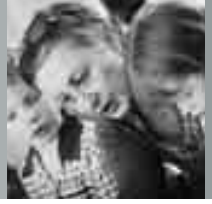
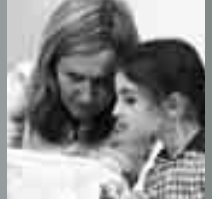




Contents

From the President

Kim Walters - ECTA President

Advocating for early childhood teachers and education at a national level has been a key focus for ECTA during 2008 and into 2009 with representation at the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care Consultation forum in Brisbane and at the National Curriculum forums and the COAG Working Group on the Productivity Agenda forum, all of which were held in Melbourne. Following the forum, ECTA submitted feedback to the board.

The national curriculums for History, Maths, English and Science being developed by the National Curriculum Board for use in Prep to year 12 classrooms will impact on early childhood educators across Australia. How the national curriculum looks may have major implications for early childhood in Queensland. Keep informed by registering your interest at http://www.ncb.org.au.

ECTA has also contributed to submissions for the Advanced Teaching and Leadership Capabilities and Charter for the teaching profession being developed by Teaching Australia.

The Early Years Curriculum Framework will affect those working with children in the years before schooling across Australia. I encourage all ECTA members to stay informed and become involved. For further details go to http://www.office.mychild.gov.au/

At a state level, prep-aide time is once more on the agenda. ECTA published a media release applauding the LNP's election promise of reinstating full-time teacher aides and called on the state government to act now and increase funding and aide-time. Now, more than ever, it is time to act. Make the time to meet with or write to your state member and opposition party now. As a voice for teachers across the state, we are approached by the media to comment on early childhood issues in Queensland.

ECTA has represented our members on the QSA Early Years Syllabus Advisory Committee and the Queensland Children's Services Alliance. We have also represented members in discussions with the Queensland College of Teachers on the Continued Professional Development CPD Framework Consultations and teacher registration and the Education Queensland rollout of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) which will be carried out by all Prep teachers this year between 1 May and 20 July.

In 2008 ECTA nominee for the National Awards for Quality Schooling, Rob Pratt, won a highly commended excellence in teaching award. Rob was nominated because of his advocacy and passion for educating for environmental sustainability.

I would like to thank QUT and OLI for their ongoing partnership with ECTA to provide the excellent Videolinqs our members and others have enjoyed throughout the year.

Congratulations and thank you to the coordinating committee members and the web, journal and conference subcommittees, along with all our regional group coordinators for their dedication to early childhood and ECTA during 2008. All are busy people but all make the time to make a difference. Regional registration forms are now due for the 2009 year.

I would especially like to thank Toni Michael for her massive contribution to ECTA which

now spans well over a decade. Although not renominating for the State Coordinating Committee, Toni has agreed to once more co-convene the Conference Committee with Robbie, and organise the Videolinqs, so she will still have a busy year.

All other members of the state coordinating committee renominated for 2009, as did most of the current subcommittee members. This is a key indicator that they all enjoy being involved and gain great satisfaction from contributing their skills and time to ECTA. If you would like to join a subcommittee or the coordinating committee at any time, please contact me.

Kim Walters

ECTA President

From the Editorial Panel

Archana Sinh

Welcome to the first edition of *Educating Young Children* for 2009. We hope you enjoy the rich collection of experience and knowledge shared by the authors. In this issue articles explore literacy, art, emotional well-being and policy in early childhood. This seemingly diverse range of interests is however, knitted together by a common thread that proposes a shift in the way we view children and their learning.

Our *Teacher Stories* include a collection of literacy conversations in which some of our valued colleagues discuss their experiences and share their insights about literacy learning. Some ideas for all teachers to ponder include thoughts raised by Annette Woods that question popular myths about literacy, Robyn Mercer's questioning of practices related to "drills or practices" and Louise Hart and Janice Lenduzzi's interesting discussion about visual literacy and technology. Further, Sharon Watkins discusses the collaborative construction of meaning making through engagement, and Michele Binstadt discusses involving children, parents, carers, libraries and entire communities in the learning of a child. Angela Le Mare continues her story, this time in the north of England. In this issue, Angela highlights the multilingual nature of literacy learning through dialects spoken outside the class and the English spoken within the class by the same children.

Yvonne Winer shares snapshots of literacy engagements in the everyday environment. Highlighting the cultural context of literacy practices Yvonne suggests that learning experiences need to be unrushed and explored through different avenues such as drama, music and puppets amongst others. On a similar note Dot Walker, while discussing Interactive Learning Centres, brings out the importance of opportunities to learn through engagement with environment. There are some great ideas to integrate into learning centres. In the article on SmArt literacy Dot Walker and Lynnette Griffiths challenge the way we view art in classrooms. They encourage teachers to think that art, like other learning areas, needs facilitation, critical thinking and guidance.

Emotional understanding and its relationship to social adeptness is well brought out by Margaret Carter, especially the link between emotional fitness and self esteem. On the same wavelength the second part of Liz de Platter and Bronwyn MacGregor's article on SEEDS delves into emotional well being. In this article they share the experiences of the trial centers and offer valuable ideas for thought on early childhood mental health.

Kylie Smith focuses on children's rights. The emphasis here is to shift our view from a single image of 'the child' to the possibilities of multiple images. This thought provoking article encourages one to acknowledge children as citizens with knowledge, rights and views. For those still seeking the balance between rights and responsibilities the five guiding principles are a helpful way to start.

Policy initiatives are vital for the changing needs of every community. Within this issue we have two articles on policy initiative, the first one discusses The National Agenda on Early Childhood Education and the second by Mark Cooper looks at the Australian Early Development Index. Members and readers will find the information in these articles to be of value in making choices and informed decisions in our everyday professional lives.

This is the first issue in which we change our book review section to *Media Reviews*, in order to reflect the diverse range of resources available to us as educators. This section covers a range of titles and websites reviewed by Mathilda Element, Sue Webster and Sue Lederhose. We invite all educators to contribute to this section, and email us any comments, questions or valuable resources they discover.

Archana – On behalf of the editorial panel

Literacy conversations

From birth young children begin to acquire literacy knowledge through their family and community contexts. Young children are increasingly bombarded by images, logos and symbols at an early age. Their lives are saturated with multimedia in the form of DVDs, CDs, computer games, digital music, email, text messaging and digital photography. So much so, that our views of literacy have expanded to extend beyond print-based to include digitally based, electronic and visual literacies. Members of the EYC editorial panel asked a range of educators to reflect on the literacy experiences in their early childhood program.

Reading time at Tingalpa and District Kindergarten

Annette Woods teaches literacy and curriculum related units in early childhood education at QUT. Annette kindly shared her personal views about literacy as she prepared for an overseas work-related trip.

Annette understands literacy to be a social practice. She says that while phonics and punctuation are very important there is much more to being literate in today's times. Annette teaches literacy as it relates to "different texts for different contexts".

Since children are so exposed to computers and other forms of texts, like access to *Barbie* sites over the internet, literacy teaching needs to take this into consideration. Annette encourages her students to think critically. Beginning teachers need to engage in a professional dialogue with colleagues around the literacy practices that they engage in, she says.

Asked about any experience that she would like to share with beginning teachers, Annette mentioned the great myth about generation Y being technology-savvy, when in fact they were more users or consumers rather than producers of these texts. Annette believes that as teachers we need to engage in questioning the myths and assumptions that we make about young people and their textual practices.



Teacher Stories

Robyn Mercer is the Director at C&K Albert Park Community Kindergarten situated in Logan City. Robyn shares her experience of 30 years in early childhood.

We build on each child's strengths by:

incorporating literacy into children's play interest as it emerges. Children who build cities and roads begin making road signs or signs for their buildings e.g. an airport. Children who are cooking "write their own recipes". They write phone numbers down for us and dial them on the mobile. We write stories for children on their paintings. When we take a child's photo and print it, we ask them to tell us the story that goes with it. They can read it and so can their parents. Children have their own folder with a supply of paper and pencils. These folders can be used for writing or drawing and can travel anywhere around our room or playground. There are also puzzles, alphabet books and songs and cards with the children's names on. Children connect with the idea of print and that there are different ways of representing an experience.

In our play-based program you would see:

a wide range of abilities in young children. Some children are ready for reading even before they enter formal schooling in Grade one. These children have been read to, encouraged to talk and think. Many children have computers at home and have experienced writing their name or using a computer. We see and interact with children who may have two languages, English being their second language. Children with older brothers and sisters at school often like to emulate them and want to learn to write and read. We also see and work with an increasing number of children who present with language delays. Parents are encouraged to consult with a speech pathologist earlier rather than later. In an environment, where children learn that communication is a two-way street, and use and practice talking and listening, there is a higher probability for becoming fluent readers.

There is a need for teachers to value and build on what students know and can do. There is also a need to develop intellectually challenging and connected learning opportunities that account for rapidly changing communication practices. (Ed. Qld)

It is the quality of teaching that makes the biggest difference to students' literacy outcomes across the phases of learning. Teachers draw on a range of teaching practices to meet the literacy learning needs of individual students and diverse student communities. (Ed. Qld)

We value:

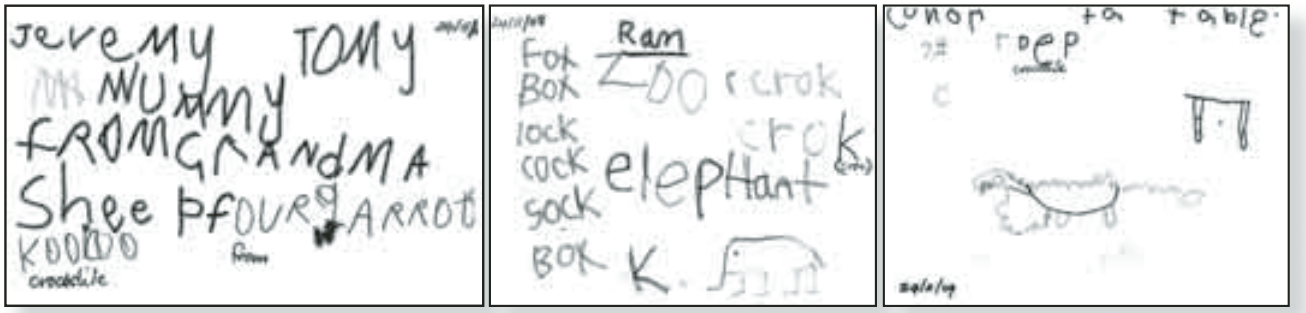
a child's "beginning writing even when it is not legible." Children who grow up in print rich environments naturally acquire a love of books and understand the purpose and connection between squiggles on a page and the words they become to mean. Reading and writing is part of each day and every effort by a child is valued. We also encourage and develop children's spoken language. To understand the printed word, children need also to be competent talkers. For example, a child who is unable to talk in an articulate sentence will have difficulty in reading a sentence.

We are challenged by:

parents who are pushing their very young children, sometimes under three, into writing. It concerns me that the interest is parent-driven rather than child-initiated. There is a certain level of prior experience that creates the springboard for children's preparedness to want to write. By finding the child's interest and creating play-based experience, rather than "drills or practice", we respond to the child's desire to be literate. We are stimulated by the children's interest to read and write and their natural curiosity and determination.

An unexpected literacy learning experience or moment:

In the course of a day, we make many lists and create purposeful experiences where teachers write. A large whiteboard is a valuable tool in our environment. We also do daily checks for grounds, sunscreen and marking rolls. We collaborate and discuss with children our ideas and solve problems together. At the beginning of 2008, we talked with children and made a list about "Playing Safe".We recorded our list on the whiteboard and left it there for the year. We had one "literate" child who would walk around with his folder each day and ask the children, "Are you playing safe?" He would then tick his paper. This was powerful reminder that adults who read and write with, for and in front of, children provide the role models for children.



