulses survive while those with little or no activity are lost (Society for neuroscience, 2004). Scientists once thought that the pruning of synapses indicated the end of critical periods for brain development and any learning not reached within these periods would be too difficult for the brain to master at later times. Such thinking has subsequently lost ground to new theories based on the idea of brain plasticity (the dynamic structuring and re-structuring of synapses). The term, critical period, is being replaced by a new term, sensitive periods (OECD, 2002). Therefore, the building of concepts, emotions, procedural skills and memories is a dynamic, lifelong process for the human brain. No child is predestined by genes to fail to learn – albeit there will be genetic influences that help shape each person's potential. The brain learns constantly and, through biological reflection, it prunes, constructs and reshapes memory, continually recruiting obsolete neural networks for new learning.

This significant research finding destroys the myth that failure to master certain learning within a prescribed period shuts down associated learning mechanisms for life. Having said that, there is no doubt that milestones in physical development associated with such areas as sight, hearing, movements and certain aspects of spoken language are subject to sensitive periods for development. Even so, as neuroscientists learn more about the functioning of brains, the development of remedial strategies may ultimately enable each brain to re-wire itself to fulfill its destiny.

The brain learns constantly and, through biological reflection, it prunes, constructs and reshapes memory, continually recruiting obsolete neural networks for new learning.

Neurons – tiny cells that learn

Neurons (from the Greek word meaning, 'bow') are specialised cells designed to transmit

information to other cells. Neurons look a little like uprooted trees. There are the branches at the top (dendrites), the longish trunk where the body of the cell is located (axons) and the roots (terminals) which branch out of the axons to make contact with other neurons or muscle cells.

Dendrites (from the Greek word meaning 'tree branches) grow as wispy tentacles from the neuron's cell body and are covered with synapses. Synapses (from the Greek word meaning to 'clasp together)' are the junction points between axon terminals and receiving dendrites.

At its most basic level, the terminals of one neuron connect with the dendrites of another neuron. The connection, known as a synapse, is a tiny gap where the brains chemicals (neurotransmitters) flow from terminals on axons to receptor points on dendrites. It is at those points that our experiences become flesh. The synapse has both pre-connection points (transmitters) and bulb-like post-connection points (receptors). As neurotransmitters flow into the synapses, due to making or retrieving memories, the tiny receptors they latch onto cause electrical or biochemical messages in the receiving neuron. Thus the input to a neuron occurs at the synapse and the output is a series of electrical blips firing down its axon in pre-determined (or learnt) patterns.

Within thousandths of a second, neurons which are part of sending and receiving networks can make sense of our world and, remarkably, remember the patters of inputs and outputs so we can recall the memory later.

Why are some things easier to learn than other things?

The human brain is born with a pre-programmed expectation to learn a whole array of skills such as eating, walking, talking, simple number facts, toileting, bonding and so on.

The human brain, however, does not expect to learn certain other things and therefore requires intense coaching and long periods of practise. Such learning includes reading, writing, complex mathematics, playing sports, driving a car and so on. Whatever the brain learns, it needs experiences to build interconnections between neurons to enable the construction of memories. Scientists call these interconnections, synapses and the growth of new synapses enables the construction of more memory networks, known as synaptogenesis. We now know that synaptogenesis occurs throughout life, a feature known as brain plasticity.

What is experience expectant learning?

Neuroscientists have divided synaptogenesis (the growth of new synapses) into two major categories. Category 1, is experience expectant plasticity, which is characterised by learning that occurs species-wide and within predictable periods. Category 2, is experience dependent plasticity, which is not constrained by age or time but does require relatively high degrees of motivation and effort to master. This latter type of learning is undertaken by pre-schools and schools and requires a structured curriculum and regular, specific feedback.

A vocabulary of 50 or so words by around age one, learnt primarily by pointing, labelling and naming items blooms into perhaps 2,500 words by age five.

Most experience expectant learning occurs within the early years of life and with little formal instruction. Most young children learn to talk and walk easily (experience expectant) compared to learning to write their names (experience dependent). A young child masters the grammar of a language more easily during the early years while the vocabulary of the same language is subject to lifelong modification. Therefore, second language learners need exposure to the grammar of the language early on if they are to speak it without an accent.

Experience expectant learning occurs when the brain encounters the relevant experience and motivation at the appropriate time (OECD, 2002).

A vocabulary of 50 or so words by around age one, learnt primarily by pointing, labelling and naming items blooms into perhaps 2,500 words by age five. Wide-spread, stiff-legged movements of the toddler mature in the second year of life into running, jumping, hopping, kicking, climbing and riding. During the third year of life many children learn to tip-toe, balance on a narrow beam, catch items and even make rudimentary-looking drawings that represent people and environments.

By around age four, most children have already developed awareness of their own minds and those of others. The child can, for example, invent the personalities for two dolls – one that acts mean and another that acts nice – then enact a scene between them (Diamond and Hopson 1998). This awareness of other people's lives and influences is crucial to children because they will model their attitudes, dispositions and behaviour on the significant adults and children with whom they regularly interact.

By around age six, most children can count to 30 or more, name several colours, write their own name, understand the meaning of prepositions (in, on, above, over, around, under) and many comparative states (biggest, smallest, tallest, widest). Running, laughing, chattering, exploratory young children require little formal instruction to master such learning. But, they do require high levels of interactions with loving, caring adults and the scope to explore and make mistakes without criticism. This is the main reason why working on children's strengths and from where the child is 'at' is more beneficial than trying pressure youngsters into matching their peers' outcomes or to manage their behaviour. Some youngsters are punished for not meeting adult demands and for acting out their frustrations through behaviour. Children find it very difficult to articulate their needs. Theirs is the world of emotions and associated behaviour. The emotions associated with punishment weaken relationships between young children and adults to the point where punishment itself has virtually no effect on behaviour. Punishment reduces risk-taking and risk-taking is a critical factor in learning during the early years.

A child is more likely to attempt learning when encouraged and guided, than when threatened, constrained or punished when things didn't work out so well. In fact, children's emotional states are far more significant in their intellectual development than previously thought (OECD, 2002). Emotion creates the shifting sands for the development of attitudes associated with formal learning.

The feeling of satisfaction accompanies successful mastery of learning. It's an emotion that strengthens children and feeds into the brain's natural disposition for learning. The early years require, above all else, the development of emotional competencies – to be self-aware, to have self-control, the ability to resolve conflicts, to cooperate with others, to delay gratification and to seek satisfaction. Many scientists assert that young children have brains that learn better than at any other time in their lives. Add high motivation to this wonderful window for learning, time-frames that reflect actual development rather than norms, and learning strategies based on individual learning styles to ensure an unbeatable combination for every child's growth and development.

No child is predestined by genes to fail to learn – albeit there will be genetic influences that help shape each person's potential.

