

EVERY Child

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Editor: Alison Elliott

Editorial Board: Pam Linke (Chair),
Alison Elliott, Carmel Richardson,
Jenni Connor and Marilyn Fleer.

In-house Editor: Kipley Nink

Graphic Designer: Claire Connolly

Publishing and Marketing Manager: Sue Wales

Publishing and Marketing Officer: Dave Kingwell

Marketing Assistant: Amanda McDonald

Cover Photograph: Andrew Sikorski

Photographs: B Patton

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Address correspondence and advertising queries to:

The Publishing and Marketing Section
PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602
Tel: (02) 6242 1800 Fax: (02) 6242 1818
Email: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au
Website: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

About Early Childhood Australia:

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Rethinking early childhood services

If January media reports are anything to go by, children's issues are going to be hot topics this year. Nationally, stories have focused on the 'shambles' of child care; shortages of child care places; reporting and assessment; improving parenting; and boosting preschool and early educational opportunities, especially early literacy skills.

It will be interesting to see how schools handle requirements for 'relative and comparative reporting of a child's progress and achievement against the performance of the child's peer group at the school' for their early years classes (*Schools Assistance [Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity] Act 2004, Regulation 2.3 [1]*). Certainly, teachers need good diagnostic information on children, and parents want to know how they're progressing. But how this will be put into practice will be interesting to watch. It seems that the ACT Government has won a concession exempting kindergarten students from the new assessment rules (*Canberra Times*, 14 January 2006, p. 7).

Today, early childhood services are very complicated—with a myriad of providers and service types; and a bewildering array of funding bodies, and legislative, regulatory, licensing frameworks.

There are considerable differences in quality, accessibility, opportunity and cost across the country. Many children miss out on early childhood programs altogether.

The fact is, since the current twin-system of child 'care' and preschool 'education' developed about 100 years ago, much has changed. For a start, family dynamics: most women and mothers work outside the home and their jobs are quite different from those

of the mid- and even late-twentieth century. They need early childhood services to match both their work needs and children's developmental and learning needs.

But child care is more than funding a place. Young children's care must be part of a broader package that nurtures development in the preschool years. 'Care' alone is insufficient to build the understandings and skills that ensure early development and successful transition to school. Experts agree that rich, positive early learning and educational experiences are essential.

Social, intellectual and physical development in early childhood is dependent on both care and education. These are inseparable, yet don't necessarily go hand in hand in early childhood services in Australia.

Few people can begin to imagine the complexity of early childhood provision until they are forced to negotiate the early childhood maze. A case in point is the experiences of this year's friends, colleagues and acquaintances who are starting the child care search. Even with the recent increase in child care places, care is scarce and, even when available, costs more than many mothers earn. However, the fact that child care and preschool fees can be so expensive comes as no surprise to people involved in providing quality care and education programs. The major costs—premises and staff—are high, especially in major cities.

Among my immediate female colleagues and friends, the child care arrangements are mind-boggling—just as they are in the community. Most have amazingly complex arrangements that involve extraordinary juggling and travel between parents and their jobs: stay-at-home dads, grandparents, nannies, friends, home-based (unregulated) care, child care, sessional preschool, work-from-home and flexible work rosters. These arrangements are mainly a consequence of the expense and scarcity of child care.

As I mentioned in a recent article (*Canberra Times*, 18 January 2006), early childhood care and education must sit better with the needs of contemporary families. The current early childhood service approaches were designed for a different time and place.

To move forward there must be serious bipartisan planning for a comprehensive, seamless national approach to early childhood care and education, with local sensitivity, including communication with schools, to meet families' demands for quality care and children's need for enriching early developmental and educational experiences.

'... early childhood care and education must sit better with the needs of contemporary families. The current early childhood service approaches were designed for a different time and place.'

The challenge is more than just providing child care places. It is about national agreement on vision, goals and policy for young children's care and education; and then action to create and fund a universally acceptable system of quality early childhood education and care to meet the diverse needs of families and their children. This is no easy task.

Clearly, families are the key providers of early childhood care and their needs must inform child care policy and practice. In this issue of *Every Child* we focus on families and parenting. Connecting parents and early childhood services is critical to successful programs and outcomes for children—and to do this our writers explore a range of topics, from grandparenting to early childhood centres as family-friendly workplaces.

Alison Elliott

Editor
Every Child

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:
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In response to the editorial from *Every Child*, Vol. 11 No. 3, 2005, a reader makes the following comments:

21 September 2005

Dear *Every Child*,

I couldn't agree more with the editorial, 'Ensuring children's futures'. Having worked in the early childhood profession in Australia, I have clearly observed the rich-poor divide that delineates a separation in outcomes for our youngest children. At one end of the scale, children in higher socio-economic areas receive better-qualified teachers, better resources and even, in some cases, better pay. Yet at the other end of the continuum, it is so difficult to obtain and retain even minimally-qualified staff who actually wish to work in suburbs which may have a negative reputation.

It seems ironic that the children who need the highest-quality care, the best-integrated early childhood programs and the most innovative teachers—to make up for socio-economic disadvantages—so often experience the opposite. Thus, the gap in potentiality for the future widens.

I hope that *Every Child* will continue to be an educative forum for the advancement of equity of opportunity for all our children.

Keep up the good work.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Milner (B. Teach)

[Margaret is currently teaching early childhood in the Solomon Islands.]

In the following letter, recent winner of the Barbara Creaser Young Advocates Award, Lynne Rutherford, writes to express her thanks and to acknowledge the dedication of all who work in early childhood.

17 October 2005

I was recently nominated for, and subsequently won, the Barbara Creaser Young Advocates Award. I wanted to say 'thank you' to everyone involved in the nominations and the judging of this award. Early childhood can be a field where many people work tirelessly for the youngest members of our society and we ask for very little in return. It was therefore an honour to be nominated for this award and a greater one to receive it at the recent ECA conference in Brisbane. The conference was fantastic, with many interesting speakers, and I really appreciated the chance to go. Well done to all those who dedicate their career to such an important age group and may you all get the recognition you deserve.

Thanks again,

Lynne Rutherford

Director, Royal Adelaide Hospital Community Child Care Centre
 Chairperson, SA Association of Community Based Child Care Centres

Tired of searching through 1000s of websites looking for quality information?



Early Childhood Australia has searched the web for you, to provide the best early childhood websites on diverse topics. The **Supporting Best Practice** section of the website contains links to 100s of fact sheets, articles and papers.

Supporting Best Practice is divided into three stages. The first is 'Growing and learning in early childhood'. The next two will be 'Teaching, programming and curriculum' and 'Children's rights'.

This is a fantastic resource for early childhood professionals, parents, other caregivers and early childhood knowledge brokers.

Visit www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au and follow the links to **Supporting Best Practice**.

In loco parentis: Parents and educators serving children's needs

Talented actor and father of five, Mark Mitchell, comments on why strong partnerships between parents and educators in a child's early years are vital. This collaborative approach—ensuring the intended beneficiaries, children, are given a secure and predictable emotional environment—is the key to best serving our children's needs.



Partnership is all about teamwork, and this means never having to shoulder all the blame yourself. It equates to a division of responsibility, and mutuality of intent, effort and commitment. It is a politically correct term for the modern phenomenon of removing the pedestal upon which parents and educators were placed in the olden days before we all became educators—even the parents.

Parents always believed they were educators but the enormity of their educative influence was rarely understood. All language patterns are acquired by the age of five. The neural pathways of a baby relate directly to the stimuli of the environment provided by parents ... not to mention moral, spiritual or other influences. Perhaps the most poignant thing ever said about parents—and I cannot recall who said it first—was **'children need models, not critics'**. In all the ways that parents model behaviour, children are educated, form expectations and behave like their role models.

Partnership is all about maximising opportunity. It presupposes that there is a potential for greater achievement, more satisfactory and satisfying outcomes, and a

more concerted effort to elicit various positive results. It is intended to foster a more nurturing environment in which our shared intentions support the resultant superstructure.

To measure the effectiveness of partnerships between educators and parents, we must consider the reality of the encounters experienced by the children themselves—the intended beneficiaries of these partnerships. Educators are bound by the term 'in loco parentis', or 'in the place of the parent', but the parallel is diminished by the sheer number of children involved. Only Mother Hubbard had as many children to deal with as has the professional educator. So, from the outset, the partnership is unbalanced. The ratios do not allow for the parallel to apply and no amount of education or training can equip the educator to act in the same way as the parent of each individual child, because there is little opportunity for the intensive individual focus that the committed parent offers his or her child.

Inevitably, the sheer disproportion of children to educators required a logical response and this idea of marketing 'partnership' developed. Culturally, there is no precedent for the burgeoning range of child care and education services. In the village tradition, all the mothers and the grandmothers would attend to all the children. The ratio was very different and the perspectives were very different. The village women educated the children in a familial tradition of mothers and aunts regardless of actual blood ties. The socialisation process was well-defined. The emotional landscape was secure and predictable.

This then must be the first goal of the partnerships we form for our children: to create a secure and predictable emotional environment. Ideally, one in which our children can model behaviour by exposure to

worthy models. Reality, funding and financial constraints conspire against this outcome, however, and that requires diverse strategies to make up the shortfall. Wherever possible, we need to think of how to augment the environment for our children to broaden their experience in positive ways—exploiting opportunities as they appear, and encouraging the creation of opportunities through committed thinking. Few problems are greater than our capacity to find solutions, but it requires a commitment to that outcome.

This then is the second goal of the partnerships we form for our children: to commit to the outcomes that best serve our children's needs. This requires definition—determining the extent to which we can form partnerships with likeminded others. Through sharing our commitment, we improve the potential for finding solutions.

'Educators are bound by the term "in loco parentis", or "in the place of the parent", but ... only Mother Hubbard had as many children to deal with as has the professional educator.'

So, there it is—from the jaded to the hopeful perspectives; and I harbour both worldviews because the reality requires synthesis. We only have a short time to influence the way in which our children understand the world, and most importantly, their value as individuals. But for the child who believes he or she is loved and

worthy of love, and capable of loving others, no greater lessons can be learned. With this as the base, the superstructure of all subsequent learning and modelling is stable and strong, resilient and appropriate.

Mark Mitchell

Mark's portrayal of a Greek fruiterer named Con in the 1980s television series, *The Comedy Company*, has endeared him to many Australians. Mark has also acted in several highly-acclaimed children's series, such as *Lift Off* and *Round the Twist*. More recently, he has worked in film and musical theatre, and is a popular guest speaker at corporate events.