Louise Hart and Janice Lenaduzzi are from Wellers Hill State School

We build on each child's strengths by

- Obtaining prior knowledge using observations in lifelike experiences within the classroom. For example, setting up a classroom shop and observing the literacy used in the children's interactions with the items and each other. Children may read the backs of cartons or they may make signs, money and lists for their shop.
- Introducing a variety of experiences and activities to do with texts. For example:
  - reading corner
  - string sentences
  - modelled reading
  - literacy book activities
  - visual literacy activities.
- Using a variety of groupings. For example:
  - small group approach
  - individual
  - whole class
  - like abilities
  - buddy systems with peers and/or older students
  - friendship groups.
- Exposing a range of texts written and visual:
  - visual aids with print messages
  - oral listening activities such as books on tape
  - reading along with books on the computer.

In our play-based program you would see:

- Children interacting with literacy activities in a variety of settings, using a variety of media. For example:
  - structured focussed lesson time (whole class and/or small group)
  - literacy block time
  - opportunities for students to interact with new concepts and revisit previously learnt concepts for consolidation
  - utilising adult helpers with small groups and/or individual students e.g. peer buddies, parents, senior student buddies
  - literacy concepts presented to students using a variety of media
  - manipulating letters, words and sentences
  - information and communications technologies interaction
  - visual matching pictures to words and sentences
  - listening to stories
  - verbal retelling of stories.

We value:

- being able to provide children with a range of opportunities through a variety of texts to engage with literacy in a fun, supportive and rewarding environment.
- fostering a positive attitude to reading and writing and a love of learning.
- exposing children to many and varied literary experiences.
- ensuring every child experiences success.

We are challenged/stimulated by:

- meeting individual children's needs.
- creating differentiated activities to suit different learning styles and needs.
- create and implement meaningful activities within time constraints.
- tailoring programs to ensure children progress.
- seeing the look on a child's face when they have experienced success.

An unexpected literacy learning experience or moment:

Before viewing *Nim's Island* on DVD one child noticed the case and stated that Nim was bigger than everything else on the cover. This lead to a class discussion about the DVD cover and visual literacy. We discussed picture placement, colours used, text, text size and position. After watching the DVD the children designed their own covers.



Teacher Stories

Sharon Watkins works in child care settings. Her responses are shaped by conversations with colleagues Stephen Gallen, Kylie Kingston and Stephen Wright.

We build upon each child's strengths by:

the literacy messages that can be found in the centre. Like the photo wall made many years ago at a centre where I once worked. It was a documentation of the centre with photos taken by the children placed on a wall at the entrance. This photo wall had the chance to start sharing the language of the centre. It recognised the innate nature in children and in us all as we work towards making meaning of our time. Literacy needs people because it is together that meanings are made. The language of the photo wall spoke of a space that children could impact upon. Through the use of multi-media tools, such as the camera used for the photo wall, languages can be replicated so that the language of one child who brought a Barbie in from home has the ability to impact on many. When friends work on similar images of Barbie, listening to each other and taking each other seriously as they sit at a table, a new shared visual language is made. Interests are strengths. To listen at this point is to listen to the common and make it uncommon. The Barbie on their paper ends up looking very different from the Barbie on TV but is now more real when enriched with meaning.

Literacy needs people because it is together that meanings are made.

In our play-based program you would see:

common tools of literacy. These are spaces where people can get together to listen to one another and includes such things as picnic blankets, tables and chairs or spaces near the computer and printer. These are places that are not full of stuff that can make listening very hard. Empty looking spaces can allow a lot of visible presence for children when given attention. People have different things to say in different spaces. For example the computer can be great for searching for images of mermaids or microscopic creatures and presents numerous images to choose from. From this, it seems that spaces can ask questions like, "What paper do you want?", "What image do you want to print out?","Where do you want to sit?" This is then something to start listening to as children make choices. This can be interesting as meanings are made. Then the walls of these spaces, if you were to see them, would start to reflect some of the conversations that are happening. As conversations are ongoing, so the documentation on the walls can be as well. It's great to put up things as they are happening, like photos, drawings or the thoughts being generated that then act as a visible presence. They remind you and the children of the conversation that you are having. The walls can work in sustaining conversations by holding our thoughts open and giving opportunities for colleagues and parents also to be part of it, as it evolves. Some conversations on the walls can be years old.

I value:

the children's thinking. I value the moments when I can listen to a child/children's thinking. I love the fact that children are active thinkers. They ask questions. They pose theories about the world that they share. For example I watch someone drawing. Not all flowers have all their

I love the fact that children are active thinkers. They ask questions. They pose theories about the world that they share.



petals. Some flowers just have a few petals and one just had a middle circle. Why? Have they blown away with the wind? Were they eaten by a caterpillar? Do they see the imperfections of life as a natural event? My job as a teacher is to try and make their thinking more visible, not only to others but especially to them. As a past co-worker Stephen Wright once put it, it is about taking children seriously. What are the patterns of electronic literacy that can become evident in children's work when you listen? I have found that black and white images tend to invite the addition of colour and can be very effective. A photocopier can become ageless as even a one-year-old child can produce the same image as a child of three when all you need to apply is three steps. Images can be reduced in size and diminish the power of the object so Superman can be made as small as a fingernail until he is so small he will vanish.

I am challenged/stimulated by:

There are many challenges in the arena of literacy. There are many reasons why it is hard to listen to what children have to say. It can take time to find common ground with someone, to find a point that you both want to talk about. I have to know myself a bit and know I don't listen as well when I am hungry or tired. I have to know a bit about the other person in the conversation. If I know a child is not as confident at drawing when with his friend, then I might make a suggestion that they can use a photo of them both together as a platform for initiating work. Therefore, it helps to know what each child is interested in. Photos of themselves and their friends are tools that can be used in exploring self-identity. Each person's interest has a life cycle so there are individual and group rhythms consistently flowing and ebbing in a room. It can be hard at low tide. What is most stimulating is that, when I am with children I am an active thinker myself.

An unexpected literacy learning experience or moment:

There was a space where children could access all the images of the children at the centre. One day I saw a child had made a book. She often did. She had all her usual friends in it, while she herself featured on most pages beside her friends. But that day she made two new friends and this meant she had to update her book of the day, to add them in. Because they were new friends, however, they were added to the back of the book and only one of the two friends got some quick colour added to her. There were obviously many messages in the book but one message it gave me was how beautifully children can document themselves. The latest digital and electronic mediums can develop relationships with children in ways that can be ongoing, involve timeframes and reveal to others some of the collective and layered decisions they make regarding themselves and their world.

Children who grow up in print-rich environments naturally acquire a love of books and understand the purpose and connection between squiggles on a page and the words they become to mean. Reading and writing is part of each day and every effort by a child is valued.



Teacher Stories

Michele Binstadt is the literacy coordinator for *The Under Fives Regional Reading Campaign (Let's Read Inala to Goodna).* *Let's Read* is part of the Inala to Goodna Communities for Children Initiative. C&K is the *Let's Read* project partner.

We build on strengths by:

using a community capacity building model. By building on the strengths of individuals and groups who play a key role in the lives of children in the Inala to Goodna area, we in turn build on the strengths of children. This has been achieved by working in partnership with children, parents, carers, early childhood education services, schools, libraries, community services and local businesses. These partnerships have been mutually beneficial and have enabled the project to reach a larger number of families. There has been an increased focus on language and literacy in the area.

In our program you would see:

- increased awareness around the importance of reading to children 0-5 years
- an increase in skills and knowledge development around language and literacy
- the implementation of a range of language-and literacy-related programs as a result of services and individuals participating in the project.

We value and honour:

literacy across cultures and, as a result, the project has had an Indigenous/Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) focus. For example:

- *Stories on Saturday* – a series of workshops focusing on fun and creative ways to promote literacy and cultural inclusion for children 0-5 yrs
- Including Indigenous and CALD sections in both the parent resource and the early educator resource. There are plans to have the parent resource translated into Vietnamese.
- Developing partnerships with services supporting Indigenous and CALD families/ children
- the delivery of books:
  - by Indigenous authors
  - in Pasifika languages (specifically Samoan, Tongan, NZ Maori, Cook Island Maori)
  - dual language books (Vietnamese/English, Dinka/English, French/English).

We were stimulated by:

the overwhelmingly positive response to the workshop series *Stories on Saturday*. These workshops focused on fun and creative ways to promote literacy and cultural inclusion for children 0-5 yrs. The key reasons for organising *Stories on Saturday* were:

- to further increase the sustainability of *Let's Read* Inala to Goodna, beyond the life of the funded project
- to enhance the knowledge and skills of staff working in the early childhood sector and to raise awareness of the importance of early literacy.

Whilst the target group was service providers in the Inala to Goodna area, the event was also open to organisations outside the Inala to Goodna area. This was viewed as a valuable way to support the networking process, assist with the dissemination of the *Let's Read* message and increase awareness of literacy across the early childhood sector in general. The feedback from these sessions has helped to shape the current and future direction of the *Let's Read* Inala to Goodna project.

An unexpected literacy learning moment:

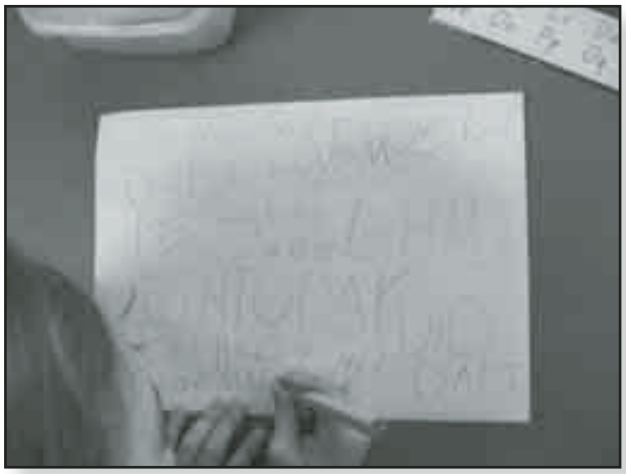
the joy, delight and sincere appreciation experienced by a mother and child when they received their first dual language (Vietnamese/ English) book. Maintaining language and culture affirms identity and provides families with a sense of belonging.

By building on the strengths of individuals and groups who play a key role in the lives of children in the Inala to Goodna area, we in turn build on the strengths of children.

Teacher Stories

Literacy is a social tool in which we communicate and function on an everyday basis. There are many types of literacy available to us. We consume and interpret texts in many different ways across a variety of social, cultural and linguistic situations." (Jones-Diaz, 2007, p.33)

Children's thoughts



What do readers do/how do you read?

"Readers look at the pictures for clues." *Max, age 6*

"Readers have a guess and check if it's right." *Claire, age 6*

"Readers think about the letters, sound it out, think about the pictures, ask for help, read good stories, do lots of writing, you know!" *Jessica, age 7*

"You just look at the words and figure it out." *Maeve, age 6*

What is literacy?

"…reading, writing, telling stories, playing on the computer, everything really." *Lily, age 6*

"It's when (the teacher) tells you good stories, really fun ones, and scary ones and we get to draw the pictures in our minds." *Jeremy, age 7*

"Reading and writing, that sort of thing." *Jasmine, age 5*

"It's after morning tea and you do fun stuff like listen to stories and write stuff…I like to draw maps with Isaac." *Lucas, age 5*

"When you are grown up, then you read stuff." *Max, age 5*

What is writing?

"Like when I want to write a letter to my friend? And I draw the pictures and (the teacher) does the words? But I'm the author coz I made it up." *Maddison, age 5*

"Writing stories, writing on the computer. You put the words down and then it makes a story and someone reads it."

"Writing is words. (teacher asks 'what are words?') Words control life." *Connor, age 7*

My favourite literacy activity is....