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Collaboration with parents

Louise Porter

Dr Louise Porter is a child psychologist with over 25 years experience in private practice consulting with parents and practitioners about children's developmental and social or emotional challenges. She has also worked in early childhood disability and mainstream settings and lectured at university in Adelaide for 13 years in topics relating to early childhood, special and gifted education, and behaviour management. She has a particular interest in how adults can guide children's behaviour, which was the subject of her doctorate. She has written many books, including: *Teacher-parent collaboration* (2008). *Young children's behaviour: Practical approaches for caregivers and teachers* (3rd ed, 2008) and *Gifted young children* (2nd ed, 2005).

Students' school adjustment relies at least in part on the practical and emotional resources made available to them over the years from home, school and the wider community (Christenson 2004; Deslandes et al. 1999). An over-riding rationale for collaborating with your students' parents, then, is to coordinate these sources of support. Yet, despite parents' and teachers' common belief in the value of education, and that both want the best for children and want them to be happy at school, teacher-parent relations are often strained (Hughes & MacNaughton 2002). I contend that this is because these relationships are based on a flawed model that entrenches a power imbalance between parents and teachers. This paper will examine the continuum of models guiding parent-teacher collaboration, and argue for a parent-driven style.

Professional-driven interactions

This first style of parent-teacher relationships is characterised by teacher dominance, whereby it is assumed that professionals are exclusively qualified to apply a specialised body of knowledge, which is the only information relevant to the issue at hand (Osher & Osher 2002; Thompson et al. 1997). They are the ones to assess children's needs, interpret these to parents and formulate a suitable program, with parents expected either to accept professionals' advice, or go elsewhere (Osher & Osher 2002).

From their elevated position, professionals often regard parents as the source of children's problems, particularly when their family is disadvantaged socially or has a structure other than the idealised nuclear family (Fylling & Sandvin 1999). Sometimes this view is softened into a conceptualisation of parents as joint victims with their child, as being somewhat fragile while, for their part, children are considered too young, ill-behaved, incompetent or troubled to participate in devising solutions to their problems (Osher & Osher 2002). Thus, within this model, professional diagnosis focuses on deficits, either within children or their families. This deficit orientation criticises parents and leaves teachers feeling increasingly pessimistic over time about their inability to counteract family 'inadequacies' (Daniels & Shumow 2003).

Professional dominance can work only when short-lived, but will not sustain ongoing relationships, as occur in schools (Galil et al. 2006). This is not a model for the 21st century. It cannot equip teachers with the information from parents that they need to teach their students well, nor secure for them the support of parents. It sets teachers up to fail by expecting them to be the ones to generate solutions to problems that are beyond their sphere of influence. And this professional-driven stance contravenes both the spirit and provisions of departmental policies on parent collaboration.

Family-allied relationships

Epitomised in the platitude that, 'Parents are their child's first (or best) teachers', a common stance of educators is that parents should actively help teachers to educate their children (Dunst 2002). To achieve this, it is recognised that families and parents cannot work in isolation: parents need schools and teachers need parents (Christenson 2004). Therefore, educators accept the responsibility to communicate with parents about their child's education, while parents are expected to support the school. Nevertheless, this parental engagement is often only in token activities that do not challenge teachers' domain, with teachers directing parents and the two working in parallel rather than jointly (Elliott 2003).

However, even these token expectations for parents are both excessive and unworkable. They are excessive inasmuch as it is not parents' job to act as their children's teachers, to police homework completion, or to discipline their children at home for problems that occur at school. And the expectations are unworkable, because parents' formal instructional support does not improve outcomes for children, and can even be detrimental to them and to their family as parents become stressed and are obliged to neglect competing commitments to themselves and other family members (Foster et al. 1981; Harris & McHale 1989; Ramey & Ramey 1992; White et al. 1992). Instead, across the ability range, formal teaching by parents is less vital than merely reading to their young children (Halle et al. 1997).

A family-allied model also fails us in schools because, as with professional-driven relationships, this approach dictates how parents should raise their children, and thereby pits teachers against those parents who do not conform to expectations. An adversarial and confrontational relationship is established which leads either to more negative or to fewer interactions between teachers and nonconformist parents (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta 1999). The end result is that the parents and students who most need teacher support to be educationally successful are the ones who are least likely to receive it (Hill & Taylor 2004; Rimm-Kaufmann et al. 2000; Schulting et al. 2005).

A family-centred philosophy

A family-centred philosophy upholds that schools and families share the common task of educating young people (Adams & Christenson 2000). Therefore, power between parents and teachers is equalised (Daka-Mulwanda et al. 1995), with the two collaborating to determine goals for children's education, jointly planning strategies, and sharing responsibility for delivering educational programs (Friend & Cook 2007). Nevertheless, while power is shared between parents and teachers, the two can fulfil different roles, as negotiated between them. Thus, family-centred practice entails both equal status and parity, which refers to valuing and blending each partner's ideas and knowledge (Christenson 2004; Friend & Cook 2007).

In a departure from the deficit orientation characterised by the two interaction styles described previously, family-centred assessment focuses on the strengths both of students and their families. Nevertheless, problems remain with this model. First, the presumption that practitioners are the rightful diagnosticians of families' assets violates the principles of true collaboration. Second, there is little evidence of its effectiveness. One study within early intervention found no developmental gains for children with disabilities, no reductions in parental stress, or any improvements in parent-child interaction patterns in those programs that were family-centred compared with those that were child-centred (Mahoney & Bella 1998). Third, family-centred practice is rare in early intervention services and even less common in preschools and schools (Dunst 2002; McWilliam et al. 1999). That family-centred practice is seldom enacted, even when recommended by policy, suggests that it is impractical, largely because teachers lack the resources (especially time) that they would need to establish frequent enough contacts with parents (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta 1999), particularly by the high school years (Adams & Christenson 2000). In short, whereas the family-allied model imposes inappropriate expectations on parents, a family-centred model imposes inappropriate expectations on teachers, particularly when it comes to supporting students and families with multiple problems.

A parent-driven model

In its stance that teachers and parents are full and equal partners, family-centred practice gives too much power to professionals – without, however,

In a parent-driven model, you are accountable to parents: they are not accountable to you

giving them the resources or knowledge base to exercise that power. The one remaining option, then, is for teachers to adopt a parent-driven model to guide their relationships with their students' parents. This stance honours parents' role as family leaders. This transforms communication from telling parents to listening to them (Dunst et al. 1988, 1994; Sokoly & Dokecki 1995). The philosphy recognises that, more than being mere consumers or even equal participants in a partnership with you, parents are actually your employers. Their function is not

to help you teach their children, but the reverse: they employ you to assist them in raising skilled, knowledgeable and well-adjusted children. They hire you for your expertise as an educator and pay your salary by way of private school fees or taxes for public education. Therefore, your task is to further their aims for their children.

In a parent-driven model, you are accountable to parents: they are not accountable to you. Using the analogy of taking a road trip, in a parent-driven approach, parents work out the route, with the practitioner holding the map as a guide so that the parents can reach their destination satisfied by the journey and its outcome (Tannen 1996, in Osher & Osher 2002).

