

EVERY Child

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VOL.11 NO. 2 2005



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\$12.95 LAH0303

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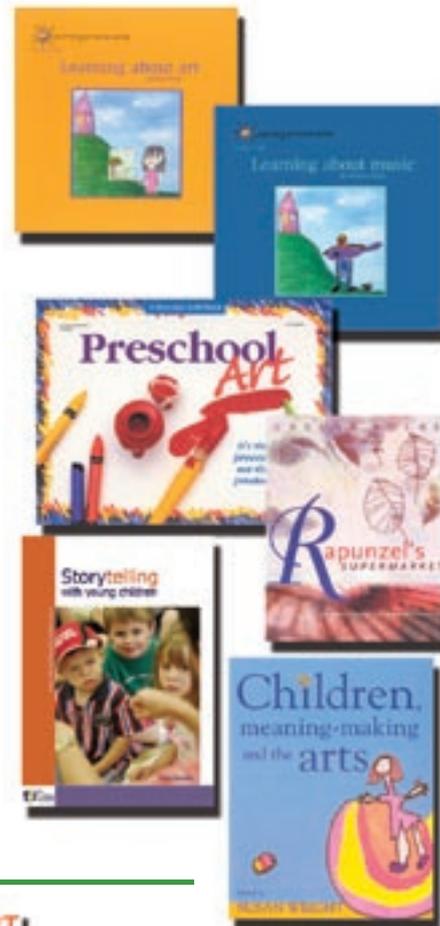
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Ursula Kolbe and Jane Smyth

Drawing and painting offers very young children powerful ways to explore and communicate their thoughts and feelings. The authors offer suggestions on how to help children express themselves through art. Filled with images of children drawing and painting, the book takes the reader on an illustrated journey through various levels of children's artistic development and expression.

\$14.95 RIP0004

Art for the child under 7 (seventh edition)

Frances Derham

First published in 1967 and now in its seventh edition, this is a classic Australian work discussing children's drawing, painting, finger painting, collage and clay modelling. Essentially practical, it is based on principles that have been thoroughly tested, and will encourage adults to provide the best settings and materials for children in any context. The latest edition also has a forward by Barbara Piscitelli.

\$16.95 PUB02

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Contents



- Editorial**
- 2 New evidence linking the arts and learning in early childhood
- Letters to the Editor**
- Guest Statement**
- 4 How to make kids hate reading. By Jackie French
- Features**
- 6 What if ... Art as language in early childhood
- 10 Me and my place: How nature, art & play value a child's unique view of the world
- 14 Building drama worlds
- 16 When learning becomes... simply irresistible
- 26 Storytelling abroad

- 20 Clapping hands and dancing feet: Exploring creative expression with Hi-5
- 24 Out of the Box. Queensland Performing Arts Centre's Festival of Early Childhood
- Regular**
- 8 Kids at the house: Performing arts for children at the Sydney Opera House
- 12 The power of the story
- 13 Romp, rhyme and revelry Yvonne Winer talks about her latest book, *Stories for telling*
- Health**
- 22 Anti fast-food messages: Sharing 'slow food' with children

- Book Reviews**
- 18 *And the 'roo jumped over the moon*
- 18 *Storytelling with young children*
- 19 *The boy who would be a helicopter*
- 19 *The runaway circus*
- Profile**
- 30 Interview with Paula Melville-Clark
- Innovation**
- 28 Building a culture of optimism and persistence with preschool children
- Legal**
- 32 Excursions, consent and the duty of care

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Early childhood educators have long recognised the importance of creative activities and are passionate about promoting children’s creativity. Most early childhood curricula have a strong focus on creative experiences – especially in music, movement and visual arts, because of their acknowledged role in enhancing children’s intellectual, social and emotional development.

to develop literacy and ensure that every child is a reader. Undoubtedly, this report will highlight the key role of rich, early language and literacy experiences for young children. In preschool and child care, the core of these experiences is frequently arts-based with children’s painting, drawing, singing, dance, and storytelling at the heart of good early literacy programs. Ensuring these traditional early childhood activities, complemented by newer digital experiences, translate into

of ‘the arts’. We focus on the critical role of the visual arts, music, and movement in preschool and child care programs and especially in developing social and cognitive competencies and preparedness for school.

Jackie French’s Guest Statement, with the provocative title *How to make kids hate reading*, proposes that reading must be promoted as fun, worthwhile and important ‘secret adult’s business’ if it is to be considered as ‘highly desirable’.

Other articles focus on creating rich dramatic play environments, transforming an early childhood setting into ‘a creative sanctuary’ and using nature, art and play to draw out and value children’s unique views of the world.

New evidence

linking the arts and learning in early childhood

Recently, the longstanding focus on creative activities has received a resounding endorsement from neuroscientists working in the ‘brain research’ area who say that neural pathways in the brain are formed and shaped by early experiences. In the first three to four years in particular, rich experiences are necessary to build the brain’s neuro-circuitry. This then influences development and general wellbeing, and later academic performance in school.

The growing knowledge of how children’s brains develop has helped refocus and energise community and government interest in strengthening and expanding early childhood programs. Current initiatives, such as the Australian Government’s *Stronger Families, Stronger Communities* program, build on compelling evidence that early developmental outcomes are linked to later wellbeing.

In the light of evidence about the importance of early experience, children’s active engagement in singing, music and movement, storytelling, and art and craft activities, is especially significant. All new and sustained experiences help create unique brain connections that have short and long term impacts on developmental pathways.

Importantly, as the current *National Enquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* draws to a close, attention is focused on the best ways

strong early literacy skills requires thoughtful planning and pedagogies that grow out of targeted initial training and professional development.

More than at any time in the past, the social and economic benefits of integrated, seamless programs of early childhood development, care and education are being discussed and promoted here and internationally. It is increasingly recognised that ‘care’ and ‘education’ cannot be separated if child development is to be optimised. Many early childhood educators would argue that experiences in the arts are at the core of this integration. They underpin much of the developmental programming within services, and draw together the key components of various social and cognitive dimensions of learning.

Today, investments in the early years are viewed as sound strategies to achieve social inclusion and academic success. But, if early childhood services are to meet the needs of families, communities and children through the next decade or so, then the visions, initiatives and strategies must be carefully planned and implemented. There must also be renewed rigour in defining and monitoring outcomes for children.

In this issue of *Every Child*, we continue to inform the debate on strengthening early childhood services by looking at developments and issues in the broad area

The range of arts-focused early childhood initiatives in centres, schools and the wider community around Australia is impressive. But embracing arts activities and understanding their value in early childhood contexts – especially as a basis for later learning – can be the biggest challenge. Ensuring early childhood professionals are able to plan and implement appropriate visual and performing arts activities for young children requires a special focus in early childhood education training programs and in professional learning programs.

Alison Elliott



Editor



Letters to the Editor

Every Child readers are invited to respond to articles published in the magazine. Publishing a diversity of opinions (which are not necessarily those of Early Childhood Australia) provides a forum which promotes professional growth, creativity and debate in the early childhood field. By encouraging letters, we would like to build a community around *Every Child*, where readers are involved and engaged. *Every Child* is for you—so let us know what you think!

Please send your letters, marked 'Every Child' to either:

PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602 or by email to: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au.

Following the publication of last *Every Child*, Volume 11 No. 1, we had these responses:

Managing Challenging Behaviour – thumbs up!

Please pass on my congratulations to Mimi Wellisch and Viggo Knackstredt for their article *Managing challenging behaviour: Is the environment a factor?* in *Every Child* Volume 11 No. 1 2005. It is wonderful to see a great article on physical environment and fabulous to know that other people are picking up the cause.

Prue Walsh

Play Environment Consulting
www.playconsulting.com

A promise to Australia's children Maybe not

While reading *Every Child* Volume 11 No. 1, I came across one article that I felt needed to be accompanied by some remarks from the editor. This was the guest statement [*A promise to Australia's children*] by Parliamentary Secretary for Children and Youth Affairs, Sussan Ley.

Ley begins talking about the Government focus on the child, but then diverges away from the children and begins to focus on how they [the Government] will be targeting issues like the community. To me, these are issues relating to and certainly affecting the child – but they are not issues that are *directly* affecting and concerning the child – such as access to high-quality early childhood services

that employ trained staff, and provide positive interactions and opportunities for the children to construct knowledge, leading to positive outcomes for the child.

While the provision of high-quality services for children are a sound financial investment in the future of a society, this article fails to focus at all on the benefits for children here and now, and it almost sounds as if children could become part of the Government's economical policy with economical benefits rather than having human implications.

I became very uncomfortable when I read the next statement: 'the Government believes sound social policy can only be developed and delivered in partnership with business, community and individuals'. This statement sounds like further support for the Government's agenda of privatising the child care industry and encouraging private operators to solve public problems such as the shortage of birth – two places. Additionally, have we already forgotten that this government had *no* social policies in the last election, and in fact its commitment to children was through the welfare sector and supported parents rather than the services providing the care for children?

On the other hand, I felt that the Question and Answer interview with Joan Waters was great, especially question seven where she questions the practice of a few hours "education" surrounded by periods of "care" (p. 5). She recognised that education should not be confined to one part of the day, but is instead present in all things we do.

John Dorrington

B. Ed (ECE).

N.B This is an extract. The letter couldn't be published in its entirety due to space constraints.

JiGSAW Magazine

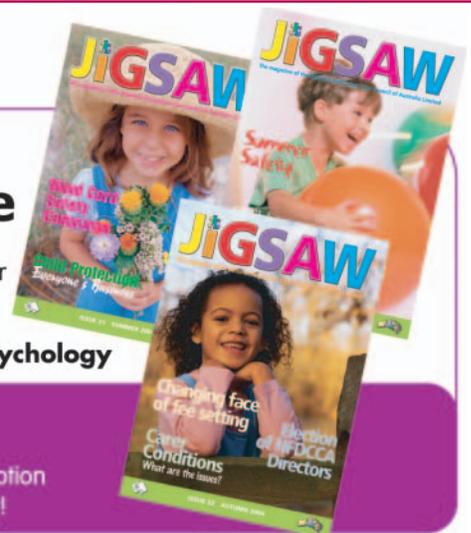
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How to make kids hate reading

By award-winning children's author Jackie French



Humans are storytellers. It's the way we pass down our history – 'official' written histories or family memories in conversations on long car journeys. And books are the best possible way of getting lots of stories.

Adults read books for fun, excitement, titillation, to relieve stress, conquer boredom, visit new universes, gather ideas. But at the same time we encourage kids to read books, 'because they are good for them'. Yes, an enthusiastic reader will have a great vocabulary, have an advantage in everything from writing essays to understanding text books and even have a lesser chance of ending up in jail. But none of those are the reasons we read as adults.

Books are one of life's great adventures. So why don't some kids read?

1. The wrong books

So often I meet despairing parents who adore reading – but despite all the books they've tempted their kids with, their children still aren't avid readers. Temperament often skips a generation. The very books you loved are the ones your kids may find boring. (They may have a lot more in common with their grandparents.) And the more kids are urged to read books they find boring, the more they are convinced that reading as an activity is boring too.

Many boys – and a few girls too – just don't like fiction. (I'm married to a man like that!

They do like reading – but they want it to be about *real* things. They like stories too, but they need to be *real* stories, like histories and biographies.)

Sometimes, with the best intent in the world, 'non-fiction' kids are coaxed to read funny, light stories – and find them totally unsatisfying. Often, again with the best intentions, kids are given short, funny books. This is the type of book a reluctant reader will choose if they're told they *have* to read a book – the shorter the better. But a more challenging book may be the one that will really show the child how satisfying books can be.

You know you've found the right book for a child when they clutch it to them and refuse to stop reading to eat dinner and want a copy of their very own, even if their older brother owns one already.

Let kids choose their own books, at the library and the bookshop! Time after time when I'm signing books at a bookshop, I see parents urge kids to read the book they're sure their child will love – and miss the signals when the child is really fascinated by something their parent would find uninteresting.

Books aren't like broccoli – you don't have to finish it because it's good for you. Never make kids finish a book! (We don't as adults, so why should they?) Kids can be intimidated by a new kind of book or longer

books or books without illustrations if they feel they *have* to read it all. Let kids read six books at once: a long book, a funny book, a book for the bathroom and a book for their bed ... so they can read exactly what they feel like reading!

Kids need to be taught how to *find* books. Even adults find it hard to find the books they like! Teach kids about bookshops, libraries, swapping books with mates, second-hand bookshops. Teach kids how to 'taste' a book, reading a bit here and there to see if it's one they'd like. Too much pressure to do it *properly* only turns them off the whole idea.

2. Learning difficulties

I'm dyslexic – a useful catchphrase that just means I have problems reading the way most people do. With my form of dyslexia it's torture to try to read a few big words on a page or, even worse, follow the line of text with my finger. With the very best of intentions, so often kids with my form of dyslexia are given reading texts with lots of white space, bright pictures and large text ... and all this teaches them is that they are very, very dumb, not to be able to read even baby words.

There are far too many reasons why kids may have problems learning to read to go into here (see *Rocket your child into reading*). But please, please, please, speaking as a

dyslexic reader and as a parent and aunt of dyslexic kids too, *kids who have reading difficulties need different teaching methods from kids who are just slow learners.*

You need to know *why* a kid has problems to work out the best way to help them. There is no one size fits all, portmanteau solution for reading problems – they are as individual as the children who are affected by them. Does this child need a speech pathologist? An occupational therapist to help them learn to concentrate? A specialist ophthalmologist who'll give them exercises to improve tracking and coordination? And this is just the start!

Kids also learn in different ways. Some kids are 'kinetic learners' – usually active boys but also many girls who literally process information better if they're physically moving around. Kids don't have to sit still to learn to read! Give them a water pistol so they can make their letters on the paving outside, or in the sandpit.

Often girls are 'social learners' – things are only real to them when they share it with their friends! So sit them at the table with their stuffed animals, so lessons are shared – then they can teach the dog to read as well.

