ECTA

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Educating Young Children

Learning and teaching in the early childhood years

\We acknowledge the traditional
custodians of all the lands that we live
on, work on and travel through together.
We pay our respects to their Elders,
present and emerging for they hold the
memories, the spiritual connections, the
traditions, the culture and the hopes of
the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
peoples of Australia. We recognise their
strength and resilience and their long
history of caring for and educating
children here. We acknowledge and
respect their continuing culture and the
contribution they make to the life of this
region. We recognise the importance of
continued connection to culture, Country
and community to the health and social
and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander children.

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Informit databases.

Photographs

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Kim Walters

From the President

COVID-19 has pushed all of us to expand our skills and challenged us in ways we would not have ever expected. Online learning has been a huge shift for all early childhood professionals and the increased anxiety has and continues to take its toll on our wellbeing and that of the families and children we teach. With this in mind, we have gathered articles for this issue that focus on topics to help support our members both professionally and privately.

This year when faced with COVID-19 restrictions we took the bold step to quickly move our ECTA Early Childhood Conference online for the ECTA Early Childhood E-Conference. It was a huge challenge, but we met this head-on and exceeded our own expectations with 220 registering for the event. This would not have been possible without the support provided by members, office bearers and members of the state coordinating, journal, and conference committees.

Special thanks to Jodie Riek for the many hours she donated to help train the presenters and ECTA hosts. While at first many thought it would be beyond their skill level, they rose to the challenge and attended multiple training sessions and did an amazing job on the day. I would also like to thank Lisa Cooper for opening the conference and Joanne Young and Jodie who joined me as ECTA host support for the day.

I would also like to thank Eben Appel and Bruce Young (ECTA host husbands) who spent the day trouble-shooting and supporting presenters, attendees and hosts to get connected on the day. We would have been lost without them.

I am so proud of how we all pulled together to make the E-Conference a reality, especially as so many other organisations cancelled their conference events. As we do with our face-to-face conference, we did it all with volunteers. ECTA is awesome. A particularly proud moment was showcasing our success as an organisation in being adaptive, innovative and committed to our members by ensuring the annual conference went ahead online to the Queensland State Education Minister, Grace Grace and Early Childhood Stakeholders at the Early Childhood State Forum.

Attendees are now enjoying recordings of over thirty presentations. We are currently looking at how we might use the skills learned to offer a hybrid conference experience next year. Please send your feedback and thoughts to info@ecta.org.au as we plan the next ECTA Early Childhood Conference, to be held on Saturday 26 June 2021.

Expression of Interest to present at the 2021 ECTA Early Childhood Conference open until 23 October.

ECTA webinars continue to be offered monthly at no cost to ECTA members. Non-members are not able to register; however due to COVID-19 we have given permission for regional group members to log in to webinars for this year at no cost.

ECTA is here as always to support members and our early childhood colleges. Please let us know how we can support you best.

Kim

EDITORIAL

Lisa Cooper

The Year That was— 2020: Connecting and Learning Online

With the global pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020, ECTA was required to deeply consider the direction of its annual conference once the decision was made that the face-to-face event would not be able to go ahead.

The ECTA Conference Committee was driven to be adaptive and innovative in order to continue our commitment to providing quality professional development to members and the profession. This required the committee to consider the options available for taking the 45th annual ECTA Early Childhood Conference online.

1. ECTA Conference Committee and E-Conference hosts in training.

   Leading up to the day, there were many online meetings with the ECTA Conference Committee and the running of numerous online training sessions for the E-Conference hosts and presenters. The ECTA Early Childhood E-Conference became a reality.

2. Virtual wave to connect delegates during the conference opening.

   Lisa Cooper, Conference Co-Coordinator, opened the 45th ECTA Early Childhood E-Conference. Although attendees and presenters were from across the country and as far away as USA, a global connection was made by starting the conference with a 'virtual wave.'

3. Nicole Watego-Gilsenan.

4. Wendy Watego-Ittensohn.

   Welcome to Country
   As the original face-to-face conference was scheduled to be held at Sheldon, Brisbane, we invited Elder Wendy Watego-Ittensohn and her sister Nicole Watego-Gilsenan (representatives from the local Quandamooka Nation in Moreton Bay) to conduct the Welcome to Country.

5. Richard McGilvray, MTA General Sales Manager.

   Modern Teaching Aids (MTA) has been the platinum sponsor of the ECTA Early Childhood Conference for many years. ECTA thanks MTA once again for believing in the association and continuing to sponsor the E-Conference. Richard from MTA connected with attendees, sharing a virtual message acknowledging ECTA's innovation, and introduced the keynote speaker.

Thank you to our sponsors:
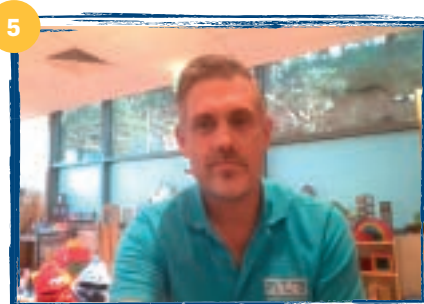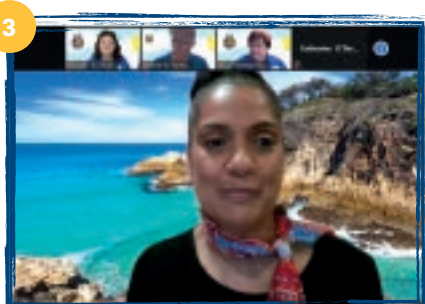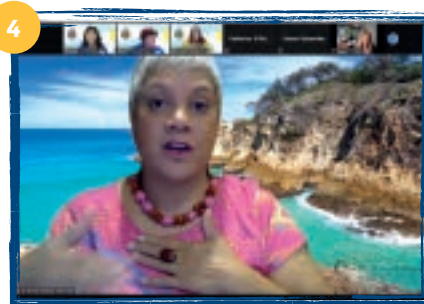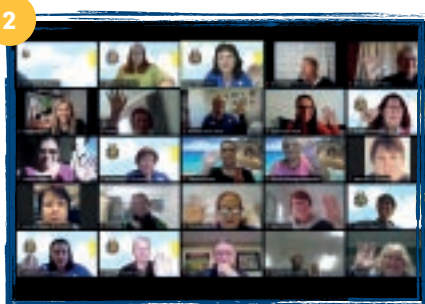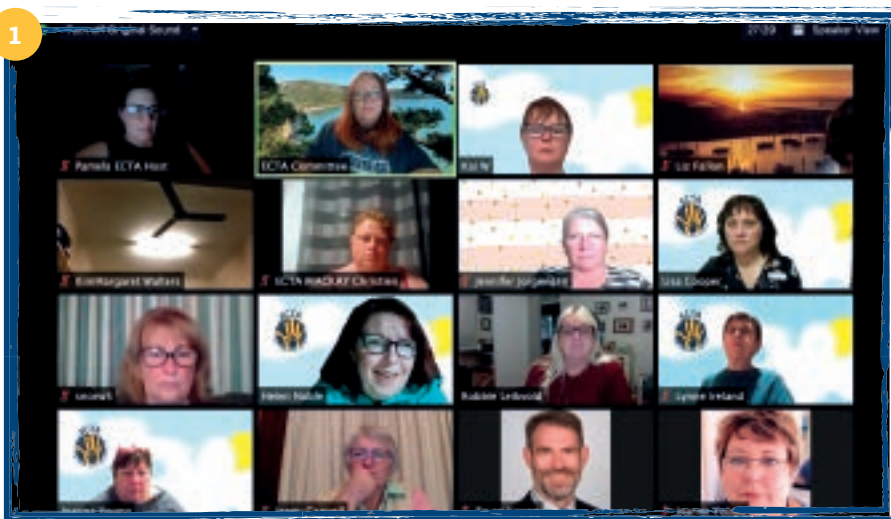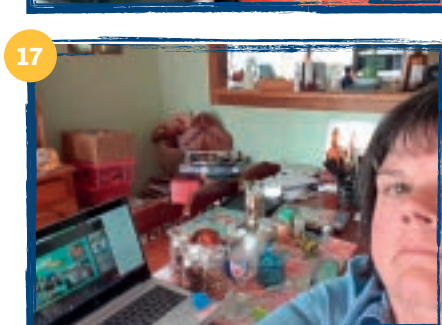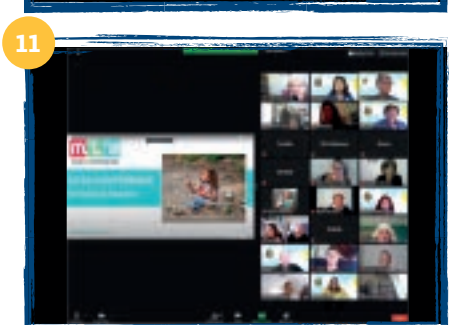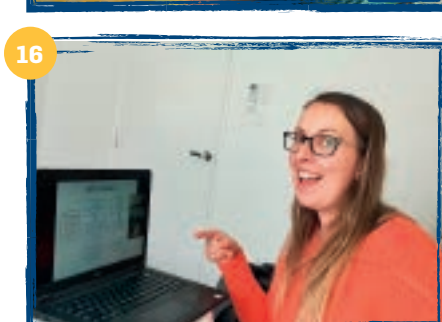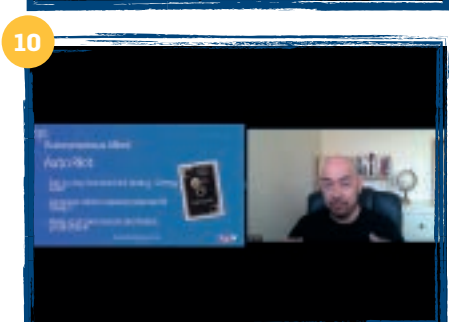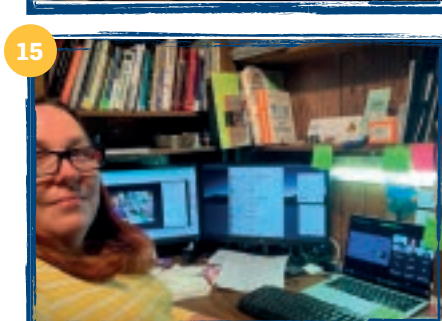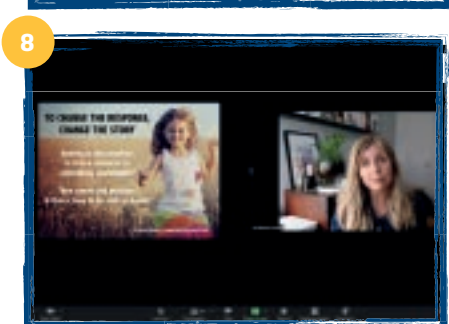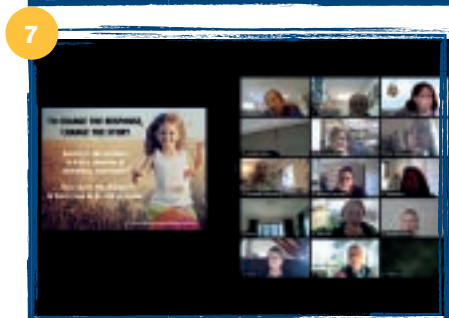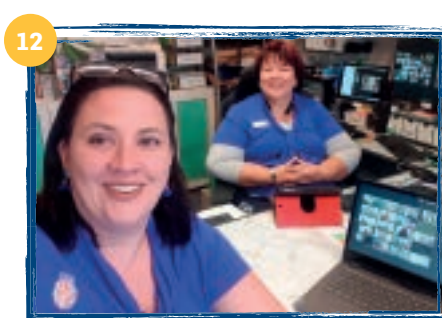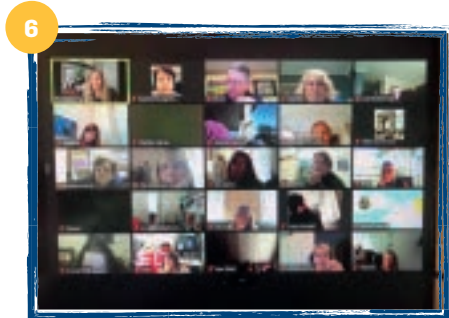
6. *Karen Young keynote: "Strengthening Children Against Anxiety."*

7. *Karen Young keynote: "Strengthening Children Against Anxiety."*

8. *Karen Young keynote: "Strengthening Children Against Anxiety."*

    Karen Young's keynote provided practical skills and strategies to effectively respond to children with anxiety. As some of the most important adults in the day-to-day life of a child, early childhood educators have a profound capacity to strengthen all children against anxiety. Thank you, Karen, for supporting our E-Conference.

    Demonstrating their confidence in the ECTA conference direction for this year, most of the presenters who had enlisted for the face-to-face event committed to the E-Conference platform. ECTA thanks presenters for having confidence in the association.

    During the E-Conference, delegates were able to attend workshops across three concurrent sessions. Most sessions were recorded and were available for viewing by attendees for a month after the event.

9. *Melissa Strader workshop: "Self-Care for You!"*

    Melissa Strader presented the workshop: "Self-Care for You!" During this workshop, attendees discussed how they could begin to take better care of themselves by exploring and meeting their individual needs. Melissa delivered a light-hearted, practical workshop.

    Attendees were able to choose between the presenter view or gallery view.

10. *Chris Phoenix workshop: "Life-Needs Balance is the New Black."*

    Chris and Sandi Phoenix, from Phoenix Support for Educators, were a huge support to the team leading up to and during the E-Conference. They both presented engaging workshops. Phoenix Support was a supporting sponsor of the event and donated prizes such as the "Phoenix Cups Online Training Package" and books.

11. *Virtual shopping session.*

    An element of the annual ECTA Early Childhood Conference is the trade displays and resource-shopping opportunity. Although the conference was not held face-to-face, a component of the E-Conference was a virtual shopping session where sponsors (MTA, TUH, and Phoenix Support for Educators) shared a video clip of resources available.

12. *Jo Young & Pam Waine in Rockhampton.*

13. *Lisa Cooper in Hervey Bay.*

14. *Kim Walters in Gympie.*

15. *Jodie Riek in the USA.*

16. *Sam Tolchard in Brisbane.*

17. *Liz Fallon in Gladstone.*

EDITORIAL

18. *Susan Norwood in Gladstone.*

    The ECTA E-Conference team members were virtual hosts from their homes and offices stretching across Queensland: from as far north as Cairns and Mackay; down the coast to Rockhampton, Gladstone, Hervey Bay, Gympie and Brisbane; and as far away as the USA.