Conclusion

Under models that give professionals ultimate power, the paradox is that if as a teacher you attempt to use that power, you will lose influence over both your parent group and your students. When parents do not comply with the solutions imposed on them, the resulting despondency and failure will disempower all of you. Instead, when problems arise, the respect inherent in a parent-driven stance allows you to recruit parents' advice and harness their expertise at solving problems for their own family and its members. This will increase the likelihood of finding workable solutions that parents are willing to enact. Given that increases in parental involvement produce improvements in children's academic skills, particularly in those most at risk of academic failure (Dearing et al. 2006), a parent-driven approach has the best chance of achieving what you and your parent group both want: engaged and successful students.

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The myth of self esteem: an example of the need for evidence-based teaching practices.

Rob Jones and Will Jones

Will Jones – is the C&K Early Childhood Education and Care Consultant for the Cape Gulf and Torres Strait. Will has over 30 years of teaching and lecturing experience across the whole spectrum of Early Childhood Education and Care in Far North Queensland. She remains committed to, and passionate about, quality; current, evidence-based, educational practice; and teaching that is not compromised by an ever changing socio/political context. To this end, Will's passion remains enabling teachers, carers, managers and families to honour Behaviour Guidance rather than mere Behaviour Management. Will believes strongly in leading by serving and therefore is equally passionate about quality teacher education and training.

Rob Jones - is a Registered Psychologist with Education Queensland [DETA] at Innisfail State High School. He is a father of three adult young women and remains passionate about the quality of family life and how this impacts on children's educational and spiritual wellbeing. Rob's career spans over 30 years within a myriad of education, counselling and teacher training contexts. He is a 2007 recipient of a Churchill Fellowship to the United States.

"Low self esteem is the cause of all of the problems in the world" Oprah Winfrey, 2001.

Oprah Winfrey's views on self esteem are widespread (Baumeister et al., 2003). Such views first became popular after the publication of Branden's The Psychology of Self Esteem in 1969 (Baumeister et al., 2003). Braden and his followers claimed that self esteem is the single most important aspect of a person. They reasoned that praise raises self esteem and that high self esteem raises performance. Critically, they reasoned that low self esteem is the fundamental cause of most if not all serious personal problems (Lunn, 2008). These ideas will be referred to henceforth as the self esteem paradigm.

The self esteem paradigm has led to classroom practices and programs specifically designed to raise self esteem (Baumeister et al., 2003). For example, the authors have observed in several early childhood classrooms a box with a mirror at the bottom. The box's lid has a caption with something like "Inside this box is the most precious and unique thing in the whole wide world". Perhaps the most widespread consequence of the self esteem paradigm has been that many teachers and parents have minimised criticism because it may damage self esteem and instead have given children lavish and sometimes undeserved praise to raise self esteem (Baumeister et. al., 2003).

This article summarises research that shows that high self esteem does not reduce most problematic behaviours or most serious personal problems. We also offer an example of the effective, research-based use of praise to improve academic outcomes for students. The article thus uses the myth of the self esteem paradigm as an example of the need for teaching to be based on research evidence and proven teaching practices not just attractive but largely unsubstantiated theories.

Baumeister et al (2003) summarised all available research regarding the relationship between self esteem and problematic behaviours. For example, they found that when compared to their peers, children and adolescents with high self esteem were more likely to experiment with alcohol, tobacco and drugs and to engage in sexual activity. Self esteem was not predictive of academic outcomes; students with high self esteem did not do better than their peers. Students with high self esteem were no more persistent and were just as likely as their peers to be aggressive or become a bully. In fact research suggests that many bullies have high self esteem which is derived from bullying others. The research also suggested that high self esteem did not have the predicted benefits in adulthood. For example, Baumeister

et al (2003) reported that adults with high self esteem don't make better workers and don't have longer or better relationships than their peers.

Examples from history and everyday life also undermine the self esteem paradigm. Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin had enormous amounts of self esteem (Bullock, 1993). Baumesiter et al (2003) point out that self esteem is based on a person's interpretation of reality and not necessarily reality itself. In other words, a person's high self esteem could be accurately based on their successes and abilities or it could be based on their arrogant and unjustified sense of inflated superiority. Readers have probably met examples of arrogant people with unjustified high self esteem.

Australian psychologist Andrew Fuller (Lunn, 2008) suggests that some parenting practices based on the self esteem paradigm may in fact produce social and emotional dysfunction. These practices involve not giving children space to fail, micro-managing children's lives for fear that the child might be bored and not telling children they are wrong, what they did was bad or was their fault. Fuller goes on to say that negative emotions such as guilt, stress, doubt and anxiety are useful emotions which must be experienced by children in manageable doses so they can learn how to handle them (Lunn, 2008).

Fuller (Lunn, 2008) suggests such parenting practices may be fuelling the growth of narcissism among children. Narcissism may be characterised as being selfish, self-absorbed and with an overwhelming sense of self-importance. In the US, there has been a marked rise in the number of young people with narcissism (Twenge et al, 2007). This trend may have been exacerbated by technology, for example SMS, Youtube, Facebook. Psychologists including Fuller and Schmidt (Lunn, 2008) have suggested this may be the result of the self esteem paradigm encouraging young people to be overly focused on their own thoughts and feelings, leading to a disproportionate sense of self importance.

We have summarised research that undermines the self esteem paradigm. Therefore teaching practices based on the self esteem paradigm must be reconsidered. For example, perhaps the caption on the box with the mirror (see paragraph two) should read "Inside this box is the one true thing that can make a real difference". Such a statement emphasises to children that they are not the only precious thing in the world and their actions can make a positive contribution.

The self esteem model encouraged ubiquitous and often undeserved praise. However, research has shown how praise may be used strategically. Blackwell et al (2007), in a study of maths achievement, showed that praising effort was highly motivating and led to improved test scores. The use of praise here was not intended to raise self esteem; it was intended to reward and encourage effort in students regardless of achievements or self esteem.

Incidentally, the authors were exposed to this practice the 1960-70s. It was used by many wise early childhood teachers and parents of that era but became unfashionable with the rise of the self esteem paradigm.

This article has questioned teaching practices based on the self esteem paradigm. This is intended to prompt readers to ask questions such as are my teaching practices based on research evidence and proven educational practices? If challenged, could I justify my teaching methods? If these questions are difficult to answer then perhaps teaching practices may be based on myths not facts.

Gandhi said "My life is my message". Our qualities of character, actions and achievements are the most important aspects of our lives. Self esteem is thus a by-product of qualities of character, actions and achievements and not an end unto itself.

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Engaging minds and hearts

Leanne Hunter and Lisa Sonter

Leanne Hunter and Lisa Sonter are Co-Directors at Mitchelton Pre-Schooling Centre and have had many years experience in a variety of early childhood settings. They offer educators practical strategies, information and support in order to enhance learning environments which empower teachers and children. They are both recipients of Community Merit Awards (National Excellence in Teaching Awards) for Leadership and Innovation in Early Childhood Teaching Methods.

They have designed a series of resources which can be incorporated into individual teaching styles across all early childhood settings.

When minds and hearts are engaged and connected, thinking can be fun! This paper is grounded in current research about children's thinking (Fleer, 2005; Nolan, Kilderry and Grady, 2006; Fleet 2004) as well as children's motivation (Bruno, 2002; Durham, 2001). Effective thinking skills can empower children to adapt to change and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. Problem-solving, risk-taking and learning to accept both successes and failures become cornerstones of learning. Demonstrating that thinking and learning can be enjoyable, regardless of age, promotes lifelong learning dispositions, and helps bond relationships.