"I like when (the teacher) tells the monkey story on the feltboard. It is so funny!" *Maddison, age 5*

"When we make books all together and put them in the hot machine (laminator) and take them to the other classes to read." *Gabby, age 5*

"Writing to my friends." *Louisa, age 8*

"Making cards for my Mum." *Maeve, age 7*

"Playing Lettergetter on the computer." *Lucas, age 5*

"When we play rhyming games and (the teacher) always gets tricked up!" *Oscar, age 5*

Quotes in this feature are taken from:

Queensland Government, *Education Queensland Literacy – the Key to Learning*, Prep teacher professional development program Work Booklet

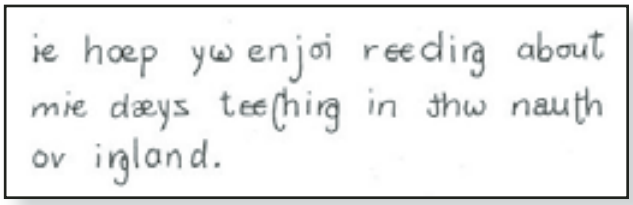
Jones-Diaz, C, 2007, *Literacy as a social practice*, in Makin, L, Diaz, C. J. and McLachlan, C (eds), *Literacies in Childhood*, Sydney, Elsiever Australia

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. In this edition Angela continues her story by sharing her experiences in the north of England.

Part 3 Sunderland



After a year of teaching in my home town in the south of England – Reading – and then working for two years in East Anglia, I moved to Sunderland in the north of England. This was in 1966 and it came as quite a culture shock. Sunderland is only about 450km north of London, not a great distance at all, and yet I understood almost nothing of what anyone said for the first couple of weeks.

This may sound like an exaggeration but this Sunderland joke may go some way to explaining the predicament.

As I started work with a class of five-year-olds in a working class district of Sunderland, I gradually tuned into the speech patterns. I learned that a child reciting the alphabet would say, 'Ee-ah, bee-ah, see-ah, dee-ah, ee-ah …' and so on. There were also local dialect words such as 'yon' for 'far', 'gannen yem' for 'going home' or 'spuggie' for 'sparrow'. Some children were unable to make specific speech sounds – but I couldn't pick this out at first. I remember one small boy shrugging with frustration one day when I couldn't understand 'too-uhn' He tried saying it louder and louder but I still looked blank. Eventually, he marched over to the science area, picked up some stones and thrust them into my hand. He couldn't make an 's' sound, I realised. If he had, maybe I would have understood sooner about the 'stoo-uhns' he wanted to show me.

It was fortunate that I picked up the dialect quickly because the local accent was not the only language factor with which I had to grapple. The

A sea-going vessel was proceeding down to the estuary of Sunderland's River Wear on a foggy night when it was hailed by the river police.
Policeman: *What's tha nee-um? (What's your name?)*
Norwegian boat captain: *Anna*
Policeman: *Ah see-uhd, 'What's tha nee-um?' (I said, 'What's your name?)*
Boat captain, louder: *Anna.*
Policeman, very exasperated: *Ah knah tha knah but ah divna knah. (The policeman thinks the captain is saying 'I know' so he says, 'I know <u>you</u> know but <u>I</u> don't know.')*

local education authority was very go-ahead and one of the educational innovations was the Initial Teaching Alphabet, known as 'i.t.a'. This alphabet kept 24 of the traditional letters, only dropping 'q' and 'x'. Many of the additional characters were ingeniously formed by joining the two letters they represented, such as 'œ' for 'oe' as in 'toe', 'ɛɛ' for the 'ee' in 'see', 'sea' or 'be'. The reading materials were regarded as a medium for helping children read, rather than a reading method.

Overall, I found the results were extraordinarily good. The children who would probably have learned to read easily, using any method, raced ahead and, as they had other sources of reading materials, such as library books and environmental print, they assimilated traditional orthography simultaneously and without formal teaching. However, it was not so straightforward for the children who did not take easily to reading. They did fairly well initially but often struggled with the changeover to conventional text.

The irony, I felt, was that there was no provision for local dialects in the i.t.a. system. Little children, who I could hardly understand as they chatted to each other or played their traditional games in the schoolyard, read to me in the classroom with vowels like small BBC radio announcers! Like me, they had become semi-bilingual.

The system was designed by Sir James Pitman, grandson of the inventor of Pitman shorthand. This is what the 44 letter alphabet looked like. I have done my best to reproduce this but quite a few of the letters are not available on the keyboard. (The following internet reference is quite useful if you want to know more.)

http://www.spellingsociety.org/journals/j7/itaproven.php#top

In-service training for teachers was comprehensive in a number of areas. Another educational innovation of the time was Nuffield Mathematics, a national project for 5 – 13 year-olds based on the theories of Piaget. Sunderland's primary school teachers were given practical in-service sessions over a considerable period of time and we became very enthusiastic about facilitating children's mathematical learning in the classroom. We set up practical areas in the classroom to facilitate a wide range of mathematical learning for the children. The teachers were making discoveries too. Our own childhood mathematical experiences had not been practical and the new knowledge was often exciting. I still remember filling in small one-hundred number squares and discovering the patterns that formed when we filled in every fifth square (two vertical stripes),



every ninth square (a line sloping from the top right to the bottom left) and so on. The nine times table was especially interesting, with each of the digits adding up to nine (1 + 8, 2 + 7, 3 + 6 …). I am sure everyone knows number facts like these now but, back in the sixties, the 'learning by doing' philosophy was fascinating to me and it increased my interest in mathematics greatly. It was at this time I first heard those profound words still quoted by early childhood educators: I hear, I forget; I see, I remember; I do, I understand.

The in-service programme also included a variety of educational speakers. One of these was the inspirational Marianne Parry. This name is probably familiar to many Queensland early childhood teachers as, I later discovered, she came to Australia in the early 1970s at the invitation of Gerald Ashby to advise on setting up preschool education in Queensland.

Another aspect of our mathematics in-service training was to explore the principles of Cuisenaire rods. When these attractive materials were used correctly, they provided a sound teaching tool for a range of number operations such as the basis of fractions and decimals. We had a great deal of instruction to help us master the principles for using the rods. Having sufficient training to use them skilfully was crucial. Later on, when we used them in the classroom, the insightful responses we elicited from the children were fascinating to observe. When I arrived in Queensland some years later, I never saw them used as I had been shown and I had the impression, possibly erroneous, that they were not popular with teachers here.

The level of support from our local education authority was certainly one of the keys to our success in implementing innovations. On some occasions since, I have suspected that, if educational bureaucrats do not support an educational innovation, their preferred strategy is to set up an inadequate system of in-service and wait quietly for the innovation to wither and die.

Incidentally, a search on Google will show that Cuisenaire rods are still in use. I was quite surprised to see more than 57,000 entries came up when I made a search. Should you be interested, Google searches also reveal information about Nuffield mathematics.

As my first school year in the north of England was drawing to a close in the summer months of 1967, my life was moving in yet another direction. According to the pleasantly gossipy old ladies in our street, they had known way before me that I had 'fallen' – a local expression. 'We knew alright,' they cackled. 'You had that bloom about you.'

So, this 'fallen woman!' took herself off to antenatal classes and retired temporarily from teaching to enjoy the role of motherhood.

The level of support from our local education authority was certainly one of the keys to our success in implementing innovations. On some occasions since, I have suspected that, if educational bureaucrats do not support an educational innovation, their preferred strategy is to set up an inadequate system of in-service and wait quietly for the innovation to wither and die.



The National Agenda

The Australian Government's agenda for early childhood education and child care focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and child care. The agenda has a strong emphasis on connecting with schools to ensure all Australian children are fully prepared for learning and life. The *Educating Young Children* journal will keep readers informed of initiatives as they occur.

The plan includes:

Universal Access for all Children to a quality early childhood education in the Year before formal schooling

By 2013, all children in the year before formal schooling will have access to a high quality early childhood education program delivered by a university-trained early childhood teacher, for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks of the year, in public, private and community-based preschools and child care.

This initiative will be underpinned by the development of the Early Years Learning Framework and supported by National Quality Standards for Child Care and Preschool, which will raise the quality of early childhood education delivered, regardless of setting, and improve access for disadvantaged children to early learning opportunities.

Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework will describe the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age as well as their transition to school. This will form the basis for ensuring that children in all early childhood education and care settings experience quality teaching and learning.

The Framework is being developed in consultation with state and territory governments, early childhood experts and educators to ensure it is a world class, evidenced-based document. The Framework will identify the most effective conditions for children's learning based on current research.

Early Years Learning Framework trial

The Early Years Learning Framework and supporting documentation is being trialled in 29 case study sites across Australia from 23 February until 10 April 2009 to test the Framework and its application in early childhood settings prior to implementation in July 2009.

The sites represent a wide variety of early childhood settings and services, including preschools, early childhood settings on school sites, Long Day Care Centres, Family Day Care, Multipurpose Aboriginal Children's Services, early intervention and occasional child care in metropolitan, regional and remote settings.

Early Years Learning Framework online forum

An Early Years Learning Framework online forum has been established to encourage discussion among early childhood education practitioners and the Government as they trial the draft Early Years Learning Framework.

Participants of the online forum will be able to review and trial the Early Years Learning Framework and supporting documents, take part in discussions and provide feedback directly to the Government on issues related to the Framework such as training or implementation.

Feedback from both the physical trial and the online forum will be used to finalise the Early Years Learning Framework.

National Early Years Workforce Strategy

The National Early Years Workforce Strategy will include creating additional early childhood education university places each year from 2009, increasing to 1500 commencing students each year by 2011; paying half the HECS-HELP debts for early childhood education teachers who work in rural and regional areas, Indigenous communities and areas of socio-economic disadvantage for up to five years; and removal of TAFE fees for Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas of Children's Services qualifications from 2009.

National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

The National Quality Framework will raise quality and drive continuous improvement in early childhood education and care services. The key elements of the National Quality Framework will be national quality

The National Agenda

standards, a quality rating system, enhanced regulatory approach and the Early Years Learning Framework.

The first public consultations on proposals for a national quality framework for early childhood education and care took place during August and September 2008. Further public consultations on these reform proposals are expected to take place in the first half of 2009.

Additional Early Learning and Care Centres

The Australian Government has committed to establish up to 260 Early Learning and Care Centres in areas of unmet demand for child care. Where possible, these centres will be located on school grounds, TAFE, university or other community land. A proposal for the establishment of an Early Learning and Care Centre in Weipa is currently underway.

National rollout of the Australian Early Development Index

The AEDI is a population-based measure of child development, which enables communities to assess how children are developing by the time they reach school age. The AEDI will help communities to tailor their resources and programs to the developmental needs of their children.

For further information go to: http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/OfficeOfEarlyChildhood



The Australian Early Development Index – National Implementation Update

Mark Cooper

All Australian states and territories will implement the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in 2009. The Australian Government is funding a national roll-out as one component of its early childhood education strategy. In Queensland, all schools (state, Catholic and independent) with prep students will participate in the implementation.

What is the AEDI?

The AEDI is a measure of how young children are developing in different communities. This information enables communities and governments to pinpoint the types of services, resources and supports young children and their families need to give children the best possible start in life. As a population measure, the AEDI focuses on all children in the community and examines early childhood development across the whole community.

The AEDI is an adapted version the Canadian Early Development Instrument (EDI) and, between 2004 and 2007, the AEDI has been implemented in 60 communities across Australia involving a total of over 37,000 children from over 1,000 schools (both government and non-government). The AEDI provides data on populations of children and is reported back to communities at the suburb or local area of the child's residence. It is not used to assess or identify individual children.

It is a teacher-completed checklist and measures five developmental domains:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills
- communication and general knowledge.

National implementation

The Australian Government has provided $15.9 million for the national implementation of the AEDI.

The importance of the early years is widely recognised. This, coupled with the greater emphasis being placed on evidence-based policy and decision-making, adds value to the data gathered through the AEDI.

How will teachers be involved?