19. *Bruce Young Tech Support in Rockhampton.*

    The ECTA E-Conference team covered all bases when it came to the online virtual platform. There were plans A, B, and C—all ready to enlist as required. One of the plans included having technical support for both presenters and attendees. Thank you to Bruce and Eben for being available (mobile and online) to support the ECTA team and attendees.

20. *Boopa Werem Kindergarten staff in Cairns.*

    Staff at the Boopa Werem Kindergarten in Cairns joined together at the kindy for some professional development and networking while attending the ECTA E-Conference

21. *This is one photo shared by Sam, an attendee at the ECTA E-Conference.*

    What was your E-Conference set-up for the day?

22. *Wine and Cheese—Multi Prize Draw.*

23. *Wine and cheese for ECTA E-Conference Support team members based in Rockhampton: Pam Waine, Bruce Young, and Joanne Young.*

24. *Chris and Sandi Phoenix enjoy the wine and cheese session.*

    A highlight of the annual ECTA Early Childhood Conference is the wine and cheese multi-prize draw at the conclusion of the day. This year, the event occurred virtually, with attendees bringing their own wine and cheese. Many posted photos of their wine and cheese on Facebook.

    During the wine and cheese, the 'Likes' were counted, and the wine and cheese photo competition winner was announced, along with the Scavenger Hunt $500 MTA voucher winner. This was a light-hearted celebration at the end of a successful day.

25. *E-Conference Team reflection session after the successful E-Conference event.*

    ECTA E-Conference hosts reflect on the day—the hurdles and successes. We had a steep learning curve but successfully took our entire annual conference online in 2020.

    Our 45th annual ECTA Early Childhood Conference will be one we all remember. Moving into the future, the conference possibilities are endless.

    We are looking forward to our 46th ECTA Early Childhood Conference in 2021 on Saturday 26th June.
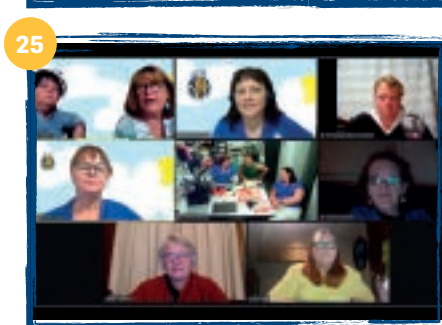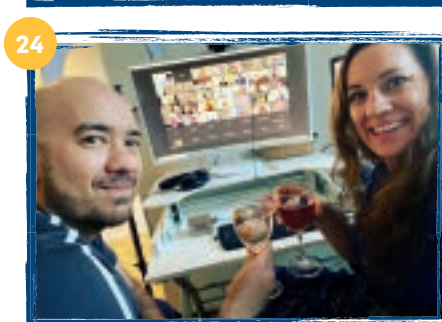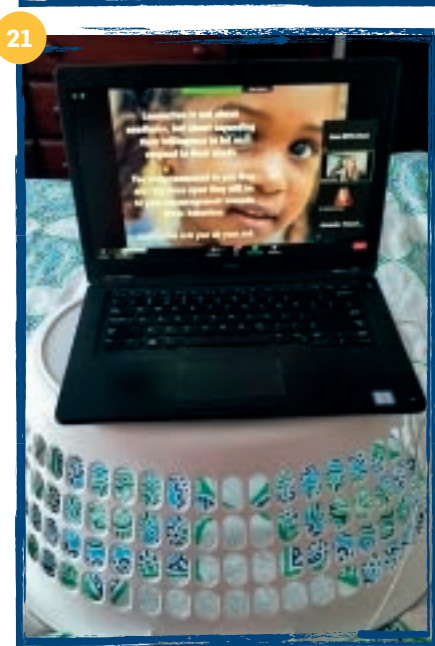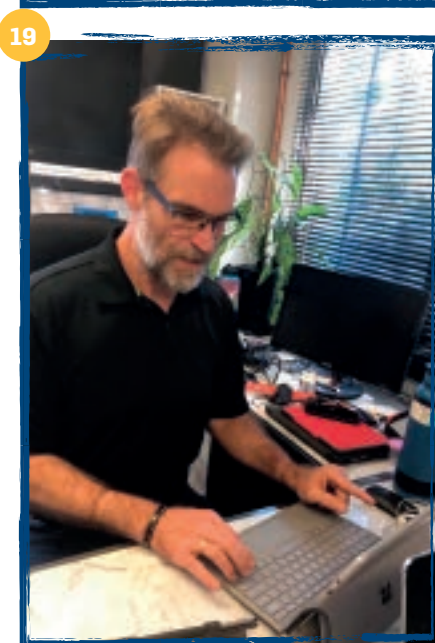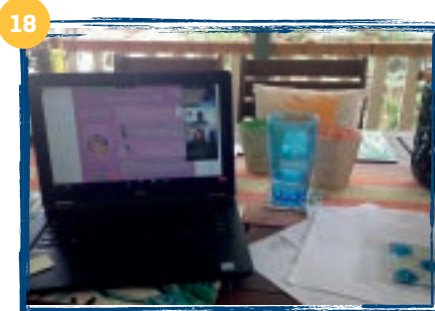
Thank you to the ECTA E-Conference team that worked tirelessly to make the E-Conference happen. You are all amazing. Thank you to the 200+ attendees who participated and to those who were patient as we sorted out the few little issues we had.

Early childhood professionals from across the globe—all online at once experiencing professional development and empowering each other!

Go team ECTA! ECTA-citing! #ECTA2020

Thank you to our sponsors:

Pia Wilkinson

Kindy During COVID-19

Pia began early childhood teaching in 1988. She developed her passion for educating and inspiring young children through her experience teaching Preschool, Prep, Year 1, and as a relief teacher in primary and kindergarten settings. In 2013, Pia became the Director of Sandgate Kindergarten and, in 2017, she moved to her current position as a teacher at Lawnton Kindergarten. With a highly creative approach to teaching, Pia seeks to authentically embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' perspectives, sustainability, and cultural awareness in her programming. She enjoys developing big projects inspired by cultural festivals and leading children in learning about (and creating) meaningful cultural artefacts such as Maori totems. Pia loves that the children take her off on new journeys each and every year.

Having limited technical skills, the sudden impact of COVID-19 made me anxious. The prospect of teaching online was intimidating and I knew it was going to be a challenge. However, I was very lucky that a mum in my group was able to help me set up our class's Zoom meetings to connect to the children not attending the centre physically.

Initially, I reached out to parents and individually phoned them to find out if their child would be attending kindy or learning from home and whether they had the time to support their child online. All but four parents were able to Zoom from a device or laptop with the phone being used as a last resort. For those children unable to access the online learning, I utilised our closed kindy Facebook group to share videos of me reading stories, doing music sessions, even planting a tree for Earth Day so that they did not feel they had missed out and were able to stay connected with what we were doing at kindy.

To keep things consistent, I Zoomed at the same time each morning, for morning group time. I usually have four group times per day, so I amalgamated all four into one group time, making sure I covered everything from the previous day, giving the children at home opportunities to share what they had done following the previous online session. They emailed all of their work to kindy and we printed them out and displayed them in the room alongside the attending children's work.

Since I had some children at kindy in front of me and other children online, I asked our group's parent liaison, who was in the Zoom session each day, to assist me by muting and unmuting the children connecting from home, to avoid speaking over each other. This was an amazing help as I could concentrate on the group time and all that it entailed while genuinely including those learning from home.

As the children drive the curriculum, it was essential that everyone at home was also given opportunities to contribute to group discussion—brainstorming, hypothesising, and voting on the direction of our program. I have found that, when the children "own it" and have input into the program, they become significantly more engaged and enthusiastic in

their quest for learning. I ensured each child had time to put through their ideas and thoughts via Zoom and listen to the ideas of the other children.

In terms of my planning, I found that I had to write two programs each night rather than one. Based on the direction that the children were taking and what they had wanted to investigate, learn about, and look into, I also had to write a program that the parents could follow at home, which paralleled what we were doing at kindy. This was a bit tricky in that I did not know what resources everyone had at home, but I kept it simple and they did not have to complete it all.

Example 1

To give a specific example, we have some military families in our group and those children were able to share their dad's and granddad's medals, uniforms, badges, and hats to the children at kindy and to those on Zoom. We also looked at teddy bears dressed in the uniforms of the Air Force, Navy, Army and nursing staff following the reading of the story "ANZAC Ted." As we discussed ANZAC being Australian and New Zealand troops working together, we also looked at the New Zealand culture. We have a few families from New Zealand, and normally we would have them in to share their culture with us, but this time I was able to get them to send in a video of themselves talking about their culture for us instead. This was amazing, and it helped keep our program real as the children love learning new things from others.

One of the children then asked if we could make a totem using real tools and wood, just like the Maoris do. As a group, we voted on this idea and developed a plan. We brainstormed together what we would need and how we could do this. We also discussed where to put it, and what materials would be suitable, and why. Once all of the decisions were made and the objects were gathered, the children then set about working on

the project. The children at home were asked to make their face for it using collage and sending in a picture of it for us. We were going to attach it to the totem for them until they could come in to create it themselves, but we were lucky that all the children were able to come back into the centre after the three weeks and they could add their face with everyone else.

Example 2

Another example was our annual Mother's Day concert. The children were upset that their mothers were not going to be able to attend the centre for the Mother's Day celebrations due to the COVID-19 restrictions. We problem solved this as a group during our Zoom time and the children suggested we could Zoom them instead! We then sent the mums an invitation to come online to watch our Zoom Mother's Day concert. The children were very excited! To plan the concert, we used Zoom group discussions to vote on the final 10 concert songs; they comprised some "Mummy Songs" as well as some of the children's favourite songs. The next decision was how we could involve the children online in our Mother's Day preparations. We sent a list home to give the parents a variety of options as to what they could do at home for presents and suggested Dad or an older sibling could help, so it would be a surprise for Mum. The children thought it would be a good idea if the children at home could stand beside their computer so they looked like they were part of the group and the mums could watch them as well as the children in-centre performing.

For our concert, the children in-centre all sat in front of the camera so everyone could see them performing. They loved seeing all of their mums come onto Zoom and waved at them vigorously. The children had a surprise for their mums and, during the concert, the children all asked them to dance with us. The mums were invited to chair-dance or stand up to join in on

The Wiggles' "Point Your Finger" and "Rock-a-Bye Your Bear." It was lovely to see all of the mums dancing on Zoom. To end our concert, the children sang their favourite song, "Skidamarink." They all had a rose that they had made the day before at kindy or home. They held the rose behind their back, said "Happy Mother's Day!", and held it out to their mum. The parents loved it, and we had lots of positive comments on the Facebook Group page from the parents saying that they loved the concert and the presents and that they were so thankful that we were able to include them.

We had lots of discussions about mums leading up to Mother's Day. One of the activities we did was based on the story, "My Mummy's Magic." The children were asked to create a wand and tell me why their Mum is special and what their wand might be able to do. I found lots of my stories that I was reading to the children at kindy were unfortunately not online for the children at home to access. I decided not to take up time on Zoom by reading stories but instead recorded myself reading the stories and posted them on our closed Facebook Group page for those children at home to watch. Parents and children would watch these stories before the session via Facebook, and we would then follow up on Zoom to discuss, hypothesise, brainstorm ideas, and show creations. The parents were encouraged to take a photo of anything the children created and send it to us so we could print it and add it to our displays.

Once the restrictions had eased and more people felt comfortable returning to the centre again, the transition back into the classroom went smoothly. Those at home were happy to be back and those at the centre were happy to see all of their friends again. On our first day back as a whole group, we revisited all of the things we had looked at during our time apart. We have 15 display boards in our room, and they were all full of the things the children had worked on at home and at kindy. Those children who were learning from home were thrilled to see their work up on display with everyone else's and to know they were still part of our group even when physically apart. Due to the restrictions, parents are still unable to come into the room to see their children's amazing work, achievements, and portfolios. As such, I filmed a virtual walk through of our kindy for them and posted it to our Facebook Group page so that they too did not feel left out and remained connected with us.

Overall, this experience was daunting and, at times, quite overwhelming. However, it has certainly helped me to grow and learn new skills and challenged me to think outside of the box. I feel that I have come through this pandemic with increased confidence and greater capability to adapt to unprecedented circumstances for the interests of the children's learning and development.

Kate Shapcott

Reflection on The Role of Positive Psychology in My Practice as An Early Childhood Teacher:
A Response

Kate is currently teacher/director at Corinda Christian Kindergarten, a position she loves. Formerly, Kate taught kindergarten in various long day-care centres, taught supply and OSHC in a small country town, and directed a limited-hours centre. Kate came to teaching in her mid-forties after many different twists and turns in her career and personal life, proving that it is never too late to learn!

After reading Baker, Green, and Falecki (2017) in "Positive Early Childhood Education: Expanding the Reach of Positive Psychology," I was prompted to reflect on the issues raised in the article and what my experience as an early childhood teacher has been.

In the article, the authors draw attention to the growing field of positive psychology and in particular to the relevance of positive psychology to early childhood education. Positive psychology is defined as the study of wellbeing. The authors highlight the importance to society of both educator and child wellbeing and that positive psychology brings valuable approaches to enhancing important aspects of our work. Baker, Green and Falecki (2017) outline the mandate of positive psychology (described by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) as supporting individuals and communities to flourish, helping families to raise flourishing children, supporting workplaces to facilitate strong employee satisfaction, and seeing policies implemented that result in high civic engagement.

The article points out where the field of positive psychology connects with established curriculum frameworks such as The Early Years Learning Framework (2019) from Australia and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (2015) from the United States of America. Baker, Green, and Falecki (2017) focus their examination on how these frameworks value the wellbeing of educators and children and point to the valuable research that the field of positive psychology has to offer when implementing the frameworks.

The authors then explore some early childhood pedagogies and theories, including Reggio Emilia and nature pedagogy, and indicate where these approaches mesh with the positive psychology field. Finally, they point to areas for further research that would help to bring all three approaches into more complete synergy.

The article helped me to reflect on my experiences as an early childhood teacher. Over the past few years, I have been presented with and have sought many different approaches to promoting both child and educator wellbeing. At times I have been frustrated by resources that seem to be modified versions of tools designed for older children and the school context. This article helped me to reflect on how we really need tools and resources that have grown from within the early childhood context.

For example, years ago, the long day-care centre—where I worked as an early childhood teacher—subscribed to a newly developed resource to promote positive life skills for children. The approach was to help children develop attitudes and habits of mind that would help them build strength and resilience for the inevitable challenges that life brings. It was useful for me as an educator to read through the materials supplied. They helped me to develop my own self-awareness of the habits of mind that I used, and this allowed me to nurture my own wellbeing and to understand the habits of mind that were held by those with whom I worked. Consequently, I encouraged my colleagues to access the resources for the sake of their own wellbeing and to incorporate the

ideas into their work with children. However, I did not adopt the whole package as it was presented at the time because it was really aimed at the primary school context. I felt that, if I were to successfully implement the package or adopt the strategies used in the package, I would have to expend considerable thought, time, and energy modifying the resources to make them suitable to the context in which I worked.

My colleagues, who worked with even younger children, also had a lukewarm reaction. As we had almost no paid time to access the resources and little further support from management, colleagues were reluctant to explore the resources during their own free time. I am sure that, in the mind of management, the package had been purchased, resources provided, and the job had been done. Had the resources been specifically targeted at very young children, come with on-the-job training, online back-up, connections with other educators who had successfully used them, and a qualification or certification at the end of the process, they would have been much more fully utilised within our centre.

However, what came out of the process for me as a teacher was a heightened awareness of the importance and value of intentionally teaching skills, approaches, and tools that enhance wellbeing. I also learned (the hard way) the importance of practising myself what I taught to others. Since then I have continued to find and adapt positive psychology resources, ideas, and strategies into my teaching repertoire. One important realisation for me in this journey has been that it is okay

to practise, experiment and trial different approaches with my class (and some groups are more forgiving than others!). Sometimes things will work and sometimes they will not. Sometimes, the second or third time I try something, I get it right and it becomes a well-used tool. Using the habits of mind that I learned all those years ago, I now know that I will not be perfect the first time and that is okay. Through trial and error, I experience valuable learning and make another step on the road to mastery!

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Karin von Behrens

Home schooling, Democracy and COVID-19: A Discussion with Dr. Bradley Shipway

"At the same time as fighting the virus on a medical level, we are also involved in the tension around how people behave, a conflict between the rights of the individual versus the greater good in a democratic society."

Dr Bradley Shipway is a self-described "Southern Cross product." He did his undergraduate teaching degree at Southern Cross's precursor, the University of New England Northern Rivers and was the first Honours graduate from the School of Education at the new Southern Cross University in 1994. He then went on to do a PhD at Southern Cross in 2003. "So Southern Cross has sent me all the way around the world and back home again," Dr Shipway said. He is now a lecturer in the School of Education and teaches Civics and Democracy in the Early Childhood and Primary Teaching degrees.

"This is incredibly important right now because we are seeing how our democratic society deals with a non-democratic virus. Right alongside that we are seeing how non-democratic societies, such as communist China, deal with the virus. There are things you can do in a 'command and control' economy that you can't do in a 'supply and demand' economy. How the corona virus is handled by our democracy is important because even before this, as a global concept, democracy was not doing very well in recent times. We have seen 13 consecutive years of decline in the levels of democracy across the globe."

In the Australian 2013 Federal election, 4.1 million voters did not cast a valid vote.

"That's 16% of our adult population that either don't know how, or don't care enough, to cast a vote that will count. Record numbers of people in Australian society are disengaged with our democracy and the current crisis is bringing that disengagement—and the shortfall in our understanding of democracy—into sharp relief," states Dr. Shipway. He believes the health of our democracy is at a turning point and that we must do a much better job of engaging young students in constructing a free and fair society.

"For too long our mainstream education system has been focused on 'the basics'. Every year we get our NAPLAN scores back, only to engage in yet another round of hand-wringing about the continuing decline in literacy and numeracy rates.

The current fashionable response is to give our students more explicit instruction – but that will not solve the wider problem. Right now we are entering into the 4th industrial Revolution.

Why do we need to be teaching our kids about how to code when we already have robots that can code other robots? We don't need kids to learn how to code; we need students who have the critical thinking skills to decide whether to give that robot a gun and send it to war, or whether to give it a Hep B kit and send it to sub-Saharan Africa. The tragic problem with calls for education to get 'back to the basics' is that our children do not live in a basic world. They live in an incredibly complex world, one that is contradictory, amazing, painful, and fragile—and we bear the responsibility for helping them successfully navigate that world and make things better than we left them."

Those who have suddenly found themselves home schooling might be asking how exactly they should be doing that.

Dr Shipway, who is a passionate advocate for home schooling, believes

the current problems offer a powerful teachable moment for our children, an opportunity for us to rekindle their natural curiosity about how the world works.

"For too long our schools have been too crowded and school life has been too rushed. The curriculum is so full that children have no real agency. They don't feel like they can control anything… . It's the perfect atmosphere for creating disengaged democratic citizens. If your child is doing school at home for a while, it can be a great opportunity to let them have an input into what they learn, instead of being dictated to by the formal curriculum, and funnily enough, it's much more like real life," he said. "It's also incredibly efficient. What takes you six hours to do in mainstream schools can be done in three hours at home."

His number-one tip in the current environment is to find out what your children like and allow them to do a project on it.

"People get worried about giving children a choice in their learning because they are convinced kids will just choose to eat ice cream and ride skateboards all day. But it's not like that. First up, you don't give kids total control; you just give them input; you share the decision-making power. Second, when you give children responsibility for what they want to learn, they take that seriously and they don't mess around. All the behavioural problems and mucking up just go away because they're fully engaged in the learning."

The reason this is so powerful, Dr Shipway believes, is that teaching is first and foremost a relational activity.

"The quality of the teacher-student relationship determines the quality of any learning that gets done. By giving kids an input into what they want to learn, you are showing that you are taking them and their ideas seriously, and that means you care about what and how they learn. So, find out what your child's favourite thing is at the moment. Is it surfing? Then do a project on surfing—When did it start? (history); Where is it done and why? (geography); What are the different shapes for? (maths); What does it feel like to catch a wave? (English). Even if their favourite thing is the dreaded video gaming, the same tactic applies. How, when, and where did video games start? Why do so many people like them so much? What are some good things and bad things about them? What might

they look like in the future? With any interest that your child has, it will already be full of maths, English, science, history, geography, arts—it's just a matter of asking the right questions to help bring all that out."

He also says there are many teachable moments that we miss every day because we are just not accustomed to looking out for them.

"How about just starting to include your kids in the cooking? There's so much maths that happens in the kitchen it's not funny, and cooking is actually chemistry. Even when you're just watching TV, you can pause it and ask them things about the motivations and actions of the characters: 'See how that person treated the other person; how would you do it differently? Why do you think they acted that way?' Just simple questions like these, asked at the right time, can teach important critical thinking skills."

For parents who worry that, if they are not good at something, they cannot teach it, Dr Shipway says that, if they are willing to sit down and struggle alongside the student and learn together, then learning becomes incredibly powerful.

"Parents can just admit that they struggle with that topic and then model what a great learner does by jumping in and learning about it together. Laugh with each other when you make a mistake and celebrate when you get things right. This virus will change our lives more dramatically than September 11 did, and the world will become even more complex and fearful. This could end with a much-strengthened China, and a much-diminished America on the world scene, and that means our little democracy at the bottom of the globe could feel quite small and alone. We really need to do a better job of creating engaged citizens or we put our democracy and way of life at risk—and not just in the long term. History has taught us that democracy is fragile; it needs to be nurtured to survive. We need to help our young people to engage; otherwise, if they don't use it, they will lose it."

Dr. Kobie Boshoff and Kultar Ahluwalia

Extra Occupational Therapy Support Needed for Vulnerable Children

Dr Kobie Boshoff is a senior lecturer in Occupational Therapy, Director at the International Centre for Allied Health Evidence (iCAHE) and editor of The Allied Health Scholar. She has had a broad range of clinical experience in paediatrics and employment for people with disabilities, gained in private practice, community based, school based and case management settings as well as in management. Kobie teaches into Occupational Therapy specific courses, including those with a practical, skill-based and placement components. She has a keen interest in research, Kobie is involved in a number of research projects and supervise honours, masters level and PhD students. Through her research and teaching, she hopes to advance social injustice through equal engagement and opportunities for all.

As Australia's teachers strive to shift education online, parents everywhere are bracing for change, but no more so than parents of children with additional needs such as autism, fearing their kids may be left behind in the race to adjust. With the school term just a few weeks away, paediatric and occupational therapy experts are urging teachers to be especially mindful of students with additional needs, advising that these families are likely to need extra support during these times of uncertainty. There is no doubt that teachers and schools are doing their absolute best to get their classes ready for online teaching. But in the dash to go digital, some of our more vulnerable families may slip between the cracks, particularly those with children with disabilities, learning difficulties, or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

These are the kids who regularly receive support in class. So, as we see school shift to a different learning environment, so too will those supports need to be adjusted. Children with autism are particularly at risk as they generally do not respond well to change, preferring predictable routines and environments to manage the world around them. Now, with severe restrictions imposed, these kids could struggle, and so could their families. We are urging schools to reach out to these families to reassure them that strategies and supports will be in place to specifically help them and their children.

Families are really concerned—and rightly so. Some of these children have tailored learning methodologies and curriculums that require a hands-on approach to deliver, so parents are at a loss as to how they can manage this, while also holding down a job—it is an impossible scenario, but the load can be lightened if appropriate support is communicated and delivered. According to UniSA research (University of South Australia, 2020), while parents of children with autism regularly advocate for their child, their calls for help often fall on deaf ears. Finding ways to be flexible and adaptable is extremely important. Now is the time for schools and parents to work more closely and collaboratively to develop suitable learning-at-home solutions for their children. If parents request alternative approaches for their child—for example, hard copy materials, tailored learning plans, or regular phone catch-ups—then this is something that should be reasonably accommodated.

Working together and supporting the mental health of vulnerable families is essential, especially now, and teachers must be prepared to be available for these families. We understand that there are massive adjustments for teachers and schools too, but spare a thought for parents who are already struggling with their child's additional needs—add schooling to the mix, no respite, and very few outlets for a break (either for themselves or their child), and it's a tough gig. Supporting these families could be as simple as a phone call, but the key is: Be accessible and please—reach out. For families seeking support, University of South Australia's City West Health and

Kultar graduated his Masters in Occupational Therapy (OT) from the University of South Australia in 2014. Kultar's work as an Education Support Officer working with young children with ASD led him on the path of OT and he has worked with families, children and youth as an OT for over 5 years. He has also mentored new OT graduates, supervised OT students in their clinical placements and provided professional development to other professions (teachers, educators & teaching assistants). Kultar has also worked in the Arts sector as a musician, community workshop facilitator, and mentor with organisations such as Carclew Youth Arts, City of Marion, City of Onkaparinga, Children of Parents with Mental Illness and the education sector.

Medical Clinic is currently delivering online services that incorporate video conferencing through: www. unisa.edu.au/Campus-Facilities/community-clinics/ Occupational-Therapy/. This can be a great service to incorporate in the family environment and help upskill parents to conduct therapeutic interventions in their own homes.

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Mikaeli Costello

Parenting in a Pandemic

The following article was created for Contact magazine (University of Queensland) and reproduced with permission below. It was written to provide support for parents as children returned to school. The article offers valuable advice that is still relevant as the pandemic lingers in our country and around the world. The original article can be found here: https://stories.uq.edu.au/contact-magazine/2020/parenting-in-a-pandemic/index.html

Mikaeli Costello, Director Alumni Relations and Engagement, University of Queensland

Mikaeli leads the alumni engagement portfolio overseeing marketing and communications, programming, events, annual fund and donor relations for UQ's 300,000+ alumni across the globe. Previous to this, Mikaeli held a fundraising role at UQ's Queensland Brain Institute. In addition to her roles at UQ, Mikaeli has worked extensively in marketing, communications (internal and external), fundraising and stakeholder engagement both within the public and private sectors; nationally and internationally including World Skills International, Dusseldorp Forum and the UK Government.

Parenting can be tough at the best of times—but parenting in a pandemic? Near impossible. As schools across the country welcome back students, the pressures of home-schooling may have waned, but new struggles are fast emerging such as nervousness, anxiety, and concerns about social distancing. That is why world-leading parenting expert and founder of the internationally acclaimed Triple P—Positive Parenting Program, Professor Matt Sanders, has launched the weekly podcast series, Parenting in a Pandemic. The popular series provides real, actionable advice to help families navigate these uncharted waters.

Here are a few of his research-based strategies to make this unprecedented time more enjoyable.

Return to a Routine

Professor Sanders said one of the biggest struggles for kids heading back to school was returning to a routine. "Kids thrive on routine, so if things have slipped during the past few months—such as extra screen time, later bedtimes, regular snacks throughout the day—now is the time to reset," states Sanders. How exactly? This is where the program's practical tips come into play: "Treat it like you have been on an extended holiday and you are returning to the routines of being at school," Professor Sanders said. "The best way to introduce a change is to start with a conversation, a firm approach, and a trial period that is open to feedback. If you want your kids to be respectful, you need to treat them the same. Be clear, calm, and consistent in your communication."

Professor Sanders recommends letting your child know that, as life returns to normal, so too will routines. "Discuss any changes or rules in a way that sets firm boundaries but lets them know you are open to feedback after an initial trial period, such as two weeks," states Sanders. While your child's opinion matters, some rules are not open for negotiation. "Remind your child that you will always respect their viewpoint—for example, 'I really want to hug my friends'—but that some new rules based on government advice are not up for debate," advises Sanders.

Signs Your Child Is Struggling

A number of telltale signs will show if your child is finding it difficult to adjust to their "new" life back at school. "If your child looks anxious or is having difficulty separating from you—suddenly wanting to sleep in your bed, or not leave your side—that could be a signal they are struggling. Ask how your child is feeling but, most importantly, try to understand what is driving their fears," said Professor Sanders.

The key, Sanders said, is to not spend too much time focusing on their anxiety but rather focus on the positive. "Kids can associate worry with guaranteeing a parental audience. If you can identify the root of their concern—for example, fear that a grandparent may die from corona virus—then you can address that worry with reassuring messages about social distancing and sanitation, etc. Ultimately, children will be comforted by your own calm approach to their worries," expressed Sanders.

Less Is More

Minimal sufficiency is a central component of the Triple P program. "As a parent, you need to instil in your children that you have confidence in their ability to overcome any challenge," Professor Sanders said. The best way to do this is through a hands-off approach. "If, for example, your child is struggling to reboot with a homework regime, you can offer support without taking on the task yourself. Only provide what is needed and what is desired to get your child started," advised Sanders.

If they are struggling to get started with a task, Professor Sanders recommends helping them craft a strategy for how they might approach the exercise but leave them to implement that strategy themselves. "This approach does two things: instils a message that you believe in your child's ability but also ensures they are resourceful, independent problem solvers. Self-belief is a powerful enabler and a lifelong tool for children to draw on," states Sanders.

Maintain a Good Relationship With Your Child's School

Professor Sanders' final piece of advice is to ensure you have an open and respectful relationship with your child's school. He believes that children whose parents have a strong and positive relationship with their school will always do well and, like any good relationship, respectful communication is critical to building rapport with a child's teacher. "If your child is experiencing any challenges with adjusting to the classroom, try not to make assumptions about what the school is or isn't doing. Always feel free to reach out to your child's teacher with genuine concerns—but not in a demanding way," Professor Sanders said. "As a parent, you are the most important role model for your children. By modelling respectful communication, you are helping shape the way your child will interact with others."

Listen to the Podcast

Parenting in a Pandemic (https://pfsc.pyschology. ug.edu.au/parentinginapandemic) is available wherever you get your podcasts. Triple P COVID-19 online resource is available for parents of children from birth to adolescents https://www.triplep-parenting.net.au/ qld-uken/triple-p/

Kynie Firmager

Working With Parents: Even the Tricky Ones

Kynie Firmager is a parent coach who started her career in early childhood, working across most roles within services. While enjoying her time as an educational leader, she developed a passion for working with parents, even the tricky ones. Kynie found there was a real need for parent support and she moved onto coaching, mentoring and supporting parents at one of Australia's busiest maternity hospitals. Kynie also runs her own parenting coaching business, where she supports parents in their homes or at workshops. Her work is relationship based, focusing on building connections with parents and supporting them. She also works with educators to break down barriers and build relationships between parent, educator and child, working together with the child as the main focus.

Best Versus Worst

Think about the best relationship you have ever had with a parent. What was good about it? What role did you play in that relationship? Now think about the worst relationship you have ever had with a parent. What did it look like? What role did you play in that relationship?

The best relationship I have ever had with a parent is one I am proud of. We had good times and our not-so-good times. We were in it together. Our journey started off when Danielle was enrolling her little baby into care for the first time. Danielle came in with her neighbour a few times before her bubs started. During this time, we were able to have small talk and begin to get to know each other. It was important, as I was about to embark on caring for her whole world. It was not long before Danielle dropped her little one off with a list of how to care for him, most specifically his sleep routine instructions. With tears in her eyes, she said goodbye and slowly left for the day. A short couple of hours later, after a few phone calls (from me to her and her to me) Danielle returned to pick up her bundle. Although there were still tears, these were tears of joy at being reunited with her baby and seeing that he was okay. I was able to give Danielle a run-down of his day, and she left. It was a similar picture for the following few days until the day I had to make a phone call. It was one that I did not really want to make but knew it had to be done, and I had to be the person to do it. "Hi Danielle, it's Kynie… Everything is okay, but it looks like your little man has symptoms similar to hand, foot, and mouth. You will need to come and get him, and I suggest a visit to the doctor."

In that moment, the relationship we worked at to build up was about to come crumbling down—or was it? Danielle lost it, she was angry, and she let me know it. I was told that my room is dirty, I do not adequately look after the babies, how dare I let this happen to her baby. At this point, there was not much more I could say; she was understandably angry, and nothing else was going to be heard. When Danielle arrived to pick up her son, she was less angry and more concerned. I was able to educate her about hand, foot, and mouth and let Danielle know it was not as scary as it sounds, and it can be caught from anywhere. I also explained that, being a new service and having no other reported cases, it was more likely that it was picked up from the local shops. We spoke about the procedures and how often the room is cleaned and disinfected. Once all recovered, Danielle and her son returned to care, bringing a gift bag of lollies and a letter of apology for the way she had reacted during the phone call.

Our phone call did not damage our relationship; it strengthened it. Over the next year, Danielle and I shared an open and honest line of communication; we would often chat about all sorts of things. Then one afternoon on pick up, Danielle shared the exciting news that she was expecting! We hugged and I was able to share in her excitement and slight worry of having babies so close in age (my youngest are 14 months apart, and I understand the mix of emotions you go through: joy, guilt, sadness, excitement, worry). A few weeks later, Danielle came in and did not look herself; she shared that she had lost the baby. We again hugged

but this time shared a moment of sadness, sitting on the floor crying together. Danielle and I shared many moments together, full of different emotions. Our relationship grew in strength through all of these shared moments.

The worst relationship I have ever had with a parent is one I am ashamed of, on reflection. I cannot share with you the parent's name as I honestly do not remember; how awful is that! I have such a strong memory of our relationship, and I have no idea of her name. It says a lot! This was the parent with whom, when I saw the car pull up in the carpark, I instantly felt my mood shift. My shoulders would get heavy, and I would tense up. She constantly wanted to stay for a 45-minute chat, she had constantly changing demands for her children, she did not seem to understand the professional boundaries, and constantly wanted to catch up outside of the service.

At first, I tried the "Fake it till you make it" idea, but it did not work. She could probably see straight through it. I tried the convenient timing of needing to use the bathroom when she arrived; that did not work either, and I would often come out of the bathroom to find her standing in the hallway, waiting. I tried engaging with a group of children and making sure I was busy; again, it did not work; she would wait or interrupt. Hiding in the storeroom did not work and the staffroom—well, she would just come on in and make herself comfortable. It even got the point of other staff trying to help me avoid her. Looking back, it was horrible. I have no idea how she felt; I have no idea why she constantly wanted to chat for an excessive amount of time; maybe she was putting in the effort and I kept shutting her out or maybe she needed support and I did not see it.

The difference between these two scenarios is the effort that I did or did not put in. With Danielle, I took the time to support her and build on the relationship. With the other mum, I channelled my efforts into avoiding a relationship at all costs. I know not everyone is going to be friends, but I have a philosophy of being kind to everyone. I failed my own philosophy! It taught me a lot; I know to work harder to build every relationship with the parents I work with. After all, they are trusting me with their world; it is the least I can do. Do you have a relationship you could improve?

How to Build Effective Relationships

Even if you have an established relationship that needs repairing, reflect on what it looks like and your role in the relationship. I am going to focus on the things you can do to change or build a relationship—as we only have control over our actions.

In many of our studies, we covered theories and theorists. One particular theorist who is constantly on my mind when working with parents is Erik Erikson. In his stages of psychosocial development, he talks about ages to go with the stages (McLeod, 2018). I prefer to look at his stages and remove the ages but use them as an order in which to help build a relationship. In the beginning of any new relationship, you want to develop a sense of trust; what kind of things do you expect from someone when you want to trust them? What happens if they betray your trust? Does the relationship blossom or does it require further work? Moving onto the next stage, you need to have autonomy in your relationships; you also need to allow the other person in the relationship to have autonomy in the same relationship. How can you balance this? What can you do to foster not only your own autonomy but also the other person's autonomy?

I am not going to go through each stage as I am sure you are getting the idea and can go through the other stages yourself to provoke more thought. At the end of the day, each of these stages highlights a positive versus a negative. When we foster the positive, we can see growth, development, and potential to thrive; when we foster the negative, we see the undoing or unstable relationship. You are only in control of your own actions; reflect on the changes you can make to improve your relationships. Unpack a current relationship that you would like to improve; use Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development to see the negative and positives and where there is room for improvement from yourself. Remember you only have control over your own actions.

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Amanda McDonald

Balancing the Use of Digital Technologies for Developmentally Appropriate Learning

Amanda Macdonald is the Early Childhood Liaison Officer for the ELLA (Early Learning Languages Australia) Program. As part of the ELLA Team, Amanda delivers workshops and professional learning and supports educators as they engage in language experiences and digital technology. With a Master of Education in Special Education and over twenty years' experience teaching pre-schoolers, Amanda is passionate about inclusive education. She is mindful of supporting the differing needs of individual children, teachers and preschools.

Educators are increasingly thinking about how to provide technologies in ways that support children's play and cultural understandings. Appropriate use of technology balances and enhances the use of other learning materials, activities, and interactions in the preschool and can expand young children's access to new content. When educators use a combination and diversity of activities and learning materials, digital and traditional play can stimulate children's imagination and social interaction. As we have all seen during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, technologies used carefully can also provide valuable support to children, their families, and educators in times of stress and isolation.

Promote Learning Through Digital Play

The use of technology in early childhood can promote effective learning and development when used intentionally within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Enjoyable shared experiences with apps that optimise the potential for children's learning and development can support children's relationships both with adults and their peers.

The Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program is a good example of how this can be realised. It supports educators by providing resources, materials, and ideas to use alongside a series of play-based apps to encourage children to develop their creativity and imagination. Importantly, technology can expand young children's access to new content (Guernsey, 2010), as ELLA does by exposing children to interactive language experiences.

As outlined in the Statement on Young Children and Digital Technologies, published by Early Childhood Australia (2018), educators must consider their own attitudes and values in understanding the role and use of digital technologies in early childhood education. It is important to use technology in a collaborative and social way. A good question to ask is: Will the technology enhance this experience?

It is evident that educators participating in the ELLA program demonstrate skill in recognising the language learning benefits that come from blending the concepts of the ELLA apps into the imaginative play spaces of their preschool rooms. The tablet device becomes a resource to support collaboration and social play. Educators become co-learners with the children; they collaborate to build hands-on experiences that augment and/or complement the digital world. The technology enhances learning as children demonstrate and consolidate their understanding through their interactions with others. It becomes part of the daily routine (Kaufman et al., 2017; Scoter, Ellis & Railsback, 2001).

Siraj-Blatchford and Brock (2016) say that the use of developmentally appropriate early childhood educational technology successfully

balances both on- and off-screen activities to integrate both digital and non-digital play in the curriculum. To benefit young children, technology should be used to support learning; it should not be an isolated activity. Educators have long moved on from the notion of providing timed doses of computer use before children get back to the real business of hands-on play. Combining both digital and traditional play can stimulate children's imagination, so apps that allow children to use their imagination and to explore their creativity are most likely to support children's learning outcomes (Verenikina & Kervin, 2011).

Educators need to explore apps that allow the children to do things that they otherwise could not. Apps that allow children to make use of the camera and microphones to record their world, and the gyroscope and audio output to manipulate and explore items on screen, add extra dimensions to the learning experience. Touch-screen devices can be used to learn about the world outside our immediate community, to motivate children to practise skills, and to share their understandings with others.

Technology for Participation

For some children, technology allows greater participation in the preschool play program. By bringing the tablet device into coexistence with other items in their physical environment, children participate in language development in a way that would otherwise not be available to them (Dezuanni & Knight, 2015). Children with language delays can find new ways to practise listening and speaking. Children who find it difficult to play alongside others may find that the technology provides a focus, and a model, for joining social play. Bird (2017) believes that the first step when implementing digital technologies is to understand how children engage with them in various forms and to provide technologies in ways that support children's play and cultural understandings.

Using Technology During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Early childhood teachers have great skill in observing learning and extending, scaffolding, and transferring children's skills. Digital technologies are becoming accepted as an important part of the early childhood curriculum (Nuttall et al., 2015), and many educators embrace the concept of digital play. This was

particularly evident when teachers quickly moved online to deliver preschool programs for children at home during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. During this time, the focus was on connections. As outlined in the Statement on Young Children and Digital Technologies (2018), digital technologies can be used to support positive child-adult relationships. Children are encountering digital technology in all aspects of their lives, so preschool should be no different (Bird, 2017). During the pandemic, families appreciated digital technologies as a way to stay in touch.

Katlyn, a kindergarten teacher in Brisbane, reached out to families:

We tried to make phone calls to all the class members' families. We were disheartened when we did not have a huge response, including one parent who later replied that they never answer phone calls.

However, she found that FaceTime chats worked well with the children and families.

In Rockhampton, Julia had a similar experience:

How to stay connected with our children and families during Covid-19 was our biggest concern. We brainstormed lots of ideas and came up with a few options, one being a daily Zoom session lasting about 20 minutes. We thought this was important so the children could still see our faces and those of their friends. It also enabled us to continue their regular routine of a group session at this time.

Both Katlyn and Julia believe that it helped the transition back to preschool. "We are now back at kindy with our full crew, with new challenges. As the children have been seeing us each week and talking to us, they have settled excitedly back into the kindy program." They feel the technology allowed the contact necessary to maintain the children's sense of belonging. "Transitioning back to face-to-face learning during Week 4 of Term 2 has run relatively smoothly as we were able to keep in contact."

Conclusion

A technology should be used as you would use any other resource—as an integrated way to support and extend the play and education of young children. Technology allows us to connect with others and explore learning and teaching in new ways.

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Melissa Kidd and Kerri Giebel

Connect 4 Children: Planning Together for Children's Wellbeing

Melissa Kidd is the Principal Policy Officer at Department of Education and Training (Queensland). She is also a qualified Speech Pathologist. Through her role as a rural practitioner in school age education, she developed a passion for inclusive education and innovative service delivery that balances the needs of schools, students and families, which later translated to management roles in student services.

Early childhood experts, advocates, and educators have long been aware that experiences in the early years lay the foundation for future relationships, learning, health, and wellbeing. In particular, we know that the first 1,000 days of life (from conception to the end of a child's second year) comprise the most rapid period of growth and change during the human lifespan. However, improving the quality of children's experiences in the early years is complex and requires a collaborative, long-term approach with multi layered, evidence-informed responses that are contextual to communities, families, and children. We also know that every community is unique—children and families have different strengths and aspirations—and service availability and accessibility can vary greatly. That is why the Queensland Government is enabling communities to come together and develop local solutions for local early childhood priorities through the Connect-4-Children strategy.

The Connect-4-children strategy was developed by the Department of Education in 2019 as one response to improve the wellbeing of Queensland children prior to school as part of Our Future State: Advancing Queensland's Priorities. The Department of Education, through the Division of Early Childhood and Education Improvement, is the lead agency tasked with improving the wellbeing of children prior to school. The objective of this priority is to reduce the percentage of Queensland children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 22% by 2025 (from 25.9% in 2018). The AEDC is a nationwide measure of early childhood development. It is considered to be a measure of how well children and families are supported from conception through to school age and provides a reliable snapshot of how children are developing as they transition to school. National AEDC collections occur every three years and, with data sets now spanning four collections (2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018), results can be compared across time to identify trends in early childhood development in local communities.

Families live within communities and, through the Connect-4-children strategy, communities in Queensland are developing unique plans to help improve outcomes for children prior to school (from birth to 5 years old). Each birth-to-five plan is created locally by the people who are invested in, and care deeply about, the future of that community and its children. By creating local birth-to-five plans, individual communities are forming important partnerships that are focused on innovation and alignment of program and service delivery. The department's partnerships facilitators (early years) are working together with communities to identify priorities for children prior to school and help make evidence-informed decisions to achieve their goals. Partnerships facilitators (early years) are also supporting early learning priorities, including improving access to playgroup and kindergarten, and supporting successful transitions to school.

Kerri Giebel is the Director of Early Childhood Education and Care for Metropolitan Region, Department of Education, Queensland. As the Director, Kerri's portfolio involves leading projects within the Greater Brisbane and Ipswich communities to ensure children have a great start to life and learning. Having worked in schools, both public and private, in multiple communities across Queensland, Kerri has seen the positive impact quality early childhood education and care has on children's life. Kerri is passionate about the importance of strong leadership and partnerships to ensure the very best for all children.

There are four strategic platforms guiding implementation of the strategy:
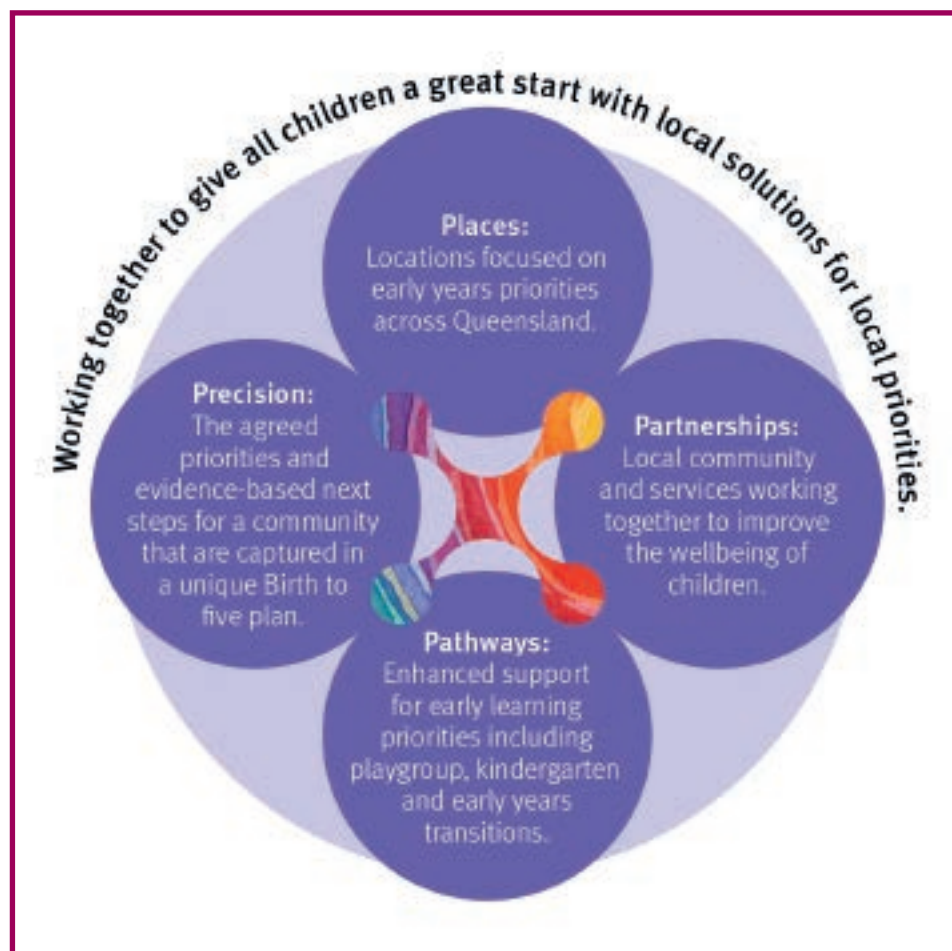
Places: locations focused on early years priorities across Queensland.

- Identify what matters most to children and families, including what the strengths, barriers, and enablers are in their local community.
- Mobilise innovative, whole-of-government responses to birth-to-five plans.
- Evidence-informed frameworks

  - community implementation: Place-Based Approaches for Community Change—Queensland Council of Social Services' Guide and Tool-kit;
  - government readiness and response: Queensland Government Framework for Place-Based Approaches.

Partnerships: local community and services working together to improve the wellbeing of children.

- Ensure services, programs, and systems are driven by the priorities of the local community.
- Strengthen integration and responsiveness of services for young children and their families through implementation of priority actions.
- Evidence-informed frameworks

  - socioecological model, including bidirectional, multilevel action.

Precision: the agreed priorities and evidence-based actions for a community that are captured in a unique birth-to-five plan.

- Develop plans that reflect the unique priorities of each community and its children.
- Utilise evidence and research to inform the design of local actions.
- Embed a cycle of monitoring, evaluation, and learning to capture the progress and next steps for each community.
- Evidence-informed frameworks
  - planning frameworks adopted, based on region and location. Examples include results-based accountability, program logic, and theory of change.

Pathways: enhanced support for early learning priorities, including access to quality playgroup and kindergarten programs and responsive early years transitions.

- Improve children's access to quality early learning programs such as playgroup and kindergarten.
- Support successful transitions in the early years.
- Align with other whole-of-government responses focused on giving all children a great start.
- Evidence-informed frameworks
  - National Quality Standard;
  - Supporting Successful Transitions;
  - K-2 Continuity and Alignment.

Connect 4 Children is operationalised in partnership with other agencies, services, and community members at the statewide, regional, and local levels.

Possible partners include

- federal, state, and local government departments, particularly those funding place-based approaches in Queensland and those with targeted funding in priority locations;
- non-government organisations, particularly those providing universal programs or services focused on the wellbeing of children aged birth to five years across Queensland or focused in priority locations;
- community members, including families.

A key strength of the Department of Education's Connect-4-children strategy is that it is underpinned by a social capital approach to improving wellbeing of children prior to school, drawing on research that recognises the importance of interconnected families, communities, early childhood services, and schools for positive children's early years experiences and outcomes (Kagan & Rigby, 2003). One example of this strategy in implementation is the Bramble Bay Culture-in-Community project. While this initiative emerged prior to the Connect-4-children strategy, it has provided a platform for implementation of the strategy, as well as guiding learnings that informed the development of the statewide strategy.

In 2016, there were 36 children who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander not attending kindergarten in the Bramble Bay area. Given that kindergarten participation is an identified protective factor for children's wellbeing prior to school, partnerships were forged between Elders, the Department of Education, early childhood education and care services, schools, community organisations (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services), and the local council to respond to this dilemma through a strengths-based approach. Partners identified that, if services were culturally inclusive and safe, then children and families would feel safe having their children attend kindergarten. This reflected research highlighting the importance of creating culturally safe environments (Williams, 2008) and reframed previous approaches targeting kindergarten participation that focused solely on family factors preventing children from enrolling and attending.

Through this place-based approach, which focused on building the cultural capability of early childhood educators and promoting excellence in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in early childhood environments, a significant increase in attendance of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in approved kindergarten programs over a three year period was observed. In 2016, there were only two children attending an approved kindergarten program compared with over 30 children attending kindergarten now.

Other achievements included

the development of the Ariba Enuba Art Trail at the Third Bungwall Lagoon;

outdoor classroom days at the Third Bungwall Lagoon;

outdoor classroom days in partnership with Nudgee Beach Environmental Education Centre;

development of reconciliation action plans by early childhood services;

sharing of professional learning; and

establishment of the Coolamon award (recognising leadership in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in an early childhood services).

The Bramble Bay Culture-in-Community project has demonstrated the successful outcomes for children, educators, and communities that can be achieved through long-term place-based approaches that build on strengths, protective factors, and multiple perspectives from partners involved in children's early years experiences. Through the Connect-4-children strategy, other locations in Queensland are developing their own place-based priorities and solutions and will have their own stories to share based on their community context.

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Further Reading

Connect 4 Children: https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/connect-4-children

K-2 Continuity and Alignment: https://learningplace.eq.edu.au/cx/resources/file/4260e30a-8d40-4ef5-bfd0-0554f9c7855f/1/index.html

Our Future State: Advancing Queensland's Priorities: https://www.ourfuture.qld.gov.au/a-great-start.aspx

Place-Based Approaches for Community Change—QCOSS' guide and toolkit: https://www.qcoss.org.au/publication/place-based-approaches-for-community-change-qcoss-guide-and-toolkit/

Queensland Government Framework for Place-Based Approaches: https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/community/place-based-approaches/framework-place-based-approaches

Supporting Successful Transitions: https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/transition-to-school/supporting-successful-transitions

The Empower Action Model: A Framework for Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences by Promoting Health, Equity, and Well-Being Across the Life Span: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1524839919889355.

Sandi Phoenix

"Attention-seeking": What is it Really?

Josie locks eyes with her educator as she reaches her little hands out to push another child off the balance beam. Before she bites someone, she glances around the room to check that an adult is watching. At group time, she makes loud, high-pitched noises that cannot be ignored. Josie has also been known to hit a parent on the bottom or grab a fist full of their child's hair right in front of them.

"What do you think is the reason she is using this behaviour? What is Josie getting out of it?"

Sandi Phoenix is the founding company director and Principal Facilitator at Phoenix Support for Educators. Her framework, The Phoenix Cups, have revolutionised how education and care professionals not only work with children's behaviour, but how teams view each other's behaviour. The Phoenix Cups adds a new perspective to understanding each other and learning to work and live in harmony together. Sandi started studying Psychological Science in 1998 when she started working as an educator. Sandi has many years' experience collaborating with staff and teams to support positive relationships and partnerships through strength-based practice. She is highly regarded nationwide as a speaker, coach, mentor and professional development facilitator.

As a behaviour consultant, I have asked this question thousands of times over the last 20 years. In the early stages of my career, like a true behaviourist, I used to ask, "What is the function of this behaviour?" These days, as a behaviour-guidance (Gartrell, 2004) convert, I am more likely to say, "What does Josie need?" Regardless of the way I frame the question, whether it is asked of a teacher in the city, a toddler educator in outback Australia, or an early years educator in the United States of America, I hear the same answer over and over again: "She's attention-seeking! She's getting attention." As a strengths-based practitioner, I cannot say "You are wrong!", but I will let you in on a guilty secret: I say that in my head.

If you Google how to manage attention-seeking behaviour (not recommended) you will find solutions such as tactical ignoring and planned attention. You might even find a video from a famous nanny or actor teaching you a technique she calls active ignoring.

The behaviour in this scenario is usually the result of an empty Connection Cup™ (Phoenix & Phoenix, 2019). Can you see how the solutions above would affect that cup? You have got it—they further empty it, getting us caught in a cycle of escalating behaviour as the cup gets emptier and Josie's stress response is triggered. Can you see how it

is much easier for adults to have compassion for a child when we view their behaviour as the outcome of an empty cup rather than attention-seeking? It would be best if we could ban the term attention-seeking in popular culture as it serves no useful purpose and sends us barking up the wrong tree. Given we cannot do that, can I ask that you ban it in the professional context of your workplace? For a comprehensive debunk of the attention-seeking myth, I highly recommend Young Children's Behaviour, wherein my colleague Dr Louise Porter (2016) reminds us of the origin of the term more than 100 years ago when Alfred Adler declared that children sought affection (p. 201).

> *"That a child is given Band-aids for injuries sustained when falling off a bicycle does not mean that falling off was 'Band-aid-seeking behaviour'"*
>
> *(Porter, 2014, p. 127).*

One day, after many years of practising how to reframe attention-seeking behaviour in various contexts, I replied with, "Tell me more about the types of connection-seeking behaviours you notice her doing." My mentee's jaw dropped. "Ohhhh," she said, "Now that you put it like that . . . ," she trailed off as a classroom full of students wrote down the words connection seeking. I had never said or seen those words before in my life; they just fell out my mouth like I always knew them. That was five years ago. Every conversation I had about attention-seeking behaviour ever since has been a breeze.

When looking for positive solutions to attention-seeking behaviour, sticker charts, rewards, and positive reinforcement systems are commonly used to shape children's behaviour into complying with adult expectations. While these can be rewarding for the adult and appear somewhat effective in the short term, possibly even creating some behaviour change while the system is in place—there is little research to suggest these systems actually teach children to make reasoned judgements about their own behaviour in the long term. Not to mention, these systems can do more harm than good to a child's developing identity and self-esteem (Porter, 2009).

I started my career as an avid behaviourist and used positive behaviour supports like sticker charts as though they were going out of fashion (actually, it turns out they did). About 15 years ago I switched lanes from behaviourist to humanistic psychology, and with that I found the guidance approach to be a well-researched alternative to the functional behaviour assessments and positive behaviour support plans that I decided to leave behind. When reflecting on why I had some huge successes with these positive reinforcement systems,

I came to realise that there is no magic in sticker charts. The magic is in the probability that positive reinforcement systems will increase the likelihood that an educator will initiate and reciprocate positive interactions with the child.

There is a magic ratio of positive interactions to negative interactions between two people that indicates a strong relationship. Gottman's (1995) highly publicised

research came about after he observed more than 700 couples' interactions over 18 years (I might add these observations took place in a laboratory—they were not creepily watching through loungeroom windows). Interestingly, the outcome of this research was an ability to predict relationship satisfaction and even divorce, in part, via this interaction ratio. Take a guess at what you think that might be. How many positive interactions does one need to counter a negative interaction in a positive and healthy relationship? I will give you a hint: The popular notion of delivering a negative interaction to someone sandwiched between two positives is not nearly enough. Gottman's magic ratio suggests that relationships that had at least five positive interactions for every negative interaction succeeded in their relationships. Research since seems to suggest that this 5:1 interaction ratio holds true for other relationships too, like educator to child (Sabey, Charlton, & Charlton, 2018). Obviously, more positive interactions are going to create a more positive tone in the relationship and the learning environment. Knowing that we are supporting children's behavioural and social learning (not "managing" their behaviour), how do you think a positive relationship will impact on the teaching and learning of considerate and cooperative behaviour?

Here is the kicker: In my experience, negative interactions include corrective (e.g. "Stop running inside") and directive statements (e.g. "Put your shoes on"), even if they are said politely. Not only is this stuff connection cup emptying for a child, impacting on their sense of self-worth; it also creates a negative emotional climate in your classroom. If you do not believe me, try it on a colleague and see how you go (actually, do not do that—I do not want to be responsible for the ensuing argument). Seriously though, if we spoke to other adults like we speak to children, they would soon work out ways not to hang out with us. It would hardly be good for your relationship and would eventually wear it away.

This is not to say we never correct a child's behaviour or we suddenly have to stop saying "No," "Don't," or "Stop," to children. But the research is clear—if you have five positive interactions for every negative interaction, your relationship will be much better off. That is science. We do not need to tolerate inconsiderate behaviour from children either, but there are ways to teach children to be considerate and cooperative in a way that maintains our connection with them.

Moving forward, Josie's educators are going to need to be intentional about connection. We can have those negative interactions, but we are going to need to drown

them out in positive interactions either side. We are not going to do this by increasing empty praise for the sake of manipulating her behaviour; it is disrespectful, and Josie will smell this a mile off. Instead, we are going to celebrate and acknowledge her efforts (Porter, 2009), make time to genuinely connect about what she is doing (without interrupting her in involved play), have conversations, give affection (verbal and non-verbal), laugh together, smile, and play. It might also help to write down a connection plan, like a to-do list or a bingo card, so Josie's educators are all on the right page. Kind of like a sticker chart, but for her teaching team, not for Josie.

When Josie's educators realise that it is the frequency of their own negative interactions that is causing the tension in their relationship with her, everything changes. We do not need to manage a child's connection-seeking behaviour. We simply need to create connection cup-filling moments, and plan to have plenty of positive interactions, because connection seeking requires connection planning.

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the phoenix cups™
CONNECTION PLAN

High Five	Say what you see and ask a question	Play together	Hug or touch	Read a story
Thumbs up	Acknowledge (e.g. effort or persistence)	Discuss a shared interest	Sit together	Take a walk together
Smile - and mean it	Actively listen	Sustained shared interaction	Secret Handshake	Reduce the amount of times your correct
Wave	Congratulate	Ask a question - with genuine curiosity	Laugh together	Reduce your directive statements
Look delighted	Say thank you	Mention an admirable quality that you notice about the child	Complete a task together	Change a routine that usually creates conflict

REFLECTION

Dr. Mina Shafer

Creative Ways of Helping Children Cope With Big Emotions and Difficult Relationships

In my work as a child and family therapist, I saw many children struggling to manage their emotions and relationships. I came to realise that art, play, and picture books were excellent resources in developing children's capacity to cope. I was inspired to write children's picture books and develop play resources that focused on coping skills. This article presents the theory and practice for teachers to help young children develop healthy ways of coping with difficult emotions and relationships through picture storybooks and play. In Australia, social-emotional wellbeing is an important learning and development outcome in the preschool curriculum (Department of Education and Training, 2019).

Dr Mina Shafer has a doctorate in health science from La Trobe University. She specialised in family art therapy. She was a teacher of 20 years and a family and art therapist working as senior clinician for Relationships Australia Victoria for over 15 years. She is also an artist and author who has written and illustrated several children's books that focus on social issues including ways of overcoming bullying; family conflict and resolution; identity and self-esteem; relating to grandparents and grief; and how to get help when there is family violence. Several of the books include resources for teachers, parents and children that can help them develop their coping and life skills.

Creating a Holding Environment

Young children cannot self-integrate without the care of a significant other, generally a parent. This care is referred to as the holding environment (Winnicott, 1960; Winnicott, 1971a). It is a safe space where a child feels secure enough to explore and take risks. Within the holding environment, there are strong and enduring attachment bonds (Bowlby, 1969).

Introducing a focus on attachment in early childhood education aims at encouraging a greater appreciation by teachers of the emotional needs of children in terms of their relationship. Teacher attachment behaviours are important in helping children's emotional-social development. These behaviours include attunement to the child by attending to and accurately interpreting the child's signals, understanding the child's point of view, and responding promptly and appropriately to the child's needs. Attachment behaviours also include encouraging, giving assistance, instructing, or reassuring the child during difficult tasks, and showing interest in the child's activities (Crittenden, 2008). Other attachment behaviours are direct, coherent, and fluent communication; the use of warm, positive statements to direct the child; less controlling and less punishing behaviours; and reporting enjoyment of the children (Marshall, 2014)—as well as being accessible, cooperative, and accepting of the child.

Coping Within the Window of Tolerance

While strong attachment leads the child to self-integrate, unmet attachment needs and adversity can drastically intensify children's experience of stress and interfere with their capacity to cope (Winnicott, 1965). Coping is an attempt to remove the stress. Some ways of coping are productive, as they involve problem solving while attempting to remain physically active and socially connected. But some coping skills are non-productive, as they involve avoidance strategies and an inability to cope with the stress (Frydenberg, Deans, & O'Brien, 2011).

A calm arousal state following stressful situations enables the child to cope productively. This calm state occurs within what Dr. Dan Siegel termed the window of tolerance (WOT; Siegel, 2011). Hyperarousal is a state of over-stimulation characterised by anxiety, panic, fear, hypervigilance,

and emotional flooding; hypoarousal is a state when pain and emotions overwhelm the brain and body and cause a state of shutting down, characterised by exhaustion, depression, numbness, disconnection, dissociation, desire to excessively sleep, and feeling emotionally deadened. In both the hyperarousal and hypoarousal states, children use unproductive coping skills, such as self-blame, worrying, acting up, giving up, and ignoring problems.

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE [WOT]

HYPERAROUSAL—fight-or-flight response
Extreme stress, rage, out of control, hard to engage with coping skills

OPTIMAL AROUSAL
Contained, calm, alert, present, feeling safe.

HYPOAROUSAL—freeze response
Extreme stressed, unable to cope, feeling numb, not feeling
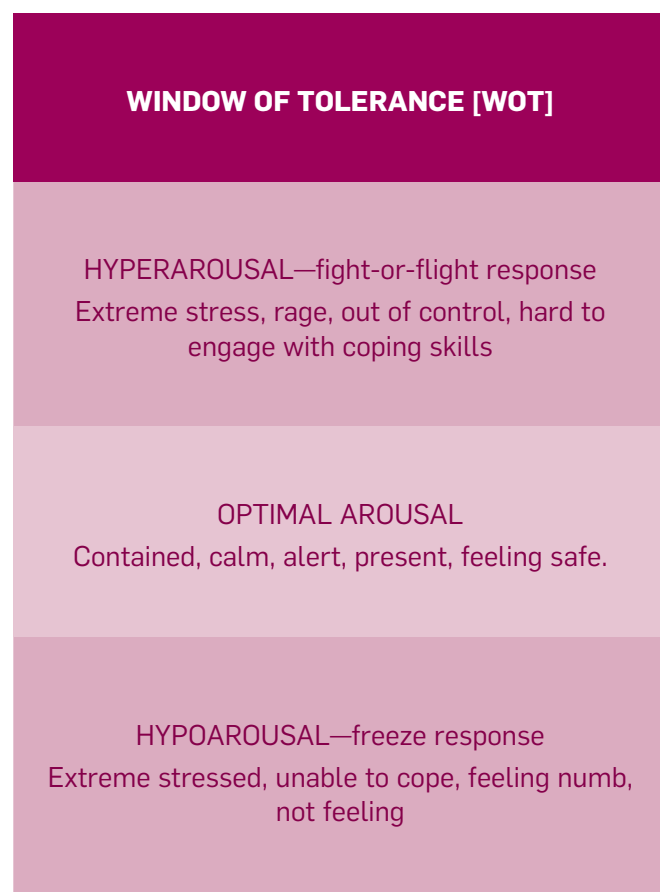
Ways of Helping Children Regulate Their Emotions

There are several ways teachers can help a child regulate their emotions by broadening the child's WOT and helping the child develop productive ways of coping:

- firstly, and most importantly, staying attuned to the child and not reacting to bad behaviour but instead sitting with the child, calming the child with a drink, and/or calming words, and caring for the child's feelings before solving the problem;

- teaching children to relax by listening to calming music; turning the lights down; and counting backwards from ten to one or taking deep breaths;

- encouraging children to notice how they feel emotionally and, in their body, they can draw a body map marking where they feel the distress and helping them pinpoint what they need to feel well again;

- helping children identify when they are in or outside the WOT by drawing a relaxation thermometer where red is very stressed, meaning they cannot think and outside the WOT; blue is calm and inside the WOT. The colours in between are other feelings they may have in or outside the WOT;

- helping children develop a yes brain by navigating away from negative behavioural and emotional states (such as aggression or withdrawal) and expanding their capacity for hope and positive self-talk: by asking why their negative self-talk might be true and why it might be false. If unable to answer, they can ask a trusted person for an opinion; then the child reviews their self-talk so it is more truthful and positive (Segal & Bryson, 2018).

How Can Picture Books Promote Productive Coping Skills?

Although children's picture books have been neglected as a path towards children's emotional development, they can help build social-emotional skills (Kemple, 2004). Picture books create positive attachment experiences for children, particularly with teachers reading and providing a healthy context for care. Picture books that focus on ways of coping with emotions can heighten children's awareness of their own emotions, promote empathy and caring behaviours towards others, as well as enhance their moral development (Harper & Trostle-Brand, 2010).

Reading picture books in a class can invite discussion about feelings and ways of coping with bullying, conflicts, or violence. Furthermore, they can identify with characters in the book who have experienced and solved challenges and broaden their coping skills. The following books support the Victorian Curriculum Building Resilience Social and Emotional Learning Materials by providing opportunities for children to develop their social skills. These books focus on emotional literacy: decision making, problem solving, positive self-regard, stress management, positive coping, help-seeking, and peer support.

FEATURES

The recommended children's books

This story is about Cassie, who was mocked by her family for being different. Cassie helps her family, and they learn to value her. While this story is about a koala family, it evokes similar group dynamics in school settings.
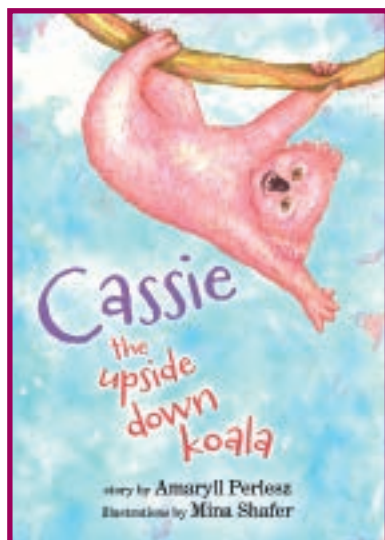
A friend pushes Zoe, and she becomes too scared to go to sleep. Zoe is helped by her family to discover her own strengths.

Clyde is in grief after losing his grandfather. He asks his grandma "What is it like being old?" As Grandma tells of the hardships and joys of old age, Clyde learns ways of coping.

Behind Closed Doors is a book about a family secret of emotional and physical abuse at home. When the secret is revealed, the family learns to say no to violence and develop productive ways of relating with each other.

Jake calls Max mad again and again. The book illustrates the devastating impact of bullying on Max and the ways Max learned to overcome bullying.

Muffin Magic is a story about conflict in a single-parent family. But one day the older sister helps her young siblings develop productive social skills that change conflict into cooperation.

Painting Secrets is about a young girl who had a secret she was too scared to tell. She used a variety of productive coping skills, including helping others.

FEATURES

How Play Can Enhance Children's Relationship Skills

Here are some games that can help children develop attunement and emotional expression with the support of an attuned teacher at school.

- The squiggle game is devised to help children develop collaborative communication (Winnicott, 1971b). The teacher invites the child to take turns drawing. The teacher says "There is no right or wrong, or good or bad, in this game. The only rules are safety rules." Avoid drawing on the child's drawing; you are modelling collaboration and respect for the child; say something like, "I thought I might add a blue line here. Is that okay?" Focus on attunement: being caring, interested, respectful, and warm.
- Paper punch is for positive expression of anger. After an incident where a child was aggressive or frustrated or angry at themselves, the teacher can say, "It looked like you were really angry. I know a game that is a really good way of becoming the boss of anger." The teacher then holds a newspaper sheet tightly and asks the child to punch through it, then half a sheet, and a quarter of a sheet; after several newspapers are punched, the quarter of the newspapers are crunched into a ball and the child is asked to throw it into a hoop made by the teacher's arms.
- Clapping hands is to enhance attunement, trust and safety: The teacher claps out a simple sequence of 2 or 3 claps. If the child claps out the sequence correctly, more claps are added. This is then repeated with each child leading. Remember the aim is to develop relationship skills, so don't correct the children.
- Throwing cotton balls: Imagine children having an angry encounter and wanting to recover the relationships. Say "Facing each other, each with a pile of cotton balls, on the word 'Go,' throw cotton balls at each other as hard as you want." Say "You expressed your anger in a safe way." At the end of the game, there is a peace treaty with a song, dance, or rubbing cotton ball on each other's hands.

Case Examples

Seven-year-old Dale was bullied by class members and became withdrawn. We played the squiggle game. I explained the window of tolerance and read "Mad Max" to him. Then Dale created a feeling thermometer to describe his feeling of helplessness. Dale then drew different ways of coping with bullying. We did some relaxation activities. Dale's parents supported Dale by brainstorming, with his teacher, ways of helping with bullying. Slowly, Dale developed his self-esteem and made new friends.

Six-year-old Sam was ambivalent about her identity. She was withdrawn in class and at home. We played the squiggle game, read the secrets book, and talked about the WOT and drew different coping skills. These interventions helped Sam develop a cleared more social picture of herself.

Five-year-old Lee resorted to tantrums in school and at night. I read Zoe's Choice and helped her draw a feeling thermometer. She drew her worries about leaving mum. She found talking and drawing helpful. These interventions helped Lee regulate her feelings.

Conclusion

With support and guidance from early childhood educators, young children can begin to understand their emotions, express themselves, and learn strategies to regulate their emotions. Reading picture books that focus on ways of coping, combined with responsive and developmentally appropriate play, can provide the opportunity for children to develop their ways of coping with big emotions and difficult relationships.