It is generally acknowledged that the world we know will not be the same for future generations. With the explosion of knowledge and rate of change it is important to acknowledge that children may require additional skills, attitudes and dispositions. Educators' critical reflection is an essential component in meeting the challenge of engaging children as active learners in the 21st century. It is crucial for teachers to bear in mind the importance of their relationships with children. It is through these relationships that children's ideas and stories can be heard. The connections the teacher makes with the child through listening, playing, talking and questioning provide a rich and significant context for extending children's learning. How adults address everyday experiences, problems and concerns impacts significantly on the children's level of trust, and respect for adults and other children alike.

Reflecting upon philosophy and practices allows teachers to review, experiment and make changes considered necessary. By undergoing this process, teachers are modeling attributes that are important for children: problem-solving, risk-taking and accepting both successes and failures.

Effective thinking skills can empower children to adapt to change and can encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. For some children new experiences are a joy; for others change can be overwhelming. Levels of resilience in children vary. Some children are able to manage challenges easily. For others this involves skills to be learnt and practiced.

How can children be supported to develop their thinking skills?

Working out what they want to know and ways to find that information may become new starting points for children. Encouraging them to access and practise a range of thinking skills during their early childhood years is to their advantage. Skills such as offering suggestions, organising, persisting, planning, thinking of alternatives, applying known thinking to new situations, reflecting and reviewing can be practised in a monitored, safe environment. Children often have greater, more

complex ideas than adults expect. Capitalising on children's creative abilities is pivotal, and, in fact, often less demanding than the adult assuming full responsibility for determining all the ideas and experiences in the environment. Teachers can draw upon children's imaginative thought to create empowering learning environments in which everyone's ideas are valued.

Children's thinking, interest and imagination can be stimulated and extended through exploratory or explicit experiences. Strategies could include:

- questioning/wondering: slowing down, looking for detail not answers
- providing props (directly, in play or to discover)
- posing a problem
- playing with children.

Open-ended questions beginning with how, what, where and when prompt children to think of possibilities. How will questions be answered? Do all questions need answering? Set the scene for inquiry; of collaborative discovery and decision making.

Spending time "wondering" with children can provide adults with great insights into children's thinking skills and dispositions. Opening conversations with the words "I wonder…" immediately signals a sense of possibilities and potentials. This process helps support the notion of both adults and children as co-learners and investigators as they springboard ideas off each other. Wondering is limitless, and can promote detailed and technical thought processes. Wondering can promote nonsensical and creative thought processes. This process can be particularly useful to help children and adults "lighten up", have fun and explore multiple perspectives.

The environment can empower children to take time to re-examine what is known and consider this knowledge in new ways. Encouraging children to slow down, in order to ponder, look and listen, supports their sense of wonder. This process furthers children's reflective and critical thinking skills.

Arrangements of materials often provide inspiration.

A length of lycra draped over a small table was the stimulus for these children to build a "frog waterfall". They carefully positioned small stones and branches so the frogs could negotiate the rapids.

As children interact with the materials they practise thinking skills such as classifying, ordering, grouping and arranging. Language skills such as describing, recalling and story telling also come into play as children arrange the materials, talk and tell stories.

Allowing children access to a variety of materials enables them to construct and represent their own ideas. Social, planning and problem solving skills are fostered as children share, negotiate and modify their ideas.

What the child has in mind may be very different to the teacher's interpretation of the same idea.

Children's thinking, interest, inquiry and imagination can also be stimulated and extended through more direct adult involvement. Presenting materials in "surprise" boxes signals a sense of mystery and often captivates the children's interest. Surprise boxes can be useful to prompt and initiate play, introduce stories or

One child wanted to make "Swan Lake". While the teacher immediately thought of tutus and ballet, the child gathered a variety of materials and arranged them on a large plastic disc placed on top of an outdoor block. The teacher supported the child's idea by providing a collection of landscape and garden pictures sourced from magazines to extend her thinking.

themes, or used to house materials to add to a game. They may be useful for introducing story or music sessions, extending dramatic play games, promoting scientific inquiry, developing fine motor skills, furthering social co-operative skills. Surprise box contents are limited only by the imagination.

Adult responses inform children, encouraging or discouraging their thinking dispositions. Their willingness to take a risk, creativity, self esteem, persistence and resilience are all affected by the relationship between the learner and teacher. When we celebrate children's curiosity and spend some time pondering and wondering with them about what could be, what may have been or what may happen next, we share their joy. Often we don't know where children's thinking will lead. Rejoice when it takes you somewhere new you hadn't considered!

Additional Resources

Other resources available from Lisa and Leanne include:

- *The Complete Diary for Early Childhood Educators.*
- *Play in Progress: Practical Insights into Play Based Curriculum.*
- ***CD Series*** *- Strategies for Success*
  - Play – The Educator
  - First Steps: Co-constructing with Children
  - Open-Ended Materials
  - Engaging Minds and Hearts
- ***CD*** *- Pathways and Connections – Learning with and Teaching Children with Additional Needs.*

Visit www.consultantsatplay.com

Supporting school readiness: literacy strategy Story Swags© and Hop Into Reading

Desley Affleck and Katie Pennell

Desley Affleck

Desley Affleck is the Education Worker for the Communities for Children initiative in the Kingston, Loganlea and Waterford West site. Prior to this, Desley worked within the Logan region as a preschool teacher and special education teacher. Her passion is to provide quality learning opportunities for children within the Logan region. Desley currently facilitates a suite of literacy programs including *Hop into Reading*, *Story Swags©*, *Wilbert's Literacy Program*, *Fun Friends*, *Butterfly Wings* and *Treasure Baskets*.

Katie Pennell

Katie Pennell is the Project Development Worker for the Communities for Children initiative in the Kingston, Loganlea and Waterford West site. Katie is an Early Childhood Teacher who enjoys working with under-fives both in the classroom and in a community approach. Katie currently facilitates the Story Swags© program with families within Logan as well as co-facilitating a range of practitioner training programs including *Foundations for Families*, *Treasure Baskets*, *Heuristic Play*, *Learning to Move*, *Moving to Learn*, *Developmental Movement Play* and *Story Swags©*. Katie is also involved in the writing of the abovementioned programs, along with the 4th Trimester project.

> *The first day of school is almost too late for a child to begin to learn to read. Children's brains begin to develop from the moment of birth. Babies are wired to their senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing and whenever they are fed, played with, talked to sung to and read to.* Mem Fox (Reading Magic)

The *Story Swags* © Program and the *Hop into Reading* Program have been developed in response to the needs of the Communities for Children: Kingston, Loganlea and Waterford West site. The Communities for Children Initiative is part of the Stronger Families Initiative of the Australian Government and is a community level early childhood intervention and prevention program for children aged birth to five years. One of the National outcomes of the Initiative is 'Improved language and cognitive development'.