'Books aren't like broccoli – you don't have to finish it because it's good for you.'

3. Television

Kids need to learn many things to learn to read: how to track, concentrate, coordinate, know how words are pronounced ... and the trouble is, kids who watch a lot of TV don't learn any of these!

Do you remember the game we used to play as kids? You throw the ball at a wall with one hand, then the other hand, then under one leg ... and no one ever said, 'Hey, kids, this is a great tracking and coordination exercise'. It was just fun!

The games kids play in every society are the ones they need to learn adult skills. But when kids watch TV they just sit there! When the TV is on all the time, too, kids aren't learning how words are pronounced – it's hard to concentrate with a blur of voices around you all the time.

Encourage kids to *do* things while they watch TV! Dangle a foam ball from the light fitting and encourage them to hit it with each hand, then kick it with each foot. Give them blocks, Lego, encourage them to dance, sew, knit, draw. The earlier they learn that TV viewing time is a time to *do* things, not just sit and absorb, the better!

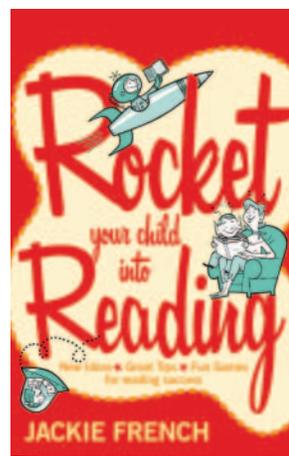
You might also find that the kids are less tetchy once they are actively engaged rather than in that strange, zoned-out state of passivity that is conventional TV viewing. Often their behaviour (querulous, restless, irritable) indicates that they are bored, even

though that is not what they would express if they were asked.

Books are the best way to journey into as many universes as possible. They're fun, they're mind stretching, they're a refuge. A life without books is like a life without chocolate, multiplied a million times. We need to teach kids that reading is highly desirable, secret adult's business, the key to a universe of books.

Jackie French

Jackie is the author of over 100 books for children and adults, with over 40 literary and children's choice awards in Australia and overseas. Her book *Rocket your child into reading* (Harper Collins) is about how to help all children to read and love books.



Rocket your child into reading, published by Harper Collins, is available for \$19.95 from all good bookstores

The Children's Book of the Year awards

The Children's Book Council of Australia recently announced its shortlist for the 2005 Book of the Year awards.

Books beneath the category of 'Early childhood' are as follows:

2005 Book of the Year: Early childhood

Dray, Matt	<i>Dougal the garbage dump bear</i>	Viking, Penguin Books Australia, 2004
Farrer, Vashti Illus. Neil Curtis	<i>Mr Noah and the cats</i>	(Start-Ups) Lothian Books, 2004
Fox, Mem Illus. Judy Horacek	<i>Where is the green sheep?</i>	Viking, Penguin Books Australia, 2004
Graham, Bob	<i>Tales from the waterhole</i>	Walker Books, 2004
King, Stephen Michael	<i>Mutt dog!</i>	Scholastic Press, Scholastic Australia, 2004
Wild, Margaret Illus. Donna Rawlins	<i>Seven more sleeps</i>	Working Title Press, 2004

For more information on the Children's Book Council, visit: www.cbc.org.au.

Feature

What if....?

ART

as language in early childhood



'Is art really important?'

'What is art?'

Questions like these are usually better argued in my house over a couple of bottles of wine and a good dinner party. But of course, there are no easy answers. Nevertheless we expect to see, in any early childhood setting or classroom, samples of children's colourful paintings, drawings and visual representations. But *why* do we do art with young children ... and how do we read it? There is any number of ways of seeing art: it gives schools and settings a 'look'. We read it as evidence of busy, happy, healthy children. It is other to 'work'. It is a tradition in early childhood settings, the origins of which are perhaps lost on us. It is a means of 'self-expression', 'creativity'. It is 'therapeutic'. It helps develop fine motor skills (this, as a *main* reason, can set my teeth on edge!). Each of these views of art carry some truths, and can shape the decisions we make about how, when and why we teach art.

I have many conversations with both pre-service and in-service teachers about the importance of 'creativity', 'self-expression' and 'art', and we nod our heads and agree – sometimes while we are looking together at 25 paper plates displayed on the wall, decorated fairly identically to resemble, say, a stylised version of a lion. Paul Duncum (2001) refers to this as 'bunny-bum' art, and in this article, I attempt to explore some of these ways of seeing art, and in so doing, raise some new questions.

What if there was no such thing as art?

Can you imagine a world without art? We would have very little ancient history, no cave paintings, Egyptian hieroglyphics, records of ancient people's religious beliefs, customs or culture. No weavings, pottery. No music – no blues, jazz, hula, Beethoven, Mozart, nursery rhymes, Rolling Stones, Beatles, Elvis, Powderfinger, Wiggles. No Michelangelo, Salvador Dali, Albert Namatjirra, Frida Kahlo. No cathedrals, galleries. No Stonehenge, pyramids, temples, Eiffel Tower. No movies – no *Sound of Music*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, *Mad Max*, *Finding Nemo*. No novels – no *Pride and Prejudice*, *Da Vinci Code*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. No poets, dancers, actors, designers. No *Kath and Kim* ... I can't go on! This would mean we were condemned to evenings of *Big Brother* and *Burke's Backyard* ... or watching the grass grow.

Our knowledge of the world, and our existence as human beings would be vastly different without art. It is art that sets us apart from other living things, and it is art which can lift us to a higher plane, sometimes helping us to see, feel and express what words cannot say.

When art is all this and more, I can't help but think it is sold short when we justify 'bunny-bum' art and colouring in with the argument that it assists with the development of fine motor skills. I think you would agree that those who created the cave paintings, the *Mona Lisa*, the hieroglyphics, were on about more than developing their fine motor skills. They wanted us to see things. They were engaged in creative acts which speak to us across time and place.

What if there was a language that everyone in the world spoke?

There is ... it's art. I am not referring to the language of art catalogues:

'It became a cliché in the work of followers like Palma il Giovane, but here it has all the force of a novel idea'.

' ... is regarded by Professor Michael Jaffé of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, as a masterpiece and a splendid example of Van Dyck's Genoese portraiture'.

I mean a language that you can know with your mind, heart, body, and 'soul', if you like. I feel it when I walk into a cathedral, when I look at a sunset, and when I look at one of Nolan's paintings of the vast, empty interior landscape of Australia. It can bring a lump to my throat when I watch a sad play or movie, and I empathise with the actors. I can feel a thrill when I watch the New Zealand haka, or African tribespeople, in full regalia, singing and dancing their tribal music. Gospel choirs can lift me, and reggae music can make me want to party. Art can help us to laugh and cry – at weddings, funerals, and other big events in our lives. The national anthem can move me, and so can *Waltzing Matilda*. For that matter, the flags of countries can say so much, through simple combinations of colours, shapes and lines. The Union Jack, in the corner of the Australian flag, tells a story of our history and colonisation.

What if you really wanted to learn this language, so you could read, speak and write it ... but nobody would teach you?

Then you would experience all the feelings of being illiterate ... you would feel disempowered, foolish, constrained and inadequate. Eventually, you would give up trying to communicate. You might even convince yourself that the language is silly, and that you have no interest in it. When you tried to become proficient in this language, people told you to just experiment and explore, and you will naturally come to understand. They simply provided you with a sometimes vast array of raw materials, frequently changed these materials, and told you that all attempts were absolutely brilliant. They refused to help you, even when you could see room for improvement, and when you asked for their

help. If artistic development and mastery is, indeed, a natural occurrence, why then are we not all fantastic artists?

How do artists learn to paint, draw, sculpt? They are taught. Many of the earlier artists studied from their masters for years. Currently, most artists have been trained in art for at least as long as we all have to become educators.

Where does this 'hands off' approach come from? The taboos against 'teaching', particularly in early childhood education, are persistent when it comes to art (McArdle, 2001). One of the most pervasive of these beliefs is that correcting children's artwork, or saying anything less than praise, will damage the child's self-esteem. But what builds self-esteem? A sense of confidence, accomplishment and mastery.

Let's think about how we teach children to read and write the English language. We call on a vast repertoire of strategies. We demonstrate; we have conversations; we provide opportunities for frequent practice; we correct; we drill; we teach skills and techniques; we question; we expose children to models of exemplary language; we immerse them in the language. Imagine if we were teaching children to learn to read and we announced that, since they had been working with letters and words for a few weeks, we were going to change things for this week. We don't want them to be bored so we will introduce a new 'gimmick', and for this week, they will not work with letters and words, but instead, will work with a piano and a basketball. And yet, instead of teaching children the skills and techniques for successful use of the basic tools for artistic communication—brushes and pencils—we urge them to communicate with feathers, balloons and marbles. Such gimmicks produce random results, not deliberate communication.

Conclusion

I hope my questions have started you thinking about your approach to art education, and I will finish with a couple more 'what ifs':

What if we said: 'I'm not very good at maths, so the children in my class don't do much. Never mind, they will get to do more next year when they go to Ms Maths' class'?

What if we charged children a 'literacy levy' to buy their reading books?

What if we helped all children to master art as a language, and help them to make their learning visible? Imagine what we would learn about our children.

Felicity McArdle

Senior Lecturer & Course Coordinator
School of Early Childhood
Queensland University of Technology

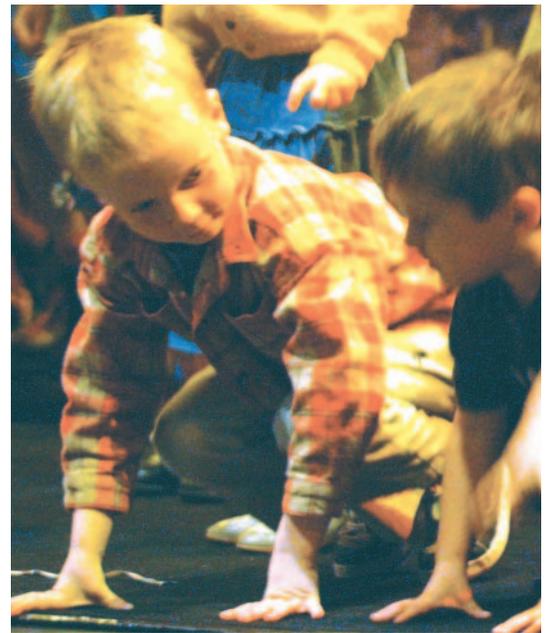
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- Duncum, P. (2000). Christmas and Easter art programs in elementary school. *Art Education*, 53(6), 46-53.





Photos courtesy of Sydney Opera House and Giulia Elliott-Hall



Kids at the House

Performing arts for children at the Sydney Opera House

Early childhood educators provide many wonderful musical experiences for young children, but little can beat the magic of a performance at the Sydney Opera House. And when that performance is a special program aimed at young children, they are transported to a clapping, toe-tapping and knee-slapping world of folk, jigs, reels and polkas, or a world of fantasy, far-away lands and mystical creatures.

Kids at the House is a season of stimulating, diverse and quality performing arts events for young children at the Sydney Opera House. Opera House programs for children have run for well over a decade. The best-known are the *Baby Proms* for children two-five years. Other programs for children up to eight years run in the school holidays. A newer program, *House Ed*, is designed for older school groups.

Noel Jordan, Producer of Young Audience Programs at the Opera House, has a dream job for any artist. A former drama teacher, he plans and curates the children's events and puts together a program that has a special 'flavour' for children and accompanying adults. He says that 'art helps children make sense of their lives and the world around them' and he aims to make each show interactive, thrilling and amazing – even for adults.

Like early childhood educators, Noel knows that music experiences are especially valuable for young children. They help them interact with each other and think creatively and abstractly. And they have the added bonus of helping build literacy and numeracy skills.

A trip to a special children's performance at the Opera House is an holistic experience, as we found out on a visit to the *Baby Proms* concert *Jig-a-Jig-Jig* with Ollie, aged three, and Emma, five. First there was the ferry ride to Circular Quay in the centre of Sydney. Then a picnic lunch in the Botanical Gardens – complete with rolling down the grassy hills and playing with other visiting children. Finally, there was the climb up the huge flight of stairs to the Opera House for the performance. Luckily there's also lift access for littlies and strollers.

The Sydney Opera House *Baby Proms* performers have children clapping, stamping, singing, and dancing their way through a performance. Children also get to try out a range of musical instruments and one lucky child gets to conduct the orchestra.



Watching the orchestra play at the speed of a child's conducting is always fun.

The recent season by Canadian folk group *Jig-a-Jig-Jig* took children on a journey through rousing, traditional folk music and contemporary Canadian tunes. They were all played on traditional instruments including accordions, mandolins, banjos, concertinas, fiddles, flutes, tin whistles and guitars, and the children just couldn't sit still!

Each new season of children's programs at the Opera House features a range of quality Australian and international works that are designed to embrace the creative imagination of the child.

'This year's program of music and simple, dramatic storytelling catapults children into distant landscapes, brimming with mystical creatures. Some of the tales told will be familiar and well-loved, whilst others are bold and new, connecting young people to contemporary culture through one of its most ancient art forms', says Noel, adding that school holiday performances are also provided by well-known groups from around Australia. For instance:

- Adelaide's Patch Theatre Company, who will be bringing their show *Pigs, Bears and Billy Goats Gruff* – a celebration of classic stories exploring the power of the number three;
- Perth's Barking Gecko Theatre Company, who will be presenting *Hidden Dragons* – a production that looks at one boy's journey towards accepting his cultural heritage as a Chinese-Australian; and finally

- Canberra's Jigsaw Theatre, who will be bringing *Arborio*, an exuberant theatrical two-hander exploring friendship, determination and ingenuity – all on a gigantic grain of rice!

Each one of these blends a combination of familiar and traditional theatrical experiences with bold, new drama and musical styles including 'vocal gymnastics'.

In an effort to open Opera House children's performances to a wide audience, Noel Jordan explained the Arts Access Strategy. This offers free transport and reduced ticket prices for educational groups. There are also reduced prices for child care group bookings. Some programs tour regional centres in New South Wales.