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Karen Young

Strengthening Children Against Anxiety

Karen Young's work as a psychologist, has seen her worked extensively with children, families, and in educational settings. She is a sought-after speaker, consultant, and professional development educator, both here in Australia and overseas. Karen is the founder of 'Hey Sigmund', an online resource that attracts millions of visitors each year and provides contemporary, research-driven information. She is the author of a number of children's books, including the best selling 'Hey Warrior', 'Hey Awesome', and 'But We're Not Lions', which creatively assist children to understand and manage anxiety, and build social resilience. The books have been translated into a number of languages.

The early years are developmentally some of the most important. This is when children will slowly expand their reach into the world and unfold their important place in it. During this time, they will experiment, discover, learn, and grow in ways that can have an enduring effect on the people they grow up to be. One of the most important foundations for their growth will come from their relationships with the adults around them. Through these adults, children will learn their capacity for resilience and brave behaviour. These relationships provide children with a safe base from which they can explore their limits and grow through the experiences that could otherwise shrink their world.

Anxiety is one of these experiences. Anxiety in young children is very common, but for some children it will intrude into day-to-day life and ripple into family, friendships, and behaviour. If left unchecked, anxiety also can diminish their self-concept, their engagement with the world, and their willingness to move towards the experiences that will nourish them. As much as anxiety can stifle children's capacity to expand their reach into the world, it will also come with opportunities to strengthen them with the skills and mindset that will enrich them for the long term.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety happens when a part of the brain, the amygdala, registers threat. When this happens, the body is surged with a potent neurochemical cocktail designed to prime the body for fight or flight. When anxiety works as it should, it is a powerful response that works to keep us safe from harm. The problem is that not everything the brain registers as a threat is a threat. Anxiety is less about what is actually dangerous and more about what the brain perceives. For young children, anything that comes with separation from their important adult, unfamiliarity, shame, humiliation, exclusion, or failure can register as a threat in the brain. The very nature of educational environments means that even the most loving, nurturing early childhood environment can have plenty of these triggers.

The triggers for anxiety can come from many places, including memories, the environment, thoughts, or experiences. When anxiety is triggered, and there is nothing to fight or flee, the neurochemical fight-or-flight cocktail builds up and leads to the physical symptoms of anxiety. These can include tummy aches, headaches, nausea, vomiting, tight muscles, clamminess, or a fast-beating heart. At its heart, anxiety is physiology, but it will drive thoughts, feelings, and behaviour that can cause distress and interfere with everyday functioning. An essential part of strengthening children against anxiety is understanding when anxiety is fuelling behaviour.

What Does Anxiety Look Like in Children?

Anxiety can have many faces. In young children, it can often present as physical symptoms such as those described above. It might also show itself through what if thinking, or feelings such as sadness, anger, or overwhelm, or through behaviour. Common behavioural manifestations of anxiety include avoidance of new people or activities, clinginess, aggression, tantrums, distress at separation from a parent or carer, restlessness, or the need to control peers, play, or their environment.

When Separation Causes Anxiety

In early education settings, anxiety will often show itself in children as distress at separation. This is more reflective of their stage of development and the importance of their connections to their important adults than it is reflective of any pathology. Understanding this is an integral part of supporting parents and children through anxiety. A child experiences safety in the world

through his or her attachment to a parent or primary caregiver. Anything that might stand in the way of that attachment can register as a threat in the brain. When we understand this from an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense. As humans, we are wired to feel safest in groups.

For a child who is not yet able to protect themselves from threat, their safety and survival come from being close to a stronger, more powerful human (such as a parent) who can do the protecting for them. Young brains are wired to feel safest when they are close to an important adult (most often a parent). Separation from that important adult can register as threat in the brain and fuel anxiety. One of the functions of anxiety in these circumstances is to restore proximity to that important adult. Relational safety is one of the most powerful ways to calm an anxious brain. Warmth of tone, non-verbals, gestures, lighting up upon seeing the child, and physical proximity to the child can all serve to facilitate this.

When Anxiety Drives Challenging Behaviour

Any behaviour that is being fuelled by anxiety is the outward manifestation of a brain that has registered threat. Any response to the behaviour, however challenging that behaviour might be, has to take account of this. In the midst of challenging behaviour, it is first important to manage any incidents and ensure anyone in proximity is safe, but the responses to that behaviour must be built around maintaining connection. This connection will help to re-establish safety and eventually diminish the felt need for fight or flight. Any response that drives disconnection, exclusion, separation, or shame will register greater threat and make anxiety worse. Once anxiety has eased, the child will be more neurologically equipped to engage in a conversation about his or her behaviour.

Strengthening Young Children Against Anxiety

It will take many years for children to be able to exercise self-control, calm big feelings, and think through consequences. In the meantime, early childhood educators have a pivotal role in providing the experiences that will help all children strengthen against anxiety.

Here are three ways to facilitate this:

1. **Leave plenty of time for free play.** Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of play for nurturing the development of resilience and coping in children (Yogman et al., 2018). During play, children have the opportunity to experiment with real-life and explore their limits. They have opportunities to put themselves in situations that allow them to experiment with being brave and taking safe risks but with the inbuilt safety net of knowing they can pull back whenever they need to.

2. **Encourage a regular mindfulness practice.** Mindfulness creates structural and functional changes in the brain that support a healthy response to stress (Creswell & Lindsay, 2014). These changes include decreased activity in the amygdala (the part of the brain connected to anxiety) and increase activity in the prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain that is connected to resilience, self-control, and the capacity to calm anxiety). Mindfulness nurtures the capacity to be less directed by anxiety and more able to stay calm in the face of it.

3. **Exercise.** The research literature (Motta et al., 2012) has consistently supported the benefits of exercise in strengthening children against anxiety. Exercise changes the structure and function of the brain in ways that strengthen it against stress and anxiety. It also helps to maintain healthy levels of neurochemicals that play a key role in mental health, particularly anxiety (Maddock et al., 2016). Movement is the natural end to the fight-or-flight response, and exercise can have a direct effect on physiology to calm anxiety.

Children are powerful when we empower them. The experiences we expose them to, as well as our belief in them, will develop their courage, nurture their resilience, and help them discover the very best versions of themselves. Children have plenty of time to develop their courage and resilience. There is no hurry for this to happen. Anxiety can make the move towards brave behaviour difficult, but the move through anxiety and towards brave behaviour can be a shuffle more than a leap—one small step after another. The relationship between an early childhood educator and a child has enormous capacity to support these tiny steps by making the world feel safe enough for children to be brave enough.

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Sonia Harris

Connectedness in Early Childhood-Implications for Early Brain Development

Over the past decade, there has been an enormous amount of research (Moore, 2006; Zero to Three, 2020) informing us how the brain develops, and technology now brings this information into the palm of our hand. We know that the first 1,000 days are critical in a child's development and that the first five years is the most impactful time to positively influence the developing brain. As early childhood teachers, we have an incredible opportunity to make a meaningful difference for children through the power of connection. This article will explore connection from three different angles and how we can apply this to our important work supporting children's healthy brain development.

Sonia Harris is the founder and manager of CHILD SA an organisation that aims to provide education and support for families, educators and organisations in order to foster a deep understanding of the social and emotional development and wellbeing of babies and children in the early years. Sonia is skilled in education and training, early childhood services, family education, coaching, and public speaking. Sonia is registered child and family health nurse that has worked with children and families in the community for over 15 years. Sonia has worked as a social inclusion coordinator supporting directors, educators and teachers in the early years to understand the need for meaningful inclusion, relationship based learning and emotional connection.

Connection With Children

From birth, an infant's behaviour is designed to draw in and keep an adult close. Infants cannot survive without someone to care for them; this is a in-built biological survival mechanism. Children's attachment systems are always on; therefore, an infant will seek connection with an adult that is in close proximity and is emotionally available. This means that an infant will provide attachment-seeking cues and, if these cues are met with a sensitive and predictable response, the infant will start to develop trust, and an emotional connection will be formed. Emotional connection creates the biochemistry that optimises the function of the brain. An infant learns how to feel about themselves, how to be in a relationship, and how to regulate their own emotions through being in a sensitive, responsive, and predictable relationship.

Forming a meaningful connection with a child is one of the most powerful ways that early childhood teachers can support children's social and emotional wellbeing. In doing so, we are creating the opportunity for the growth of neural connections that lay the foundations for the child's sense of self, future relationships, learning, and development. When the brain activates certain pathways, the connection is strengthened. This explains why, when we practise something, we get better at it and, when we do not practise a skill for a long period of time, the brain prunes this connection, we lose it. When a connection is repeatedly activated, the brain lays down a special coating over the neural connection, which turns it into a superhighway for transmitting information.

For a teacher in the early learning environment, there are many opportunities for meaningful connection throughout the day. Children travel around the circle of security (Circle of Security International, 2019) hundreds of times in a day. If we are attuned to children's needs, read their cues, and are emotionally available, then we can respond appropriately with connection in moments of shared delight, comfort, and care. Angulo (2017) discusses four elements of connection, "eye contact, touch, presence, and playfulness," stating that "we produce oxytocin, the hormone associated with social bonding and love, every time we share these [connection] moments with our children. Our chemistry literally sends the message that we are connected throughout our body and our brain."

Connection With Ourselves

For us to truly connect with the children in our care, we need to be connected to our own emotional state. We need to have our emotions regulated in order to be emotionally

available. We can use the circle-of-security model (Circle of Security International, 2019) to explore this further. As teachers, we are the safe hands for the children. We enable children to flourish in the early learning environment, to grow healthy brain connections, and to develop executive functioning skills. For this to occur, children must feel confident that they are in the hands of a safe and trusted teacher. Teachers must be available to share in the children's exploration, to delight in them, to help them when needed, and to be a safe haven to come into when necessary. The safe haven is a space where we can help organise children's emotions and comfort them until they are ready to explore again.

Research (Porges, 2015; Perry, 2020) tells us that children need to feel safe and secure before they can access their executive functioning skills. When a child feels unsafe, anxious, worried, or scared, they function from the lower part of their brain. This area of the brain, the brain stem, is responsible for our fight-or-flight response. When a young child experiences the feeling of being disconnected, stressed, and unsafe, these are the experiences that activate brain connectivity and shape brain architecture. There is a saying, "Cells that fire together wire together," coined by Donald Hebb, the father of neuropsychology (Ferguson, 2020, para. 8). A key point in this model is that we must be emotionally available, safe, and predictable in our responses. If we are dysregulated, or emotionally unavailable, we may not be able to successfully meet the needs of the child. If the child is met with unpredictable responses from the teacher, they have the potential to learn mistrust of adults and may miscue their needs. This can have a significant impact on the child's stress hormones and may have a detrimental impact on the child's learning and development potential.

Practising mindfulness is an easy and practical way

in which we can begin to connect with our emotional wellbeing. Research published by Headspace (2020) has shown us that mindfulness can help reduce stress, boost creativity, strengthen relationships, and improve attention, working-memory, and concentration. When teachers learn mindfulness, they not only reap personal benefits, but their schools do as well. In randomised controlled trials, teachers who learned mindfulness reported greater efficacy in doing their job, had more emotionally supportive classrooms and better classroom organisation.

Connecting Children to Their Calm: Co-Regulation

When young children are feeling disconnected and stressed for too long, or exposed to high levels of stress, they will experience the negative effects of having excess stress hormones flood the body. Cortisol is a stress hormone that—if present in the child at high levels—interferes with the brain's ability to access and store memories and to access the pre-frontal cortex—which supports the child's ability to concentrate and learn (Gerdhardt, 2014). Perry (2020) introduced an important concept that guides us through three steps to calm a child who is dysregulated. The three Rs

The Power of Connection

guide—regulate, relate, and reason—reinforces the importance of an adult being emotionally available to help the child regulate their own emotions. Young children will co-regulate with a trusted adult while they are learning. Once the child has begun to calm, we can relate to the child through connection. The final step is to reason with the child, but this can only happen when the first two steps have occurred (Perry, 2020).

Helping children connect to their breath is one way that we can support them to regulate. Research has shown that deep-breathing exercises can reduce cortisol levels by up to 50%. When we feel stressed, our breathing rate and pattern changes as part of the fight-or-flight response (Better Health Channel, 2020). Multiple studies (Mindful Schools, 2020; Nieminen et. Al., 2016) have found that children as young as two-and-a-half years old can benefit from learning mindfulness in terms of improved cognitive outcomes, social-emotional skills, empathy, resilience, and wellbeing. Incorporating mindful practices into the early learning environment can help children to learn how to connect with the way their body feels when experiencing stress. By encouraging children to learn about the way their body feels and their associated emotions, we can give them the language and tools to help regulate their emotions and calm down.

Forming meaningful connections with the children in our care is foundational to building healthy brain architecture. We have explored the importance of self-regulation and attunement in building relationships with children, the power of meaningful connection, and using mindfulness as a tool to support teacher wellbeing and resilience in the workplace—but also for the development of social and emotional wellbeing in young children. As a teacher or early childhood educator, we may be the first safe hands that a child experiences outside of their primary caregiver relationship. We are building the template for what children learn to expect from adult relationships. What a rewarding and incredible opportunity teachers have—to make a lasting difference for the children entrusted in their care.

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Christopher Phoenix

Work-Life Balance or Life-Needs Balance

Christopher Phoenix is the wellbeing specialist for Phoenix Support for Educators (PSFE). Christopher has a keen interest in health and wellbeing, and his passion for hypnotherapy and mindfulness turned professional after his appearance on Australia's most popular national morning television show, Sunrise. Since then, Christopher has also featured as the Commonwealth Banks Australian of the Day, been interviewed on Australia's most popular national radio station Triple M, as well as having been the subject of numerous national and international newspaper articles. It is Christopher's goal to increase wellbeing practices in the early education setting and he is excited to be developing programs that do just that.

Dabbing the corner of her eyes with a tissue, Mary wipes away her tears. She then takes a long composing breath and gets out of her car. This has been her morning ritual for months now. As she reaches for the front door of the school, a mother opens it from the inside and holds it for her to enter. Mary heads into the staff room already taking her oversized handbag off her shoulder. As she enters the room, from under the sink she is greeted by the top of two tanned buttocks poking out the top of faded blue work shorts. Sensing her enter the room, the owner of the buttocks calls out in a warm voice "Hi dear, don't turn the tap on."