Statistics undertaken as part of the consultation in the area, demonstrated that children were falling behind their neighbouring and more affluent cohorts. The Australian Early Development Index was undertaken in the region in late 2005. Results from this analysis found that Loganlea fared the worst-mapped in the state with 28.1% of children being classified as vulnerable in the area of Communication and General Knowledge. Additionally, local K-seals tests undertaken in the pre-school in 2005 and 2006 indicated that, for both Expressive and Receptive Language, 46-57% of children fell below average with over 63% of children also falling into the below average category for Words and Letters.

Recognising that the area was both culturally and demographically diverse, the site consulted with the community and opted for a suite of literacy activities rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. *Story Swags* © and *Hop into Reading* are two of the programs that support literacy, language and communication development for early childhood in the region, using unique and differing approaches.

Story Swags©

Story Swags© is a soft entry literacy program, developed by and copyrighted to Geraldine Harris, Project Manager of Communities for Children, Kingston, Loganlea and Waterford West. This program is currently facilitated by Katie Pennell and Desley Affleck.

Story Swags© is set up as a six week program which gives parents/caregivers the opportunity

to explore the exciting world of literacy in a relaxed and caring environment. Participants are given the opportunity to learn simple sewing, drawing, painting and game development skills whilst exploring their story of choice. Each *Story Swag*© is created with the participant's story in mind, extending it through different literacy and numeracy activities. Each participant is provided with a high quality children's story book and all materials required to complete a *Story Swag*©.

Participant Sewing Swag

The drawing process

The objectives of the *Story Swags*© program are for participants to:

- become confident in spending quality time with their children – whether it is reading a story, swinging on a swing or kicking a ball around etc.
- extend their skills in following their children's lead and giving input into play
- to gain an understanding of the importance of early literacy
- to be excited about child parent interactions – encouraging social and emotional development
- to explore their own creativity and supporting them to stretch their boundaries
- to be challenged to extend their own ideas and work together as a small team
- to become familiar with different areas of child development.

And also for participants to support their children in:

- early literacy
- social and emotional development
- early numeracy
- creativity
- concept development
- communication skills
- pre-reading and pre-writing
- listening
- interactions with peers and adults
- verbal and visual story telling.

Participant creating games and activities for their swag

Participants are encouraged to spend time with their children, telling different stories and talking through different aspects of literacy throughout the course of the program. This is done through

different opportunities including role playing, felt stories, singing, rhyming and all sorts of activities and games. It is also a wonderful opportunity for participants to get to know other parents/ caregivers within the local area, forming lots of new friendships and support networks over a cup of coffee.

The *Story Swags*© program has been running within our target suburbs for approximately two years with great success. Initially the program was to be run for only a couple of sessions but we found that, as word of mouth spread, so did the popularity of the program. Communities for Children are now running regular *Story Swags*© sessions, with more and more people signing up each month. Participation within this program have encouraged participants to explore other avenues within our region, including volunteering in other programs, overseeing local play groups, participation in parent forums, attendance at other Communities for Children programs and encouraging others to become involved.

In the final week of the *Story Swags*© program, participants are also encouraged to become members of the local library. A strong partnership with local libraries has been developed and they happily indulge us with story-telling opportunities and a new place to explore.

a completed swag

Hop Into Reading

Hop Into Reading is a literacy program written and facilitated by Education Worker, Desley Affleck. It targets preschool age children and their families and it aims to engage the children in quality, small group story sessions which get them excited about books and motivated about becoming readers themselves. It also sends a message to families that it is never too early or too late to begin reading to their children and encourages them to utilize other literacy programs available in the community.

Miss Froggy presenting book to a child at Kingston Prep

As a teacher with 20 years experience Desley realized that at the end of many busy days in the classroom she never had the time or the opportunity to do story sessions with individual or small groups of children and that many of the children she taught did not have these experiences at home either. Consultation with other practitioners confirmed this to be their findings also.

Hop Into Reading was developed to give each child the opportunity to enjoy a personalized story session with an adult and to recount that story session using a diversity of age-appropriate activities. Quality books were chosen, some award winning, timeless favourites which could be used to demonstrate to parents how to make story reading a fun, exciting, learning experience for child and carer.

The program begins with the children being withdrawn in pairs to a quiet setting where general book awareness is discussed e.g. children pointing to the front cover, title, discussing the role of the author/illustrator and predicting the story using the illustrations.

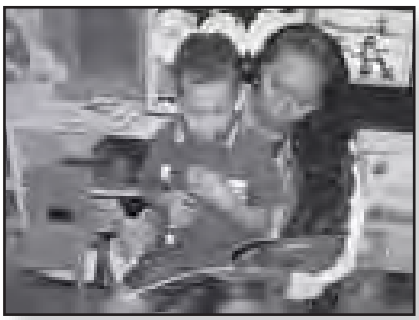
Each child then recounts their story through such mediums as puppet making, easel painting,

drawing and mask making and their words are recorded in print to become part of a literacy display.

Child at Kingston Prep doing easel painting as recount of their story

Each child prepares a personal invitation to their families to attend a *Hop into Reading* morning. The morning teas are also advertised in school newsletters and billboards and have been wonderfully attended by Mums, Dads, Grandparents and neighbours, all keen to see the display of work produced by their children. In a parent-friendly style the audience learns about choosing books for different age groups, how to engage children who are less interested in books, environmental print, emotional literacy and how to get the most enjoyment and learning out of story sessions with their children. This information is then demonstrated by the facilitator as she engages the children and parents in a combined story session using books from the program. In the parent evaluation forms, completed at the end of the morning, parents often report this is their favourite part of the program, to see the children's faces and reactions to the story being read.

The impact of the story session is added to by the use of a large frog character 'Miss Froggy' who visits the classroom to hop into reading. Miss Froggy presents each child with a book to share at home. The parents, carers, children and staff then share a morning tea with many finding a comfortable spot to sit with their child and read the book they have just received. There is nothing more rewarding than watching a Grandmother balance a child on one knee and a book on the other and laughing at the illustrations of Edward the Emu trying to be a seal at the zoo.



Child and parent reading book at parent morning tea.

Evaluation from parents indicates an increased awareness in the value of reading to their children. Changes in practice at schools, such as the opening of school libraries before school starts to enable parents and children to borrow, has been supportive of the parents' efforts to expose their children to wider literacy experiences. Feedback from practitioners' reports is that, for some children, the book they receive through the program becomes a treasured possession and may just be the catalyst required to create a life-long love of reading.

The first day of school is almost too late for a child to begin to learn to read. Children's brains begin to develop from the moment of birth. Babies are wired to their senses of touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing and whenever they are fed, played with, talked to sung to and read to.

Less stress - more success!

Lisa Sonter

Lisa Sonter is an early childhood teacher with many years experience in a variety of early childhood settings. Lisa offers educators practical strategies, information and support in order to enhance learning environments which empower teachers and children. She is a recipient of Community Merit Awards (National Excellence in Teaching Awards) for Leadership and Innovation in Early Childhood Teaching Methods.