The AEDI will be completed across Australia between May and July 2009. All teachers of children in their first year of formal full-time schooling will be asked to complete the AEDI Checklist based on their knowledge and observations of each child in their class. Children are not required to be present and information about individual children is de-identified (all individual data is anonymous).

Teachers will be provided with a detailed training CD-ROM and an *AEDI Guide for Teachers* to assist with completing the AEDI Checklists. Teachers will be funded for one hour to undertake the AEDI CD-ROM training package and 30 minutes for each completed the AEDI Checklist.

The checklist is completed using a secure online web-based data entry system developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research.

How will the AEDI be used?

The national AEDI will provide evidence that can be used to support policy, planning and action for health, education and community support across Australia, and will provide all communities with the opportunity to strengthen collaborations between schools, early childhood services, and local agencies to support children and families. Communities will be able to use the national AEDI results to develop and evaluate their efforts to improve children's outcomes and mobilise communities around early childhood, enabling them to place children's development as a high priority and work towards enabling all children get the best possible start in life.

Information about the background and trial of the AEDI across Australia is available on the AEDI National Support Centre website www.aedi.org.au or at http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/aediqueensland/index.html on Queensland's Department of Education, Training and the Arts AEDI website. Early childhood professionals can access Fact Sheets for principals, teachers and parents about implementation and a set of parent information posters.

Balancing your Head, Heart and Hands ... promoting mental health in the early years

Liz de Plater and Bronwyn MacGregor

Balancing your Head, Heart and Hands, has emerged as a key message in Queensland Health's Social and Emotional Early Development Strategy (SEEDS). The SEEDS project, collaboratively with parents and early years professionals, developed a mental health promotion framework which aims to enhance the social and emotional wellbeing of children, parents and staff in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings.

A previous EYC Journal article (Summer 2008 Vol 14 No 3) featured an overview of the SEEDS Mental Health Promotion (MHP) Framework providing an introduction to the Head, Heart and Hand components of the framework and other resources developed to support the implementation of SEEDS in early childhood settings.

This article shares some of the strategies jointly developed and implemented by centres and parents as part of the trial phase of the SEEDS project. The involvement of parents and early years professionals in the development of the SEEDS framework was crucial to ensure that the framework provides those who care for children with ways to promote social and emotional wellbeing. The framework specifically highlights the important role of staff who provide early childhood education and care and their impact on the lives of infants, toddlers and young children.

While the framework and the associated resources and strategies were developed to be applied in centre-based care services, they have the potential for wider application across other services for children, parents and families.

Parents, Greg and Mary-Ann, happy to be spending time with their daughter in her centre.

Through a series of workshops conducted during 2007 and 2008, the project provided a diverse group of directors, staff and parents with some key information/knowledge and, very importantly, some processes which provided opportunities to consider what this information meant to them – personally as well as professionally.

☺ Key Knowledge shared

- When and how children's brains form – the interconnectedness of early brain development and significant relationships;
- the role parents and staff have as 'architects' by shaping the brains of the children they care for
- how secure attachments to parents and staff can enhance the life outcomes of children they care for
- how high quality childcare can enhance the life outcomes of children dealing with disadvantage.

☺ Key Processes used

- Making "Time to Talk" a priority using *learning circles* to discuss information and new knowledge
- encouraging "Time to Reflect" by giving participants space between workshops to expand their own self-awareness of their teaching and parenting practices
- making "Time to Connect" by bringing staff and parents together regularly and providing follow-up support with the project team.

This combination of processing information together with others, facilitates integration of the information into participants' core practice and enables them to develop strategies which nurture communications, self-awareness and connectedness.

The SEEDS framework was developed from participants' feedback and comments collected during these sessions and has been organised around three central concepts – ☺**Head** (Knowledge – What I Know), ♥**Heart** (Values –

What I feel and who I am) and ✋**Hands** (Skills – What I do).

Some of key ideas and strategies that were incorporated into the SEEDS framework included:

- ☺ understand the importance of brain development and attachment and ✋how to pass this information to other families and communities
- ☺ create a space to think about and ♥value the development of children's social and emotional intelligence as well as the more well-recognised cognitive intelligence
- ☺ plan for more opportunities to promote social and emotional development with an emphasis on attachment
- ♥ ✋when observing children, ☺interpret their behaviour in terms of what the behaviour is trying to communicate, not just to change the behaviour
- ♥ prioritise the child's needs whenever it is possible
- ♥ be more available for parents
- ♥ consider the importance of culture and the family's recent experience when ✋transitioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and refugee children and their families into early childhood environments
- ✋ incorporate the idea of a staff member spending ten minutes every hour, sitting in one place in the room or outside so the children can access the staff easily, make eye contact and provide one-on-one contact
- ✋ use digital cameras to take pictures during the day that parents and children can share at pick-up time
- ✋ consider home visits by staff for some families – at least one for all families, if possible.

At first reading, these strategies may not appear to be very different from what might already be occurring in many ECEC settings. What makes these strategies significant is how they are put into practice. When using the SEEDS Mental Health Promotion Framework, it is the nurturing and valuing of relationships that directs the strategies. When implemented in the context of SEEDS framework, the focus is on *relationships* as each strategy is put in place. The SEEDS framework proposes that social and emotional wellbeing of children, staff, parents and families, and the wider community develops through nurturing and valuing relationships. The key to successfully promoting social and emotional wellbeing is to make your setting *relational* as well as *operational.* For example: when transitioning children from one room to another, consider their friendship groups … not just their age. When a child is distressed as a parent leaves … talk to the parent about their feelings too – don't be in a rush for the parent to go. When working with other staff … greet them in a friendly way as the day begins.

Head Heart and Hands at work

In a work environment that now sees early childhood professionals busier than ever with paperwork, programming, planning and assessment, the SEEDS framework provides an opportunity to redress the balance and put the 'Heart' or passion back into early childhood education and care. As one SEEDS participant said, 'It (SEEDS) puts the CARE back into early childhood care and education.'

The Heart (or who you are) is the key to quality relationships. Life experiences shape your values and who you become (heart) and all these experiences influence what knowledge (head) you take in, and how you apply your skills in practice (hands). From this perspective, SEEDS is not a lifeless framework that 'tells you' how to promote mental health. Rather, it becomes an intrinsic way of thinking, feeling and doing that values and nurtures relationships and consequently enhances social and emotional wellbeing. It is a way of reflecting on who you are and how that impacts on your professional practice and in your personal relationships. A key message for staff is "Who I am is important to how I care for children".

Staff, parents and children take time to connect during the parent afternoon hosted by the Nursery room.

The remainder of this article outlines some of the ways that the SEEDS concepts were implemented by child care centres during the trial phase of the project.

Heads, Hearts and Hands in action.

You may discover that some of these approaches would work for you in your setting. One way to think about the following strategies is like sowing seeds. You may find them an easy way to get started (to begin to nurture those seeds in your early childhood setting). You and your colleagues will already have your own unique suggestions of how to use your Head, Heart and Hands in ways that nurture communications, self awareness, and connectedness which will enhance the social and emotional well-being of children, parents and colleagues. The SEEDS framework gives you a way of understanding and processing what it is that you think and feel and do. Consider some of the ideas presented in the following section of this article. Can some of the strategies outlined here be implemented in your early childhood setting in similar ways to those trialled by the SEEDS centres?

Information about the importance of brain development and attachment was shared within trial child care centres in the following ways:

- using information/posters from the SEEDS CD of resources (or a poster you have) to create a display either at the front of the centre or in rooms. Some centres enlarged existing posters; others created their own posters based on the information provided. (E.g. adding … Did you know … you are the architect of your child's brain?)
- displaying information about social and emotional wellbeing in the rooms, on the programming walls, and staff use this information to inform their programming. (E.g. SEEDS framework poster linked to activities for the day – i.e. focus on ✋.)
- selecting small chunks of information on social and emotional wellbeing (perhaps around themes such as secure attachment or sensitive, responsive caregiving) to share over long period of time. (E.g. using information from SEEDS CD, dot points from transcripts of presentations – gradually communicating these to parents and staff via meetings and newsletters.)
- letting families know about social and emotional wellbeing via the Centre's newsletter and attaching some resources from the SEEDS CD. (E.g. a copy of the framework – or diagram of how the brain prunes unused pathways.)
- linking information with communications by encouraging parents to look at social and emotional wellbeing information displayed via the parent newsletter, and then talking with parents about their thoughts on this information.
- holding a parent evening to share information on attachment and brain development. (E.g. using a DVD such as the Raising Children DVD to focus on care giving/parenting topics.)
- developing a pamphlet on separation anxiety and attachment theory to include in the parents' welcome package (Zero to Three Website has quality resources to assist with this).

Information about promoting social and emotional well-being was shared by parents within trial child care centres in the following ways:

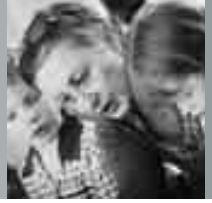
- a parent wrote a 'parent handout' to share information about social and emotional wellbeing.
- one parent wrote a letter to parents (in the 'Babies room') – SEEDS from a parent's perspective.
- a parent initiated an opportunity to use the centre for a community event – for parents to gather for discussions about social and emotional wellbeing – a time for parents to come and chat – what works at home – perhaps to have regular screenings of sections of the Raising Children DVD as useful topics for community discussions, and use snippets from the DVD to start discussions.
- The 'Nursery room' hosted a family play date/social get-together where all 'Babies

All About Kids know All About SEEDS

room' parents met and had the opportunity to talk informally about promoting social and emotional wellbeing.
- a parent joined the National Association for Community-Based Children's Services (NACBCS) so she could represent SEEDS and the centre in this forum.

Trial centres created a space to think about and value social and emotional well-being by:

- beginning a new style of *communication book* (trialled in the Nursery room) which contains a daily synopsis of an interaction the child had and a paragraph from a human development/ theory book relating to this.
- reviewing how transitions between the rooms occurred – especially transitions from nursery to toddler rooms – so the transition is smoother for the children and families.
- acknowledging the need to encourage fathers to be involved by holding a father and child read-a-thon.
- holding a staff meeting to talk about the concepts of emotional availability, personal triggers and reactions. The whole staff meeting was set aside to enable this discussion – acknowledging the need to be open and honest about our own experiences and how these could be reflected in who we are today and in what we do each day.
- erecting a 'staff room SEEDS whiteboard' so staff can reflect on information, give each other praise, thoughts of the day, ideas, emotional support through text – in other words be emotionally available for each other.
- developing a wellbeing sheet for staff to complete to reflect on their own social and emotional wellbeing. What do you like about your job? What makes you not want to come to your job? When I am upset … it would help for people to … ?
- reviving the staff "reflections diary" in the staff room.
- asking staff how the Director can facilitate the nurturing of communications/ self awareness and connectedness so staff can get the kind of support they need.
- developing a staff acknowledgement display with a photo of each staff member accompanied by positive comments and things recently done well at work (and in personal life if appropriate).
- actively recording recognition received from parents and each other about their work. Wellbeing for children starts with staff wellbeing as staff give this back to children.


Trial centres provided more opportunities to build relationships with new children and families by:

- making more recognition of the *child* in the orientation process … balancing the needs of children and their parents.
- making an orientation booklet (in picture/ story book format) for new children to take home for reading with their parents. This helps them to understand what happens each day and become familiar with staff and with the centre routines.
- asking parents to review the enrolment process and orientation information, making the centre's orientation process a better way of welcoming new parents.
- reviewing waiting list procedures and working on ways to keep parents better informed from the very beginning.
- increasing the time involved in the orientation period and settling-in process. Start with little visits to become familiar with the environment and new carers, then slowly increase the length of visits and emphasize the relationships with new carers.
- giving parents some strategies to assist a child to settle.
- using the Circle of Security™ graphic (available at www.circleofsecurity.com) to help the unsettled children feel more secure and support the children that (don't check in) to connect with the carer.
- using recent examples of children's experiences as they transition into care to encourage staff reflection; encouraging the staff involved to share their perspective in the staff room.

Staff increased awareness of the ways in which they observed, interpreted and responded to behaviour by:

- revising the centre's Parent Communication Sheets – ☺♥✋ codes were inserted as a way of talking about the child's development, growth, abilities, individuality and interests. A letter was sent to explain the changes and to introduce the SEEDS ☺♥✋ concepts.
- changing their way of looking at children's behaviour. Noticing children who may be at risk, especially the quiet ones who they may have less contact with.
- being more aware of how the child is feeling, rather than just on their motivations or the behaviour they are showing. Staff first ask themselves, "What is this child telling me s/he needs emotionally?"
- watching children play and noting that they do look for connections with adults.
- providing opportunities at staff meetings to discuss the "childhood experiences" and "emotional connections" of staff to nurture self awareness.

Staff focused on the child's needs as the number one priority by:

- consciously increasing the amount of praise and acknowledgement given to children. All staff make sure they notice one little thing each day for every child and make contact with compliment, smile, hug or praise.
- consciously increasing conversations about feelings and emotions.
- consciously changing the staff's focus from not only 'watching over' children, but 'caring for' children – supervision vs. connection.
- focusing more on 'relationships' with children and less on planning activities for children to do.
- encouraging staff to reflect more about how they manage children's behaviours. What is it I know about children? What do I know about how I have felt and dealt with this before? How could I do it differently?
- using the language of ☺♥✋ every day and bringing this system of learning into the daily routine e.g. encouragement to children … 'kind heart', 'clever mind, interesting thinking' 'kind face', 'soft/safe hands'
- the group leader spending time observing her assistant and recognising how brilliant she was in her interactions and connections with others.
- staff in the 'Nursery room' wanting to make changes to address reasons why they are not spending more one-on-one time on the floor with children. They are taking away some writing time, keeping programming to a maximum of half an hour per day and monitoring that.
- focusing more on the types of things/



interactions they are having with the babies e.g. doing massage, a lot more talking, face-to-face interactions.
- talking more to the children about what they have been doing and where they are going next so that the children are prepared for small daily transitions. For example, a staff member might say, 'I'm going to lunch soon but XXX will be coming to look after you while I am out of the room.' By giving an explanation, staff members are not making assumptions that children understand the staff lunch roster.

Staff made themselves more available for parents by:

- communicating more with all parents on a casual level.
- changing the initial point of contact when new parents come by giving time to sit and bond with the parent, so the carer can find out the parents' needs and values in quiet relaxed atmosphere.
- focusing on the 'trust' aspect of care and education; transferring the parents' trust in the staff to enable the child to trust them also.
- talking to parents about social and emotional wellbeing and asking parents about their aims for their children. Are they Head, Heart or Hands aims?
- asking parents what their perceptions of mental wellbeing and emotional development are – discovering many parents think of mental health in terms of child behaviour or serious mental conditions.
- sending out questionnaires to parents to gain information relevant to separation and bonding i.e. asking for parent feedback on how transition to care is managed; asking what they do as a family unit; and trying to gain more information about the child's family history/background using documents developed by the centre: Orientation checklist, All about me and my family, Settling into childcare, Help us learn more about your child.
- sending home child profile books with the SEEDS Head Heart and Hands frameworks in and encouraging parent contributions on their child, gaining more insight about individual children from this.
- involving parents in meetings to discuss how the centre could implement a stronger focus on social and emotional wellbeing.

One of the hopes of the SEEDS project would be that centres that are implementing the SEEDS framework would begin planning to visit other centres to get feedback and ideas about social and emotional wellbeing and invite other centres to see what they have implemented.

If you and your centre/setting would like to implement SEEDS as a way to balance your Head, Heart and Hands in practice, please do take up this challenge and get in touch with another SEEDS centre. Work together to enhance social and emotional development in your setting so that you and the children in your care will learn, love and live happily.

As a result of a successful collaboration with the SEEDS Project, the Gowrie (Queensland) Inc, and the Professional Support Coordinator Queensland (PSCQ), have developed a SEEDS Training Manual and DVD which is being used as the basis for a statewide professional development program for senior staff in child care centres and family day care. The aim is to help services to build the capacity of all staff and carers to promote and strengthen the social and emotional wellbeing of their communities. This is an innovative and very well-informed approach to professional development that has the potential to really influence quality service provision. For more information about these training resources and training dates contact PSCQ or visit their website at www.pscq.org.au

For more information about the SEEDS MHP Framework and associated early years health promotion resources (including *Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds*; *Germ Busters*; *Happy Teeth*) contact:

The mental health promotion team:

Brisbane Southside Population Health Unit, Queensland Health

Tel: (07) 3000 9105
Fax: (07) 3000 9121

Email: Alanna_Stewart@health.qld.gov.au or Kerry_Bidwell@health.qld.gov.au

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C&K Conference 2009

Conference looks at early childhood input

Who exactly should be involved in an early childhood curriculum? This and other related questions will be addressed at this year's C&K's conference entitled *Ponds, puddles and water treatment plants - Who has input into early education?* It will be held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, from 30 - 31 May.

The conference will focus on curriculum in early childhood and the collaboration between parents, staff and children of individual centres. Who has input into the curriculum? Whose voices are the staff listening to when they think about plans for and with the children each day? And who is insisting that the industry do what they ask (i.e. government policy, the early learning framework, etc.) We will have speakers from all these groups of people giving their perspective on these questions.

Keynote speakers include Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Child Care Maxine McKew; Dr Margaret Sims, who will speak about neurobiology, child development and program planning; and Dr Kathy Hirsh-Pasek – co-author of *A mandate for playful learning in preschool*.

Professor Margaret Sims of the University of New England is well-known for her research into measuring cortisol (a hormone resulting from stress) levels of children in child care centres. She will speak about neurobiological research which has given early childhood professionals a "scientific" framework for the work they do with young children.

Dr Hirsh-Pasek will speak about perceptions of unstructured play and how this was often seen as a waste of time by parents, who increasingly considered interaction with didactic, electronic toys to be a form of play.

> *Play and playful learning captivates children's minds in ways that support better academic and social outcomes as well as strategies for lifelong learning.*

The conference provides a great networking opportunity for early childhood professionals and others interested in early childhood.

C&K conference 2009 details

Ponds, puddles and water treatment plants - Who has input into early education?

When: 30-31 May

Where: Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, cnr Merivale and Glenelg Streets, South Bank

For more information, ph: 3552 5333, toll free: 1800 177 092 or go to

C&K's website: www.candk.asn.au

Emotions and children

Dr Margaret Carter

Margaret works in private practice as a behaviour change specialist, based in Brisbane. She works with families, children's service staff, kindergartens, care and education systems, government departments, community organizations, mental health practitioners and therapists. Margaret's work is always contemporary and relevant, designed in response to needs, circumstances and specific situations. Margaret is a qualified teacher and has worked as a preschool teacher, special education consultant and guidance counsellor. She works as a consultant, mentor, teacher, social coach, program designer, facilitator, presenter and mediator, and is the author of seven books. Margaret is a passionate advocate of inclusion and inclusive education. She has co-authored two social understanding curriculum texts for children 3 – 10 years of age and is the co-author of *The Five Faces of Parenting* program, a dynamic and unique program designed to make a positive difference in the lives of families.

Emotions are universal. Children experience hundreds of different emotions each day. Emotions, and the thinking associated with these emotions, are what trigger children to be affected by the people and events around them.

Children initially rely on facial clues to tell them what someone else is feeling. The core emotions joy, anger, sadness, fear (Campos and Barrett 1984) – are easier for children to identify as they concentrate their attention on how the person looks rather than on the context of the situation. As children grow and develop, they more accurately recognize a wider range of emotional expressions. They progress from relying on facial clues alone to considering situational clues that could elicit certain emotional responses. As children mature, they develop an understanding of the source of the emotion – how and why emotions occur.

Once children can understand emotions – their own and other people's – they are in a stronger position to solve social conflicts. Throughout this process, they develop their competencies to establish and maintain positive social relationships with others. The cornerstone of these relationships is mutual respect.

> *Many social problems with which communities struggle have strong emotional undercurrents. Often mental health difficulties are centered around deficits or unusual patterns of emotional expressiveness, understanding, and regulation (Denham 1998 p. 15).*

Children need to let their emotions drive them but not take control of them. Unexpressed emotions and feelings get stored up inside, causing hurt, anger, depression, anxiety, and poor self image. Children often lash out at others when they feel sad, upset, frustrated, embarrassed, humiliated or excluded. Angry outbursts and overreacting are often the result of not expressing underlying emotions and feelings. It is important to get to the root of the child's emotions, what may be driving the emotions in the first place. For example, the emotional roots of anger are guilt, fear, hurt and helplessness (Leaman 2006 p. 30).

Children need to learn to recognize their personal body signals as their emotions are escalating so that they can take charge, neutralize and calm. This way they are developing emotional strength, flexibility and resilience. They are staying engaged and connected under pressure.

Children do not start out knowing the names of emotions any more than they do the names of animals or toys. They benefit from developing an emotions vocabulary so that they can use the right words to describe how they are feeling.

Children are not born knowing how to manage their emotions. As a result, they often rely on inappropriate strategies. Young children require extensive practice and a supportive learning environment to enhance their affective development. Within this environment, the



adult's role is to accept children's emotions, assist children in understanding their emotions, in conjunction with providing safe outlets for children to express their emotions.

Use everyday life situations complemented with direct teaching as the medium for teaching emotional understanding. Teach, coach and support children as they learn to name, understand, express and respond to their own and others' emotions safely and constructively. When teaching children, focus on the fact that, as individuals, we are responsible for our own behaviours. Feelings are one aspect of how and why we behave the way we do.

Children's Emotional Fitness

Children who have developed emotional competence and resilience are developing emotional fitness and the ability to experience and understand the causes, consequences and expressions of emotions. During this process, they are learning to interpret the emotion signals of others as well as regulate and respond to their own emotions.

Children need a certain amount of emotional fitness to deal with the ups and downs of life. They need to learn how to cope with life's disappointments and troubles; to bounce back from stressful experiences; recover from misfortune and be ready to try again another time. This capacity for emotion fitness empowers the child to develop coping behaviours, to persist in the face of failure, to bounce back confidently from setbacks with their self esteem intact. Children who have developed these competencies possess personal power and positive self esteem.

> *Positive self esteem is the signal most important psychological skill we can develop in order to thrive in society. (Kaufman, Raphael and Espeland 1999).*

Take the time to make a difference in the emotional life of a child – teach her emotional fitness competencies so she can develop emotion fitness capabilities. To me, this is one of the more important challenges we have as early years professional practitioners.

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Emotions are universal. Children experience hundreds of different emotions each day. Emotions, and the thinking associated with these emotions, are what trigger children to be affected by the people and events around them.

Setting up and managing interactive learning centres for young children

Dot Walker

Dot Walker has been involved in many aspects of education for more than 30 years as a teacher, administrator, curriculum writer and independant consultant.

More recently, she has started up an original educational supply business called Class Act. This business is unique in that many of the resources are designed by Dot and made locally in Cairns. She combines these "hands-on" resources with practical consultancy sessions demonstrating their flexible use across curriculum areas.

She has worked overseas and throughout Australia and has presented at many national and international conferences. Dot is a published author both of children's books and a variety of teacher resource books including the top selling book *Literacy Centres for Middle Years Classrooms.*

In early childhood settings, learning centres have evolved as part of an integrated approach to learning, particularly in the area of literacy. The establishing of learning centres in a classroom has many advantages such as freeing up the teacher to deliver focused teaching episodes, either with groups or individuals, and providing opportunities for the teacher to observe and reflect. It is important that teachers clarify what is meant by the term “learning centre” as there can be a variety of definitions.