Unmasking the divide: Connecting fathers with early childhood

Anthony Body, director of Orange Preschool, outlines the establishment of an innovative fathers' group at the centre. This is a success story—motivation for any early childhood centre aspiring to encourage and foster strong relationships between dads and their children.



Starting a fathers' group involves:

- inviting a group of dads to make something new;
- using their ideas to set the discussion topics;
- mixing, talking and other activities;
- seeking feedback from the men and their partners; and
- celebrating the amazing things fathers can do.

Fathers and early childhood centres are a strange marriage. I am an early childhood professional and a father—another strange combination. This group has been a learning experience for these dads and a learning experience for me.

As an early childhood professional I have noticed that fathers will often come into a centre and get really involved. Their involvement will be very beneficial to the service but, at the end of the time, I often ask myself as a director, 'Has there been any emotional connection with these dads?', and, in making this emotional connection, 'Have we, as a service, made a difference in their lives?'

Fathers' nights

Orange Preschool's fathers' nights are usually a sell-out, and the fathers always leave chuckling.

It usually is a big, blokey, silly night, where they see their mates playing alongside their children, they watch each other, and swap footy and work stories. In the end they have fun and, on leaving, I'm sure they feel good about their roles as dads.

Every year there has been a small number of dads wanting to do more, asking: 'What next?' We are a small service, quite culturally and socially diverse, but this project came out of the belief that we could try something for our fathers—a next step. This next step became a parent partnership that explores how we as a service, and a small group of eight dads, can make a difference in the lives of these families. We advertised a get-together night in our newsletter, targeted certain dads and then went to the meeting with some key questions. The rest was up to this small group of dads.

Aims

Our fathers' group meets once a month, and since its inception has been a great success. The goals of the group include:

- to allow fathers to use their children as a basis for friendship;
- to explore the issues that are affecting fathers today; and
- to share information with the objective of developing more confidence and competency in the role of being a father.

Healthy dialogue

Whatever the family type, there is often a father figure who is influential in the children's lives. Making this man more confident in this role is beneficial to everyone in that family group (Russell et al., 1999).

Our fathers' group has developed into a small group of friends that talk about their children as a common interest. They talk about their fathers, and how they want to balance their work and family and support their partners. It seems as if this group has developed into a safe place to explore the issues that worry them—issues they think of in quiet moments.

These men wanted to be completely involved with their children—right from birth—but they had few role models and few opportunities to ask questions. We have found that, when they sat down together, they spilled everything out on the table and wanted to talk. This was an opportunity to bring up tricky or difficult questions without looking stupid.

Fathers, partnerships

The group is very honest and very open, but in a way it is a safe place for them to talk. I'm sure that some of the things that they say are things that in the past they hadn't even shared with their partners, but now do. Partners of group members have also noted a difference in their interactions and discussions.

Through this experience, we have found that the emotional relationship that these fathers have with the service increases dramatically.

Many parents struggle. Some of us lack the confidence or feel that our skills or time are lacking; others have never had the role model they need to be an effective parent. What we can learn and what we can achieve through this group is the belief that most fathers can be effective, sensitive and really be a true partner in the childhood of their sons and daughters—a benefit to everyone in that family.

Anthony Body

Director, Orange Preschool

Reference

Russell, G., Barclay, L., Edgecombe, G., Donovan, J., Habib, G., Callaghan, H., & Pawson, Q. (1999). *Fitting fathers into families: Men and the fatherhood role in contemporary Australia*. Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services.

Family partnerships: *Back to basics*

Searching for an alternative to the 'expert' approach of working with parents? Family partnerships training, introduced into Australia by Hilton Davis, emphasises genuine and respectful partnerships with parents. In this article, Dr Mary Hood, a trainer of facilitators with Hilton Davis, tells us more about the origins, aims and structure of this program.

Family partnerships training (also known as parent adviser training) is of interest to a wide range of health, education and social care professionals.

This model was developed by the UK Centre for Parent and Child Support (www.cpcs.org.uk), originally established to help child and family services communicate more effectively with the people they serve. The centre is commissioned by health, education, social care and voluntary organisations to enhance the skills of their staff and evaluate what they do. The approach also aims to encourage the efficient and effective use of the health, social care and educational resources available to parents. It can be used to help prevent psychosocial problems in children and to intervene early if they arise.

The family partnerships program is the basis for a number of different service developments in the UK, Australia and Europe. This approach and associated service developments have been used as examples of good practice in a number of national reports overseas (e.g. Audit Commission, Mental Health Foundation, Sure Start).

The family partnerships approach is based upon a framework that integrates the use of core helping skills and qualities with the processes of a goal-orientated approach. The model used is one of working in partnership with parents, rather than taking the 'expert' approach to working with parents.

Family partnerships training

Family partnerships training is an intensive, five-day (or 10 half-days) course in which participants learn and practise the model

of working in partnership with parents. This involves using the model to discuss the real situations they meet in their daily interactions with parents.

Course participants are encouraged to develop knowledge, skills and confidence in the processes of engaging and relating to parents and supporting them effectively. These processes are assumed to involve the development of a genuine and respectful partnership. This is supportive in its own right by facilitating parental self-esteem and self-efficacy, but is also the vehicle for the exploration of possible problems and joint problem management.

The core family partnership training program covers the needs of parents and children, the nature of the parent–professional relationship, the processes of helping, and the qualities and communication skills needed to facilitate these processes.

All the programs can be modified to meet specific needs of particular organisations or individuals.

Experience shows that the program is often more effective if participants are not all from the same work group. This means that they bring different experiences to share and learn from. It also helps to build intra- and inter-organisational relationships.

Benefits of family partnerships

Family partnerships has been extensively researched to show positive outcomes from the training. The family partnership model has been implemented and evaluated with a range of services in different countries. The approach has been used by practitioners

'Course participants are encouraged to develop knowledge, skills and confidence in the processes of engaging and relating to parents and supporting them effectively.'

from all disciplines (e.g. paediatrics, nursing, child care, teaching, social work, volunteers) in services relating to child and adult disability, chronic illness, child mental health problems, educational special needs, and the prevention of psychosocial problems, including abuse. In all these areas, the model is supported by its demonstrated usefulness to practitioners and by evidence from research studies. The program significantly increases participants' knowledge and understanding of the processes and skills needed to help parents. There is also evidence of observable improvements in the personal qualities and communication skills of participants—skills needed to listen effectively to parents and to work in partnership with them. Several studies have shown improved accuracy in workers' identification of family needs and significantly improved parental satisfaction with the service they provide. Some of the benefits are summarised below:

Family

- Increased parental self-efficacy
- Better health outcomes
- Strengths-focused approach

Professional

- Relevant to all professional and non-professional backgrounds
- Breaks down barriers and gives people common ways of approaching issues
- Increases links in the organisation
- Increases self-reflection and closer examination of practice
- Assists professionals to put themselves in the place of the parent
- More effective helping process—the partnership versus expert model
- Better understanding of client issues and their own lives

Personal

- Increased satisfaction
- Reduced stress
- Increased psychological wellbeing
- Improved occupational health, safety and welfare outcomes

Organisation

- More likely to work in partnership with other organisations
- Increases interagency networks

Community

- Better outcomes for children
- Partnership is true community development
- Long-term financial benefits due to better outcomes and community capacity building
- Stronger sense of community and empowered families

Course program

All programs use an adult learning style, which recognises and makes use of the experience that participants bring with

them. The courses are for 12 participants and consist of 10 three-and-a-half-hour sessions (or five full-day sessions) with assignments in between. Each session involves a seminar and a skills practice, designed together to maximise participant understanding, confidence and skills. Ideally, the course is run over 10 half-days to allow greater time for integration and practice of the skills learnt.

The course is interactive, requiring the involvement of all participants. It is assumed that members of the group learn best by active discussion—not passive listening—and by actual practice of their skills in a secure environment with constructive feedback. Participants are required to complete limited reading and observational tasks between sessions.

Participants are not formally assessed; but since the course is carefully constructed to build session by session, successful completion is dependent upon attending all sessions. Being absent for even one day significantly reduces the understanding and value of subsequent sessions.

At the end of the core family partnership training course, participants are given a certificate of completion of the training. It is important that there is provision within organisational work plans for some follow-up days each year where participants can come together, with or without a trainer (preferably with), to maintain motivation and momentum.

The training is now being carried out and the model being used in South Australia, Western Australia (over 600 staff trained in health, child protection and education), New South Wales, Victoria, ACT and Tasmania. Results in terms of feedback and staff practice have been consistently positive.

Dr Mary Hood

Centre for Parenting

Children, Youth and Women's Health Service

Reference

Davis, H., Day, C., & Bidmead, C. (2002). *Working in partnership with parents*. London: The Psychological Corporation.

For further references documenting the efficacy of family partnership training, email hood.mary@cyh.sa.gov.au or visit www.cpcs.org.uk

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GRANDPARENTS' viewpoints on child care

Joy Goodfellow is a grandparent and a researcher who has gathered stories of grandparents' experiences as regular child care providers. Here she reveals some of the grandparents' perspectives on child care and the issues raised by them.

About one-fifth of children aged below five in Australia are cared for by grandparents as regular child care providers. However, grandparents are not a homogenous group. They cover a wide age span, are found within all cultures, may be living alone or with partners, may be still in employment, may have chosen to care for their grandchildren or have the responsibility thrust upon them. The views reported here are drawn from a study of 32 grandparents who cared for their grandchildren on a regular basis for more than eight hours a week (see Goodfellow & Laverty, 2003). These grandparents have cared for their grandchildren on a regular basis from when their grandchild was only a few months old. They spontaneously shared their views during one-on-one interviews and informal group discussions.

Relationship building

Grandparents speak of the caring relationships that they have with their grandchildren as being 'more than just minding'. Many grandparents enjoy and gain great pleasure from time spent with their grandchildren through strong, warm, loving and responsive relationships. Such relationships depict a sense of connectedness between the grandparent and the grandchild, a high sense of trust and feelings of empathy—'you feel for them'.

Grandparents reported how they spent most of their regular grandparenting time engaged in their grandchild's play:

'I've really given 100 per cent to them. They now don't like me doing other things. They've got used to the fact that whatever they're doing I'm there with them. If they go outside and I don't go out but sit and have a coffee or whatever, they'll play there for a little while, then they'll be back in. If I go into the computer room to do something, within two minutes they're there.' (Thelma).



Indeed, and particularly with very young children, joint attention episodes are significant in the development of effective relationships within the child's whole social experience. Grandparents were (often unknowingly) aware of this.

Comments made by these grandparents provide some insight into possible reasons why they choose to care for their very young grandchildren in preference to their grandchild attending child care. They were concerned that where carers looked after 'other people's children', the carers' capacity to get to know the children was often limited—'if you're caring for children in general, you really are just doing the job, you're not emotionally involved'.

The grandparents also raised a concern about the high and seemingly unnatural ratios of children to adults in child care. This is because, even with multiple births, having more than three children within an age range of twelve months is unusual. This issue of ratios is one that research suggests needs to be addressed with respect to formal and licensed child care services for many services still operate with child:staff ratios higher than 3:1. In New South Wales, for example, regulations support a 5:1 ratio which has caused considerable debate among early childhood professionals because such a ratio does not reflect best practice. However there is a cost associated with the reduction in ratios and service providers are concerned that reducing the ratios would increase child care costs and thus make care of younger children even less affordable.

The challenge to think about cost, equity and the nurturing of young children is a real issue for grandparents, parents and for child care providers alike. Indeed, a number of research studies suggest we need to be cautious about supporting maternal employment of more than 30 hours a week during the first year of life and preferably until the child is three years of age. With these issues in mind, grandparents often choose to offer themselves as alternate providers of child care for their children's children.

No child is raised in isolation. While there was wariness on the part of grandparents with respect to the use of child care services, they had an even greater concern about society's view of children. A theme that permeated many of the grandparents' comments was one of concern about young parents' perception of the role that children play within society. Indeed, a discussion within a small group of grandparents raised the issues of children being 'accessorised' and dehumanised:

'I have often observed young couples out with their children. I think that they have this picture in their mind of mum and dad—the stroller, the 'this' and the 'that' ... they think that the baby is going to go to sleep and wee when you want it to. The baby is not a toy—'now be quiet; now you sleep; now you eat.'

Grandparents expressed concern about a view of parents as consumers of products and services for their children.

Consumerism and the commodification of children

Consumerism, within the context of child care provision, refers to the increasing emphasis on viewing parents as consumers of child care; child care as a service that is purchased; and children as commodities that occupy shelf space (i.e. child care places) in an increasingly monopolised supermarket model of child care. Commodification occurs when we turn the caring of children over to the marketplace. In that marketplace we constantly talk about the availability and cost of child care places.



Grandparents were concerned that the community may have lost sight of what child care experiences are like for the child. It is the nurturing function that grandparents were concerned about, as 'neither the state nor the market' can provide such a function—'for neither operates from love' (Waterman, 2003, p. 449).

A contemporary view of the child as a strong, competent and active learner has permeated many of the professional practices child care provides. However, because young children are dependent on their caregivers for love, protection, education and health care, this may also contribute to a view of children as accessories because they are not seen as individuals in their own right (Cannella, 1997). This image of the child needs to be connected to the informed choices that the professional child care provider makes when extending each child's learning and understandings.

Many grandparents choose to care for their grandchildren to alleviate the burden of the cost of child care. They see that it is one way in which they can support their adult children who are trying to establish themselves financially and save money to purchase a home. If grandparents are not available, then the alternative is to purchase the type of child care that is most affordable, rather than seek services that are of the highest quality. Parents may not always be in a position to identify key aspects of high-quality services because they are not present in the child care centre throughout the child's day. Therefore, they may find it difficult to judge the quality of staff-child relationships and the nature of the staffing environment.

Grandparents continue to play a significant role as child care providers. They may well need support in this role through initially being recognised for their substantial economic and social contribution to society. Their contribution needs to be valued and child/family policies and practices need to be inclusive of grandparents.

Joy Goodfellow

Hon. Associate
Macquarie University

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Graeme and Sharynn, creators of the Lee-Beau oven guard, first thought of the idea of an oven guard when their toddler burnt himself on a boiling urn in their kitchen. He is now nearly eight years old and still bears the scars from that night. After inspecting their house for any more possible hotspots, Graeme noticed the dangers of their shiny oven, with its attractive light, and set out to design a heat-protective cover. The final product was the Lee-Beau oven guard, on display at KidSafe WA and featured on the ABC's *New Inventors* program.

Win!

To celebrate the 'Parent-partnerships' theme of this *Every Child*, Early Childhood Australia is giving parents and centres the chance to win one of three fantastic new oven guards. The oven guards have been generously donated by Lee-Beau Creations (www.ovenguard.com.au) and are valued at between \$110 and \$150 each.

Every Child—Have your say

All you need to do is submit a letter to the editor, voicing your opinion about the latest *Every Child* or any other issue facing the early childhood field. Your name will be placed into a random draw for a fantastic, easy-to-use oven guard (style, size and fashionable colour to be decided by winners). Entries will be accepted until COB 14 April 2006. The best letters will be published in upcoming issues of *Every Child* and winners announced in the next issue of *Every Child*.

Send letters to the *Every Child* in-house editor:

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Through the Looking Glass (TtLG) is an innovative, attachment-based parenting project. The program is operating in a number of child care settings—including Lady Gowrie Adelaide, child care sites at Noarlunga, Paradise and Salisbury, and interstate in Gowrie Perth and Brisbane. The project is a partnership between the Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service (CYWHS), Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) and Lady Gowrie Child Centre. It is funded through the Commonwealth’s Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

A multipronged early intervention strategy

This project is a health, education and welfare early intervention strategy. It utilises child care settings to intervene with families where there is a compromised attachment relationship between the primary carer and child/ren. The child care setting is chosen because it is non-threatening, non-stigmatising, and independent.

The TtLG program provides intensive psychosocial support, therapeutic intervention and child care as a package for high-need families in order to develop and support more secure attachment relationships between parent and child. The project is designed to achieve specific outcomes for parents, children and child care staff. These outcomes include:

For parents

- greater insight into the issues which impact on their parenting;
- increased empathy for their children;
- greater confidence in their parenting ability; and
- increased links to broader community resources.

For children

- increased resilience as a result of more secure attachments;
- increased feeling of safety; and
- the encouragement of a safe haven in a child care setting.

For child care staff

- increased ability to work as part of a broad intervention strategy with high-need families; and

- increased understanding and application of attachment theory.

The intervention has multiple components including intensive individual and group work, specific fathers’ sessions, video recording of parent–child interactions, partnerships, and learning stories relating to attachment concepts and primary caregiving as a child care approach. TtLG draws heavily on the ‘Circle of Security’ graphic (see *Circle of Security* article, p. 24) in assisting parents and child care staff to understand and integrate attachment theory with practice.

In the TtLG program, both the clinician and child care worker act in partnership with the family. The program works with up to seven families in each group and focuses on their particular struggles that directly impact on their attachment relationship with their child/ren. The group program consists of 18 sessions of two hours each. Both child care and group sessions play an important role in providing a secure base for the parent—enabling maximum opportunity to explore their needs, to reflect and consider their relationships. A unique aspect of the program is the provision of up to two days child care per week for families in the program. The project pays the child care gap fee, hence supporting more families to access care.

The child care component, specifically the primary caregiving model of care, provides the secure base for both child and parent. The child care worker provides an alternative

attachment figure for the child. It is this aspect which ‘holds’ the family within a secure, safe and supportive environment while targeting the specific aspects of their relationships—delivering positive outcomes for families participating in the program.

Intensive support

Referrals to the program are accepted through service providers or by parent self-referral. Each family is assessed by the clinician attached to that child care site and invited to participate in the program where indicated. Up to seven places are available in each 18-week program. Places are kept to a minimum to ensure that participants can feel safe and are able to access the intensive support provided.

Our experience to date indicates high retention rates; increased social connectedness (with over 80 per cent of families continuing to utilise child care following program completion); increased family confidence in accessing the local community for support; strengthened interagency relationships; and a skilled and confident workforce, building on ongoing training and reflective practice activities.

Pam Murphy

Program Manager

Through the Looking Glass

Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Adelaide

For further information on the Through the Looking Glass program, please email pamm@gowrie-adelaide.com.au or visit www.throughthelookingglass.org.au



Intellectual disability and parenting

Supporting families where one or both parents have an intellectual disability can be a major challenge for practitioners in health, education and welfare. There are no exact figures on the number of families headed by a parent with an intellectual disability, however, a 'best guess' estimate based on information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics is 1–2 per cent of Australian families with children aged birth to 17 years are in this category.



Intellectual disability does not automatically result in parental inadequacy and does not inevitably result in child neglect or abuse (Feldman, 1994). However, Australian research has shown that parents with an intellectual disability are disproportionately represented in child protection services and care proceedings. Researchers in other countries have also reported high rates of child removal from the family home when a parent has an intellectual disability.

The reasons for this are complex, but there are three factors which may explain this trend:

- the assumptions and beliefs people have about disability;
- the high levels of disadvantages faced by these families; and
- gaps in effective services, support and resources for these families.

Assumptions

As practitioners, how we view people with an intellectual disability influences how we work with them. Disability is a concept that is socially constructed and there are certain preconceptions about it. For example, there is a widely held assumption across the community that low intelligence means parental incompetence. Practitioners often report being concerned about the consequences when people with an intellectual disability become parents, presuming that such parents will not be able to provide the physical, social and emotional stimulation that children need to develop 'normally'.

Failure to recognise the strengths of a family affects the way we provide support to them. Believing that a parent does not have the capacity to learn can result in practitioners giving them few opportunities to learn new things. For example, by assuming that a parent cannot learn to check the temperature of a sick child, the parent may never be given the opportunity to learn how to check temperature. If we believe parents can learn and do new things, we will then provide opportunities for them to develop skills they need in their parenting role.

Disadvantage

A productive way to think about parents with an intellectual disability is to consider the disadvantage they face, rather than focusing on their disability.

Disadvantages include:

- poverty, unemployment, substandard housing, high stress levels, a history of maltreatment, depression and poor self-esteem;
- poor health. A recent Australian study conducted with a small sample of mothers with an intellectual disability reported significantly poorer health than mothers without disability;
- lack of positive parenting role models;
- limited learning opportunities. In our community, most parents have access to written material on parenting. Parents with an intellectual disability often have great difficulty getting hold of, understanding and applying such information;
- limited informal supports. Most parents have family and friends that they can turn for reassurance, practical help and advice. Parents with intellectual disability are often isolated and experience little social support;
- limited formal supports. When problems arise, most parents can obtain professional supports and services. These services are not well-equipped—in terms of training or resources—to accommodate the learning needs of parents with intellectual disability.

Importantly, such disadvantage is often associated with chaotic living circumstances that can bring families to the attention of the child protection system.

Support, services and resource gaps

Researchers have identified features of the service system that may weaken, rather than strengthen, parents' beliefs that they are doing a good job of parenting. These include a lack of continuity of service delivery, failure to involve parents in decisions that affect them and

their family, and practices that are not based on what we know works for these families.

Research has shown that by using teaching methods matched to their learning needs, parents with an intellectual disability do learn, retain and use parenting skills.

Critical elements for developing effective parenting skills include:

- Teaching and learning in the setting in which the skills are needed—most often this is the family home.
- The focus of programs needs to be on parents demonstrating skills, rather than just talking about them.
- The most effective teaching strategies involve breaking complex tasks down into small steps, giving clear instructions, demonstrating the skill, giving concrete examples from the parent's everyday life, providing immediate feedback, prompting, lots of practice, and plenty of positive feedback.
- A range of teaching aides (such as pictorial manuals, photographs,

audio tape, videotape) assist learning when used in conjunction with face-to-face teaching.

- The program is flexible, long-term, and plans for the skills to be used. Parents are more likely to use their new skills if practitioners teach them in the home, use everyday interactions that parents have with children as teaching opportunities, and teach multiple examples of the same skill or concept.

Supportive approaches in practice—a case study

Susan Rogers, a psychologist at the Victorian Parenting Centre, has seen first-hand how effective these supportive approaches can be for parents with learning difficulties. Susan was able to adapt the parenting program so that several parenting strategies, such as praise and setting up play activities, were taught using visual prompt cards, modelling and role-play instead of the traditional workbook approach. Susan was also able to link the family up with their local cub scouts organisation to give the family the opportunity meet with other families.

Skills for real settings

As well as best practice parent education, attention should be paid to the context in which parents are expected to use their skills. Even programs that are well-planned, based on best practice and rigorously implemented may have limited success if this is not done. The disadvantage that many parents with an intellectual disability experience can act as a barrier to applying the parenting skills they have recently learnt.

There is now a strong body of research that shows the benefits of providing parent skills education in conjunction with other family-focused support—known as supportive contextual interventions. This also helps parents overcome obstacles to effective parenting. An example of a supportive contextual intervention is to teach budgeting or problem-solving skills to a financially overstretched parent, in conjunction with teaching specific child care skills that will provide for their child's immediate needs. Another example is when practitioners devise strategies that promote access to community-based support networks for parents with an intellectual disability. While providing social support is not sufficient to enable a parent to learn new skills, it may be one of the most effective ways of ensuring that parents have the opportunities to develop skills which—once acquired—will be used, maintained and generalised to new situations.

Robyn Mildon

Project Coordinator, Victorian Parenting Centre

Catherine Wade

Development Officer, Victorian Parenting Centre

Jan Matthews

Deputy Director, Victorian Parenting Centre

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The Victorian Parenting Centre and the University of Sydney are currently implementing an Australia-wide initiative, *Healthy Start*, to support parents with learning difficulties and promote a healthy start to life for their young children.

For more information please visit www.healthystart.net.au



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A special setting: *Child care in Aceh, Indonesia*

Observing the practices of child care centres in diverse settings provides a foundation for reflecting on the activities of centres in Australia. Andi Pramono, manager of the Youth Off The Streets–Muhammadiyah child care centre in Aceh, Indonesia and an Indonesian-born, permanent Australian resident, provides a brief snapshot of the centre that arose out of the December 2004 tsunami.

The project

Following the December 2004 tsunami, Youth Off The Streets and Muhammadiyah established a child care centre to care for separated or unattached children in Aceh, Indonesia.

The centre, in operation since January 2005, accommodates approximately 45 children. Staff members include team leaders, cooks, a cleaner, drivers, a translator and security guards. All staff are local Acehnese.

Facilities

The centre consists of tents, an open-sided mosque, a kitchen, an office, a medical room, and a quiet area designated for study. It is based on a disused Telkom (telecommunications company) site, about 10km from the city of Banda Aceh.

What's happening at the moment?

After almost one year at the Telkom site, we are moving 'camp' to another site. It's exciting, because this move also signals the start of building permanent facilities—enabling the children, and staff, to live in a more secure and comfortable environment.

What happens on an average day at the centre?

The children wake up early for the first prayer of the day at 5.30am. Later in the morning they attend their respective schools, and on their return at around 2pm they have a well-deserved rest! By late afternoon the centre comes alive again. The girls have a passion for volleyball and often the boys join in, or they head off to the local soccer field for a game or two. The children have English lessons during the week, and a movie night on Saturday nights.

It is fantastic to witness the children lying about the multi-purpose mosque on the movie night, eyes glued to the projected image, laughing along to an Indonesian-subtitled version of *The Lion King*. Their joy at this time is often heightened in the knowledge that the next day, Sunday, means they can return to their respective villages for a day. With most of the children having extended family members, they are able to visit their relatives on this special day. Often, due to financial difficulties (or other issues), these relatives are unable to provide extended care, but retaining this connection is crucial to the children's wellbeing.



Can you describe how the emotional, pastoral and psychological needs of the children, post-tsunami, are being met by the centre?

Every Wednesday and Saturday, counsellors from a local non-government organisation, *Kanaivasu*, come and help the children with their psychological needs. A few of the children who have experienced more acute psychological trauma receive support from 'The Calming House', run by *Medecins Sans Frontieres*. Back at the centre, a Muhammadiyah religious leader provides religious education. Importantly, the layout and organisation of the centre is such that we try to create a family-like environment for the children. For example, in the children's eyes I am not the 'manager', rather I am like a brother, or a father.

What has been your most memorable experience while working at the centre?

On the first day, when no-one knew who I was, the youngest boy (10 years old) approached me and grabbed my hand. He told me that he lost all of his family in the tsunami. I was stunned by his openness, and surprised that he trusted me with such a personal story. We have stayed very close friends up until now.

Finally, how has managing the centre affected you personally?

I am definitely not the same person today as I was when I first walked in the gates. Working here and being a part of the children's lives has changed me in a way I never could have imagined possible. I love waking up to them each day and I love coming home. I came here as a centre manager but I know I'll leave here as so much more. It has enriched my life.

Andi Pramono

Manager, Youth Off The Streets–Muhammadiyah Child Care Centre
Aceh, Indonesia

For more information on this unique project between Youth Off The Streets and Muhammadiyah, visit www.youthoffthestreets.com.au

The Everyday of Parenting Program

Cooloon Children's Centre Inc. received initial funding in July 2003 and again in July 2005 under the Australian Government Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to implement 'The Everyday of Parenting Program'. The program is designed to allow the service to expand its capacity to support existing families and wait-listed families, as well as families in the wider community, before they reach a crisis point.

The program is based on the knowledge that children's services have always acted as knowledge brokers and support points for families in the context of a trusted, familiar, non-threatening environment. It is based on the knowledge and understanding that the first five years in a child's life are critical to his/her long-term development and wellbeing; that all parents are vulnerable to some extent; and that young children are naturally challenging and demanding.

Many parents feel overwhelmed by parenting—isolated and lacking in confidence—and recognise how challenging it is to be a good parent. This was supported by an Australian Childhood Foundation survey, 'The Concerns of Australian Parents' (Tucci, Goddard & Mitchell, 2004), who found that almost two-thirds of the parents interviewed believe they could be better parents for their children; three in four of parents interviewed do not believe that parenting comes naturally; and over half of parents (56 per cent) lack confidence about their parenting.

Supporting parents

At Cooloon we have applied The Everyday of Parenting Program to our early child care setting. Our staff are able to readily identify needs through the daily interactions with the children in their care. Parents often disclose areas of concern and difficulty without fear of stigma on a regular basis as they access child care.

The program strategies at Cooloon include:

- *Reading Together* program;
- home visits;
- discussion/information nights;
- social family functions;
- focused parenting library and resources;
- peer-driven support groups;
- monthly newsletters—catering for both enrolled and wait-listed families, community members and services for families;
- increased community presence—interagency groups, Families First, early intervention, media, local services, private practitioners;
- 'The things they didn't tell us about parenting' parenting course; and
- supported playgroups.



Challenges

Misinformation still exists about the role that early childhood services, such as child care and preschool, play in the wider picture as family support centres.

This program does require a funded and dedicated parent support staff, as existing children's services staff do not have the additional time, resources and/or skills to work with parents at the higher level demanded by the program.

We have had to come to understandings between the differing disciplines of early childhood education and family support services. In our particular setting we have had to grapple with space considerations and restraints, particularly as they relate to issues of confidentiality and privacy. We, as all of you who work in children's services already know, have had to work with families within their willingness and/or ability to identify needs within their own values and belief frameworks.

A model for other centres

We do see potential for this model to be replicated easily. If given adequate recognition, funding and resources, children's services are ideally placed to respond to families as part of an ongoing relationship. It is preventative with early intervention on a formal and informal basis, in collaboration with other family support services. The nature of the setting in children's services allows for parenting supports and interventions that are child-centred.

'There may not be one "right" way to parent every child, but parenting might need to respond to the particular characteristics of the child' (Sanson & Wise, 2001).

Judy Radich

Manager, Cooloon Children's Centre Inc. and 'The Everyday of Parenting Program'

National President, Early Childhood Australia

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For more information, please contact Judy at the centre on 07 5536 5929 or email cooloonchildcare@auschild.org.au

Profile — Margaret Negus

Margaret Negus is a Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services) graduate and 2005 TAFE NSW – North Coast Institute Student of the Year. In the following article, Margaret tells us about her sudden career change, the highlights and also challenges of her course, and her vision for early childhood education.



1. Why did you get into child care?

After the collapse of Ansett Australia, and the subsequent loss of my much-loved job of 20-plus years as a flight attendant, I was faced with the stark realisation that I had no formal qualifications to back up a job application. I decided not to chase another airline job—which I felt could never measure up to the one I had lost—so I turned to my childhood dream of becoming a kindergarten teacher.

2. What motivated you to complete the course and do so well?

A combination of a need for meaningful employment and the need to gain a qualification I could build on if I found I was capable. Time was a definite factor. I am 47 years old and I wanted to complete the course in the set time frame. My initial goal was simply to complete the course—doing so well was a bonus that happened partly because I found I was capable, but mostly because I was surrounded by wonderful people who encouraged and believed in me. It is quite a phenomenon to experience unwavering support and endorsement.

3. What were the highlights of your course?

By far the most significant highlight has been 'learning to learn' and gaining confidence to continue. Throughout my two-year diploma course, my ability to learn was confirmed in my own mind and my confidence in this area grew by degrees with each module passed. The whole TAFE experience at Coffs Harbour Education Campus was positive for me—from the wonderful team of teachers who were flexible, approachable, incredibly dedicated and always seeking to improve their own practices, to a remarkable class of fellow students who combined to create a wonderful energy and an atmosphere of generosity, networking and genuine friendship that blossomed within the classroom.

4. What challenges did you encounter?

Even though I firmly believe it's never too late to study, re-entering an educational institution as a mature learner was fairly confronting for me. Another great challenge for me was the pressure I put upon myself, largely because of my age—I imagined that somehow more was expected from me at

this age than if I had been an 18-year-old straight from school. The biggest and most frustrating challenge within the course was learning, as I went, to use a computer to complete written assessment tasks. I was also challenged to adjust my thinking from the classroom to the reality of the workplace with each practical assignment I undertook.

5. What are you planning to do in your career?

My goal is to gain full-time employment in the Coffs Harbour area. With that, I expect to undertake some more formal learning to build on my early childhood qualification and continue my professional development. Since completing the diploma as a full-time student, I have become aware of the value of concurrent study with work in a relevant field—where the work and the study complement each other—even though it might stretch the duration of the course.

6. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

One of the things that makes life interesting is that the answer to this question often bears no resemblance to the final outcome. Today I see myself remaining in the field of children's care and education; I am still at the starting line with the knowledge and experience of a beginner and continually formulating ideas and opinions. Through my present employment, work at TAFE and volunteer work, I have discovered the necessity of ongoing professional development in order to remain conversant with contemporary trends in child care and associated services. I am contemplating a degree in early childhood education.

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7. What vision do you have for early childhood education?

My vision for early childhood education is that it is valued and respected by the community in general and also local, state and federal governments. More importantly, that all stakeholders regard these crucial early years of our children's lives as an important foundation for their future physical and emotional wellbeing.

In a perfect world, I would increase the ratio of educators to children. Children with special needs would be given ready access to specialists and assistance when required. The red-tape maze that exists to gain extra funding for a child with special needs would be simplified.

My vision is that child care workers are paid a wage that realistically reflects their level of responsibility, training and ability. It is also important to acknowledge all of the facets of this occupation such as caring, concern, compassion and love.

8. What changes or refocusing might be needed to optimise early learning and development opportunities for children?

Child care services are as individual and unique as the children, families and caregivers within them. Change and refocusing must not always be viewed broadly—it should be tailored to suit the people, place and time. In general, however, as more and more children will spend a great proportion of their early years at child care facilities, I see a need to simplify schedules and routines for children, and recording and planning for early childhood professionals. Refocusing and change is a continual process and it is important to foster partnerships with parents

and other early childhood professionals so as to optimise early learning and development opportunities for children.

9. What does your crystal ball say about directions and developments in early childhood education?

Families are becoming more complex and mobile and, with a lack of extended family, they are often unsupported. This will lead to changes and movement within services for staff members and children. Many children may be spending a great proportion of their early years in formal care situations while parents and guardians pursue paid employment. This trend increases the vital role that early childhood education plays in our communities, as child care services become an important extension of the family unit.

Providing high-quality care and education to all children attending child care facilities will require services to be flexible, open-minded and creative in these times of constant change.

10. What are you doing now?

I work two days per week in a centre that offers long day care, preschool and occasional care to children aged three–six years. At this centre there is a wonderful amalgamation of professionalism, fun, love and efficiency. One morning per week I volunteer in the kindergarten room of our local Rudolph Steiner School—exposing me to a philosophy that caught my attention during my studies and which provides me with another perspective. Another morning I work at TAFE—assisting at the play session run by the students. This is an opportunity for me to observe new trends and interact with yet another group of families, which further broadens my understanding of early childhood education.

I have continued with the job I had while studying, as a sales assistant in a furniture shop, working Saturdays, Sundays and 10 hours on Thursdays. I am juggling all this for now as I continue to explore early childhood education from different angles. In each of these situations, I learn something new each day.





From *juggling* to *balancing*

Early childhood centres as family-friendly workplaces

Early childhood centres are inherently family-oriented places that support policies and practices that value children and families. Coupled with this, there is much current interest within the community to consider workplaces that support families through policy development and provision. From John Howard's 'BBQ Stopper' to Pru Goward's recently-published discussion paper 'Striking the Balance', work and family is firmly on the Australian political, economic and social agenda.

While early childhood education and care is often an important feature of discussion and debate in the context of work and family issues, it is seldom that the issue of work and family for early childhood educators is addressed. In a profession dominated by women and which has historically been identified as a 'nice job for ladies' (Stonehouse, 1994), there is a certain irony in the lack of work and family provisions for early childhood educators.

This article traces how one early childhood centre has attempted to address this contradiction, and recognise and support the needs of staff and their families in supporting other working families. The article explores some of the factors which have led to the development of family-friendly initiatives, why such measures were considered important, and the ongoing journey of establishing and maintaining a supportive workplace culture.

Juggling work and family

Located at the University of Queensland, Campus Kindergarten is a unique early childhood centre, with a tradition of valuing people as the heart and soul of the organisation. It is a community-based early childhood centre that operates dually as a long day care centre and as a creche/kindergarten. There are three groups of children at the centre, and up to 65 children attend each day. Children attend either two, three or five days a week in a consistent enrolment pattern.

Over twenty full-time, part-time and casual staff are employed at the centre. The centre has a strong organisational culture that can best be described through the values that this community promotes, including rights, respect, trust and responsibilities.

Campus Kindergarten began seriously thinking about family-friendly policies and practices following a period of maternity leave taken by a long-standing and valued member of staff. This leave was taken in isolation, with little planning for the transitions either side of the leave. While such a situation is not uncommon in many workplaces, there was a strong sense of 'how can we do this better?' In particular, the Campus Kindergarten community was keen to take a broader view of the issue, to ensure that family was considered in a way that was inclusive of the variety of family situations—to move from a consideration of 'work and family' to 'career and family', and from 'juggling work and family' to 'finding ways to support a better balance'.

'In a profession which has been identified as a "nice job for ladies", there is a certain irony in the lack of work and family provisions for early childhood educators.'

The balancing act

Campus Kindergarten has traditionally placed high value on staff professional development (PD)—this was the starting place for consideration of career and family.

One key starting point was not with staff members' families as such, but with individual staff members themselves. Questions needed to be addressed, such as: what was their view of the early childhood profession? What was their view of themselves as early childhood professionals? How did they see themselves as advocates for the professionalism of the field? How did they see their own current and developing careers? In this discussion the issue of balance was prominent—balance between the needs of the centre, and the professional and career needs of individuals. While there are clear overlaps between both sets of needs, the issue of balance has become a key recurring theme within the centre's professional development programs.

Another important development in the process of addressing career and family at the centre has been the Campus Kindergarten career planning sessions. They took place at a local outdoor cafe over a coffee and provided a nurturing and reflective environment for a

staff member to engage in a 'think tank' with the director and a member of the board of management professional committee. The sessions were informal in nature, although a framework of questions were provided as discussion starters, and were very much about thinking 'big picture' with respect to goals and aspirations.

While the PD days and career planning sessions were important in establishing the framework within which the centre thought about career and family, the collaborative development of policy has been important in providing the means by which these frameworks could be put into operation. All policies are framed by the centre's culture, including the rights of all people in the community and a strong image of children as an integral part of this community. This approach has been integral to the development of family-friendly policies and practices. Some relevant policies include:

- staff professional development policy (including the key elements of flexibility, opportunity, career pathways, study support and leave);
- parental leave policy (including paid maternity leave);
- staffing policy (providing a framework for the staff model); and
- job-share/part-time work policy.

It is not possible to provide detail of these policies here, but these policies have been critically important in helping support both the centre and staff members.

Striking a balance

Some of the key benefits of adopting family-friendly initiatives for staff at the centre have ranged from the practical issue of, for example, being able to bring one's child to the centre on a pupil-free day, to the professional acknowledgement afforded by access to paid maternity leave. For Campus Kindergarten, these initiatives help demonstrate the centre's valuing of staff and, in turn, contributes to the improvement in such areas as staff retention, staff motivation, job satisfaction, staff absences and staff performance. At a broader level, these initiatives have helped Campus Kindergarten in the development of a greater shared understanding of career and family—between teachers, parents and families.

More particularly, however, the process of addressing career and family issues has focused staff on the issue of balance. We have come to understand that balance is very much a dynamic concept, not a static one. If we think of trying to stand on one leg, we realise that we don't actually 'strike a balance' but, in fact, we need to work very hard to that maintain balance. Additional support makes that balance easier to maintain.

Embracing work and family

This article has provided a snapshot of some of the current issues in early childhood education and care, with respect to work and family, and has outlined the process by which one centre has sought to address these issues. It is hoped that this discussion has promoted questioning and critical reflection about the possibilities that exist. Key points that early childhood centres might like to consider in developing family-friendly initiatives in their own unique settings include: flexibility, supporting opportunities, creativity, and recognising diversity. In moving from merely attempting to juggle work and family, where one of the balls could easily be dropped, early childhood centres can embrace the idea of family-friendly initiatives, thereby supporting greater balance for all families in their community.

Megan Gibson

School of Early Childhood
Queensland University of Technology

Tricia Rooney

School of Political Science and International Studies
University of Queensland

Megan Gibson and Tricia Rooney presented a paper at the Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference in 2005.

The authors are currently engaged in developing a research project looking specifically at family-friendly policy provision in early childhood education and care in Australia. Please contact the authors for more information, email: ml.gibson@qut.edu.au

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- Stonehouse, A. (1994). *Not just nice ladies: A book of readings on early childhood care and education*. Castle Hill, NSW: Pademelon Press.
- Sumsion, J. (2005). Staff shortages in children's services: Challenging taken-for-granted discourses. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 30(2), 40–48.

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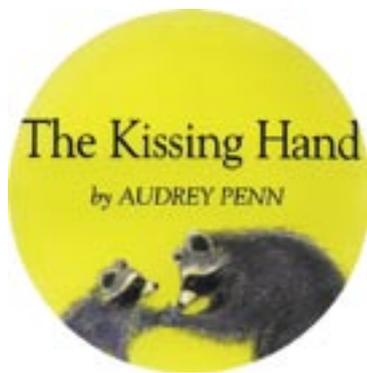
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By Audrey Penn
Illustrations by Ruth E. Harper and Nancy M. Leak

Child Welfare League of America (1995), distributed in Australia by The Book Garden
 ISBN 0878685855
 RRP \$42.95

The Kissing Hand can be used in a variety of settings and situations, especially when a child is in need of reassurance in confronting a difficult situation. The book can be used when a child may be faced with separation from a loved one—through death, foster care, hospitalisation, camp or starting school. This story can be further explored in a library or classroom setting, for example during circle or sharing time, and would be thought-provoking in an assembly at the beginning of a school year.

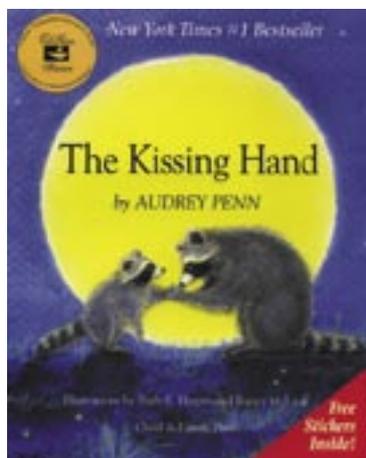
The storyline can be used to develop a special way of gaining inner confidence. For Chester Raccoon and his mother, the love that is combined with all the reassurance and strength to gain this confidence is both delightfully moving and loving.

The author, Audrey Penn, obviously has experience in writing in partnership with children. She writes sensitively, using language that is friendly for adults and children alike. Nine-year-old Sophie commented, 'there are not too many hard words, so lots of children could read it'. Eleven-year-old Bronte thought the story was about love and doing new things that turn out not as hard as you thought they would be.

I read *The Kissing Hand* to a range of different children—aged three, four, seven, nine and 11 years. All children responded with similar, favourable comments and predictions about the title and what may be happening in the vibrant cover illustration. Indeed, this vibrancy and delightful art continued all the way through the book. As a teacher, I would also use this book as a base to extend art activities; for example, with a wall mural.

I should also add that this book is published by the Child Welfare League of America, a membership-based child welfare organisation in the US. The proceeds from the sale of the book support programs benefiting children and their families.

Kathleen Fraser



By Leonie Arthur, Bronwyn Beecher, Elizabeth Death, Sue Dockett and Sue Farmer.

Thomson (2005)
 ISBN 0170111660
 Available from Early Childhood Australia for \$94.95

This book is all about programming and planning; different play experiences; relationships with peers and adults; philosophies; and on top of this, an all-round resource textbook about supporting children's play!

It is a great resource book for academic and study purposes or for the child carer who just wants to 'look something up'.

Written in easy-flowing English with not too much use of jargon, it is easy to understand.

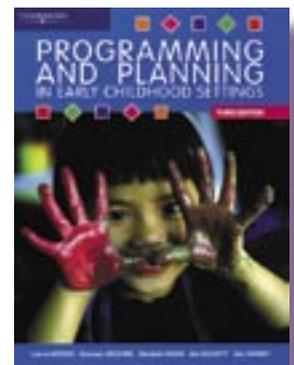
The information learned from the book is of great use in:

- assignments—for those of you who are studying early childhood;
- the early childhood workplace—for example, ideas for displaying children's artwork; and
- conference presentations.

There are quite a few photos of children engaged in play; and tables and diagrams that relate to the text. The photos help in breaking up the uniformity of the text on the page and assist in understanding the topics being discussed. The tables and diagrams assist in an easy interpretation of theories and plans.

Overall, I'd say that this text is an informative resource for early childhood professionals and those studying to be in the field. It could also be used as a tool for those of us that need a brainwave when programming activities, or just for some fresh ideas.

Veronica Pompei

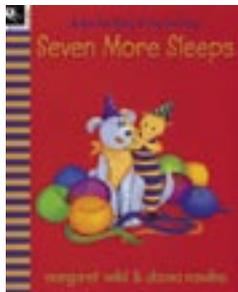


Babs the Baby & Fog the Dog Seven More Sleeps

By Margaret Wild
Illustrations by Donna Rawlins

Working Title Press (2004)
ISBN 1876288604
RRP \$24.95 (hardback)

Margaret Wild is a fine writer who covers the gambit of themes—from serious life and death issues to the daily lives of families and young children.



Titles such as *The Very Best of Friends*, with Julie Vivas (1989), *Old Pig*, with Ron Brooks (1995), and *The Midnight Gang*, with Ann James (2002), have won or been short-listed for the Children's Book Council Picture Book of the Year Awards.

Seven More Sleeps is a book designed to be shared with a very young child. The story, obviously from its title, stars Babs the Baby, Fog the Dog and, of course, the ever-patient Mum.

It begins on Sunday, with Mum announcing, 'It's just seven more sleeps until the birthday party.' 'While they wait, they paint the birthday invitations.' And, of course, on it goes, through six more sleeps, when '... they make some decorations', and three more sleeps, when '... they go shopping for good things to eat', to one more sleep, '... when they make the cake'. Finally, the big day arrives—and we're all in for a surprise: exactly whose birthday is it?

For little children, understanding the passing of time and how long it takes for something to happen are puzzling ideas. Quite early on, when they are toddlers, we use special events in children's lives to introduce these ideas by 'counting down' to an event that's significant for them. 'How many more sleeps?' becomes a familiar (and sometimes irritating) phrase. (The book *Everyday Learning about Maths*, available from Early Childhood Australia, explores these ideas in relation to young children). This charming picture book is a wonderful vehicle for pondering the notion of time, talking about occasions special to our family and enjoying a storybook together.

Margaret Wild has worked with a range of Australia's best children's book illustrators and the match of illustrative style, medium, story quality and sense of audience always seem remarkably apt.

In this case, Donna Rawlins' gentle, whimsical illustrations are perfect for this simple, but clever, cumulative tale that can be read over and over. Donna seems to capture 'the universal child'. Her babies and children seem cuddly enough to reach out and hold. She often puts in a red-haired child (because she grew up wishing she had red hair) and both Mum and Baby in this story have glorious red-gold locks.

The title, '*Babs the Baby and Fog the Dog ...*' implies a series of books starring these characters. Parents and carers of very young children will anticipate them with glee.

Jenni Connor

By Jingo!

an alphabet of animals

Story by Janeen Brian
Illustrations by Dee Huxley

ABC Books (2005)
ISBN 0733315054
RRP \$27.95 (hardback)

Janeen Brian's and Dee Huxley's picture book, *By Jingo! An alphabet of animals* is a source of much delight.

Even at first glance, the huddle of animals on the cover and the intense colours and clever design convey a sense of fun, and an expectation of animal oddities to come.

There is irresistible appeal in the sight of a small owl perched on the back of a monkey whose tail has seemingly been flicked around the long neck of a giraffe. While there may be a slight recoil from a sideways glance of the lion, there is reassurance in the smiling plumpness of the hippopotamus. Nor does the large beak of the toucan overshadow the delightful discovery of two small elephants in the huddle.

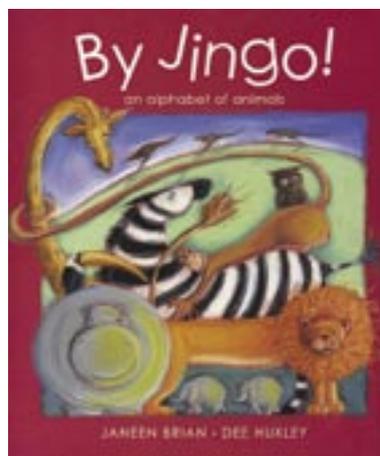
All this, together with the vivid illustrations and merry-making verses, brings about a fresh approach to learning the alphabet letters and their sounds.

When Q—quokka snores and B—bats explode into flight, there is a new, exciting focus on letters. In a verse of delightful absurdity, the words 'bats' and 'hats' give way to 'crunched' in a collision of sounds. The absurdity continues with the words 'eleflumping' and 'hippo-pottering'—which children will chant gleefully.

The illustrations will absorb the young child's attention. Small fingers will explore the beautiful pastel drawings. They will trace the alphabet letters and so begin the learning process among the alphabet of animals.

By Jingo! is a wonderful book—just the right gift for children!

June Connelly



Reminder—Free Chickenpox Vaccine

The Australian Government is offering a free chickenpox vaccine.

Who's eligible? Babies born on or after 1 May 2004, at 18 months of age.

Contact: Immunise Australia Program
Infoline, T: 1800 671 811 or visit
www.immunise.health.gov.au

**Diary—22 March—UNESCO
World Day for Water 2006:
Water and Culture**

I: www.unesco.org/water/water_celebrations/
E: wwd2006@unesco.org

**Annual event—
Under Eights Week 2006**

Early Childhood Australia
Queensland Branch invites you to
celebrate 50 years of Under Eights
Week!

When: 19-26 May

Contact: T: (07) 3352 4640,
E: ecaqld@earlychildhood.org.au or
visit [www.earlychildhoodaustralia/
under_eights_week.html](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia/under_eights_week.html)



**Going out—
Kids at the House 2006**

The incredibly popular Babies Proms
series returns to the Sydney Opera
House.

Shows: *A Frog in My Throat*,
21-26 March and *Dougal the
Garbage Dump Bear*, 6-11 June.

Contact: T: (02) 9250 7777 or visit
www.sydneyoperahouse.com/kids

**Fundraiser—
The Great Australian Bite**

Diabetes Australia is raising
funds for diabetes awareness.

When: April

How: Register, share a bite
to eat with family, friends
or colleagues and ask for a
donation.

Contact: T: 1300 136 588 or
visit www.greaustrianbite.com.au

Children's Week
last week of October
see page 28

**Farewell to
Amanda McDonald our fabulous
Marketing Assistant
Thanks for all your enthusiasm**

Farewell to Early Childhood Australia
I have been the Graphic Designer for the
last three years and now I'm moving on.

It has been my pleasure to work on all the
publications, I hope you've enjoyed them.

Thank you

Claire Connelly



Signing: An extension of body language for young children

Signing is frequently used to help children with hearing impairments or developmental delays to communicate. The use of signing to advance the early communication skills of babies has recently risen to prominence. Tania Teitzel is a mother and speech pathologist. She writes of her own family and professional experiences in using signing for all children, not just those with identified disabilities.

A large percentage of what we communicate comes from our body language. We give a high-five for a job well done and use our hands to show the size of that fish which got away. Children are exposed to a richness of natural signs through their interactions and participation in songs. Doing the actions to *Twinkle twinkle little star*, putting hands out to the side for 'gone', or blowing for 'hot', are all ways that children communicate about their world before they have words. Babies readily pick up body language for 'bye', 'yes' and 'no'. The use of signing just builds upon this natural tendency.

When to start?

Although signing can be used from birth, it may be more effectual to introduce signs around eight to nine months—when babies are becoming avid imitators of actions. Babies need to see signing modelled as communication for a time before they begin to use it themselves. Most babies would typically start using their first signs between nine and 14 months. Signing is ideal for children in the lead up to their first words and during their acquisition of their first 50 words. Signing typically fades out when children begin to make word combinations.

Signing in practice

As a speech pathologist, I have always used signing with children who struggle with early talking milestones. I was eager to follow my own recommendations, after my children Matilda and Samuel were born, so our family introduced signs from eight months of age. Both children subsequently became avid signers from nine months of age, eventually using approximately 50 signs which faded out in their period of 'verbal explosion' when two-word combinations emerged.

How can signing help?

Signing can assist young children to:

- communicate their needs and desires;
- share their world;
- understand what others are saying;
- reduce tantrums and frustration; and
- communicate words that are hard to say or unclear.



Will signing discourage a child from talking?

Two decades of research by Acredolo and Goodwyn (2002) using Baby Signs has shown that signing does not slow down talking—in fact, the reverse is true. We would never say, 'Don't encourage waving or he'll never say goodbye', yet parents and carers often mistakenly believe that signing may stop the child from talking. Signs should always be accompanied with the spoken word. Signs are useful before children have words but speech will always allow them to communicate more quickly with greater length and complexity.



Acredolo and Goodwyn (2002) found that children who were encouraged to sign as toddlers had:

- more advanced talking and understanding skills than non-signers at one, two and three years of age; and
- higher IQs (12 points on average) at eight years of age than non-signers.

Signing increases the motivation of the child and the adult to engage in more communication, not less, and builds connections in the brain.

What signs to use?

Signs can be taken from recognised sign languages (see useful websites below) however our own intuitive body language often gives inspiration for signs, as do actions in songs. Ingenious toddler signers frequently start to create their own signs as they become 'driven' to communicate.

Conclusion

Signing can be a great bridge for all children in the transition to speech. Signing extends our natural tendency to communicate using body language. While signing may have come to prominence as a way to boost children's language and intellectual development, it also has great potential to strengthen relationships in early childhood through improved communication.

Tania Teitzel

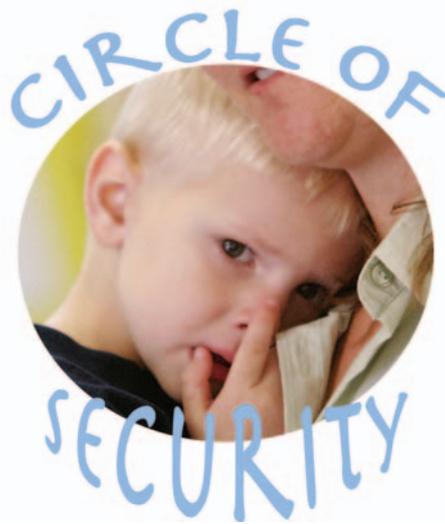
Private Speech Pathologist
 Manager of Therapy Matters
 Email: therapymatters@optusnet.com.au

References

Acredolo, L. & Goodwyn, S. (2002). *Baby Signs: How to talk with your baby before your baby can talk*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Useful websites

www.babysigns.com
www.auslan.org.au
www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/sed/makaton/



& child care practice

The Circle of Security (COS) early intervention program (Marvin et al., 2002) makes attachment ideas accessible to parents and to the professionals who work with them. The authors are working with staff from Head Start to integrate ideas from the program into preschool and child care practice. In Australia, something similar is happening in Through the Looking Glass (Lady Gowrie, Adelaide) (see p. 11), The James Cahill Preschool Project (The Benevolent Society–KU collaboration, Sydney), the Sir Philip Baxter mentor group (The Benevolent Society–NSW Institute of Psychiatry collaboration, Sydney) and the Partnerships in Early Childhood (PIEC) project (The Benevolent Society, NSW). These projects have used the map of the Circle of Security to help staff and parents understand attachment theory and to support reflective practice.

In the James Cahill Preschool Project, the play environment has been modified at the start of the day, in line with the COS map, to make staff available to the children in a predictable manner. The staff sit down rather than move around. Each staff member brings an activity to their ‘play space’ that they can share with the children. They wait for the children and parents to come to them, observing how each child approaches and trying to get their welcome ‘just right’—becoming more sensitive to the children’s feelings and more aware of their own. Evaluation of the project shows that children find it easy to interact with staff in ‘play spaces’ and experience them as congenial environments for learning to play with other children. Play spaces are now an integral part of the PIEC project.

The attachment ideas represented in the COS map are also changing the role of child care workers at Sir Philip Baxter. They say that the map has helped them to understand children’s behaviour and their role as carers:

We know now that a child needs our support to take big steps into our world. When a young boy arrives, we might first need to help his mum stay calm so she can help him settle. We have learned to wait for him to come to us and not to rush him to ‘do a painting’. He might rather just watch for a moment or tell us something that interests him. When a child is rough or pushy we know this is a window into what the child is feeling or struggling with. Taking charge, we help the child manage his feelings so that he sees that we can help him regain a calm state when things go wrong. We have learned to watch children’s play and to build relationships by trying to follow what they are thinking. We now ‘see’ children who do not feel they will be noticed. We are more delicate in our relationships and respectful in our requests, so each child feels safe and calm. Above all, we have learned the importance of our care giving role (E Warren).

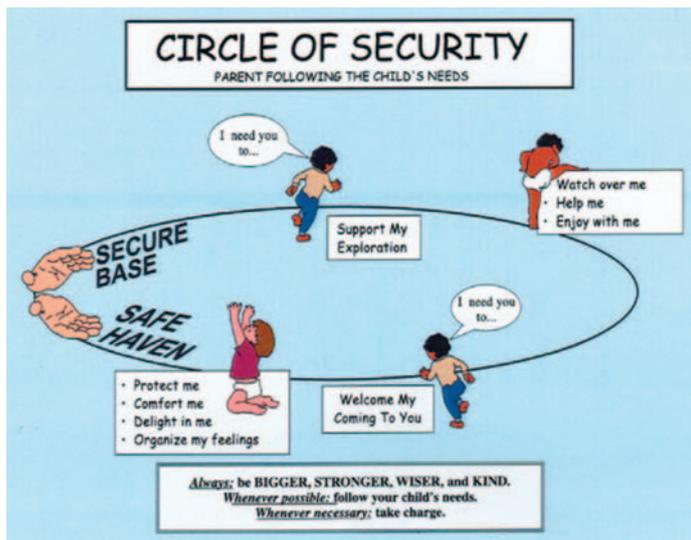
Robyn Dolby is a psychologist in private practice.

Elizabeth Warren is the director of Sir Philip Baxter Child Care Centre, The Benevolent Society.

References

Marvin, R., Cooper, G., Hoffman, K., & Powell, B. (2002). The Circle of Security project: Attachment-based intervention with caregiver–preschool child dyads. *Attachment and Human Development*, 4(1), 1-17.

www.circleofsecurity.org



This map shows a circle held between two hands: one supports the top half of the circle, representing the secure base that children need for play. The other supports the bottom half of the circle, depicting the safe haven that children return to after exploring long enough. To travel smoothly around the circle—from exploration to attachment needs and back again—children require the support of an emotionally available adult, ‘a special person who is always kind and stronger, older and wiser than themselves. This person will follow the child’s needs. Whenever necessary they will take charge’ (Marvin et al., 2002, p. 110). This may be a parent or a child care worker.

Sunshine:

Are our children getting enough?

Dr Judy Barbour tackles the question of how to balance the health benefits (adequate vitamin D levels) and health risks (skin damage and skin cancers) associated with exposure to the sun.



The dilemma

It is clear that the exposure of babies and children to the sun in summer, especially during the middle of the day, increases the risk of skin damage and skin cancers later in life. However, some small amount of sun exposure is needed to keep us healthy. This is because we need vitamin D, which is made by the action of sunlight (UVB rays—those that cause sunburn, skin damage, and skin cancer) on the skin.

The Cancer Council Australia released a position statement in May 2005 which says:

'Australia's high ultraviolet radiation levels mean that even when babies are outdoors for very short periods before 10am and after 4pm with small amounts of skin exposed, they are likely to receive enough ultraviolet radiation exposure to maintain healthy vitamin D levels even with the use of sun protection'.

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is a hormone which is needed for strong and healthy bones and muscles. There is even some evidence that having enough vitamin D will reduce the risk of many cancers, especially breast cancer. There is a very small amount of vitamin D in some foods, such as milk, margarine, oily fish, eggs, liver and cheese; but for most of us, virtually all of the vitamin D that we have comes from exposure to sunlight. UVB rays react with chemicals in the skin, producing this essential vitamin.

Vitamin D deficiency—am I at risk?

People who get very little or no exposure to sunlight are at risk of not having enough vitamin D, and this can lead to an increased likelihood of weak bones and muscles. People most likely to have very low levels of vitamin D are elderly people in nursing homes who have virtually no exposure to the sun. These people are also at a high risk of falls and broken bones, especially fractures of the hip.

In Australia there have been a very small number of young children who have very low levels of vitamin D—causing a problem called rickets. Almost all of these are babies born to mothers who have little exposure to sunlight during pregnancy. This may be because the mother covers most of her skin with clothing and/or veils. It can also be a result of low levels of vitamin D associated with dark skin. If mothers have very low levels of vitamin D, very little vitamin D passes from the mother to child before birth.

An old wives' tale

Some people have suggested that nappy rash heals more rapidly if the sore area is exposed to sunshine. While exposing the nappy area to the air may help, the practice of exposing a naked infant to direct or indirect sunlight puts them at a high risk of sunburn and skin damage and is therefore not recommended (The Cancer Council of Australia, March, 2005).

The verdict

There is no evidence that suggests babies and children—who fall outside the categories of those at risk of low levels of vitamin D—will have very low levels of vitamin D when they are protected from the sun in the ways that are recommended by The Cancer Council of Australia.

Dr Judy Barbour

Child and Youth Health
South Australia

References

Australian and New Zealand Bone and Mineral Society, Osteoporosis Australia, Australasian College of Dermatologists and The Cancer Council of Australia (2005, March). *Risks and benefits of sun exposure*. Position statement. http://www.cancer.org.au/documents/Risks_Benefits_Sun_Exposure_MAR05.pdf.

The Cancer Council Australia and the Australasian College of Dermatologists (2005, May). *Sun protection and infants (birth to 12 months)*. Position statement. http://www.cancer.org.au/documents/sun_protection_infants_may_2005.pdf.

For more information, visit the 'Sun Protection' section of the Child and Youth Health website: www.cyh.com

A green poster with a white border. At the top, it says 'An Australian Government Initiative' and 'www.australiasaysno.gov.au'. To the right, it says 'VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN' and 'AUSTRALIA SAYS NO'. In the center, there is a white box with 'VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN' and 'AUSTRALIA SAYS NO' in black text. At the bottom, it says 'Confidential HELPLINE 1800 200 526' and 'www.australiasaysno.gov.au'.