As we are very aware, different things cause stress in different people. Everyone reacts to stresses differently at different times, and what relieves stress for one may cause it in another! I have tried to include a variety of different authors and ideas, so, like the proverbial box of chocolates, this paper may offer up some favourite ideas, and perhaps some less preferred options.

Carl Honoré, in his book *In praise of slow,* (2004) shares how he came across an article in a newspaper while waiting for a flight which transformed his thinking! It read *The one minute bedtime story*. To help parents deal with time-consuming tots, authors had condensed classic fairy tales into sixty second sound bites. On reading this, his first impulse was to shout eureka! At story time with his son each night, he would invariably lead him toward the shortest and read them quickly, accelerating the bed time ritual while his son would shout "you're reading too quickly" or "I want another one". He describes how part of him felt terribly selfish but another part simply couldn't resist the urge to hurry on to the next thing on the agenda; pay bills, watch the news, more work. At first glance, *The one minute bedtime story* series seemed too good to be true! As he begun to wonder how quickly Amazon could ship the whole set, he talks about redemption coming in the shape of a counter question: have I gone completely insane? He considered how he had become a scrooge with a stop watch, obsessed with saving every last scrap of time, a minute here, a few seconds there. And he realised he was not alone. Everyone around him: friends, family, colleagues, were caught in the same vortex. (Honoré 2004, p. 2-3)

Recognize the feeling?

Robert Pirsig (1974), in his classic novel *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance* talks about the hurriedness of life and suggests that hurrying something means we no longer care about it and want to get on to other things. Waterhouse (2001) wonders why we are all so busy. Where are we so busy getting to: a trip to a stress-free destination or holiday? She explains that would be worth rushing for, but challenges that most of us are busy going nowhere. She offers the following advice:

> *Happiness doesn't just happen: we need to make it happen.*

You can't be happy all the time, but you can be a little happy most of the time. Outsmart your fatigue with fun: do something that makes you smile, giggle or sigh with contentment.

Take one day off! Remember Sundays before the shops were all open? Try to use one part of the weekend for relaxing, for going and thinking slow.

> *Envisage a sign that reads 'Rest area two hours ahead.' If you can't slow down when you need to, give yourself something on the horizon to look forward to.* (Waterhouse 2001)

Waterhouse suggests we take up the mantra: Life in progress, slow down. She discusses eight types of natural energy sources:

- caloric energy (food)
- hydraulic energy (water)
- physical energy
- natural energy (nature)
- restorative energy (sleep)
- sensual energy (connectedness)
- comic energy
- balanced stress: calming chaotic energy.

She argues that we need to listen to our bodies and try and seek balance in these areas.



> *Your fatigue is not telling you that you are not good enough, organized enough, productive enough, or disciplined enough. But it may be telling you that you aren't eating enough, drinking enough, moving enough, sleeping enough, socializing enough, laughing enough, or relaxing enough.* (Waterhouse 2001, p. 236)

George Bernard Shaw's 'life wasn't meant to be easy' quote (made infamous by Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser), comes to mind. Peck (1997) challenges us to consider that the biggest lie promoted by various of our social institutions … is that we're here to be happy all the time. We're bombarded by business, the media, and the church with the lie that we're here to be happy, fulfilled, and comfortable … How wicked! The truth is that our finest moments, more often than not, occur precisely when we are uncomfortable, when we're not feeling happy and fulfilled, when we're struggling and searching.

Kagge (2005) challenges us to look or search for solutions or answers in the right place: even if it's hard to do. He explains that it is often easier to blame circumstances rather than spend uncomfortable time teasing apart problems or stressors. However, taking this time to reflect and challenge our assumptions may enable us to see new possibilities and shift the pendulum from disempowerment to empowerment, for both ourselves and the children in our care (Ebbeck & Waniganayake 2003).

My personal observations, readings, reflections and struggles have led me to use and develop the following strategies which may help minimize stress more successfully!

Look for balance:

- Hold realistic expectations: every year is different.
- Accept that when you feel tired, you probably are tired. Some days we can achieve the seemingly impossible, other days we may struggle to walk in the door.
- Let go: ask yourself: what are you trying to promote/extend? What is really important? Choose your battles.
- Remember the KISS principle: Keep it simple sweetheart! What are you trying to achieve in a day: is it too much? Often a simple idea/ activity is the most special and meaningful.
- Consider what is a productive day: a busy day or a day when you are achieving a goal? Christine Kane suggests that we understand that some days may be smiggle days: days set aside to clean out the 'junk drawer', enabling you to focus on what you want to achieve next. Don't forget big picture goals: not getting caught up in day-to-day busy-ness without a plan of action.

Slow down:

- Allow time for relaxing and rejuvenating during the day. Consider pack up time. Perhaps call the group together several times during this activity to take some gentle calming breaths. Perhaps one adult could tidy with a small group of children while others are relaxing, then move on.
- Teach children how to breathe deeply and calmly for relaxation. A variety of yoga type postures and strategies can be used with young children effectively. Consider teaching these to parents as well.
- Take time to stretch: sitting, standing and lying.
- Visualising can be a very effective stress management tool. When implementing this with children, I explain to them that we are going to take a photo inside our head of what we are going to do (e.g. at pack up time, we take a 'photo' of what the room will look like before we commence, and on completion). Calling images for children to visualize during rest time or language time can assist the development of this great imaginative skill.
- Perhaps use a candle at story time or rest time to signal a quiet time.
- Take time to recharge. Try for at least one or two minutes to sit and model stillness and reflection. We try to sit quietly in the room at the beginning of rest time, just being there, with gentle music playing. I have found that children often relax more when they see the adults modeling this behaviour and taking time to relax as well.

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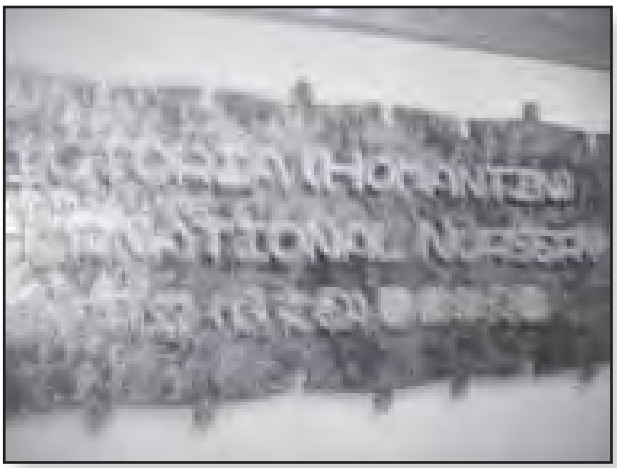
Catalysts for changes in early childhood practices

Roslyn Heywood

The World Organization for Early Childhood Education's seventh O.M.E.P (Organisation Mondiale pour l'Education Prescolaire) International Conference was held in Hong Kong in May, 2008. The conference facilitates the sharing of ideas and pertinent research in early Childhood Education. Sponsors were the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Faculty of Education, Hong Kong. *Educating Young Children* editorial panel member, Roslyn Heywood, shares her experiences from this conference.

The Opening Ceremony's Dance of the Butterfly.



Homantin International Nursery Sign.