Mary does not respond but puts her bag away in her locker, also wondering how a matchbox car made its way in there. When she turns around, the plumber calls out "Hey, can you see my great big silver toolbox on the table? Are you able to see if you can find some white thread tape?"

"Sure," Mary replies.

As she digs through the toolbox, not exactly sure what thread tape is, she calls out "What's the story with the tap?"

With the sound of the wrench rattling, and a strain in his voice, the plumber replies "It's the usual story. It's not actually the tap, it's what's happening down here in the pipe. The problem usually always lies deeper. It won't take long to fix."

"Do you like playing under sinks?" Mary asks, still searching through the toolbox.

"Well, as a plumber, we play in places a lot worse... . Any luck with that tape?"

"No, sorry," Mary replies.

The man languidly pulls himself out from under the sink. He takes a moment to struggle to his feet, and the first thing Mary notices about him is his face. Although it is familiar around the school, she is still surprised by it. He wears all the lines of hard work and a complexion hardened from years working under the harsh sun. What captivated Mary the most, however, was his expression. Or rather, lack thereof. Neither serene nor tense, he appeared truthful, like an artist had appeared and somehow captured him between thoughts. Even the way he slightly limped over to her and the toolbox was captivating. He just seemed to move about his world with an air of indifference, like the way a duck might glide upon silver water.

Stepping beside Mary, he looks down into the toolbox. He ruffles through for just a moment and then pulls out the tape. Turning back to Mary, the corners of his mouth curl upwards as he throws the tape up a few inches in the air and catches it again. The man then stops suddenly and investigates her face.

"Why dear, it looks like your face has been leaking. You know I have some silicone sealant in here that would fix that right up."

As Mary tries to lift her lips to form a smile, she is surprised to find that they struggle, and they begin to

tremble. Instead of surprise, the man's face warms.

"Luckily, I filled the kettle before turning off the water. Sit down dear; let me make you a cuppa." he says.

As he turns on the kettle, Mary sits and composes herself. She looks over to the toolbox and says "Did you bring in that whole great big toolbox just to fix the sink?"

"Well," the man said, "sometimes you find out you might need more than just a wrench. It's always good to have a lot of tools in your toolbox, just in case. Besides, if I only brought in what was needed to fix the sink, I might ignore what else might need attention in here... . You know dear, the last time I saw a tear as fat and round as that one in your eyes—it was rolling down my own cheek."

Mary had no words, and instead the sound of the kettle beginning to boil filled the room. Without prompting, as he reached for the mugs above the cupboard, he continued: "You know, Bukowski once said, 'Find what you love and let it kill you.' Melodrama aside, what he meant by this is to throw yourself into whatever it is that truly lights your fire, and this I have done for just over 50 years. I knew I wanted to be a plumber—even when I was in school. I got my apprenticeship when I was sixteen and have played with pipes ever since."

The man poured the bubbling, steaming water into the mugs. "Then something happened. I must have been in my late forties when I suddenly felt a kind of... emptiness."

The plumber put the mug down in front of Mary and took a seat opposite her. "What I couldn't understand was why, all of a sudden, I found it hard to want to go to work. I mean, I have always wanted to be a plumber. Why now is it that I dreaded getting out of bed? I started contemplating that perhaps it was the work, that maybe I had finally grown tired of it. So, I decided what I needed was some work-life balance. The problem was, the more I enacted this work-life balance plan, the more polarised I felt. Like I was somehow meant to be a different person at home and at work. All this did was have me resent my work even more. What I didn't realise was that, no, I didn't hate my job—I was just burnt-out. My cups were empty. That is when I realised we don't need work-life balance; we need life-needs balance."

"What is life-needs balance?" Mary asks.

"Well, work-life balance proposes that we are different people in different locations. Sure, what is expected of you is different, but we are still the same person whether we are at work or not. With life-needs balance, however, we can look at getting our needs met, or cups filled as I like to say, in all areas of our life. Think of it like this—imagine you had a cup for each of your needs. You see, when a person has full cups, or knows how to fill their cups, they feel good and have a strong sense of wellbeing. Their needs are met, or at least they know how to have them met. When one or more of their cups are emptying, however, a person suffers burnout. Therefore, we need to make cup-filling plans to meet all our needs at home and in the workplace. The way we fill them in each location may be different, but at least we are still the same person, and are getting all of our needs met. I have been far more fulfilled ever since."

In this story, the plumber refers to The Phoenix Cups™ framework. Each cup in the framework metaphorically represents a different basic human life need. Those cups are the connection cup, the safety cup, the mastery cup, the freedom cup, and the fun cup. When these cups are full (our needs met), we feel a sense of self-worth, security, self-competence, autonomy, and joy. When one or more are emptying, we feel a sense of disharmony. Life-needs balance is about ensuring we are filling our cups in all areas of our life. This will provide greater levels of wellbeing at home and in the workplace. So, instead of trying to balance work and life as though they were two equal parts, we should be trying to meet all of our needs in all aspects of life. Forget work-life balance; we need life-needs balance.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

Title:

Morphing Murphy

Author:
Robert Favretto

Illustrator:
Tull Suwannakit

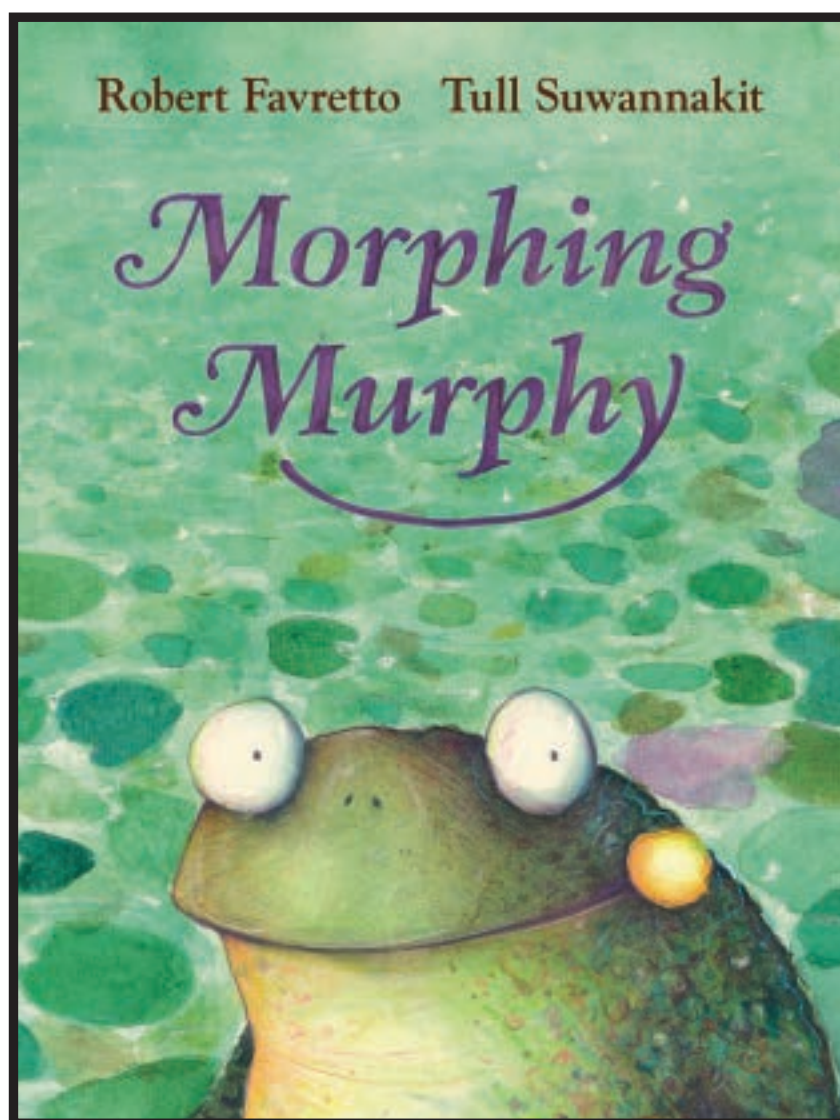**Publisher:**
Ford Street

ISBN: 9781925804324

Reviewed by:
Evangeline Manassakis

As we go through changes in our daily life, story books can take us on a journey making us forget the times we are faced with; This story does just that. Murphy is a tadpole morphing into a frog. Murphy the tadpole is caught by surprise as he notices changes in his body. The story is naturally engaging where we are left wondering what will happen next. Murphy sees possibility in the changes in his life and finishes with a 'hoppily ever after'.

This story can begin with the teacher or educator reading the exciting, provocative blurb to stimulate discussion and finish with an extension of science learning about the life cycle of a frog.

Overall, Morphing Murphy is a good read for us all, to remind us to keep going with any changes that happen in our life - even if we lose our tail.

MEDIA REVIEWS

Title:

Tabitha and the Raincloud

Author:
Devon Sillett

Illustrator:
Melissa Johns

Publisher:
EK Books

ISBN: 978-1-925820-13-3

Reviewed by:
Kate Shapcott

Tabitha is having a bad day; nothing goes right, and things get worse until she comes up with a playful way of engaging with her problem. Then the raincloud disappears, and Tabitha has a strategy for the next time it comes.

Devon Sillett has written a thoughtful and accessible book that deals sensitively with an experience common to us all. The text is simple and direct, economical yet effective with short sentences that flow smoothly. I find this book very easy to read aloud. There are many opportunities to stop and discuss feelings, ideas, words and pictures without disrupting the flow of the book. Devon Sillett skilfully creates a climax that has the class anticipating each page.

Melissa John's illustrations are as integral to the success of the book as the text. Children can read the story without knowing the words because each page illustrates the text perfectly. I think this is one of the reasons why this particular picture book has been so very popular in my kindergarten class as a rest time companion. The other reason is the subtle, lyrical and textural quality to the pictures. They are beautiful to look at and easy to follow; the perfect recipe for a successful picture book.

If, like me you are always looking for picture books that help to teach emotional literacy, self-awareness and empathy, then "Tabitha and the Raincloud" will be a useful and enduring addition to your teaching resources.

(Teacher notes are available from the publisher)

Title:

The Boy in the Big Blue Glasses

Author:
Susanne Gervay

Illustrator:
Marjorie Crosby-Fairall

Publisher:
EK Books

ISBN: 978-1-925335-99-6

Reviewed by:
Sue Webster

"The Boy in the Big Blue Glasses" is a very thoughtfully written story. It centres around Sammy, a young man who feels like a superhero every day; that is, until he gets reading glasses.

Then he no longer feels like a superhero, he feels invisible.

The adults in his life – parents, grandparents and teachers – naturally try to encourage him to wear his glasses by telling Sammy he is now handsome (he was handsome before), they ask where Sammy has gone (he now feels he has disappeared) and they say they do not recognise him anymore (so no one sees who he is anymore). Sammy feels different, vulnerable and invisible. He can see better but he has not changed.

Sammy is struggling to manage the change in his life; his self-confidence plummets and he hides from everyone. Showing his true superhero spirit, Sammy draws on a close friendship and uses humour to remind his teachers and friends that he is Sammy. He realises that people do like him – glasses or no glasses – and that the glasses are now part of him. Sammy uses this difference to empower himself, not diminish himself.

Marjorie does a fabulous job of bringing the story to life with almost retro style illustrations, soft colours that are as calming and gentle as the text. They truly add to the humour that Sammy sees with his glasses.

This is an important book as it raises questions for all children. It validates their fears and helps them to realise there is a way through.

I look forward to using this book to help young children to empower themselves in the face of adversity.
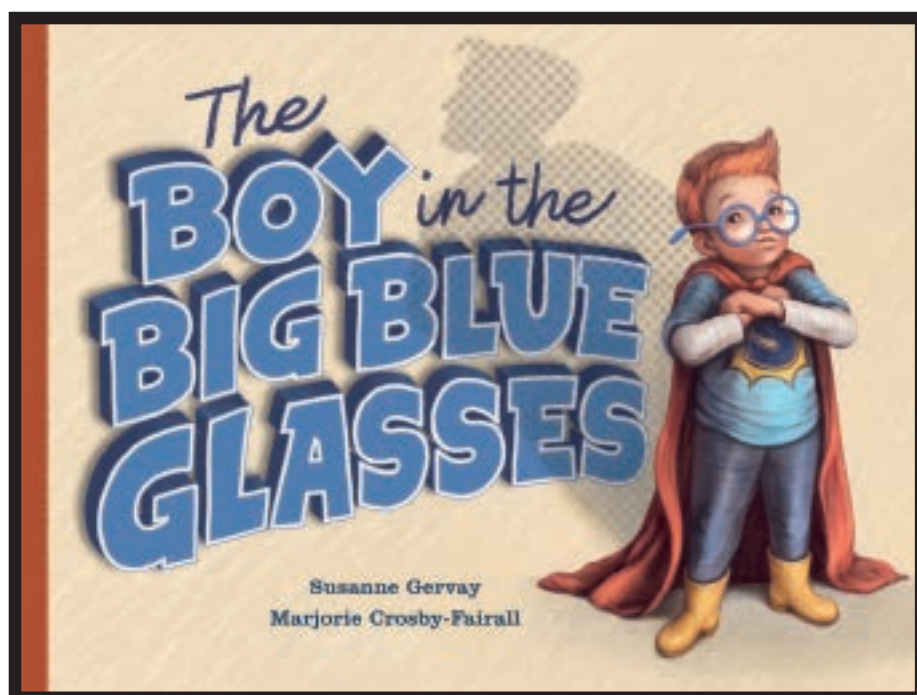
Guidelines for writers

The EYC editorial panel welcomes articles and ideas for possible inclusion in the journal.

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

Style

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

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

Referencing

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

Maybe you need help with referencing. If so, ... The preferred style for the *ECTA Journal* is the author-date system (pp. 188–208 of the *Style manual for authors, editors and printers, 6th ed.*).

Example of in-text citations: This approach (Smith 1995; Tyler 2002) suggests ...

Example of book referencing: O'Hagan, M 2001, *Early years practitioner*, 4th edn, Harcourt, London.

Example of journal referencing: Bredekamp, S 2006, 'Staying true to our principles', *Educating Young Children*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 21–4.

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

Specific terminology

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

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

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

Length of contribution

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

Form of submission

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

Author release forms must be signed and a hard copy forwarded to ECTA 20 Hilton Road, Gympie, Qld. 4570. Where original artwork or material has been submitted it will be returned at the contributor's request. All contributors will be sent a copy of the journal.