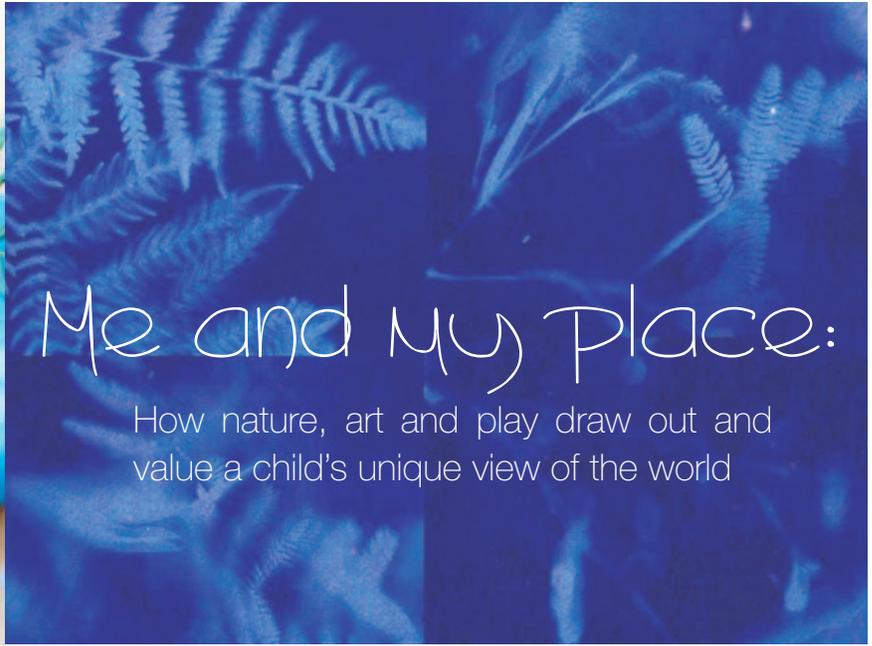
Finally, several children's Opera House events come with notes for parents and educators to help make the experience as meaningful as possible.

Program details and teacher notes are available at www.sydneyoperahouse.com/kids.

Alison Elliott

Editor, *Every Child* and Research Director, Early Childhood Education
Australian Council for Educational Research





Bull ants and bracken

Imagine a group of three- and four-year-olds engrossed in open-ended and playful encounters with bracken, gum leaves and bark from their backyards and kindergarten playground. Picture their excitement as they use these to create a range of artworks. Hear them talking with curiosity about their local environment as they make playdough embossings and large-scale drawings of hand-picked plants.

Immersing children in diverse art media not only builds knowledge of art techniques but also helps them develop a sensibility for the expressive and graphic qualities of each art process. Children come to understand that art itself is a language that offers many choices for expression.

Exploring and revisiting natural specimens gives them the chance to reveal local knowledge and insight. While making solar graphic prints of a bracken bush, one child notices its sticky sap – this leads to talk of how bracken sap can lessen the intensity of a bull ant sting.

I would definitely use this solar graphic technique again; it's building their confidence and connects them with nature.

– Liz Serritelli, kindergarten teacher, UYCH Children's Centre.

By looking closer at things – it's amazing – the children then go and look closer at other things because they've had this experience.

– Frances Bell, kindergarten assistant, UYCH Children's Centre.

Microscopes and mites

Now imagine a group of Grade Three and Four children in a similar workshop in the beautiful surrounds of the Little Yarra Steiner School. Picture their intense concentration as they create amazingly detailed studies of objects found in their environment. Using microscopes and magnifying glasses, they draw the intricate detail of a range of leaf structures and note with wonder their map-like composition, discovering various insects and leaf diseases through their careful examination. Nature journals from bygone eras and botanical studies of plants and landscapes are explored, as are Indigenous ways of representing place and portraying its spirit.

Revisiting everyday natural objects through art processes allows children to develop a range of art skills and a visual repertoire through which to express the uniqueness of *their* place. Most of all, they have fun engaging with nature in this hands-on way.

Nature journals

Nature journals are a photographic and written representation of the children's work and personal insights along the way. The teacher can use the journals as a significant learning tool, co-constructing further learning experiences by building on the interest areas and discoveries made by the children. By creating a collaborative nature journal, we can celebrate community discoveries.

It's got four, no five, green leaves and lots of red leaves as well ... my picture is big. – Alexander comments on a sprig of gum leaves he has chosen to draw for the nature journal.

Creative Junction

A series of nature journals was created by Yarra Ranges schools and kindergarten groups in the art and nature workshops held as part of the *Creative Junction* project. A Shire of Yarra Ranges and VicHealth initiative, *Creative Junction* sought to connect art and environment to personal, meaningful experience and to develop and express a sense of place and wellbeing through art.

The journals added wealth to the community data, as well as a living archive celebrating the people, place and history of the region. Not so much a scientific record than a way of recording and expressing place through different lenses and world views, these nature journals created a 'seeing eye' that would allow people to slow down their viewing, spend time in the natural environment, and begin to see and listen to the world around them.

Art can be a way of focusing people's attention on the finer grain of nature – the infinite textures, patterns and sheer beauty of nature. What worries me is that we will have a generation of children growing up that doesn't have the capacity to see and value the environment. Art can be used to enhance the capacity to see this wondrous diversity and detail.

– Penelope Figgis, AM, environmental advocate and immediate past vice-president of the Australian Conservation Foundation (pers. comm.).

By also focusing on tactile and sensory engagement with place, nature journals helped participants develop 'a broad sensory appreciation of our landscape which enables appreciation of the environment' (Brady, 2003).

An aesthetic sense of place develops alongside personal discoveries about place. *Creative Junction* gave life to the idea that sensory engagement with nature encourages aesthetic appreciation.

Making learning visible

Howard Gardner, in his collaborative work with Project Zero and the Reggio Emilia educators, speaks of 'making learning visible'. Gardner explains that documenting the learning process 'highlights the world of vision – what one can see, what one can

understand, what one can convey to others in graphic form' (Gardner, 2001).

The *Creative Junction* nature journals made learning visible and will inform future art and environment projects in the Shire of Yarra Ranges. Chris Dupé, manager of Economic, Cultural and Community Development at the Shire commented:

The Creative Junction workshops and the nature journals that were created by the children and the general community as part of those workshops, reflect the value that the Shire places on the natural environment, people's connection to it, and also how vitally important it is for the Council to engage in a relationship with its local schools and child care centres.

Nature journals help children engage with place through an enriching experience of sharing unique insights and discoveries. They are a catalyst for connecting community. The constant use of visual, photographic, oral and text-based documentation of children's input is a powerful means of leaving the children and their community with a rich, visual repertoire of place and personal stories of knowing.

Geraldine Burke

Lecturer in Studio Arts and Art Education
Faculty of Education – Early Childhood and Primary
Monash University

Geraldine is currently working on a joint VicHealth and Shire of Yarra Ranges project at Yarra Junction, aimed at promoting social connection through art and nature-based community activities.

Author's note

Thank you to Karen Malone and Jane Scomazonn who helped me facilitate these nature journal workshops, and to Jane Poynter the project photographer. The nature journals were but one of many art-based community activities that took place as part of *Creative Junction*. Visit www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au for further details of the project.

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Shadow casts at the UYCH Children's Centre create large-scale drawings of the leaves, rocks and nuts found in the kindergarten playground.



Solar graphic prints at the UYCH Children's Centre revisit bracken through a different aesthetic medium.



Intense concentration as children from the Little Yarra Steiner School explore a network of veins in a giant leaf. Through re-seeing the various elements of a tree we are encouraged to re-think the patterns and connections between leaf, branch, trunk, roots and earth.



Children develop an attuned eye exploring diverse leaf shapes and structures.

story *story*

The power of the



'Do you know,' her voice is easy to remember, 'you are two years behind in reading?'

No, I didn't know.

Her next question was: 'What are you going to do about it?'

Even in my confusion and shame a little voice told me that she should be able to answer that question better than I.

What happened to me between the ages of four and eight? I went to school. We sat on hard seats, we recited written work and tables from the blackboard. The days were long and boring. I couldn't wait to get into the playground. I loved to talk, laugh, tell jokes. The teacher would say: 'Empty vessels make the most noise!' As I was always making the most noise, I had to be an empty vessel. Everyone knew that; the class knew that; I knew that. The power of the teacher.

By the time I went to high school, my reading had improved through my natural love of books. But my confidence had not improved. I was terrified of reading in class, and I generally avoided offering opinions. I was an underachiever.

In my last year of high school, I changed from my high school in Zimbabwe to a tutorial college in Cape Town.

A tiny brown-eyed woman of about fifty introduced herself as Mrs O'Brien, our English and history teacher. She began by giving us a test. My heart sank. I looked blankly at the sheet: there was barely one question I could answer. I received my usual low mark. Mrs O'Brien didn't say a word. Instead, she launched into poetry. She began with *The man from Snowy River*.

As she read and talked, the class was transfixed. Although I had not been to Australia, I could see the horses charging over the gullies and through the rivers and past the stringy-barks. Clancy's gnarled Australian face was easily transformed into our African classroom.

When I eventually came to Australia, I immediately recognised the landscape that Mrs O'Brien had so easily portrayed through her reading of that poem.

She taught us South African history. Everything came alive, the Voortrekkers, the Zulus, the massacres, the peace treaties. I was mesmerised. My first assignment received a poor mark, and

one word underneath it, 'condoned'. I had to look it up in the dictionary, and it said, 'forgive, overlook'.

I began to relax and enjoy Mrs O'Brien's classes. Instead of worrying about my performance, I listened and learnt. Mrs O'Brien didn't have to condone my next assignment, or the next. My grades improved until I received a distinction at the end of the year. Her confidence in me had a domino effect on my other subjects, and I did well enough to get into university. The power of Mrs O'Brien.

I suppose Elizabeth Mansutti and Mrs O'Brien are a relatively rare species. They have the talent of being able to transfer knowledge through storytelling. They are also confident and secure within themselves and they trust their instincts with their students. Although most teachers and parents could not aspire to the same status in storytelling, it seems to me we often miss the wood for the trees.

Teachers, and parents, have fantastic resources available today, to help us teach children. Computer programs, videos, lavish coloured picture and text books.

Unfortunately, many of these tools enable us to remain distant from children. A child may find it hard to take risks with a teacher or parent who seems 'unreachable'.

In their *Stories in the classroom*, Bob Barton and David Booth say that 'sharing stories with children allows them to enter worlds of past, present and future, to experience life through the ear, and to absorb print in an interesting, non-threatening significant manner. Listening to stories told or read aloud gives children their future in reading.'

As a teacher I have found oral storytelling to be a magnetic teaching tool. The act of telling the story can be so relaxing for teacher and students, for it is as true now, as it was long ago that 'once upon a time' means the room becomes quiet, everyone draws closer to the fire, and the magic begins.

The power of the story. The power of the teacher.

Gerrie Mackey

www.gerriemackey.com

The power of the story was previously published in *Sydney's Child*, April 2004.

So much pleasure can be found in stories – either from the page or from sitting curled-up in front of a storyteller. But as Gerrie Mackey explains, having the right teacher or caregiver around to help unlock this pleasure can be critical.

Elizabeth Mansutti, a poet, storyteller and teacher made us laugh, cry and listen in an address that lasted an hour and seemed just a few minutes.

The occasion was a conference some time ago, called *Rejoicing in literacy: Voices in Australia*. I had come as an ESL/resource teacher to learn more about assessment, reporting and new literacy programs and ideas. Elizabeth Mansutti, the last speaker, spoke of none of these matters specifically, yet somehow put them all in proportion for me.

She recounted her teaching experience with difficult adolescent students. In an effort to make some contact with these cynical, hard-living students, she put away the books and told them a story. Her version of *The ugly duckling* led to their stories, both written and oral.

I was reminded of the storyteller teacher who saved my own education. The power of the teacher.

My mother was always proud of the fact that I could read before I went to school. We read books together, over and over, until I could turn the pages in all the right places.

Yet, from school, I have no memory of reading. Instead my most vivid memory is this: I had just finished a spelling and reading test. I was sitting in a hot, stuffy little room, just off my classroom. The principal sat in front of me. It was rare to be interviewed by the principal, but my performance obviously warranted being spoken to directly.

Romp, Rhyme and Revelry

Yvonne Winer's latest book, *Stories for telling*, describes the ancient art of storytelling – incorporating drama, puppetry, masks and how you yourself can get involved!

For lo, the story teller comes, let fall the trumpets, hush the drums ...
– Ross, R (1972). *Storyteller*. p. 25.

In his book *Storyteller*, Ramon Ross reflects on the role of the storyteller as musician, lively newscaster, actor and spinner of tales. My latest book, *Stories for telling*, invites you to do all these things and to fall in love with this age-old tradition. It focuses particularly on the use of props such as the many different types of puppets, including glove, shadow and spoon puppets. It also invites us to dramatise stories as we dress up and dance and use masks and percussion instruments together with large cutout cardboard characters – sometimes larger than the children themselves. At the same time, it introduces storytellers to the world

of small theatres, such as laptrays and dioramas.

Stories for telling is an invitation for us all to value childhood. It entices us to romp through many different ways of introducing children from birth to the magical world of playful language and sound, exploring the here and now and the endless possibilities of the imagination. It is a timely reminder that literacy begins at birth – or even from the moment of conception, and is best introduced through the magic of play and oral stories, starting with peek-a-boo games and rhymes and song. Throughout *Stories for telling*, children are respected as enthusiastic and capable participants and imaginative storytellers.

All the props suggested in *Stories for telling* are easy to make, yet readers are encouraged to keep an eye out for the 'unexpected' at community markets where unusual, and sometimes wonderfully historic items (straight from grandma's attic) can be stumbled upon and used as storytelling

props. This way children can share small historic anecdotes as well as become familiar with many items from many cultures. It also suggests ways for making props flexible, such as having multiple detachable heads for some puppets, so that a simple change of clothing or head can turn a single puppet into a Santa, a pirate, a clown, or a nasty old trader who lures monkeys from the forests. A host of photographs by Don Hildred captures these props.

Except where stated otherwise, the stories in *Stories for telling* are my own. Most are participation stories so that children are always encouraged to be part of the story. Hopefully this book will be an invitation to all who work with young children to meet the challenge and to become animated and enthusiastic storytellers decked in hats and shawls, or enveloped in storytelling aprons brimful with puppets peering from magical pockets, all scrambling to take centre stage!

Yvonne Winer



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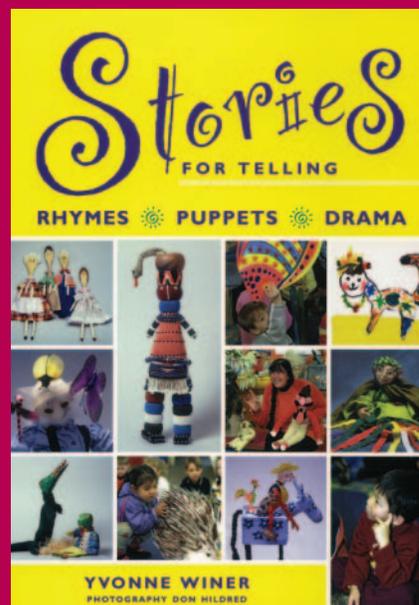
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176 Pages

**Lyn Bower, Department of Early Childhood,
University of Southern Queensland, says it all:**

Stories for Telling is a wonderful resource for all early childhood professionals. Yvonne provides the reader with a wealth of stories, ideas and wisdom that will inspire your imagination and encourage you to step into the magical world of storytelling.

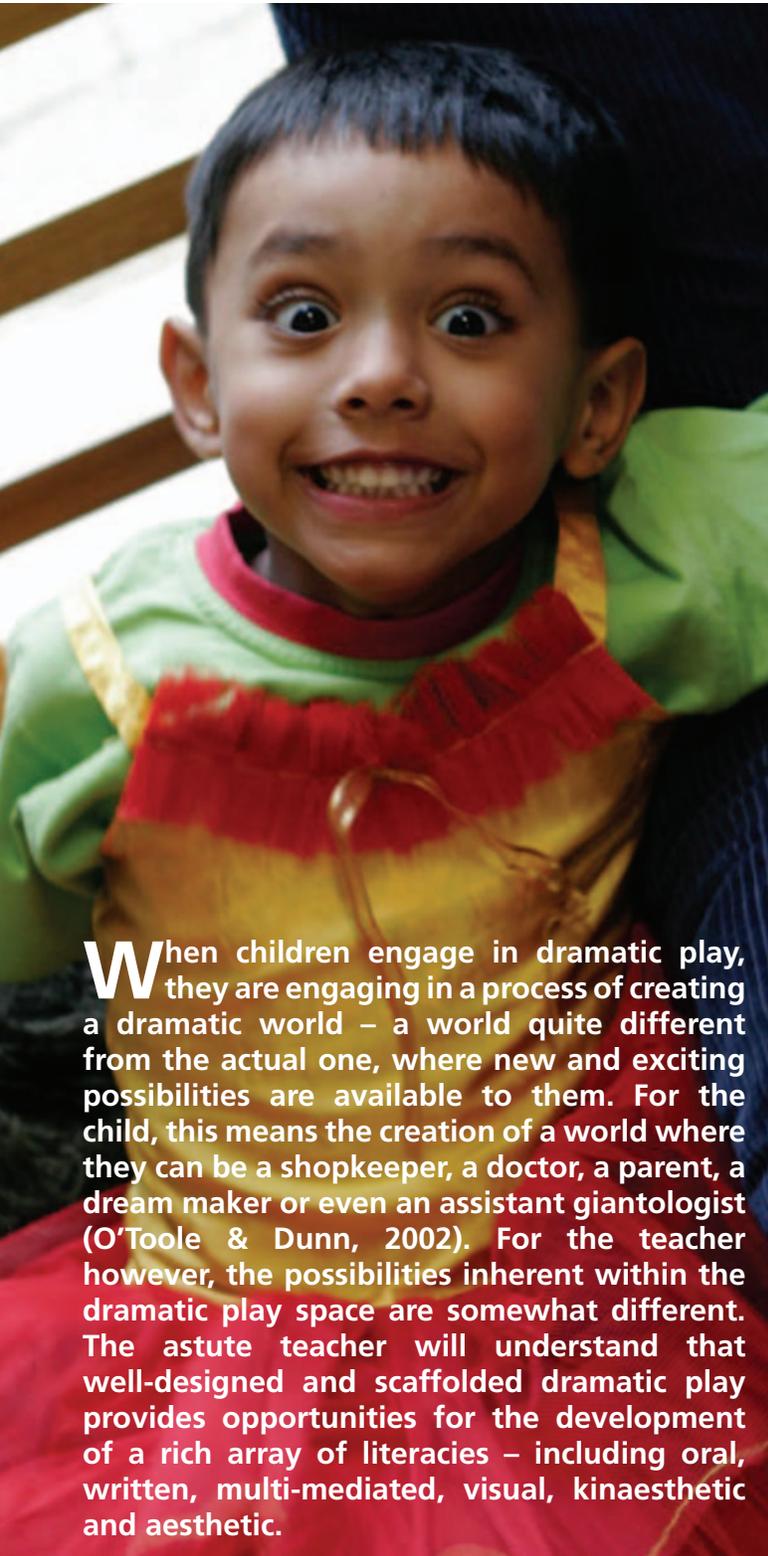
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When children engage in dramatic play, they are engaging in a process of creating a dramatic world – a world quite different from the actual one, where new and exciting possibilities are available to them. For the child, this means the creation of a world where they can be a shopkeeper, a doctor, a parent, a dream maker or even an assistant giantologist (O’Toole & Dunn, 2002). For the teacher however, the possibilities inherent within the dramatic play space are somewhat different. The astute teacher will understand that well-designed and scaffolded dramatic play provides opportunities for the development of a rich array of literacies – including oral, written, multi-mediated, visual, kinaesthetic and aesthetic.

The design of a play space and the learning experiences that precede play are, however, critical for the full potential of dramatic play to be realised. Careful planning is needed to ensure that the space not only meets the literacy development needs of the teacher, but also generates excitement and a real desire amongst the children to engage with the space and the literacy materials and opportunities available within it. A shared understanding of the context itself is also crucial, as is some modelling of possible roles and situations.

Building drama worlds

Four steps to creating literacy-rich dramatic play environments

The following section outlines four steps for developing successful dramatic play environments, with one of the key steps involving the application of the structures and strategies of drama education. This approach to drama emphasises whole group exploration of fictional situations and is usually characterised by the use of teacher-in-role. This strategy sees the teacher working with small or large groups and adopting one or more roles relevant to the dramatic context. From within this role the teacher is able to model relevant language and roles, informally demonstrate how props might be used in the play, and introduce options for a range of literacy experiences.

Step 1 – Select a play context with the potential for opportunities across the full range of literacies.

This step seems deceptively simple – it isn’t. In some cases the decision will be made for you (by the children themselves), but at other times you may want to extend, develop or enrich the possibilities for play by introducing new contexts – contexts that the children would not normally arrive at on their own. For example, the children may be currently showing a deep interest in the insects found around the centre or classroom, but they would be unlikely to spontaneously set up an entomology laboratory or a Pest Busters Bureau! These two play spaces, connected to the topic of insects, offer real opportunities for a whole range of literacy experiences, involving vocabulary and language registers not normally used by the children in their everyday communications.

Also important, in terms of building a literacy-rich play space, is to consider the particular literacies which you want to develop. For example, an ‘under the sea’ dramatic play space may be wonderful for building kinaesthetic or spoken texts, but not so useful in terms of generating written ones. If you want the children to work across a range of literacies, then the key is to choose a context that involves or infers action. In other words, there must be something to *do* in the space and if your goal is the development of written literacy, there must be opportunities to create relevant written documentation. For example, the entomologist’s laboratory or Pest Busters Bureau play spaces can offer opportunities across the entire range of literacies, but only if you include materials within the space that enable these literacies to emerge (see step 3 below).

Step 2 – Develop a shared understanding of the fictional or real world context to be explored in the play space using the teacher-in-role strategy.

Whether the play space is based around a fictional or life-like context, a shared understanding of the roles, situations, tasks and materials

relevant to this space is needed. This shared understanding can be achieved either through real world experiences or dramatic ones; and while real world experiences can be wonderfully rich, they are sometimes difficult and/or expensive to arrange. Indeed, the drama alternative can in some ways provide a more highly-scaffolded experience, as the teacher can simplify and clarify aspects of the context for the children.

A range of drama strategies can be used in this process, with teacher-in-role being the most significant of these. Here the teacher not only introduces some of the roles possible within the space, but can also interact with the children by modelling ways in which materials within the space might be used. For example, in the Pest Busters Bureau experience discussed above, the teacher might use role-play to introduce the children to a customer with a major pest problem who needs their help, or become one of the staff of the Pest Busters company itself. As the teacher chats with the children from within these roles, he/she can also introduce them to the equipment available in the space, such as old mobile phones, maps, pictures of insects, briefcases or even old laptops or keyboards that are able to send messages back to headquarters. Modelling of the use of these materials by the teacher-in-role, along with appropriate accompanying language, is invaluable for facilitating further play and, of course, literacy tasks.

All that is required is for the teacher to select a role relevant to the context, a simple prop that can be used to signal the shift into this role (e.g. a pair of glasses, a briefcase, a nametag, or a combination of these) and, most importantly, decide upon the status of the role they will play. Status is a key aspect of working in role and the status you choose (high, medium or low) will have quite an impact on the play that evolves. It is generally useful to begin by using a low status role – adopting an attitude of someone who doesn't know or doesn't understand, someone who needs the children's help. This approach empowers the children to be the ones who do know and usually leads to them offering to help or support this character in some way. By not knowing how to use a particular piece of equipment or read a map, understand a problem or know what to do with a set of instructions, the teacher is offering opportunities for the children to support the character and therefore engage in a range of exciting and purposeful literacy activities. This desire to help the low status character usually carries over into the play space, where one or more of the children follow in the teacher's steps, adopting a similar role using the props and materials modelled by the teacher within the drama experience. They may begin to converse on the telephone, make lists, record information, create a map, speak to headquarters using top secret codes or even take photographs – all because they have seen the teacher-in-role behave in this way.

Step 3 – Involve the children in the process of designing the play space.

This, of course, is a general practice in most early childhood settings, but when creating a play space following a teacher-structured drama experience, this step takes on a number of new dimensions. First, it is important that you include in the space any items that you used when working in role. This ensures that the children have the opportunity to play your character in their own way within the

space. In addition, given that the play space may have a stronger fantasy element because of the drama work surrounding it, the children need plenty of time to create their own materials. Time will be needed to both make and share these items with the group and plenty of open-ended resources will be needed. One key to generating real excitement is to include resources which the children might not normally have access to (such as micro-cassette recorders). Finally, ensure that you have thought about the possibilities in terms of literacy and included materials that take advantage of these. You will limit the literacy potential of the play if you do not include materials to target these.

Step 4 – Plan for play: including the facilitation of discussions around the 'What's up?' factor.

The final step in pre-play scaffolding is to facilitate discussions about the 'What's up?' factor. Many child-structured play sequences collapse or are unsatisfactory for the players because they lack tension – in other words, nothing much is happening. For play to be successful, there needs to be something happening, just as a good film or book will hold our attention if there is plenty of action. Highly skilled or experienced dramatic players are very good at spontaneously introducing tension into their play texts, but some children struggle with this and their play becomes repetitive and eventually boredom means that the children leave the space or become disruptive.

To overcome these situations, the teacher can support play by holding discussions both before and after play sessions about this 'What's up?' factor. Prior to play commencing for the first time and subsequently as needed, children can work together to brainstorm some ideas about what might be happening in the space. For example, the Pest Buster Bureau's equipment might not be working, or the pests might be getting larger or more dangerous, headquarters might not be happy with the work being done or the book containing information about the pests may have gone missing.

Following each play session, sharing can take place and successful players who have been able to engage in highly imaginative and engaging play can share their experiences and 'What's ups?' with others who are interested. In this way, Creaser's (1989) 'master dramatists' are supporting those who need further experience and opportunities in play.

Of course, the teacher also has an important role once the play begins, especially in terms of deciding how and when they will intervene in the developing play texts ... but that's another story!

Julie Dunn

Lecturer, Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology

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When learning becomes ...

simply irresistible

Transforming the early childhood setting into a creative sanctuary

What is the role of intrinsic motivation in the education of young children – the feelings of enthusiasm, confidence and zeal? Do these emotions assist in helping children take risks, persevere and excel? How can we as early childhood teachers activate these feelings in children, so as to use them as a tool for encouraging children to think, hypothesise, construct and acquire knowledge and understanding?

Motivation can be defined as something that energises and directs behaviour. Once an initial interest is nurtured in young children and they discover the pleasure of enquiry, exploration and self-satisfaction of achievement, then the motivation and desire to further explore, discover and hypothesise takes over. This fosters in children the desire to continue to delve deeper into the learning journey.

Reflecting on current practice in early childhood settings, it appears that children's learning and their opportunities for further learning are often confined to the limits that are part of established theories around age and development. If we are open to seeing it, children will show us that they are more competent and capable than traditionally believed. It is this competence that challenges teachers to see each child as being on an individual and ongoing journey of learning that is not constrained by predetermined developmental expectations.

In an attempt to link theory to practice, let us consider a common element of many traditional programs. Early childhood settings around Australia offer table activities as a major component of their daily program.



These range from the pre-writing exercise comprising recycled paper and a box full of random (sometimes) blunt pencils to the



irresistibly arranged pre-writing experience using mirrors, children's photographs, small sheets of quality paper, envelopes, and well-sharpened pencils with a vase of flowers to add to the aesthetics.

If we think about the definition of 'irresistible' (as 'cannot be resisted, tempting') then it is easy to see the difference. The first provides the basic tools to draw or write while the second offers serendipity, possibilities, exploration, provocations, the unexpected, richness, reflection, experimentation, wonder, curiosity, scope and intellectual engagement. The second display acts as an invitation to the child – offering scope for exploration while nurturing and embracing feelings of identity through the use of photographs of children within the group. It does not give detailed instructions on what 'must' be done but instead suggests what 'could' be done.

The next factor is the children's response – and, in turn, the outcome for them as learners – to these two displays. As the children scan what is on offer, those interested in drawing may come to the table with the paper and

pencils and draw. They will possibly draw pictures just like the ones they have previously drawn. With the second experience, imagine the difference; the children become curious, which in turn generates motivation to want to explore and discover what they were not even looking for.

The teacher now becomes crucial in order to extend the possibilities and opportunities for further learning. It is the role of the teacher to support, facilitate and provoke. It takes an observant and tuned-in teacher to be able to recognise the optimum time to encourage, prompt, praise or question a child. It is a complementary relationship that exists between the teacher's role and the environment's role. Time filling (or time wasting) table activities are transformed to irresistible experiences by the teacher who has moved in his or her thinking beyond just accepting established theories of age and development. The transformation also occurs when the teacher understands the role and power of motivation in the learning process.

Think about another example: the standard bucket of Duplo found in practically every preschool room throughout Australia. Upended on the table, it gives no direction, provokes no imagination and provides no possibilities. The same bucket of Duplo, arranged as a partially-constructed building with photographs of elaborate buildings (even better, of buildings from the local community) arranged alongside, motivates the child to explore further possibilities and to move from the ordinariness of



Duplo to a possible investigation of local architecture, planning and construction methods – allowing children the opportunity to think, hypothesise, construct and acquire knowledge and, ultimately, understanding. Transforming Duplo from a mere table activity to an irresistible experience, so that it continues to promote curiosity and engagement, requires a teacher to take the thoughtful road rather than the easy road when setting up the classroom.

So what are the elements that make an irresistible experience? When planning and designing experiences that capture children's imaginations and unlock their motivation, there needs to be attention to detail, use of abstract items, items that do not have only one purpose in mind, light, reflection,

colour, magic, in 3-D rather than flat on the table, something that sparks curiosity, use of natural materials, cleanliness, organisation, depth, quality and richness.

The writing and Duplo examples are general in their nature and are used to provoke thinking about bringing change to what we offer children. The next step is to relate the irresistible experiences we offer to the particular group of children in the early childhood setting. To do this requires the teacher to know what makes each child the person they are and what makes up the community in which they live. The teacher needs to listen to children, to take notice of what is happening in the community, both local and at a broader level, and, without asking specific questions, to familiarise herself with what makes every child unique. Does a child live on a farm or in a high-rise apartment? Is he or she an only child or from a large extended family? Does the family engage in community events and do they bring something of these events to the early childhood setting? Does the child's interest reflect something that may be a particular passion or occupation of that family? The questions are endless when it comes to getting to know a child because the questions for

each child have to be as unique as each child is. It is not that we ask a thousand questions but that we listen and listen and listen again until we get the answers to the thousand questions that then tell us who each child is. If there are a hundred languages, there are a thousand questions!

In conclusion, if we are to move from table activities, that are often no more than the inventory of the storage cupboard, to irresistible experiences which make thinking irresistible, there are two non-negotiables. The first is the physical action of transforming our ordinary equipment into the extraordinary with thought, imagination and creativity. The other is a teacher who has shifted from the traditional 'owner of the knowledge' to the teacher who knows the individual children within the group and understands the role and power of motivation in their learning process.

Sarah White

Deakin and the Park Schools for Early Learning

This article is based on a workshop that was given at the '... about learning to think and thinking to learn' conference in Canberra, September 2004. The workshop was given by Sarah White and Evelyn Callaghan from Deakin and The Park Schools for Early Learning.

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Book Reviews

Compiled by Robin Morrow,
illustrated by Stephen Michael King

Scholastic Press (2004)

ISBN 1865047821 RRP: \$14.95

And the 'roo jumped over the moon: Australian stories and poems

for children is a collection of 46 stories and poems by Australian writers. As its title suggests, many of the contributions have Australian themes—ranging from landscapes (*The rock pool* by Peter Skrzynecki) to wildlife (*Magpies* by Judith Wright and *Flying Foxes* by Lydia Pendar)—and will resonate with many children's experiences. Others place an Australian spin on classics such as *How many miles to Lilydale* (Stephen Grey) and the D H Souter poem from which the title is taken. Several stories and poems bear no particular reference to Australia apart from the nationality of the authors, but add a richness to the volume for the broader possibilities they provide. Aimed for children four to ten years of age, these can be either read aloud to children or read by older children.

While this collection is mainly made up of poems, the two genres work well alongside each other as the stories are short and punchy and continue the rhythmic motif the poems provide. This is further reinforced by Stephen Michael King's illustrations that offer a visual continuity to the text. While this volume is, in essence, a celebration of Australian writers, I felt that children and adults would have enjoyed reading more about the contributors and their writings through the inclusion of brief biographies. Such an emphasis might have enriched the sense of cultural diversity so characteristic of Australian society – but not immediately evident in this collection of contemporary poems and stories.

Jane Page

The University of Melbourne

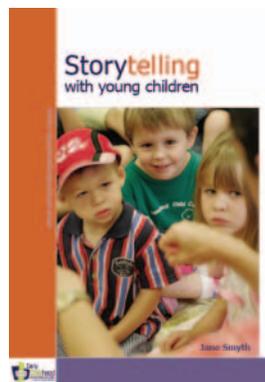
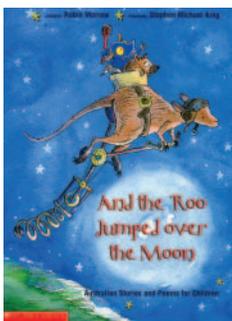
This is a book that explores Australia through stories and poems. It is lots of fun. Some of the poems and stories remind me of things I have done. I like *Statue* by Sally Odgers because it reminds me of beach holidays and how it feels to be watery and sticky and sandy. I also liked the language the writers used. There is a poem about a train called *There and back* by Libby Hathorn. The rhythms and rhymes she uses to describe the journey end up sounding like the clickety clack of the train. I also thought *Morning and evening* by Gwenda McKay is a wonderful poem. The words she uses makes you think of the passing of time at each end of the day. One of my favourite stories is *The happy sad car* by Lyn Donald because it teaches you that being different is OK. I think lots of children would be impressed with this book because it has many stories and poems that you can read over and over again.

Laura Marshall

7 years, 7 months old

And the Roo Jumped over the Moon

Australian stories &
poems for children



Storytelling with young children

Jane Smyth

Early Childhood Australia (2005)

ISBN 0975193562

RRP: \$14.95

This book is a gem! Jane Smyth has covered her topic thoroughly and taken the reader logically through the necessary steps for telling stories to young children. She establishes clearly the difference between storytelling and story reading – in storytelling the 'illustrations' are in the listener's imagination. The essential link between the teller and the listener is stressed – the wonderful sharing of a joyful experience – as well as the need for comfort and reassurance.

She reminds us that we all have stories to tell and that young children love to hear about familiar experiences. It would have been encouraging for readers if she had mentioned the value of family stories in the wider social context. They are part of a family's history and, hence, that of the nation's.

Smyth demonstrates how oral storytelling plays a vital part in the development of literacy skills. Perhaps this could have been extended to discuss the use of nursery rhymes, which are the precursors of literacy. Even the smallest infant absorbs the rhythms and cadences of these old favourites.

The practical details of storytelling to young children are well covered and the author gives some useful tips, wisely noting the importance of not leaving the listener confused or frightened – a safe resolution is necessary for young children. The inclusion of a few sample stories is a handy guide; although, where she speaks of using props to enhance storytelling, she could perhaps also have mentioned the short attention span of young children and the consequent need for variety in the presentation of stories.

This is a clear, concise and wise resource. Highly recommended.

Mary French

Secretary of the ACT Storytellers' Guild

Regular storyteller at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

The boy who would be a helicopter: The uses of storytelling in the classroom

Vivian Gussin Paley

Harvard University Press (1990), distributed in Australia by Inbooks – the retail arm of James Bennett Pty Ltd

ISBN 0674080300 RRP: \$34.95

This book, by Vivian Paley – an inspired and inspiring preschool teacher – is about much, much more than storytelling. It is also about play and connecting play and stories. Paley sees play as the ‘practising of problems’ and the real business of life. And her book, at a very deep level, is about respecting each child and what he or she brings to the early childhood classroom and its complex and challenging relationships.

Paley’s use of storytelling as an integral part of her daily curriculum is a wonderful way of developing literacy and involving many other concepts within and through the children’s stories. The stories come from the children and evolve out of the children’s learning and emotional and social needs – and they become the children’s pathway forward. Paley sees her role – as a teacher – in making connections: connections between people and connections between images and ideas.

In this book, Paley explores her educational theories in the context of the experiences of the children in her group. The book follows the journey of one child, Jason, from being outside of the group and struggling with his personal social and learning challenges to his eventual joining in with the other children. She shows how the children incorporate Jason’s needs in with their own needs and learning pathways until he becomes a part of the group. As a teacher, she shows the importance of using what the children bring, moving at their pace and allowing them to find their own pathways and solutions within the safe framework of her capacity to contain their feelings and behaviour. Through Jason’s experiences, the reader can see the process of the teacher’s facilitation of learning and emotional progress in the classroom.

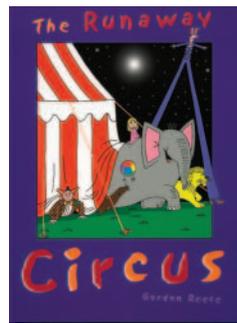
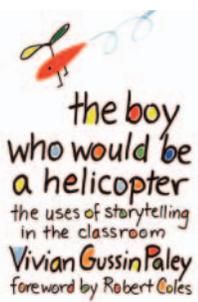
Paley emphasises the importance of stories in education by using Jason’s story to demonstrate the way the children in her class move forward in their learning, through all the challenges that Jason and others present. Paley sees herself as a learner and throughout the book intersperses comments about what she and the children are learning from their storytelling and play and, in doing so, she highlights the importance of respectful observation.

Although Paley shows how her method of teaching and learning develops educational concepts, especially literacy, her focus on relationships and connections reminds us that perhaps the most important qualities for succeeding with education are the personal and social ones.

This is a complex but wise and wonderful little book and would make a very good discussion point for staff development sessions for early childhood educators.

Pam Linke

Centre for Parenting
Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service
Child and Youth Health, SA



Gordon Reece

Lothian Books (2005)

ISBN 0734407378

RRP: \$26.95

The Runaway Circus

‘One night Joanna dreams that she runs away to join the circus. But when she wakes up, she discovers that the circus has run away to join her!’ So begins this picture book by Gordon Reece.

Joanna is delighted that her home—and later her school—is taken over by the magician, lions, seals, trapeze artists, escapologist, contortionist, fire-eater, bearded lady, man on stilts, clowns and the world’s fattest man. Other animals from the circus are present as well – including the bear, giraffe, elephant and tigers. The story is presented in brief sentences on each page, accompanied by detailed illustrations that are eye-catching and offer more information about the action. The illustrations are brightly coloured and clear. Children with whom I have read this book were much more interested in the illustrations than the text. The text is set in sand font, which does make it more interesting than many others, however beginning readers sometimes were confused, for example when the word ‘so’ looked remarkably like the numeral 50.

Children enjoyed the book, focusing on the illustrations and the absurdity of these. They laughed a lot at the fire-eater making toast for everyone at breakfast time and at finding a contortionist in the cupboard. The ability of the knife thrower to scare school bullies produced a slight chuckle, and a hint of concern, but it was unclear from the children as to whether this concern was with bullies or throwing knives – clearly something that is not permitted at school!

As an adult reader, I was less comfortable than the children with the stereotypical images – such as the boring maths teacher who was made to disappear, the science teacher who became a human cannon ball, the bearded lady and the world’s fattest man, and wondered how representative these are of modern circuses. Despite this, children remained fascinated by the magic of the circus.

Sue Dockett

School of Education and Early Childhood Studies

University of Western Sydney



Photo courtesy of Aussie Shots

Clapping hands & dancing feet:
Exploring creative expression with

Hi-5

A child is not a vase to be filled, but rather, a fire to be lit. – Rabelais.

The Hi-5 philosophy

Hi-5 is a show for children aged between two and eight years. It presents a bright, energetic world, in which music and dancing, fun and imagination are at the heart of all learning and play activities. It features five dynamic, multi-talented performers whose warmth and energy invite children to actively share the excitement of exploring the world through song and dance.

Hi-5 aims to encourage each child to develop their own potential and celebrate their individuality. As an important part of this aim, *Hi-5* always strives to open up the world of the imagination and to encourage children to express their creativity through whatever mode seems natural to them. In each episode of *Hi-5*, a theme relevant to young children is explored in a range of imaginative ways, through a range of creative art forms, including music, dance/movement, drama, visual art, and storytelling.

To connect and energise all of the ideas in the show, music, song, and dance weave prominently through each episode. This is one of the most distinctive features of *Hi-5* and it is probably the most important ingredient of the show's success.

Move your body! The joy of song and dance

My little girl has been dancing about ever since she watched it.

– Comment from a mother in a UK study of *Hi-5*, 2001.

Hi-5 has always prided itself on being 'anti-couch potato' television. Every segment of the show contains songs, music and movement. The songs are catchy, with infectious rhythms that make children want to get up and move! Feedback from parents and from a UK study (2001) emphasise the active engagement children have with the show – children spontaneously join in with the

movement, music and stories in each program. Movement and dance, as well as being enjoyable, can help children to build their coordination, fine and gross motor skills and spatial awareness.

In *Hi-5*, opportunities for children to join in with songs and dances are enhanced through repetition. Repetition is a technique (often used in children's television) to help children gain mastery over new material and build their confidence in participating. In *Hi-5*, the *Song of the week*, which explores a weekly theme (such as Love, Games or Holidays), is repeated every day of the week and also at the beginning and end of each episode. Dance moves for the songs are carefully choreographed so that they are movements that children can follow and learn – especially for the chorus. The lyrics are designed to be catchy and easily remembered. The shorter songs within segments ('songlets') are also repeated during the segment to give children a greater chance to become familiar with actions and words and to join in confidently.

Fun movement and dance are also specifically explored in Charli's *Body move* segments. Movement is a natural way for children to relate to the world (consider a child imitating an aeroplane, making aeroplane noises and 'flying' around the room). In her segments, Charli reinforces concepts from previous segments by re-interpreting them physically. If Tim makes a musical kite, Charli might turn her body into a kite, drifting and swaying in the wind. Charli encourages children to jump, clap, throw, crawl and twist along with her in imaginative ways – e.g. doing a dragon dance, playing imaginary instruments, being a curious penguin on slippery ice, dancing with scarves to a rainbow song, or stretching like a piece of elastic. Charli also explores fine motor skills playfully in her segments (e.g. turning her fingers into little birds on a branch or pretending to be a pianist playing an imaginary piano).

Playing around: Dramatic play in *Hi-5*

According to Bruner, all theory in science and all narrative and interpretive knowing in the humanities is dependent on the human capacity to create; to imagine a world.

– Wagner, 1998, p. 62.

Children's early drama experiences flow naturally out of their instinct for imaginative play – sometimes called 'dramatic play' or 'pretend play'. They play out situations, such as 'families', 'going shopping', 'hospitals', and can take on a range of roles within these improvised dramas. In this way, children can 'try on' other characters and explore what it's like to 'walk in another person's shoes'. Dramatic play of this nature is not a performance. It is spontaneous and free play that is not necessarily designed for an audience (however, budding actors often start to hone their skills in these contexts!). Dramatic play is valuable for young children, as it can help them to develop social/interactive skills and language skills. It can also help them learn to express their thoughts and feelings and to explore different aspects of themselves (Parsons, 1991).

Hi-5 helps scaffold and model such pretend play in the way it uses imaginative role play to explore situations (both real and fantasy) and different characters. Comments in the UK study (2001) affirmed the fact that *Hi-5* encouraged positive role-playing for children. Roles and situations are explored through stories in the *Sharing stories* segment at the end of the show and also in individual segments – e.g. Kellie and Chats might pretend to be fire-fighters, Nathan might play at being a truck driver, Tim might go on a fantasy journey through the jungle, meeting monkeys, snakes and even crocodiles ...

Just as children embellish their creative play with props and dress-ups, so too do the *Hi-5* presenters. While sometimes these are quite sophisticated in *Hi-5*, often it's as simple as putting on a black coat to become a penguin, donning a pair of ears to become a rabbit, using a clothes basket to make a tortoise shell, driving a car made from a cardboard box, or using a metal colander for a space helmet. A simple costume can make a world of difference in creating a sense of character, and children love to dress up as part of their dramatic play.

By watching segments and stories where the presenters take on characters, children see ways that they can experiment with playing different roles (e.g. trying out different voices, movements, wearing simple costumes). Children can re-enact their favourite scenes, stories and characters from the show, or they may be inspired to invent their own. The show acts as a creative springboard, opening up imaginative possibilities and demonstrating the potential for fun, creative play.

Suggestions for enhancing children's imaginative play

Caregivers can act as a sort of 'Stage Manager', providing resources that encourage children's dramatic play and add to the enjoyment. Such resources include:

- **time** (blocks of uninterrupted time are necessary for satisfying dramatic play);
- **space** (help to set up a space as a shop, a tent, a forest);
- a box of **dress-ups** and fabrics (old clothes, aprons, scarves, different-sized pieces of fabric – e.g. a white sheet to create a world of ice, green fabric for a jungle); and
- things that can be used for simple **props** (e.g. cereal boxes, cardboard tubes, an old telephone, envelopes, kitchen utensils).

(Adapted from Davidson, 1996).

You could use *Hi-5* as a jumping-off point by watching an episode, then helping a child to collect costumes and props relevant to a favourite segment. For example, if Kellie and Chats are playing 'post-office', you could help the child set up a desk—provide letters, old stamps/stickers, a hat, a big bag—and then let the play begin!

Final words

Television needn't be a drain on children's time that prevents creative exploration. On the contrary, a show such as *Hi-5* that encourages joyful expression through music and dance and that stimulates the imagination can hold many rewards. With thoughtful caregiver interaction and opportunities for follow-up play, *Hi-5* can be a spark that helps to light the creative fire.

Catherine Martin

Script Producer, *Hi-5*

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'The show acts as a creative springboard, opening up imaginative possibilities and demonstrating the potential for fun, creative play.'

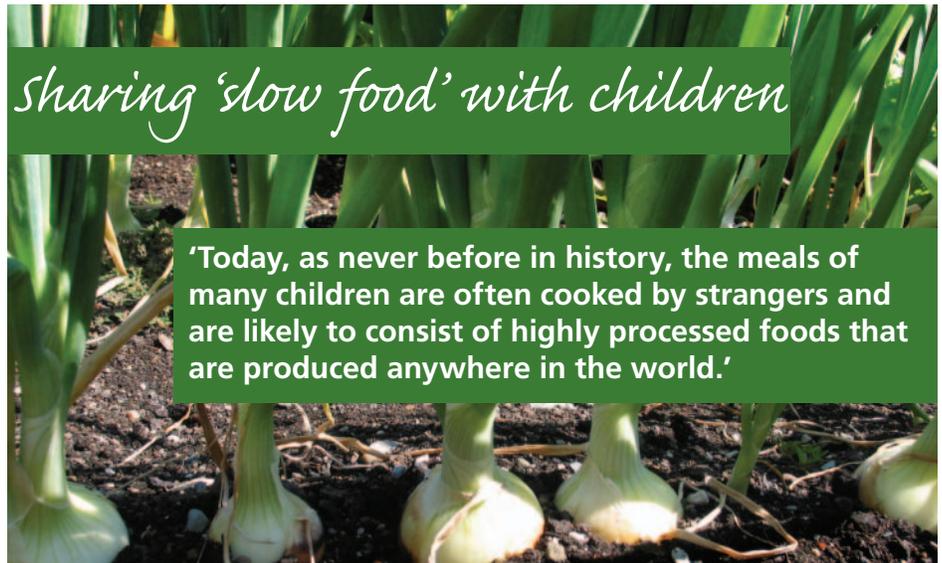
Anti-fast food messages: *sharing 'slow food' with children*

Disturbingly, fast food messages mislead us and our children by suggesting that food is cheap and abundant, that abundance is permanent and that resources are infinite. Standardisation is promoted as more important than quality and speed is often seen as a virtue. Slow food is anti-fast food. So what are anti-fast food or 'slow food' values?

The Slow Food Movement advocates for alternative messages to fast food messages that permeate our society by promoting local production and food making. The movement was founded in 1986 in Italy by Carlo Petrini. Petrini, a journalist, was appalled at the opening of Italy's first McDonald's in Rome. He believed that regional foods and small producers would become extinct and he set out to save them. Furthermore, he wanted to revive and 'celebrate the tastes of food and highlight the importance of the senses in relation to food and eating'. In essence, the Slow Food Movement (see www.slowfood.com and www.terramadre2004.org) aims to wage intellectual war on the homogenisation and globalisation of food around the world, thus protecting endangered animals, plants, traditional ways of food making and preparing and cooking food (Nistri, 2003).

Undoubtedly, beliefs and values that we hold about food and eating are conveyed to children on a daily basis. Today, as never before in history, the meals of many children are often cooked by strangers and are likely to consist of highly processed foods that are produced anywhere in the world. Meals are often 'eaten casually, hungrily, in haste and even at times, alone.' (Alice Waters, 2002). Thus, there is potential for children to be vulnerable to the misleading messages of fast food. Waters (2002) urges us to provide opportunities for every child to have a relationship with the land, to know how to nourish themselves and to know how to connect with the community around them.

Slow food schools' projects have already begun in Italy and in America as a result of the messages from the Slow Food Movement. Such projects focus on creating



an awareness in children of their own eating patterns and those of their families and friends. They also provide a curriculum that is laden with 'hands on' experiences for children so that they can engage in growing and preparing food. For example in 1996, Alice Waters created *The Edible Schoolyard Project* in Berkeley. A kitchen classroom was created where children could learn about staple foods eaten around the world, and get a chance to transform the garden's harvest into creatively prepared meals. Thus, the cooking of food was a lesson in sharing ideas and pooling labour; the eating offers an opportunity for unhurried social interaction.

We can all become actively involved in celebrating slow food with children as they grow, harvest, prepare, cook and eat a wide range of foods. An example of the power of slow food with young children is described by Jodi Brunjes, group leader at Birralee Child Care Centre, Queensland:

'When the plants are ready for eating, we pick and wash them and use the produce in the meals our Centre provides for the children. For example, we grew beetroot, lettuce and carrots, which the children picked, washed, prepared and served as a side salad or with pita bread for lunch. Many of the children (and some staff) had never eaten fresh beetroot before and some children didn't know how it grew because they'd only ever seen it come from a can.'

'Children are more prepared to try foods that they have helped to look after. For

instance, some parents were surprised to hear that their child ate and enjoyed fresh beetroot or lettuce. Sometimes the food doesn't even make it to the lunch table, when our snow peas and tomatoes are ripe they have been known to disappear into the mouths of children just after the washing stage!'

Clearly, slow food messages influence how children think about food. Thus, slow food can teach us the things that really matter such as care, beauty, concentration, discernment, sensuality – but only if we take the time to think about what we're eating (Abbey, 2002).

Through a philosophy of cooking and eating, children can connect with the source of their food, both the land it came from and the seasonal cycles in which it was grown and harvested. Become involved in spreading the slow food message to children. Take time to savour new food and taste experiences with children. Enjoy the experience of eating together. Wherever possible, try to 'provide children with opportunities to experience growing and eating healthy food that they enjoy' (Brunjes, 2005).

Noelene McBride

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Co-author Matter of fat - Childhood Obesity

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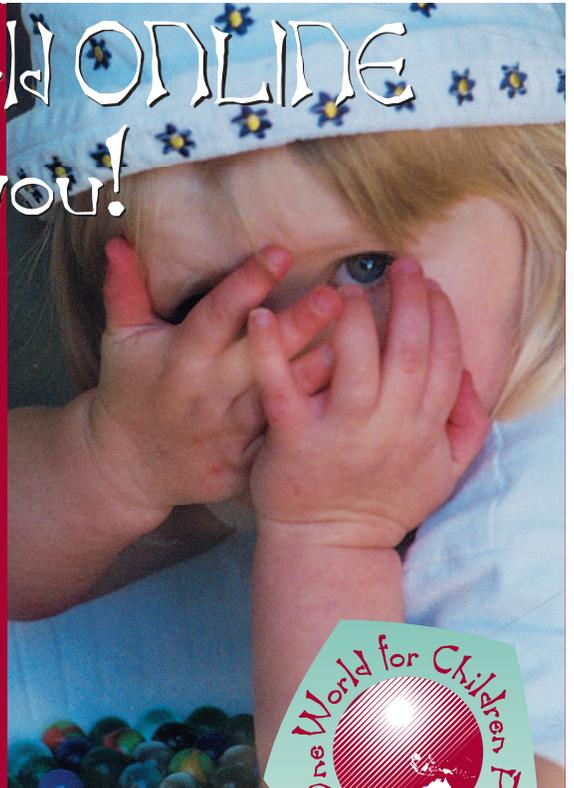
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Out of the Box

Queensland Performing Arts Centre's Festival of Early Childhood



The award-winning Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) remains the only arts festival in Australia and one of the few in the world that caters specifically for children aged 3-8 years. Since it was established in 1992, over 350,000 children, their parents and carers have experienced Out of the Box. This event not only caters for children's creative needs but has also sparked new knowledge about how to assist parents and carers to support children's engagement in the arts.

The festival

Out of the Box is a child-centred festival that supports children's development by creating and presenting high-quality, innovative and creative activities and events. The program structure is finely tuned and responsive to the diverse tastes and needs of children and their parents and carers. Out of the Box conducts regular consultation with our large and diverse audience to gain insights into their needs, aspirations and contemporary experiences.

Children enter a special space when they come to the festival. The size, scale, audience numbers and quality of the work are truly amazing. The whole building (the largest performing arts centre in Queensland) and the outside green spaces are literally taken over by children for the week of the festival.

At the last festival up to 10,000 children per day experienced a diverse program of free and ticketed performances, workshops, exhibitions and creative spaces. A typical day at the festival might involve:

- attending a show featuring local, national or international companies presenting various works, from the small and intimate to the large and spectacular;
- participating in a creative workshop which involves children in anything from making sushi and biscuits at *YUM*, producing a TV show at *TV* to becoming a DJ, producer and Hip Hop performer at the music-making workshop *Jam*; and
- participating in the free events program of theatre, public art and installations ranging from *Putt Putt* to *The Island*, a colourful presentation of songs, dance and music by Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island and Pacific Islanders.

The next Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood will be in June 2006 at QPAC. The guidelines *Children, their Parents and the Arts: Some guidelines for working with parents of young children* are available from QPAC. Please email ootb@qpac.com.au or phone 07 3840 7500 for a copy of the guidelines or to be added to the festival database.

The festival and parents

Alongside the festival program, QPAC implements a range of strategies designed to support children's teachers, parents and carers in maximising the festival experience for themselves and their children. At each festival, considerable time and energy has been devoted to supporting teachers through the provision of Teachers' Notes, preview events, festival buddies and other support materials. While these activities are considered a core undertaking, the 2004 festival saw the introduction of a new initiative, *Learning Partnerships with Parents of Young Children*.

Under this initiative, QPAC, with the support of the Australia Council for the Arts and the Queensland University of Technology (Early Childhood and Creative Industries Drama Faculties) undertook action-orientated research designed to explore the ways cultural institutions can create engaging relationships with parents of young children. Essentially, QPAC wanted to be responsive to findings of the report to the Australia Council: *Australians and the Arts* (Costantoura, 2000), that indicated it is parents' own participation in and value of the arts that actively impacts on the subsequent engagement with and value placed upon the arts by their children.

'This event not only caters for children's creative needs but has also sparked new knowledge about how to assist parents and carers to support children's engagement in the arts.'

The report (Costantoura, 2000) found that a person's attitude towards the arts is likely to be more positive if they had been encouraged to be involved in the arts when young. It also noted that many families perceived the arts as being 'family-unfriendly'.

In response to this research, a number of strategies to support parents were implemented at the 2004 festival. These included:

- providing parents' notes to demystify various creative forms through the provision of follow-up activities for parents and their children to undertake after the festival;
- developing targeted marketing materials such as a hotline for any questions about the program and a simple brochure designed to alleviate common perceptions that arts and cultural institutions are difficult to access and navigate; and
- a critical friends group of 50 parents, carers and children. This group was provided with tickets to events as well as access to artists and arts workers. They also participated in a public forum on the final day of the festival.

The strategies implemented at the festival have now been analysed and provide the foundation for the formation of some guidelines for working with parents of young children on arts-related projects. These guidelines are useful to anyone interested in children, families and the arts. The guidelines feature four key platforms including:

- Deliver a philosophical framework with children at the centre

A child-centred philosophical framework and programs, events and experiences especially designed for children that recognise children as beings with agency, who are appreciated and valued by parents. As one parent noted:

Small children are important – these events show that the community values children. I appreciate that something special for children has been created and shows children are valued.

- Parents are pivotal in the learning community

Parents introduce their children to the value of the arts and provide the foundations for children's knowledge, attitudes and appreciation of the arts. Carefully planned support strategies for parents are highly valued. In describing the support materials, a parent said:

Suggestions, outline and content was very helpful – helped me to understand the ... performance.

- Cultural life is a collective and collaborative responsibility

Collective action around children's public experience of the arts can be rewarding not only for children but for all participants. Out of the Box involved over 550 adults, including artists, arts workers, security guards, volunteers etc. Parents strongly value the range of people involved to assist them in navigating the space, in engaging in the work and participating in the arts. When adults from various backgrounds and fields come together to produce a child-centred environment, children learn from the social cohesion that is modelled. After the festival, one parent observed (in describing positive aspects):

Plenty of good QPAC staff and volunteer help and people to take part with the children.

- Take a futures perspective

Although the role of the arts has been significant for the *preservation* and reconstruction of history, it is important to realise that the arts also play a significant role in the *shaping* of current and future cultures. Children are important contributors to community and cultural life. The arts, and arts festivals, provide important pathways for children as they connect with the wider community. Through arts activities children come to understand themselves, their interactions with others in their community, their culture and the wider world. Parents appreciate arts experiences that are designed to enhance young children's learning and development. As one parent stated:

My child absorbs everything – these experiences become a part of who he is, he grows up with an understanding of community – with respect.

From our research, it is apparent that parents believe that participation in activities such as the festival support children and their learning differently, away from the time, space and institutional constraints of schools and other more formal early childhood settings. It is vitally important that individuals and organisations continue to not only create sophisticated and innovative festivals, programs and events for children but to consider the support structures provided to the parents and carers participating alongside children.

Collette Brennan

General Manager, QPAC's Out of the Box Program

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Storytelling abroad

In August 2003, children's author and consultant Yvonne Winer travelled to Vanuatu where she led a group of authors in the creation of books for young Ni Vanuatu children. What follows is an account of her experience as a writer in Vanuatu, which resulted in 40 stories.

The beginnings

This is the story about a project that had a long and troubled gestation period, but a magical conclusion. In 1999, I was approached by Janet Bunyan, the coordinator of projects for the Vanuatu Preschool Association, to lead a group of early childhood advisory staff and key teachers in writing books for their preschools. In order to fund such a project that would bring selected writers together, Janet diligently sought support from such agencies as: World Bank, UNICEF and other funding organisations. Then, in 2002, Canada Fund provided the required money to bring the preschool coordinators and key teachers to Port Vila on the Island of Efate, Vanuatu, to write picture books in the form of shell books for young Ni Vanuatu children. It was decided to present the books as shell books in order to ensure that they would reach the children in the 115 languages of Vanuatu. At last we were in business; and serious planning began for creating 36 such books.

The nature of shell books

Shell books are exactly that: a shell, a book that is illustrated based on a written text. However, the illustrations are designed and created as though the text is there, and are based on a



carefully edited and paginated text, which is provided separately. This ensures that when the text is eventually hand-printed into the book there will be a good relationship between the illustrations and the text. At the conclusion of the project, the books would be presented to the teachers across Vanuatu so that they could print the stories into the prepared illustrated books by hand in the local language.

Writing books for a different culture

When I was first approached to be involved in the Vanuatu trip, I certainly did not realise the enormity of the project or the many demands and challenges that lay ahead.

While I had experienced literacy projects in Africa and on other Pacific Islands and Malaysia, those experiences were totally different from writing books with an unknown group of adults who had never experienced writing books for children before and some of whom had had very little experience of even handling picture books as we know them. How do you conduct writing workshops in a foreign country that you know so little about, or a language that you cannot speak?

I could not even apply the basic ethnographic principles about living in a country for a reasonable period to become familiar with its customs and beliefs, its peoples and its languages, before launching into this experience. This was partly the result of the lead up to the actual workshops, which had been uncertain due to never knowing when and if money for the project would become available.

Arriving in Vanuatu

We had two very lucky breaks when I arrived in Vanuatu. The local agricultural show was on the day I arrived. Within an hour I was walking amongst friendly Ni Vanuatu people, hearing their language and experiencing the carnival atmosphere of the showgrounds with its rock band, penned pigs, poultry, a nanny goat that had just given birth to a kid, some huge Brahmin cattle, and horses in an arena. Amongst the vegetables sat a root vegetable which must surely have been the most humungous Yam in the world. Big Fella Yam is what the sign said, and indeed it was!

The next morning I was able to attend the Woman's Cultural Day at the local museum –another fortuitous opportunity to experience the traditional crafts and cooking of the rural women. A Lap Lap was being prepared and I had the wonderful opportunity to observe the age-old tradition of cooking pounded root vegetables such as yam and taro and sweet potatoes, made into a paste and wrapped in taro or banana leaves, cooked on hot stones and covered by more hot stones. Here I also witnessed a variety of clever baskets being woven from coconut palm, some for carrying, some for holding fish, some for collecting shells. There seemed to be a basket for every occasion. This was also my opportunity to visit the museum and be introduced to the interesting history of Vanuatu. Brief as these encounters were, I found them invaluable when it came to presenting the writing workshops.

The writing workshops

The workshops started at 7.15am each day, where I would begin by taking the group through various introductory writing exercises. On the very first day we started with my puppet and the big book *Little brown monkey* (Winer & Tsinganos, 1987). I selected this story because it so effectively illustrates many of the characteristics suitable for shared reading, such as an interesting topic, simple language, repetition, predictability and participation.

Monkey is a rather large stocking puppet and always captures the hearts of listeners with his animation. Soon he had the participants enchanted, joining in the actions and phrases and predicting what was coming next as the Little brown monkey dressed in his black shoes, striped socks, red trousers, blue checked shirt and big brown hat. I reread the story, and Jim Tsinganos' drawings had the participants in hysterics. The group immediately latched onto the importance of humour in children's stories and the value of repetition and predictability in books for shared reading. This session also focused on the importance of action,



getting your character to move quickly, doing something interesting and possibly using some repetition. The message was this: reading for young children should be fun; and reading out loud to children and telling stories is a way to make them fall in love with literacy. At this time I did not dwell too much on these inherent ingredients of the story. The point was just to break the ice and create an informal, relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere. *Little brown monkey* never lets me down!

Once we had settled into the session, I provided simple writing activities which were directly linked to life in Vanuatu. These included exercises such as: 'I went for a walk on the beach, through the forest, to the market'. This helped to focus their attention on places familiar to them and the children they were writing for. I gained a lot of insight from this session since I was introduced to aspects of the environment as seen through the eyes of

the participants. It also alerted me to areas that they deemed culturally significant and of course, many of the taboos.

I also introduced custom stories (traditional stories) during the third workshop. This turned out to be an excellent move. They had strong storylines and their frameworks reinforced our earlier ideas that stories can include repetitive themes, be active, include repetitive songs and chants, and be acted out. It also encouraged the writers to use very specific Ni Vanuatu 'voices'. These stories also reinforced our earlier information about story structure and gave us further opportunities to explore beginnings, the development of the story, endings and the value of rhythm.

Excerpt from a North Efate story

What follows is a delightful example of interplay of sound and rhythm from a North Efate story.

Makoukou lapa, Makoukou riki ... Big mud crabs, little mud crabs, Padorodoro au, padorodoro au ... Let me go, let me go.

Lawo saika ruku ... The mud skippers made a secret plan with me.

Paki au, ta katiko ... That's why I'm holding you.

Paki au, ta katiko ... That's why I'm holding you.

This song relates to the custom story of 'the Reef Heron goes fishing'. In this story the Reef Heron is attacked by the crabs on behalf of the mud skippers who had been the Reef Heron's favourite food. Sadly, the crabs are now the Reef Heron's favourite food.

As part of this project, we decided that in order to preserve the books as a collection we needed to have these books printed in Bislama, the common language of Vanuatu. We received funding from the Toowoomba East Rotary Club to print 10 of the illustrated books, and hope to find further funding to print the remaining books in the coming year, so that these books can be purchased by the families of all young children in Vanuatu, not just those fortunate enough to attend the preschools.

Yvonne Winer

Children's book writer and consultant. Yvonne is also the author of *Stories for telling*.

The full report of this project is available from Yvonne at winery@icr.com.au.

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During 2003, teachers at Happy Valley Kindergarten in South Australia were becoming increasingly concerned that a number of children regularly announced 'I can't' and were observed to readily give up, rather than pursue challenges or tasks that teachers believed four-year-old children were capable of. It became obvious that many children were striving for perfectionism, fearing failure, lacking self-confidence, or having social anxiety. There was a general societal apprehension around world events, and staff and community had suffered low morale as a result of September 11. Subsequently, it was decided that we needed to build a culture of optimism and resilience. Staff at the kindergarten had the opportunity to participate in an action research project funded by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services, and this was a chance to explore a range of strategies to help children build a sense of optimism and to develop their individual persistence skills, to help them to achieve resilience in coping with the stresses and strains of everyday life. While optimism and resilience remained our overarching goals, the element of persistence provided observable and measurable evidence for the project.

Staff were fortunate to participate in a number of inspiring professional development sessions with world-renowned educators who influenced our thinking. These included: Bill Spady – highlighting individual readiness and rates of achievement in outcomes-based education; Glenda MacNaughton – who looked at critical reflection and critical dialogue; Phillip Gammage – who focused on Locus of Control Observation Scale; Randell Clinch, who explored the method of recalling past success and happy experiences to build optimism and resilience; and finally Micheal Bernard, who looked at *Program achieve* and *You can do it!* education. We were also inspired by reading Martin Seligman's books on 'Learned Optimism'. Our mentor, Helen Sara, a child/adolescent mental health therapist in the area of optimism and resilience, encouraged us to believe that 'optimism is the sense that generally things will improve over time'. Micheal Bernard informed us that 'optimism will get you there and persistence will keep you there'.

We also scrutinised the Essential Learnings section of the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA) for optimistic and resilient language that related to our project and focused on the learning areas of Identity and Futures. Using all of this knowledge and experience, our research question evolved: 'How can we teach strategies which encourage persistence skills in young children?'

Staff and the parent committee brainstormed our understandings of optimism, resilience and persistence and children brainstormed their own understandings of peace, harmony and 'having a go'. We then developed statements and goals for building 'a culture of optimism and resilience in our community of learners' – children, parents and staff. We also selected a sample group of children

to engage at a deeper level, while all children were involved in the teaching and learning program. Parents and staff were surveyed and asked to anticipate their child's response to scenarios where children would be faced with challenges and may need to persist to achieve a goal. The children were then interviewed and asked questions about what they would do in particular situations, which required persistence. Some of the questions were:

- What does 'having a go' mean?
- When do you 'have a go'?
- How did you feel when you first ... ?
- Tell me about something you can do now that you couldn't do when you started at kindy?
- How did it make you feel?
- How do you feel inside when you are trying to do something that is hard?
- What can you say to yourself when it feels hard but you want to keep trying?
- What's good about trying?
- What don't you like about trying to do new things?

Children's responses were very perceptive and self-reflective. For example, 'I say to myself the body has to keep on trying'; 'I can say to myself, keep doing it'; and – about persisting to write their name – 'when I was a baby I yelled all of the time and then I tried and tried each time and then I did it!'

Each child's survey was collated and persistence-learning goals were developed with their parents. Parents were very receptive to the relevance of a persistent approach to life and learning. We pursued each child's learning goal and took photos of their learning journey as evidence of their achievements and their ability to keep trying even if things became challenging, these learnings were captured through 'Learning Stories'.

A culture of persistence was cultivated in all aspects of the preschool program and we saturated our environment with persistent language. We purchased resources to support this learning including Groovy Kid Dolls, which we named Persistent Penny, Persistent Pete and Persistent Kyle. Plays were written, so that children could relate to the dolls' experiences of needing to persist in order to achieve new skills. For example, climbing over the scramble net, cutting, writing their name, doing up their shoes and overcoming social anxieties.

The Mind Master program was the inspiration behind the catchphrases: 'Have a go spaghetti o', 'Don't give in Mr. Chin', 'Easy peasy lemon squeezy', 'Do your best hairy chest', and children developed their own, like 'Give it a try banana pie!' Staff found the phrases very catchy and while it became very humorous, we constantly reminded children and each other to persist during daily challenges.

We developed a 'You can do it' journal, which provided a means of showcasing and documenting

children's own reflections of their achievements of tasks in which they needed to persist. This was a means of reinforcing the need to persist and the feeling of success at each step towards accomplishment.

The culmination of the project was 'Have a go day!' – a mini sports day, which took on the theme of persistence. The catchphrases (above) were made into posters and taped to the climbing equipment and children cheered each other on when the going got tough by quoting the phrases. The added challenge of manoeuvring wheelchairs through the circuit required great persistence and physical coordination.

We developed a Bright Side Quilt on which families were invited to contribute their tried and true sayings which spurred them on in challenging times. Some families have commented that these sayings have become part of their family culture and have helped some children who have just started school to meet their new challenges. Parents felt it particularly timely when their children were about to enter school that they be equipped with a 'virtual tool bag' of coping strategies. Some of the schools that children were making transitions to were also using persistence strategies, and teachers quickly commented on how these children settled in well using some of the strategies and phrases they had learnt in kindergarten. One child who had been particularly concerned about starting school received a Special Award for Persistence in his first school term.

It was coincidental that the film *Finding Nemo*, which demonstrated persistence strategies in a meaningful way for children, was showing at the time. Staff were so inspired that they rewrote aspects of the story and performed it for children; and then children used the props to perform it as well.

Traditional stories such as *The tale of the turnip* have persistence strategies and, when children reenacted it, they added their own catchphrases to emphasise persistence and reach the achievement.

We shared our findings with each family in the study. Parents commented that they had adopted many of the strategies at home and that their children were using persistent thinking and language in other aspects of their lives when they met challenges they needed to overcome. Staff found this endorsement of the outcomes of the project very professionally satisfying, as there was tangible evidence that persistence was a significant factor in children's lives. Persistence has now become embedded in our teaching philosophy and we are committed to ensuring that children develop this philosophy, as we have seen the benefits for all children, families and ourselves.

Debbie George

Preschool Director
Happy Valley Kindergarten
South Australia

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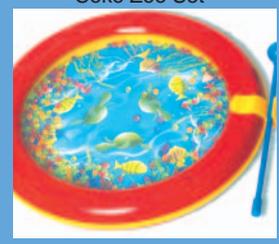
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Paula is a music lecturer at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), where she is director of the USQ Junior Academy of Music. She works extensively with children of all ages developing music and movement programs.



Q & A

Interview with Paula Melville-Clark

1. You are the director of the USQ Junior Academy of Music. What drew you to the area of music and early childhood?

Teaching music and movement classes to young children is only a small part of my work as Director of the USQ Junior Academy of Music. I conduct classes for early childhood right through to tertiary students. I think when you work with such a broad age-range and wide ability level, there is a natural tendency to be aware of the whole process of educating musicians – to go back to the beginning and endeavour to make sense of the whole journey. I'm very drawn to teaching music to young children because it's so rewarding and such a privilege to be involved with touching and shaping young lives.

2. Do you think musical play is still on the periphery of many early childhood programs? If so, in what ways can it be made more of a priority?

Musical play is sometimes one of the least understood of subject areas within the early childhood curriculum and is, therefore, often on the periphery of many early childhood programs. If it is to be made more of a priority then we need to firstly convey the importance of music education in the development of the whole child to those involved; for example, curriculum

developers, academics, educators. To do this, we need more research in the area to support the case for including music more prominently in the early childhood curriculum. Secondly, teachers need to be aware of when and how they can include music in the daily lives of the children in their care. This takes specialist training, which will require musically qualified and experienced early childhood practitioners in our universities to teach student teachers, as well as units of study devoted to music education as opposed to including music within general expressive arts units.

3. A big part of your work is focused on music combined with movement. What does this sometimes involve? How does this combination assist with the development of children?

As a Dalcroze-trained teacher, I am intensely aware of the dominant sensory systems of learning (that is, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) and endeavour to provide a range of these experiences in my classes. Music is not only experienced by the ear and eye alone. It is also innately physical. Music evokes a natural desire, particularly in young children, to move. By tapping into this natural response, children or indeed people of any age, can experience the music in the body. Learning through movement

and muscular sensation is the kinaesthetic response. In a typical early childhood music and movement class, children may be seen skipping, running and jumping; manipulating props like balls, hoops and fabric; creating their own musical play through movement games and enjoying songs and chants with actions. Teaching music through movement is a powerful tool with young children who enjoy exploring their world through moving. I would describe my approach as 'holistic' because it taps into the whole development and response of the child. Music brings all the senses together and, if guided appropriately, can assist in the development of the physical, emotional, cognitive and sensory capacities.

4. What inspires you about early childhood?

Children are like little sponges soaking up information. They learn so much and so quickly and they are so desirous and full of energy. Young children always want to know what other instruments and props I have in the cupboard and what other songs I know. They want to have a go at playing the piano when I play. And they all want to hold hands with me in the circle or be the one to sit on my lap when we sing a song. Is that enough to inspire anyone?!

5. In your own childhood, Paula:

a. Who did you most want to be?

I recall when I was quite young I used to play 'schools' with my dolls and use the inside of my wardrobe door as a chalk board (imagine all that chalk dust!). I think I must have always been a teacher in the making but I don't recall modelling myself on anyone in particular.

b. What was your first memory of music?

There was a lot of music in our house. My father played the piano and the banjo and my parents had a good collection of classical and popular gramophone records that I would often play. Jorge Bolet playing Chopin was one of my favourites. Sing-a-longs with my father at the piano were daily events. At five years old I could do a great imitation of English pop star Cilla Black singing *Anyone who ever had a heart*, although when I made my debut singing performance at the local music festival my voice was inaudible. I can still see my father standing at the back of the hall and wondering why he was making huge gestures with his arms while I was singing. At six years old I started formal piano lessons and the rest is history.

c. What was your most magical experience?

The whole of my childhood was a magical experience. I was fortunate to have wonderful parents who provided a loving environment with plenty of encouragement and opportunity. Family friends and teachers also made an impact on my childhood and I have many happy memories. Perhaps this is why I love to enter the world of the young child. One of the mothers of a child in my three-year-old class stated recently that she (her daughter) laughed more in music class than at any other time. It's true. We do laugh a lot and there is a lot of joy sharing the world of our little ones. As Susan Young (University of Exeter, UK) reminded me

in some recent correspondence, when it comes down to it, we shouldn't forget the intrinsic value of music and the fact that it is simply lots of fun.

6. What are the issues you're most passionate about right now?

I'm very aware that many early childhood practitioners have had limited training and experience of music education in early childhood, both in the university context and in ongoing in-service opportunities. I see many teachers and carers struggle to conduct music sessions because they simply do not have the necessary skills. It disturbs me to see good teachers who are unable to engage effectively in musical experiences with the children, especially when music is so important to a child's development. I would like to see an accredited program set up in Australia that provides appropriate music education training to educators in the field of early childhood and where current practitioners would be able to gain accreditation through attendance at residential schools.

I am also aware that there are limited resources for teaching music education in early childhood, particularly in music and movement programs, and am currently working on compiling a song book, CDs and lesson plans to be published shortly for use in the early childhood context.

7. When it comes to the education of Australian children, particularly in the early years, what do you think children most need, and what would you like to see more of?

I can only really comment on the area of music education. We are aware of the critical importance of the first years of life for all aspects of later development. There is now enough evidence emerging from research around the world to suggest that music is fundamental to the early development of the child. I believe all children, regardless of socio-economic status and other issues,

should have access to good quality music programs in the early years. A good-quality music education includes experience with a qualified and experienced practitioner and involves moving, singing, listening and playing activities. It fosters creativity through musical learning, uses developmentally appropriate teaching methods, develops physical, emotional, intellectual and sensory capacities and is conducted in a positive and enjoyable learning environment.

8. Who are, or have been, the most influential people in your career?

In the last decade, the people who have most influenced my career are Associate Professor Laurie Lephed (retired, USQ), who supervised my Masters research and challenged and encouraged me to pursue this area of music education. Wendy Lorenz who was, until recently, Head of Music at USQ – who supported my work and was integral in launching the Junior Academy of Music and inviting me on staff. I have been fortunate to study with Dalcroze exponents: Sandra Nash and Joan Pope OAM, and am indebted to them for my training in this area. Finally, Ros Beeton, former Director of Chiselhurst Kindergarten in Toowoomba, who took me under her wing and helped to open my eyes to the world of how young children learn.

For more information on the work Paula does, go to: www.usq.edu.au/jam. Similarly, if you're interested in Paula's workshops, contact her directly at: clarkp@usq.edu.au.



Photos courtesy of University of Southern Queensland



Excursions, consent and the duty of care: Legal obligations in early childhood settings

When my youngest recently came home with a consent form for a trip to the aquarium, it was a reminder that excursions are now a common part of early childhood programs and are a favourite with the children. However, as with any risk, excursions do need to be managed, and while consent forms are a must for many reasons, they do not absolve the centre from meeting its legal obligations.

Duty of care

Preschools and child care centres owe a duty to take reasonable steps to protect children in their care from reasonably foreseeable harm. It is not a duty to ensure that no injury will ever be suffered by children but, nevertheless, the duty is quite high when supervising preschoolers – whether it is inside or outside the centre's premises.

The legal standard of care that applies on an excursion is higher than that imposed at the centre. The centre may be held legally responsible for any injuries received if an accident occurs during an excursion even if it is outside of regular preschool or centre hours of operation. The centre may also be held responsible for any damage caused to the property of another person by one of the children while they are on an excursion.

How to manage risk

One way to manage risk is to ensure that, well before the event, someone from the centre has inspected the site and identified the hazards and then put in place a plan of action to reduce the risk of these occurring. The risks to be considered start from the moment the children leave the centre to the time that they are safely back inside the gate. The centre should have a documented policy that sets out the procedure to be

used when organising an excursion and the matters to think about well in advance. Sufficient staffing for an adventure away from the centre is a major starting point in any risk management action plan. First aid kits, contact numbers for parents and knowing all the possible escape routes accessible by children are also priorities for risk-aware carers.

One important factor that the courts take into account when considering whether there has been negligence is whether or not the activities selected were appropriate for the age group, experience level, and even the capacity of the children to get into mischief or to ignore instructions. For this reason, the younger the child, the less likelihood there is of the courts finding that the child contributed to his or her own injuries.

The respected British judge Lord Denning said: 'A very young child cannot be guilty of contributory negligence. An older child may be; but it depends on the circumstances. A judge should only find a child guilty of contributory negligence if he or she is of such an age as reasonably to be expected to take precautions for his or her own safety; and then he or she is only to be found guilty if blame should be attached to him or her. A child has not the road sense or the experience of his or her elders.'

It is for this reason that, from birth to about six years, it is highly unlikely that a child would be found liable under tort law or found to have contributed to his or her own injuries. Between age six and late adolescence, a variable standard is used, which depends on the standard of care to be expected from a child of similar age, intelligence, and experience.

Parental consent forms

Consent forms are useful because they inform parents about the excursion, provide details about costs and enlist the assistance of the parents in identifying any special needs the child may have. They are also a source of emergency phone contacts and permission to obtain medical treatment when time is critical.

A parental consent form will not permit the centre to avoid legal liability in the case of negligence, because the parents cannot sign away the rights of their child.

Parental waivers and release forms

It is common practice throughout Australia for centres to ask parents to sign documents called 'releases' or 'waivers' in which parents appear to relieve the centre of liability in the event of an accident. A release does not do this because parents are not able to waive their children's rights. A waiver of this nature is basically a contract that is not beneficial to the child and is not enforceable against the child.

The fact that parents or caregivers consent to the participation of their child in an excursion should not be taken as removing the responsibility of the centre for taking all reasonable steps to ensure the particular activity is safe. Excursion consent forms do not create any waiver of rights by the parent or the caregiver in relation to their child. The main purpose of consent forms and information forms is to give enough detail to parents and caregivers to allow them to make an informed decision about whether their child should attend the excursion. It is also to assist the parent or caregiver to provide relevant information to the school about the child's care needs.

Excursions and risks are a part of today's preschool life. By managing the risks, the chances of injury can be reduced and everyone, including carers, can continue to enjoy them.

Marianne Robinson

Marianne is a compliance expert with over 25 years experience in the area of risk management and compliance.

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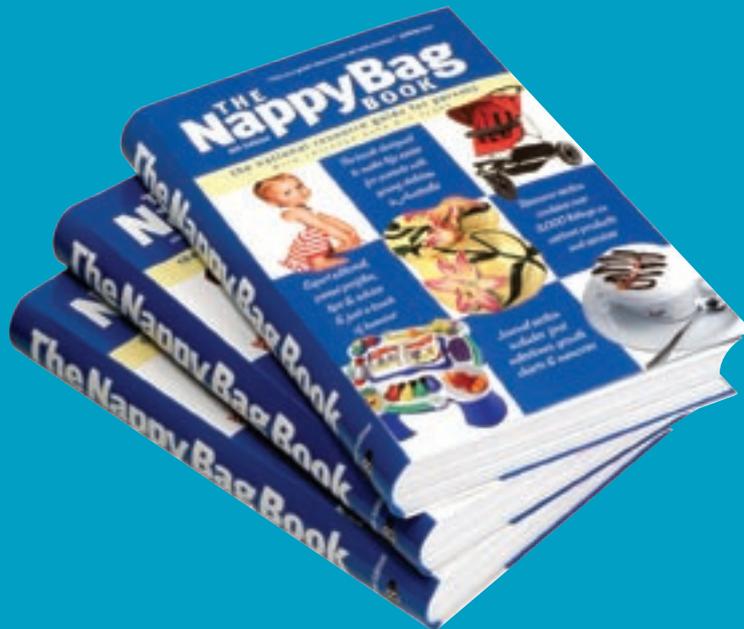
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