The conference theme was Catalysts for Changes in Early Childhood Practices and was beautifully introduced in the opening ceremony by a number of children who danced change- they unfurled their butterfly wings after dancing as caterpillars.

Victoria Gardens is a privately owned International Baccalaureate candidate school whose mission is to "develop an active learning environment where all children feel secure and empowered to achieve their highest potential, academically, socially and personally." Homantin's philosophy places great value on parental participation as it sees such engagement as "fundamental to the

Doors to HKU Kindergarten

development of the holistic child." It has a strong parent volunteer programme as well as an active parent group which travels internationally to visit other schools. Homantin offers a Primary Years Programme as well as a Nursery Programme, with the youngest enrolment being one year old. Early learning programmes support the child's natural curiosity with inquiry-based learning driven by children's questions and facilitated by teachers.

Outside Soft Fall Area on Balcony.

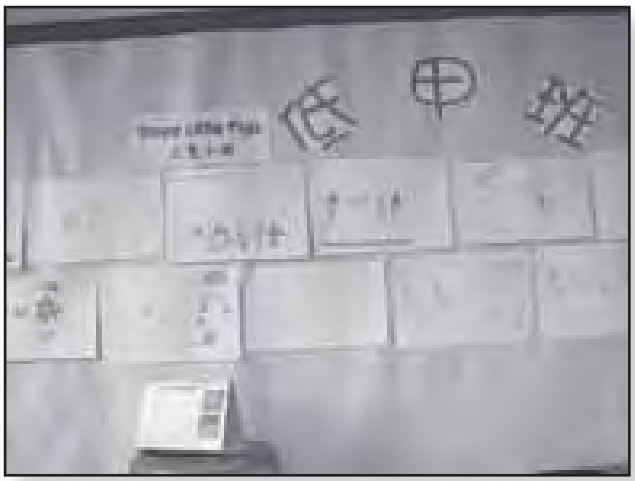
The Hong Kong Baptist University Kindergarten is an on-campus Kindergarten, accessed by elevator to the third floor. Similar to Victoria Gardens in its programming – child centred and play based kindergarten – it boasts a large cement unroofed balcony, covered in soft fall for physical education activities. Children are able to engage in various outdoor play activities and engage in guided physical education activities. This is a treat for children of Hong Kong.

Sustainable Environment Projects

Both early learning providers placed importance on the sustainable environment. Children at Victoria Gardens learned how to recycle paper into new paper and planted seeds in milk cartons to learn where their food comes from. Children in HKBU Kindergarten used paper in construction activities with a Rugby League field and players made from it. Children made use of used boxes to build a post office wall. Due to upcoming Beijing Olympics, both faculties had displayed related art projects using recycled materials.

Children in Hong Kong are required to learn three languages – Cantonese, English and Mandarin. They have natural speakers of these

Sustainable Environment Projects



Three Little Pigs.

languages on staff. One wall at HKBU was covered in blue paper-covered cork board with the story of the *Three Little Pigs* represented in English.

Following an inspiring and enjoyable day at the schools, Friday saw registrants make their way to the green hills of Taipo where the Hong Kong Institute of Education stood. Numerous research posters were displayed for viewing. You could spend hours looking at the latest research. Oral presentations and seminars were offered in various lecture rooms. Friday and Saturday saw the following keynote speakers address those gathered from the nations:

- Professor Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, who is the world President of OMEP. Her address was entitled, *Globalization of Early Childhood*.
- Professor Lyuan Pang from Beijing Normal University who spoke on, *Early Childhood Education Policies in China: Thoughts and Progress*.
- Professor Wendy Schiller from University of South Australia with, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Issues in Children's Health and Wellbeing.*
- Professor Patrice Engle from California's Polytechnic State University speaking on, *Program Regulation and Improvement*.
- Professor Carl Corter from Canada whose address was entitled, *New Approaches to providing family-friendly early childhood services: What do parents want and need?*
- Professor M.Wong of the Hong Kong Institute of Education whose address was entitled: *Changing the Quality Culture of Hong Kong Early Childhood Education*.

In closing, an international panel comprising OMEP representatives from Norway, China, Hong Kong, Africa, Korea, New Zealand, Latin America and North America, all touched on challenges to early childhood from their regions and internationally, with the need to support the rights of the child highlighted because millions of children throughout the world are not reaching their full potential (Grantham-Mcgregor et l. 2007; Walker et al. 2007; Engle et al, 2007). A quote from the past world president of OMEP, South American University Dean, Selma Simonstein Fuentas, was that "The world cannot begin to pay attention to the children only when they start going to school."

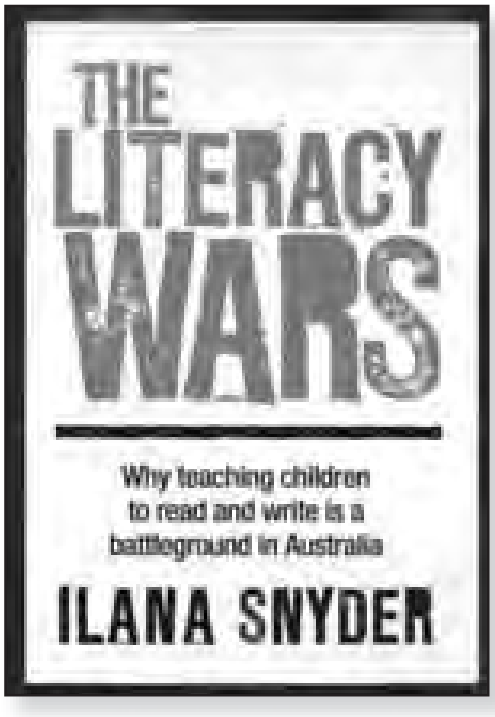
Children are catalysts for change as they are the future. Enabling all children to dance the dance of the butterfly would be breathtaking to observe.

Children at Victoria Gardens learned how to recycle paper into new paper and planted seeds in milk cartons to learn where their food comes from. Children in HKBU Kindergarten used paper in construction activities with a Rugby League field and players made from it. Children made use of used boxes to build a post office wall. Due to upcoming Beijing Olympics, both faculties had displayed related art projects using recycled materials.

Title: The Literacy Wars: Why teaching children to read and write is a battleground in Australia.

Author: Snyder, I. (2008) RRP: $32.95 plus p/h
Published by: Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, NSW

Reviewed by: Beryl Exley



About a decade ago, a poignant moment occurred in a tutorial. A group of 30 beginning preservice teachers and I, their tutor, were lamenting the politics of teaching – how content, pedagogy and assessment choices were both strong statements about their philosophy of teaching and learning, as well as their construction of the ends of education and its role in producing particular types of citizens who 'succeed and fail'. Through a range of case-studies we deconstructed possible scenarios and their projected outcomes. One preservice teacher countered, 'If I was interested in politics I would have gone into government. I just want to learn how to teach children to read and write'. Regardless of political persuasion, I learnt through my own time in the classroom, once immersed within the fray of practice, the gauntlet of parents' expectations and the frenzy of media, that the politics of teaching is palpable.