Flying into the future with Butterfly Wings

**Butterflies high and butterflies low
Butterflies fluttering to and fro
Butterflies high and butterflies low
A great big hug to say 'Hello'!**

This rhyme is chanted at the beginning of every Butterfly Wings Child Parent Program. Parents gently touch their infants using butterfly fingers and give their child a big hug at the end.

This short, simple rhyme demonstrates to the child and the parent the joy of touch. Touch is one of the most sensitive learning tools a young child possesses. Messages children receive through the nerve endings on the skin are able to give them information about texture, shape and size. Touch also helps the carer and the child to form an attachment with each other as they both experience the rhyme together, while staring happily into each other's eyes.

The rhyme also establishes rituals. The child will eventually understand that the Butterfly Wings program has started when this rhyme has been chanted. This is reassuring for the child and provides continuity and certainty—they know there is going to be a fun and exciting program for everyone for the next hour-and-a-half. They begin to look forward to the experience!

Butterfly Wings Child Parent Programs are early intervention and early literacy programs which focus on singing traditional and contemporary rhymes and songs and playing simple singing games. These activities help children and adults to become familiar with each other and form secure attachments. They are free community programs for all parents of children from birth to five years and include storytelling skills and opportunities for parents to talk and discuss problems with each other or with the facilitators.

Butterfly Wings is a fun, interactive, capacity-building parenting education program to help parents develop literacy skills, contemporary early years brain and child development knowledge and a repertoire of rhymes, songs and stories to share with family members. Butterfly Wings parents learn parenting skills in a fun way.

The Butterfly Wings Child Parent Program runs for eight weeks during each school term. Parents are encouraged to continue the program over a sustained period of months or even years. Each term a new program is introduced—for example in Term 1 it is *The Joy of Touch* and in Term 2 *Routines and Rituals*—although Butterfly Wings program rituals and favourite rhymes remain. There are two Butterfly Wings Child Parent Programs: one for parents of children birth to two years and one for parents of children two to five years, although they can (and do) overlap.

The first Butterfly Wings Parent Child pilot program began at Springwood Community Centre in south-east Queensland in February 2004. It was extremely successful. The feedback received from parents, university evaluators, health professionals and others encouraged the facilitators to continue. The Springwood program is funded by a Telstra Foundation grant and has now continued for over 18 months—with many of the same parents and children.

Some infants started as babes in arms and are now confident toddlers running, dancing, singing and joining in with the rhymes and songs they have grown to love.



The Butterfly Wings Child Parent Program for parents of two- to five-year olds has been successfully presented in four Queensland state schools. The program has also been funded by Redlands Shire Council. Queensland Health provided research funding to start five programs in and around Ipswich in various venues in 2005. Queensland Health also funded a three-day Butterfly Wings Child Parent Program Facilitators Workshop in June 2005.

Gwen and Lisa, the two Butterfly Wings facilitators, were invited to present at the first Reading Aloud Summit held in Sydney in August 2005 and funded by the Federal Government to share the Butterfly Wings experience with national and international educators and other professionals.

The Butterfly Effect—small and apparently insignificant incidents can set in motion a chain of events with far-reaching consequences (Ian Stewart, 1989).

Testimonials

Parents comment on the Butterfly Wings birth to two-year-olds program

Butterfly Wings is a fantastic program for myself and my son Angus. Modern society has lost the rhymes and songs of yesteryear. It has been a delight to watch the children around us respond to the songs. Angus has his obvious favourites. The Butterfly Wings program is an important part in my son's development as we apply it every day and I can see Angus is progressing with skills. Without this program, I would not have a clue on early childhood learning. Thank you to the ladies of Butterfly Wings.
Catherine

I have been attending Butterfly Wings from the first week and I love it and so does my son. He was only one month old when he first came and I have noticed that he is responding more and more to music. Whenever he gets grumpy I just start singing

one of the songs from Butterfly Wings and he will give me a big smile. It has made such a difference and he is funny because he will have a favourite song which will last for a few weeks and then he will change to a new one.
Liz

I think Butterfly Wings offers both mothers and children a chance to socialise, learn a range of songs and also get some useful information about child development.
Grainne

Absolutely marvellous experience as I attend with my grandchild. To know the reasons we do these things we did with our children. How it helps with writing, learning, coordinating and spending one-on-one time with your children.
Linda

Gwen Rayner

Butterfly Wings Child Parent Program founder, facilitator and trainer.

Lisa Hingst

Butterfly Wings Child Parent Program, facilitator and trainer.

Reference

Stewart, I. (1989). *Does God play dice? The mathematics of chaos*. Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, p.141.

If you would like more information on the Butterfly Wing Child Parent Program please email Gwen or Lisa at butterflywings@powerup.com.au or visit www.butterflywings.com.au



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Celebrating children & diversity:

The Children's Multicultural Festival, Perth 2005

Creating a sand mandala in the shape of a sun failed to prevent the almost continual downpour at the Children's Multicultural Festival—held at Hyde Park in Perth—during the closing day for Children's Week 2005. However, the rain failed to dampen the spirits of some 800 children and their families who attended and stayed to participate on the day.

Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation Inc.

As convenor for Children's Week in Western Australia, Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation Inc. organised the festival around the theme of cultural inclusion. The activities included craft, such as painting, and making Vietnamese dragons and hats, Chinese fans and lanterns, gingerbread houses and puppets. Entertainment included Solomon's African Drumming, Fairy Queen Caroline, the Mothersong Choir singing lullabies in different languages and Marimba Magic—a children's percussion group.

Ties that bind—celebrating our connectedness

Storyteller Clare Louise Stace captivated children and adults alike with her stories and the making of a giant string-figure that became three-dimensional when hoisted up and suspended from the branch of a tree. This installation was part of the theme, 'Ties that bind—celebrating our connectedness,' where the knots in the figure represented the connections between people as well as the cooperation that was necessary to create it. Highgate Primary School also contributed to this theme: 50 pupils provided paintings and drawings on the themes of friendship and multiculturalism which were displayed on fishing net stretched across the back of the stage.

Alain Thirion and Kerry Fletcher of *Bella Music Flute n' Veg* moved around the festival dressed as wandering minstrels, playing panpipes made from hand-carved vegetables. Meerilinga's nutritionist provided a display of staple foods—including Indigenous Australian foods—from around the world.



Children's Week 2005

The Children's Multicultural Festival was one of four major events organised by Meerilinga for Children's Week 2005. Children's Week is an initiative of the United Nations, underpinned by the values of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is always held in the last week of October, centred around Universal Children's Day.

A formal occasion: Consulting with children to develop Children's Week in WA

Like adults, children and young people have the right to participate in decisions which affect their lives. This perspective is defined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which expresses the view that children have a right to give their opinion and for adults to listen and take it seriously.

Policy-making is often dominated by adult perspectives and the opportunity to develop independent policy-making initiatives by and for children is restricted. In 2005, Meerilinga organised a Children's Parliamentary Forum to consult with children as to how they would like to see Children's Week develop. Meerilinga used the principles outlined in the *Early Childhood Australia Guidelines for Consulting with Young Children* (ECA, 2002).

The forum, held in the week following Children's Week, took place at the Legislative Assembly, Parliament House, in Western Australia. The Hon Mark McGowan MLA, Minister for Youth, opened the forum and explained the purpose of the event.

The forum itself supported elements of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework of schools including 'investigation, communication and participation,' and 'active citizenship'.

The 36 forum participants were: Junior Ambassadors for Children's Week and their peers; pupils from Coogee Primary School who were *Award of Recognition*—recipients in Children's Week 2004; and the Children's Advisory Group from the Office for Children and Youth.

The participants were divided into small groups with an adult facilitator to guide the discussion and one pupil as a group leader. The groups were asked to consider questions relating to Children's Week and a spokesperson from each group summarised the findings at the end of the session.

A poster summarising the responses from the children's groups has been sent to all participants to serve as a reminder of the event, as well as a working document to develop future directions for Children's Week.

Rose Yeoman

Team Leader, Children's Week

Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation Inc.

Reference

Early Childhood Australia. (2002). *Guidelines for consulting with young children*. www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au.

For more information on Children's Week, go to www.meerilinga.org.au.



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Standard of care decision



A recent decision of the High Court of Australia puts some limits on the extent of the standard of care owed by a school authority in relation to the supervision of students.

An eight-year-old girl had been injured when pulled by a fellow student from a flying fox in the school playground. The supervising teacher had been momentarily diverted from her observation of the flying fox by an incident occurring in another part of the playground area for which she was responsible.

Majority opinion

The majority opinion of the High Court was that the accident was not the result of the use of the flying fox, nor of any inadequacy in instruction of pupils in its use, as alleged.

'It is not reasonable', they said, 'to have a system in which children are observed during particular activities for every single moment of time—it is damaging to the pupil-teacher relationship by removing even the slightest element of trust; it is likely to retard the development of responsibility in children and it is likely to call for a

great increase in the number of supervising teachers and in the cost of providing them.'

The High Court also took the view that *'it is unlikely that a teacher, even a teacher watching the equipment uninterruptedly, would have been able to prevent the girl's fall once the other two children had grabbed her legs'*.

Dissenting judgement

Justice McHugh dissented from the majority decision of the High Court, saying the school was negligent in its system of supervision. While no serious accident had occurred on the flying fox in the six years it had been in place, that did not mean that the magnitude of the risk was low or that the probability of injury was low and the risk of injury to Year 3 children was not remote or negligible.

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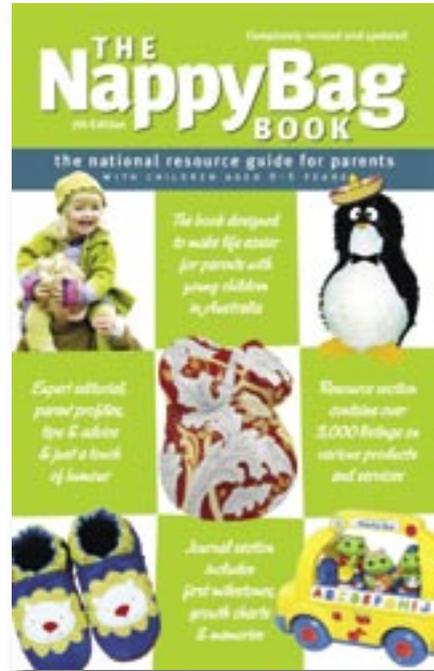
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