Matching centre

I believe a learning centre is an area where student-centred activities occur. These activities can be set up for individual children, pairs or small groups depending on the intended outcome. There can be one or several learning centres operating in a room at the same time. However, learning centres must be carefully planned to meet the needs and developmental levels of the children interacting with them.

Successful implementation of learning centres doesn’t just happen. There are several important considerations to be taken into consideration such as:

- physical environment
- resources
- modeling
- time
- children’s independent and social skills
- the purpose of each learning centre
- assessment and evaluation
- reflection time.

In planning the physical environment, it is necessary to consider the movement of students, noisy/quiet areas and the spatial requirements of each particular learning centre.

All resources that children are required to use in the centre should be readily available.

Writing centre

Children should also know where to place completed activities and where to move when they have finished. For young children, picture cues of where to place scissors etc. assist in this process. A pictorial task board can be helpful in showing children which centres they will be working at.

One of the most important aspects of learning centres is the modeling of what the children are being asked to do. This may seem time consuming but, if children do not clearly understand what they are to do, then learning centres will not succeed. It is crucial never to set up a learning centre with new concepts that the students have not been exposed to previously. Learning centres are a way of reinforcing what has already been taught or experienced.

When planning learning centres, teachers must decide the amount of time that students will spend in each centre. Often centres are set up on a rotational basis with some form of signal for the students to move to the next activity. Other methods are to use a timer or teacher direction when it is time to move.

To independently or interdependently work in learning centres, young children need a variety of social skills such as taking turns, respecting others, using people's names and sharing resources. By observing the children in their care, teachers can identify which skills children need to work on. This can be done as a mini lesson on a particular social skill and then reminding children when they start to move into the centres.

> *" Remember when we practiced our listening skills yesterday? When you go into your centres to work today, I want you to remember to be good listeners"*

Each learning centre must have a clearly defined purpose that relates to the children's development and interests and reinforce what has already been taught For example, if children had been learning the letters of the alphabet, it would be beneficial to set up an alphabet centre with a variety of "hands on", reinforcing fun activities. If an interest in butterflies was generated from the children's experiences, then a learning centre could be set up with books about butterflies, pictures, and some interactive activities for the children to complete.

Although learning centres provide time for a teacher to do some focused teaching, this time can also be a wonderful opportunity for a teacher to observe or undertake anecdotal recording of children's progress. This does not always have

Reading centre

Games centre (cards)

to be written but can be videoed or an audio recording. These snapshots of children interacting with the centres and their peers provides a rich bank of information for teachers to build on, use in their planning or to add to children's individual portfolios. By observing what is happening in learning centres, teachers are also able to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of the centres they have set up.

Following any learning centre sessions, it is important to build in time for reflection and sharing. This validates the independent activities and provides opportunities for the teacher to give appropriate praise and feedback. By specifically planning reflection time, it also presents an opportunity for children to develop their skills in speaking and listening. Reflection time does not always have to be done on a whole group basis as teachers can build in a variety of sharing strategies such as sharing in pairs, triads or small groups.

In conclusion, I believe that learning centres are an important component of early childhood programs as they prepare children to be independent, interactive learners whilst developing their social and communication skills.

Puzzle shape centre

It is crucial never to set up a learning centre with new concepts that the students have not been exposed to previously.

Learning centres are a way of reinforcing what has already been taught or experienced.

SmART literacy learning - let's step outside the box

Dot Walker and Lynnette Griffiths

Dot has been involved in many aspects of literacy education for over 20 years. She is a published author of teacher resources plus a wide variety of children's texts.

Lynette is a successful graphic designer and multimedia artist who now combines her expertise in this area with effective teaching and learning strategies.

Dot and Lynette combine their experience and skills in art and literacy to integrate young children's creativity with storying and language development.

New models for early childhood education are forged through necessity and innovation – the energies of so many on behalf of children have produced bold ideas, creative models, beliefs and practices. Education of young children has evolved and still is. Dr Barbara Piscitelli (2007)

Walking into any early childhood centre or classroom you most likely would see examples of children's art hung on the wall and display boards. These could be anything from spontaneous examples from a painting session to ten paper plates neatly stuck together to create a caterpillar with an assortment of miscellaneous "stuck-on bits ". What we often don't ask the children or ourselves is what they have learnt, what process they went through, the problems they solved or in art terms what they critically think? How often do we discuss with young children what a real artist does? How often do we as teachers think about how art work links to other learning rather then simply a decorative craft?

As early childhood teachers we are very much aware of our responsibility to build children's language and literacy skills. However, do we ask ourselves how artistic learning can also be structured to in a meaningful way with correct and quality equipment; not glitter balls and spangles? In the early stages of learning it is essential that students have access to appropriate, quality materials and that they are involved in critical conversations to produce greater creativity and depth of connected learning.

If we use the analogy of learning to read and write; as teachers, we would never simply provide the children with a range of books and writing implements that changed frequently and then expect them to learn to read and write simply by interacting with the materials. However, this is often the norm when it comes to art in early childhood classrooms.

Art can make us laugh, cry, give us pleasure and tell a story of who we are but knowing how to create this in a classroom context can be difficult.

> *As teachers we possibly don't have the skill base to teach good art practice and therefore stick with the "bag of tricks" which produces much of the multiple sameness that decorates classrooms.* Barbara Piscitelli (2006)

So how do we retain the creativity of young children and yet teach them the skills and meta language they require to grow and develop in this area?

We believe that SmART literacy learning is an effective way for early childhood teachers to support the specific development of children's art alongside children's creativity. We firmly believe in the acquisition of artistic technique and skills using appropriate materials can go hand in hand with a creative process.

SmART literacy learning allows the scaffolding of skill aquisition and technique to work alongside creative exploration and encourages children to solve problems both collaboratively and individually. Students and teachers reflect on the work and together start to critically evaluate at each stage of the process.

By following the program, teachers of young children will be involved in planning, interacting, monitoring, assessing and reflecting which are the four interactive processes involved in delivering any successful early childhood program. There are many opportunities of "teachable moments" for language development and early literacy skills as the children are involved and engaged in the "real life" processes that have been set up.

The following example about creating a clay turtle demonstrates how language development is integrated with many maths concepts.

" Now take the smaller ball."

" Make it round with your hands like this."

"How many legs do we need for the turtle? What shape will these be?"

"What else do you know that has the same shape as the shell?"

"Are all your legs on your turtle the same size?"

We also believe that very young children are capable of effectively using technology such as digital cameras and computers as long as the processes, safety and expectations are clearly modelled. What better way to teach young children about what makes a good photograph than using examples of their own work? Whilst viewing their photographs the meta language of visual literacy can be introduced in its earliest form.

" What do you think about the angle this photograph was taken at?"

"Is this photograph too dark? What could we do to improve it?"

The SmART literacy program also addresses development of social skills as children work through several of the processes collaboratively. A good example of this is using the mural wall to create shared stories and so build early language skills evolving from children's original artwork.

There are directed teaching strategies embedded within the program which are as follows:

Demonstrating - the teacher models how something is done in order to support the child in their efforts.

Instructing - the teacher passes information onto the child as to how to master a skill or concept.

Directing - the teacher guides the children's behaviour in a step-by-step fashion to support task completion.

Task analyst - the teacher helps the child identify the key steps involved in completing a task in order to gain success.

Reflecting - the teacher and child reflect on the process and develop a meta language to assess the process.

We believe that the arts are much of the time undervalued and misunderstood, often being allocated to wet afternoons or "add ons" rather than being valued as a core component of children's education and development. We believe that the SmART literacy learning program will enable educators of all year levels to begin to see the advantages of integrating the arts and developing lifelong skills in the children they teach.

For more information about SmART literacy learning contact:

enquiries@smartlitconnect.com.au
www.smartlitconnect.com.au

Pathways to literacy

Yvonne Winer

Yvonne Winer was born in South Africa and has lived in Australia since 1961. She has published 27 books including picture story books, teacher resource books, junior novels and books for educational reading schemes. Yvonne has spent the greater part of her life as an academic. She has a PhD in Philosophy and has acted as a consultant in Basic Education and Early Childhood Education to UNICEF in the Pacific, and as an Early Childhood Consultant, developing literacy programs in South Africa and Malaysia (Kuching). In 2002 she conducted writing workshops in Vanuatu which resulted in 40 picture books for preschool children in Bislama. These are being translated into the 115 languages of Vanuatu by the regional teachers. Yvonne retired as head of Early Childhood at the University of Southern Queensland in 1997 and is now an Early Childhood Consultant and conducts writing and storytelling workshops.

This paper outlines some elements of my keynote addresses: one from the New Zealand Early Childhood Conference in Rotorua, 2005 entitled "The aesthetics of picture story books" and the other "Pathways to literacy" presented in Australia at the Perth Early Years Conference 2007.

> *For lo the Story Teller comes! Let fall the trumpet, hush the drums.*

I borrow this quote from the great story teller, Raymon Ross (1972, p. 25) who reminds us "that since ancient times story telling has included the arts of song, story, dance and mime". Who of us have not sung a nursery rhyme to a baby or toddler, joined in the chant as children play, recounted an interesting event with an excited voice filled with inflection and intonation, expressed sadness and fear, and whispered secrets? There is magic in storytelling. A magic we all share, a magic which indeed lays the foundation for all future literacy development; lays the foundation for reading and writing.

Intimacy, relationships and bonding.

By reflecting on a few photographic images I would like to share the concept of Intimacy of the world of storytelling, being in my view, the very beginnings of the rich pathway to literacy. An experience that all our young children, whether at home or in early childhood learning centres, should enjoy. These experiences beg us to take our time and do them well and use play as our vehicle for this rich world of literacy for children from 0 - 8 years.

Let us for a moment consider the bonding moments of the mother and the infant, the parents and siblings and the infant, and the carer and the infant. This is an emotional mix of joy and trepidation, of love and uncertainty, of the recognition of the present and the future. It is an overwhelming mix of emotional responses for the many paths that set the scene for language and literacy. Will it be rich and stimulating or will it be uncertain and unsure?

Imagine a mother holding her child and speaking to him.

As we observe we reflect and share her joy as she hums tunes and sings nursery rhymes, cuddles and rocks her tiny son and speaks in a calm voice. She makes cooing sounds, smiles and seeks eye contact, she breast feeds her two week old son. Now there is a new game, the important game of taking turns; the baby suckles and rests, the mother talks and cajoles, the baby suckles again.

'So?' you may ask, 'what has all this to do with literacy?' Indeed it has everything to do with not only the communication foundations of literacy, but the ongoing elements that will surface again and again as this child learns to take his place in society; as he anticipates when to enter conversations and other social occasions, when to respond to sharing the telling of tales, when he first participates in the reading experiences, when he listens and watches facial and body language and learns to read the meanings conveyed in

inflection and intonation and other visual cues that invite or reject, are angry or friendly and so forth. He has experienced responsive language, intimacy, rhyme and rhythm, turn taking, smiling, cooing and other sounds. Language grows from sounds and is nurtured in a world of sound. Above all, it is enveloped in a world of either positive or negative responses. These early experiences enhance his sense of 'reading' a wider world. Malaguzzi (cited in Dahlberg, 1999, p. 59) sums up the importance of early literacy when he says 'When children are born they are washed by an ocean of words, by signs, and they learn the art of speech itself, the art of listening, the art of reading the signs.'

This image is that of a mother, Beth, and her three year old daughter Julia sharing a book. Beside Julia is her teddy bear who goes everywhere with her. It is a large very cuddly bear and is always referred to as 'Bear'. They are cosy, comfortable and in bed. Beth is reading and Julia is eagerly listening and observing. Beth reads. Julia responds. Julia draws the bear into the story reading session. 'Look Bear. Look,' she says excitedly as she points at a picture. Beth stops reading and she shares Julia's excitement and respects the interruption (and so does Bear). Julia understands that pictures tell a story too. She also knows about taking turns and sharing. She is learning that an adult appreciates her contribution (and so does Bear) When Beth, decides to get out of bed, Julia moves into Beth's position in the bed and drags Bear closer. Now Julia 'reads' enthusiastically to Bear and explains about the pictures. Her rich pathway to literacy seems well established. A little later in this paper I intend to look at the importance of picture story books in more detail.

Julia's father is David. He too encourages her language, her imagination, her literacy development. David and Julia are painting in the gazebo. They can mess as much as they like. David starts painting a fish. Julia steps closer and watches. There are now more fish … big ones, small ones. David starts telling a story about red fish, blue fish, big fish and small fish as he paints. As the fish are painted Julia gets very excited and David says, 'Hang on a moment Julia. I still need to paint the water so the fish have lots of water to swim in. They will need lots of water for swimming.' Now the fish are swimming in the sea and Julia gets even more excited! She jumps onto the wet painting and starts to dance and slide over it, the thick finger-paint squishing through her toes. 'Fish, fish in the sea,' she calls. Suddenly she looks down; for a moment her face clouds. The fish have disappeared! Then she laughs and claps and dances a little more. 'The fish all gone!' she says. 'Fish all gone under the sea!' So we know Julia can join in making a story, can take her turn, and has a wonderful imaginative way of ending the story. Story structure has become part of her language and literacy development. She has encountered the beginning, the middle and the end of the story by not only hearing it, but seeing it unfold visually and physically participating with her whole body. These observations clearly illustrate Julia's

responsiveness, her interaction, her ability to take turns and she creates an ending for the story.

Peek-a-boo games, finger plays and action rhymes

These images introduce us to other elements important for Julia's play with language and its early development. These are the vitally important peek-a-boo games, fingerplays and action rhymes. They all capture rhythm, body action, rhyme. They invite responses and interactions and strengthen bonding. They flood a child's ocean of words with more rhythm and rhyme and games and fun and, above all, play. Play with other siblings and adults – one-to-one – a most important ingredient. Julia is an only child at this point in time, so Bear is keenly invited to participate with simple little games borrowed from other well-known rhymes. As a family we all join in; we all play with Julia.

Peek-a-boo baby, what do I see?
A peek-a-boo baby looking straight back at me.
Peek-a-boo baby, what do I see?
A peek-a-boo baby clapping hands with me!
(borrowed from *Brown Bear* and many similar other verses)

Peek-a-boo games happen all day every day and are part of most events. They have been part of family interaction with Julia since her birth. She initiates many of the games hiding behind her hands; at bath time, behind the face cloth; at lunch time, behind the serviette; in the bed, behind Bear and over and over and over again and this repetition will go on well into her world of stories and other early literacy experience and flow over into that repetition she encounters in picture books and early reading schemes. Prediction is not likely to be a problem for her.

Julia hops into a big flat Zulu basket and so we now have a spinning game. We make up rhymes and chant:

Where is baby Julia
and her teddy bear?
Spinning round and round.
There … there … there!

Where is baby Julia
and her teddy bear?
Spinning in a basket,
There … there … there!

(Then she hides Bear in a big box. Again we play at action rhymes.)

Where is baby Julia
and her teddy bear?
Hiding in a big box.
There … there … there!



Of course repetition comes into play again so now she hides behind the door, under the chair. She initiates, she anticipates, she takes her turn, she predicts. She is surrounded by Malaguzi's (1993) ocean of language engulfed in rhyme and rhythm, narrative and verse where adults accept her invitations to play and extend her vocabulary and play with words.

Play-listen to my story. Children as story tellers.

The most important stories in our early childhood centres and our homes are, of course, the stories the children tell. The art lies at the very heart of their stories, as they work earnestly in two- and three-dimensional forms and have endless conversations with their friends as they poke, prod and paint, making their own creations, and are not trapped in the awful adult-directed activities that so often adorn the walls of early learning centres. Here I refer to the colouring-in and pasting-in photocopies and the 25 replicated bunnies, Easter eggs and other trivial non-art events.

Recently I was shown a painting by a three-year-old by an observant teacher who captured the essence of this child's thinking and creativity. I would like you to imagine this child's very simple painting that might easily be overlooked by a teacher or parent. This is the description offered by the teacher of a painting three-and-a-half-year-old Sophie created at the easel.

> *There were swirls of blue and green – great swirls – and in the middle were four dots. The green spots in the middle represent buttons to push. Sophie told us that they make beautiful musical sounds when pushed and that the music then turns into beautiful butterflies that fly up and up and up. As Sophie painted this picture she sang the sounds and also moved to the imagined music.*

The teacher then explained, 'This episode not only demonstrates Sophie's creative thinking and problem solving but shows us how she skilfully integrates bodily kinaesthetic awareness, with aural, visual, imaginative and expressive dimensions.' What storytelling!!! How many of us ever stop to really listen and watch and observe the way this teacher did?

Literacy and the curriculum for the under Eights.

What this incident describes are, of course, the multiple intelligences Gardner (1983) speaks of and also illustrates the very components Eisner (1985) wishes for in a *Curriculum ideals for children under eight*: a curriculum built on refinement of the senses, the stimulation of the imaginative processes of the mind, the encouragement of the playful treatment of ideas; providing opportunities for the multiple forms of literacy and the many forms of representation such as music, dance and drama and, of course, the visual arts. He also emphasised developing a strong sense of 'automaticity' – that is the ability a child develops after having experienced a medium so often that it becomes an automatic part of what they do. He pleaded for us to focus on what is important and not to expose children only briefly to a wide variety of materials but rather to let them take their time as they explore and gain confidence. He also reminded us that the curriculum is a mind-altering device and, when we consider the number of hours and years a child spends in our care in these early years from birth then we are indeed taking on enormous responsibilities.

The emergent curriculum

Here in this environment that Sophie has shared, this teacher plans for her to hear the rich, encouraging, supportive language of adults, the developing language of children as they constantly challenge, question, reflect, share ideas and negotiate. Above all Sophie has experienced a teacher who knows how to plan further after reflecting on Sophie's play. She has not restricted Sophie's play and development by pre-planned compulsory limiting 'table top' activities or surrounded her with stereotypical dress-up and domestic play or harnessed her into a program that constantly stops and starts and values tidying up more than a child's satisfactory conclusion to a game. This program provides Sophie with an enticing world of open-ended creative pathways of an emergent curriculum. Important elements of the emergent curriculum in early childhood programs are superbly demonstrated in the book *Documenting and reflecting: An early childhood story* by Vivienne Harris and Sandy Houen (2008).



There is no one suitable universal program for young children. There are millions of children in childcare and early childhood centres across the world, thousands across this country; each in a unique environment, each with unique requirements, each with unique cultures and unique communities. Uninterrupted play deserves flexible and aesthetic environments that feed the imagination. These programs need to be in the hands of well-qualified specialist Early Childhood teachers who are capable of planning an appropriate curriculum, an emergent curriculum through observation. We also need early childhood educators to seriously question programs that limit children's freedom to play and who seat them at desks and put them into school uniforms too early.

Wells (1983) has long advised of the importance of giving children frequent exposure to story telling as this enables them to develop early explicit understanding of the power of language as a symbolic mode of representation and a preparation for later reading and writing. They also require oral stories surrounded by long uninterrupted play periods. For me it makes sense that children should first establish their story frames through play as they recount and script their experiences through dramatic, social and creative play, enhanced by frequent stories through telling , singing and dramatisation and reading aloud beautiful picture books. Valuable stories for very young children are those which make extensive use of sounds and repetitive phrases and stories which have opportunities for participation.

The aesthetics of picture books

Picture books feed into the emergence of literacy in its fullest sense. A picture book is an introduction to literacy far beyond the foundations for reading and writing, the stepping stone into the rich world of the imagination and the bridge into the realm of the arts and aesthetics embedded in culture and relationships.

Australian picture books introduce children to the world of the visual arts in the most exciting and enticing way through the eyes of excellent imaginative illustrators and the voices of outstanding authors. Some would say the very best in the world! Picture books dance unashamedly with multiple forms of literacy; with the rhythm and rhyme of language, the imaginative interpretation through drama and puppetry, the translations into music as the story becomes a ballet, a percussion performance, an operetta or a sound story. Picture books monitor and reflect the cultural ebb and flow of our society; the tensions and sorrows of our lives, the harmony and destruction of nature. Erica Wagner (2004 p.9) says of picture books. 'I look for elegance, for balance and harmony, for confidence in line, drawing, imagery, for the kind of subtle strong original work that comes when an artist has followed his or her vision, when everything is considered and yet the result seems effortless.'

The Vygotskian paradigm (File,1997 pp.295 - 317) offers us a recognition of how curriculum and teacher-child interactions are nested within and influenced by culture and in "a more dramatic shift Vygotskian theory leads us to examine early childhood settings as a culture, with an understanding that early childhood education as we know it has been socially constructed and can be reconstructed" (File, p.295).

Good picture books contribute effectively and directly to this reconstruction. They communicate though sensitive appropriate narrative, buoyant on a sea of illustrations that capture the essence of age, gender, and cultural reconciliation. They open doorways for a child's own exploration and construction of knowledge, which has resulted in powerful paradigm shifts. Good examples of such books are *The outback* by Analiese Porter, illustrated by Bronwyn Bancroft (2004), *Not so fast Songololo* by Niki Daly (2000) and *The whale rider* by Witi Ihimaera (2005). This paradigm shift reflects the fact that there have recently been many more books written and illustrated by Indigenous writers who are recognised and valued for their contribution to children's literature. They have become part of the mainstream literary scene and have been awarded many literary awards. We recognise Bronwyn Bancroft, an Indigenous writer, as one of our leading illustrators of books for young children in Australia. Not too many years ago Indigenous



stories were illustrated by non-Indigenous illustrators and their stories were interpreted by non-Indigenous writers. In *The outback* (2005), Bronwyn Bancroft has illustrated the poem written by Annaliese Porter, a young Indigenous writer who is eleven years old and this too is a shift which reflects and acknowledges the child as competent as she invites us to rejoice in her interpretation of the outback through her eyes, the eyes of a young girl. Her verse reflects the relationship between Indigenous people and the land. She says:

> *For thousands of years Aboriginal people*
> *have trodden this dusty sand –*
> *caring for mother nature*
> *and their sacred land.*
>
> *They have felt the softness of country*
> *and seen the crystal sky –*
> *they have tasted the searing desert wind*
> *and heard the eagles cry.*

Two other books that reflect the competence of children within the story are: *Not so fast Songlolo* by Niki Daly. In this book, Songolo is only small but streetwise and competent enough to take his granny shopping. Daly (2000), also sees the older person (Songololo's grandmother) as strong when he describes her, 'Gogo is old, but her face shines like new shoes, her hands are large and used to hard work but when they touch, they are gentle'.

In *The whale rider* we see the powerful whale being ridden by a young child, a girl. Not only is she competent and an important active strong character in the book but she is capable of questioning the role of women in her society.

Shaun Tan tells his story of migrants in a superb wordless picture book, *The arrival.* In another picture book, *The great bear*, a book where the illustrations slowly displace the text, Libby Gleeson and Armin Greder (1990), help children see the cruelty to animals through the eyes of the bear.

Final thoughts

As we follow this meandering pathway of literacy through the development of the child from birth we cannot but reflect on the many twist and turns this pathway will take and how important each new step is in strengthening the child's enthusiasm for literacy as the child passes through bigger and ever expanding worlds of environmental print, television and computers. In the end there are many literacies that will build on those very first important steps. Let us recognise them and strengthen them in an unrushed world of intimacy, play, song, music, books, drama and puppets and the arts generally, so that the foundations remain secure and strong and lead to wider horizons. Let us allow the child a long, long swim in that ocean of words before we cast an ever tightening formal net over their exploration and understanding of language and their increasing knowledge of themselves as competent capable human beings.

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Child participation in the early years of education

Dr Kylie Smith
The Centre for Equity & Innovation in Early Childhood,
Melbourne Graduate School of Education,
The University of Melbourne

Dr Kylie Smith is a Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne's Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood. Kylie's research examines how theory and practice can challenge the operation of equity in the early childhood classroom and she has worked with children, parents and teachers to build safe and respectful communities. In her work with the CEIEC, Kylie has been actively involved in leading consultations with young children in curriculum and policy making in the early years. She has presented papers from that work to international early childhood conferences and has co-authored articles about the work that have appeared in peer-reviewed early childhood education journals. Kylie also works as director and kindergarten teacher at the University of Melbourne's Swanson Street Children's Centre two days a week.

Background

There has been a growing interest in child participation in the early years of education in recent years in Australia and internationally. Two of the influences on this growing interest are firstly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and secondly the conceptualisation of democratic principles in education.

Several articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) call for us to recognize that children have a right to participate and have a say in matters affecting them and a right to receive information about their world and how it can or may affect their lives. For example children have:

- the right to express their views on all matters affecting them and for their views to be taken seriously (Article 12)
- the right to freedom of expression, including freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds through any media they choose (Article 13).

The Convention has been with us for 19 years and has influenced youth participation activities such as committees and youth forums, and young children's voices and perspectives in early childhood research (e.g. Candy & Butterworth, 1998; Martello, 1999; Corrie & Leito, 1999; MacNaughton, 2001; Campbell et al, 2001). In 2005 the focus shifted onto young children's participatory rights with the release of the United Nations General Committee's General Comment No. 7 *Implementing the United Nations Rights of the Child in early childhood*. Comment No. 7 states that young child's right to express their views and feelings should be taken into account in 'the development of policies and services, including through research and consultations' (OHCHR, 2005, p. 7) and it stresses that these are the rights of all children, irrespective of their age. Prior to Comment No. 7 it was argued that young children under the age of eight were too young to understand, articulate and make decisions about their lives. The release of General Comment No. 7 raised questions for how child participation might look for young children in the classroom.

Education as a democratic practice was originally explored and written about by John Dewey (1916). In more recent times, people's work such as Peter Moss and Alison Clark from the United Kingdom (e.g. Clark, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2001; Moss, 2007) and Gunilla Dahlberg from Sweden (e.g. Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) have called for democratic practice to be intrinsically woven into



the early childhood classroom. Democratic practice encourages and supports children to participate alongside adults in planning, developing and evaluating their world. Democratic principles are enacted to support children to ask questions, raise issues and concerns and expect adults, such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, policy makers and politicians, to be answerable for decisions made that affect their world. Further, democracy creates the possibility for diversity to be respected and honoured where social conscience and community care are in the foreground of children's and adults' lives (Moss, 2007).

Implementing child participation in the classroom

In Australia, curriculum development and design in primary school and early childhood classrooms has been heavily influenced by curriculum documents, state regulatory requirements and quality assurance documents (e.g. Department of Education, 2004; NSW Department of Community Services, 2004). Professionals, particularly in the early childhood field, have argued that children already have opportunities to participate in developing curriculum through a child-centred approach to curriculum or an emergent curriculum approach. However, a child-centred approach to curriculum means that adults develop and implement curriculum *for* children based on observations *about* them.

When implementing child participation based on democratic practices it means that a rights-based approach to curriculum is developed where curriculum is decided by adults with children based on observations with children.

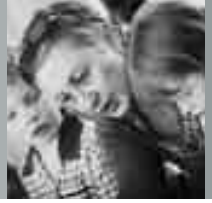
When implementing child participation based on democratic practices it means that a rights-based approach to curriculum is developed where curriculum is decided by adults *with* children based on observations *with* children.

To make the shift from child-centred practice to a child's rights approach, professionals need to shift from a singular image of the child and begin to explore multiple images of the child. In Australia one of the dominant images of the child is the child in need of protection, too innocent and/or immature to effectively comment on and contribute to decisions about them. A second image of the child is the 'developing' child, developmentally unable to have valid ideas or be able to make informed decisions, where the child can make decisions only within the parameters or options given by adults. An emerging image of the child is the child as a citizen. This recognises the child as a social actor with valid and important knowledge about their world and their place in it (MacNaughton & Smith, 2005). Understandings of the child as citizen recognises children's knowledge, insights and perspectives provide different not 'inferior' information to adults' knowledge and views. Further, children's knowledge helps adults understand their experiences differently. Children's citizenship also emphasises children's right to information about matters affecting them. The image of the child as citizen supports child participation in the classroom.

Implementing a rights-based approach to child participation

To implement a rights-based approach to child participation in the classroom, children should have a right to have a voice, raise questions and direct learning as daily practice. Five guiding principles to support child participation in daily practice include:

1. ethical engagement with children e.g. if adults ask children for their views and opinions then they must be prepared to enact the children's ideas and be answerable to the children when ideas are not enacted;
2. listening carefully to children e.g. adults should create space for children to pose their own questions and hypothesis before sharing theirs;


3. using different cues to hear the voices of children of different ages and verbal abilities e.g. observe sounds and patterns of movement through areas when considering babies' opinions and views;
4. using multi-method techniques to help children from diverse backgrounds and ages to express themselves e.g. explore how photos, photography, computers and audio recorders can support children with diverse linguistic skills due to age or ability and be supported to participate;
5. respectfully documenting children's voices to share them with others e.g. as citizens children should have ownership of their words and other materials such as art work, so ensure that children's consent is obtained before sharing their ideas with others.

Conclusion

In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), young children have a right to participate and have a say in matters affecting them and have a right to information that affects their lives. As a democratic and ethical endeavour these participatory rights need to be enacted in the everyday classroom. To do this we need to engage with multiple images of the child and particularly the image of the child as citizen. We must stop and create space to listen to children and to ethically enact children's views and opinions where possible and be answerable where this cannot occur. As written by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999):

> *This is part of a wider ethical project of establishing a culture where the children are seen as human beings in their own right, as worth listening to, where we do not impose our own knowledge and categorizations before children have posed their questions and made their own hypotheses* (p.137).

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Media Reviews

Calling All Educators!

In this new century, the world of teaching is filled with new technologies and new tools to help educators and carers of young children in their professional lives. To reflect the diversity of texts and resources (books, journals, websites, CDs, DVDs, etc) available to us, we are changing the name of our regular 'Book reviews' column to 'Media Reviews'. We encourage our members and colleagues to expand on this by sending in reviews or recommendations of any and all texts they find useful. Have you found a particularly great website? Want to review an educational early childhood television program? Email us at info@ecta.org.au with suggestions or for more information.

Website Reviews

The following websites were recommended by attendees at the October 2008 ECTA Videoling, and are reviewed by Mathilda Element, an ECTA member and multi-age early primary teacher.

Dust Echoes

Address: http://www.abc.net.au/dustechoes/

Hosted by the ABC, this high quality website contains twelve beautifully animated short films that tell indigenous dreamtime stories from Central Arnhem Land. The stories cover diverse themes of love, loyalty, duty, relationships, Aboriginal customs and law and are told in indigenous dialects. In each five-minute tale, the actors, animators and storytellers have managed to capture the essence of the story with richly textured detail, interwoven with original musical scores. The site also allows the viewer to edit the tale even further, making their own one-minute version. Although the site is intended for upper primary students (with study guides available at this level), it could be adapted to suit the lower primary students with teachers providing explicit scaffolding and support to the students' comprehension of content and themes. The site provides written story synopses, maps and information about each of the tale's origins and with teacher guidance, could be useful in a Year Two or Year Three classroom, in conjunction with SOSE, Technology, Media (animation) or Literacy Studies.

Sparkle Box

Address: http://www.sparklebox.co.uk/

This British website provides the sort of templates, signs and resources that busy teachers are often in need of. It boasts of having thousands of free printable and downloadable resources, from sight word kits, counting games and curriculum ideas, to photos of classroom setup and displays. I found the lists of picture books themed around various topics to be useful. However the many advertisements and the confusing lay-out of the site were a turn-off for me. Other early childhood educators have found it very useful, and I recommend it if you are looking for something specific that you can search for easily in the search menu. This will save you time, which is extremely important for teachers and carers of children aged birth to eight years.

Title: Shadow shadow - Shadow puppets and shadow puppet plays

Author: Yvonne Winer

Published by: The Beaded Frog Books

ISBN: 978 0 977 575 52 7 **RRP: $35.00 p/b**

Reviewed by: Sue Webster

"When we introduce shadow puppets for storytelling we are creating a whole and complete literacy experience captured in the rich aural and visual dimensions of the arts," says Yvonne Winer who has created an interesting book containing seven stories/plays and patterns to make the puppets to go with these stories.

The stories have been selected so as to have a variety of storytelling that brings light, shadow and movement to capture the imagination of children. The clever blend of stories, music and props also brings in music, colour, movement, dance and singing.

Stories include *The Dream Dragon*, which has an Asian influence, *Papa Mareng Goes Fishing*, with an African influence, and *Goanna and the Old Red Sun*, with an Aboriginal influence.

The plots are repetitive and allow the children to participate in all parts of the performance - including singing, clapping and dancing. The stories are presented with a list of requirements and a list of preparation that is required. The story is written in easy to read short sentences with corresponding instruction on how to use the puppets for each sentence.

The puppet patterns in the appendix, allow teachers to do easy and practical shadow storytelling and thus inspire children to not only participate but to make their own puppets and make up their own stories. The instruction on how to make the shadow puppets is simple as are the instructions for the shadow puppet screen.

Even with all the stories and instructions set out so well, puppeteers and readers are encouraged to use these as guidelines only, so that they can "create their own magical worlds, by imaging, exploring, experimenting and transforming".

Shadow shadow is an intriguing book for adults and children to present, and children to be entertained and inspired by. Children of all ages will enjoy the interesting cultural stories and the use and making of the puppets.

Orders can be sent directly to The Beaded Frog Books, Yvonne Winer,

21 Gordon Crescent, Withcott Qld 4352 (cheques to have address and phone number on the back) or orders can be done on the internet through www.winercreative.com.au

Title: Childs Play

Author: Maja Pitamic
ISBN: 978 0 731 813 70 4
Published by: Simon & Schuster, Australia
RRP: $29.95

Reviewed by: Sue Lederhose - Director of the Munduberra Kindergarten in regional Queensland - Diploma Teaching, Grad Diploma (early childhood), artist

Every parent should own a copy of this book, read it with their children and put it into practice. This would incorporate literacy in action and the art of play, both of which seem to be diminishing in today's time deprived families. It focuses on the ages one to three, and studies of children have shown conclusively that a child should have a parent as their primary caregiver up to this age. This book gives invaluable help.

The factual information is set out in age brackets, with developmental notes and games to play, as well as relevant safety aspects. This together makes it extremely readable, relevant and user-friendly.

Early childhood education is gaining increasing recognition, with the Montessori Method being used by most professionals. The activities are home-based, using items found in any Australian home.

Above all, it places importance on play, teaching parents and care-givers what and how the children are learning and encourages them to get involved, have fun and enjoy their little ones.

Title: Emily and the Big Bad Bunyip

Author: Jackie French
Illustrator: Bruce Whatley
Published by: Angus & Robertson

Reviewed by: Sue Lederhose - Director of the Munduberra Kindergarten in regional Queensland - Diploma Teaching, Grad Diploma (early childhood), artist

Another great Jackie French book aimed at the early childhood market of 2-8 year olds but enjoyable for everyone. This Australian story, set on Christmas Day, is in the calibre of Mem Fox's Possum Magic and will no doubt become another classic.

Of course, the words are only half the story; Bruce Whatley provides the other half with his quirky illustrations, which pad out everything that is not said, to tell a story behind a story. He has cleverly included the characters from his previous work with Jackie, the carrot-eating wombat, Pete the sheep, characters from Shaggy Gully and the dancing kangaroo named Josephine.

This book is full of hideous noise, action and fun, while Emily the emu tries very hard to get Bunyip to join in with the Christmas spirit.