In her most recent text, *The Literacy Wars: Why teaching children to read and write is a battleground in Australia*, Illana Snyder reconciles a concise yet comprehensive account of the outcomes of major curricula, pedagogical and assessment reform and smaller experimental studies in Australia, the US and UK from the 1960s through to the Rudd Government's utterings of 2007. She does so through her own professional narrative as a teacher and teacher educator. Snyder succinctly fleshes out multiple interpretations of innumerable mandated reforms, discussion papers, and the relentless and ruthless media attacks on teachers of literacy propagated by the Murdoch press. She eloquently and rigorously exposes the problematics of these atheorised 'commonsense' appeals by conservative politicians and the allied commentariat.

Snyder talks directly to those involved in the early years of education: teachers, teacher educators, researchers, administrators, parents, stymied politicians, system leaders and reformists. What she has to say is worth reading, reflection and continued discussion in appropriate circles. Her detailed coverage makes visible how particular voices are heard over all others. Her carefully and impressively documented illustrations foreground the complexity and near impossibility of teachers entering these conversations about the very profession in which they are working. This struggle to be an equal voice, and to be constructed as knowing, highlights the import of early years teachers reclaiming their professional language and status, and of the advocacy and the range of independent professional development activities offered by peak professional associations.

This publication is for sale at the AATE/ALEA Bookshop. Freecall 1800 248 379 or purchase through www.alea.edu.au.

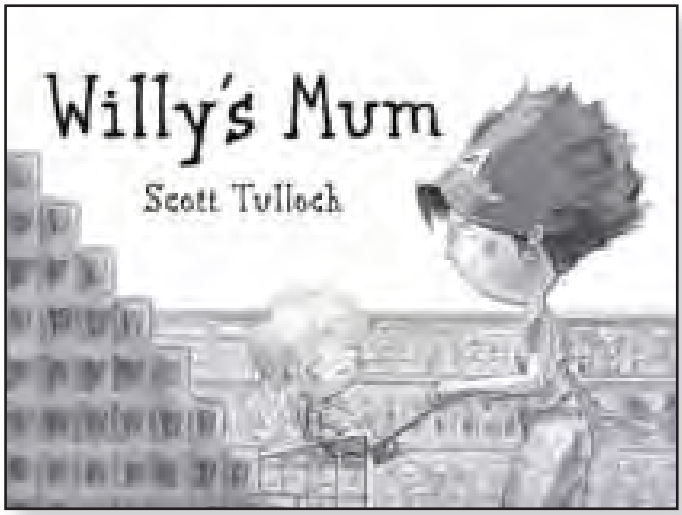
Reviewer Bio: Dr Beryl Exley is a lecturer in language and literacy education at QUT.

Book Reviews

Title: Willy's Mum

Author: Scott Tulloch
Published by: Harper Collins RRP: $14.99

Reviewed by: Susri Pre-prep Group 1, Thursday Island



This picture book is very appealing to young children and adults alike. There is an underlying humour throughout the picture book that will make this title a hit! Poor Willy's mum is the only 'grown up' in the house. The story follows Willy finding out if his mum has always been so sensible ... A great story for all!

Title: Miss Llewellyn-Jones

Author: Elaine Forrestal
Illustrator: Moira Court ISBN: 978 1 921 361 17 3
Published by: Fremantle Press RRP: $16.95

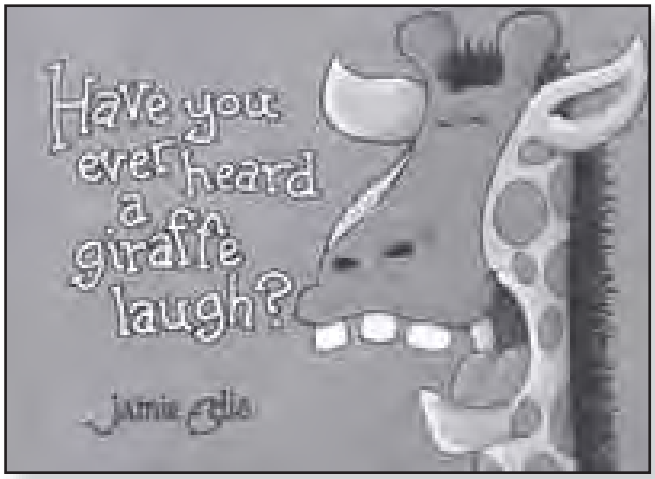
Reviewed by: Susri Pre-prep Group 1, Thursday Island

This picture book is very appealing to two to six year olds. The repetitive script and detailed illustrations bring the story to life. Our class found this book hilarious and the teacher had a chuckle too. The story follows the main character trying to hang her washing out to dry. The strong wind is problematic, causing the washing to fly away. This poses different amusing scenarios and a very happy ending thanks to a clever teddy. This picture book enables many extension activities and is one your class or child will want to listen to repeatedly.

Title: Have you ever heard a giraffe laugh?

Author: Jamie Edis
Published by: Fremantle Press
ISBN: 978 1 921 361 14 2
RRP: $16.95

Reviewed by: Kim Walters and the Gympie South Prep Class children.



Story line.

A tickle starts in the giraffe's toes and works its way up to his nose. Unfortunately, due to the length of the giraffe's neck when the laugh comes out, after everyone has gone home for the night, the giraffe has forgotten what he was laughing about.

The children all gave the book a resounding 'We like it.'

When asked to review the book many children commented on the illustrations which are playful, bold and colourful.

Lachlan: 'Yes, because I like the giraffe's spots. I like the colours.'

Emily: 'I like the spots.'

David: 'They're a bit funny.'

Nathan: 'I liked it when it laughed because it looked funny.'

Several children commented on specific parts of the story line that they liked.

Storm: 'I like reaching his neck.'

David: 'It's funny because it goes up his foot and his knee and neck. It goes right up to his head.'

Emily: 'I like the giraffe. They tickle her toes. It's funny 'cause it went up into its nose. And (it's also funny) when it's laughing.'

Paige: 'It's funny because the bird goes up to his nose.'

Matthew B: 'It starts at his toes and then it goes up to his nose and tummy. It's funny.'

Eugene: 'It's funny when he starts laughing when there is no one around.'

Siarna: 'The giraffe was funny because it (the laugh) went up to his nose.'

Teacher reflection:

The children really enjoyed this book. They all responded to the colourful illustrations and simple story line. The cheeky bird that follows the laugh was popular along with the expressive face of the giraffe. I would definitely recommend it for three to six-year-olds.

ECTA Guidelines for writers

The ECTA journal committee welcomes articles and ideas for possible inclusion in the journal.

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

Style

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

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

Referencing

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

Maybe you need help with referencing. If so, you should find the *Style manual for authors, editors and printers (6th edn)* very helpful. The editor uses this manual and also the *Macquarie Dictionary*. This is the preferred style for the ECTA Journal.

Example of referencing for a book: O'Hagan M 2001, *Early Years Practitioner*, 4th edn, Harcourt: London.

Example of referencing for 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.

Specific terminology

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

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

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

Length of contribution

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

Form of submission

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

Author release forms must be signed and a hard copy forwarded to ECTA 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.

ECTA

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION