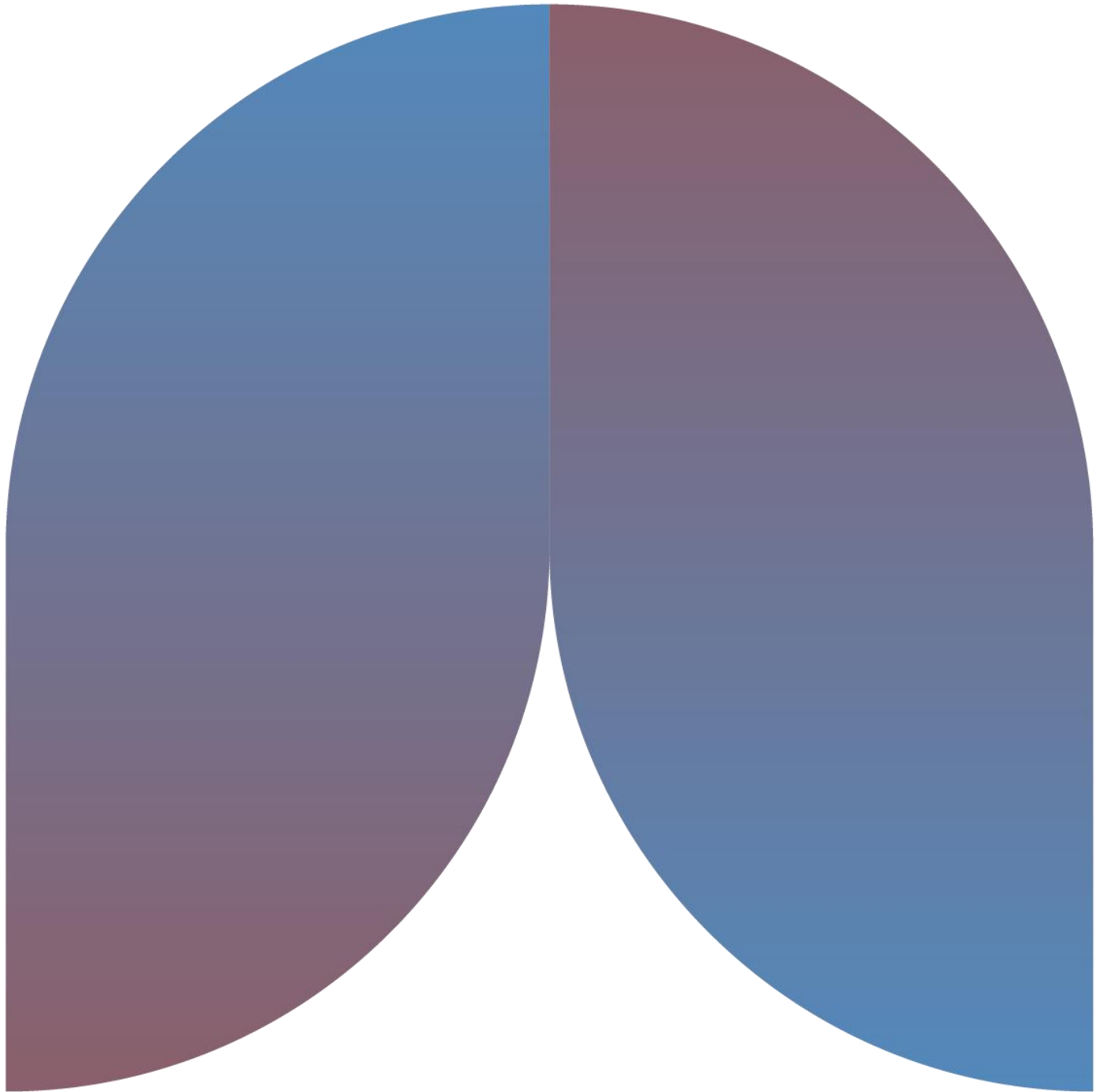


# AUDAX

(latin) bold, courageous, daring

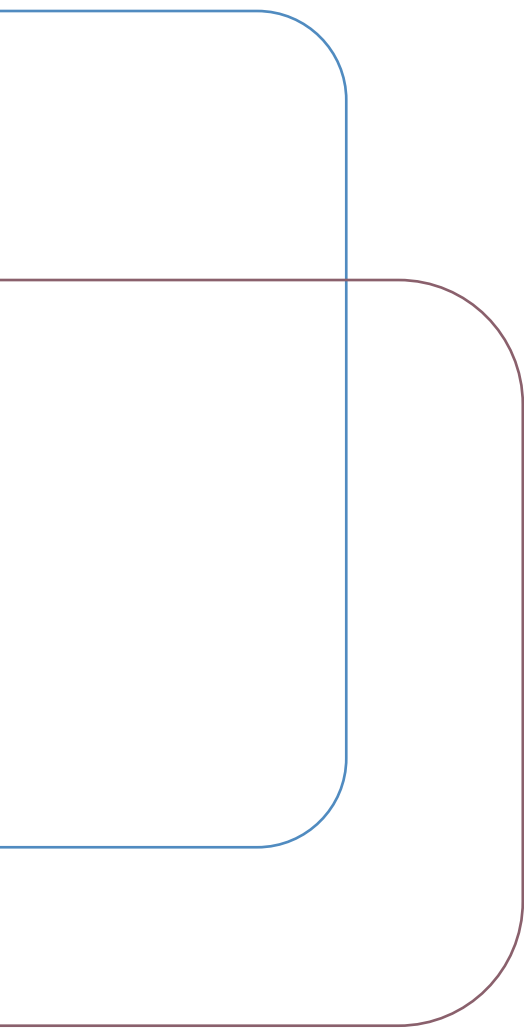


# AGECS

Special Anniversary Edition

Spring 2022

Journal of the Association of Graduates in Early  
Childhood Studies



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies would like to acknowledge both the Bunurong/Boon Wurrung, and Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Custodians of the Lands on which we are located in Melbourne. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We also acknowledge the Aboriginal language groups across all of Victoria, whose lands we provide funding for specific projects around Early Childhood Education. We acknowledge their history, their people, and their stories. As an Association we will work together for reconciliation, a process that starts with the acknowledgement of true Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures of Australia, and will always value the contribution to our community and culture, the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families, communities and their stories.

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## From the President

Celebrating 100 years of AGECS, during COVID has meant a number of changes to the events that were planned. However, the one thing that did not need to change was Wendy Grenfell's idea to tell the stories of the early childhood community in our AUDAX magazine. Writing my own one was hard, but enabled me to reflect that once upon a time the last thing I wanted to do was teach children, yet somehow, I found my calling and all these years later, here I am the President of AGECS.

I hope that the stories warm your heart and remind us of the joys of working in early childhood. It is time to share the success of AGECS, but AGECS would not exist without our members and being able to acknowledge their 'wins' is vital. I am sure the stories will share many successes but also the challenges.

I have not had the opportunity to read the many stories yet, but like you all, will settle down to read them, hopefully now on a warm sunny day in the garden. I am sure there will be some surprises. The varying ages of the authors will give us a glimpse into the strong history of our profession and the many changes that have occurred.

Thank you for joining us in our celebration of 100 years. There is currently a lot of work going on behind the scenes to determine how best AGECS can support educators over the next few years (hopefully even 100). We hope you will support us as we engage with our community to know your needs.

Happy reading,

Sarah O'Donnell

# From the Editor

As you pick up this special edition of AUDAX, you will indulge in a discovery read of many fascinating and unique ECE journeys. Everyone tells a different story because it is their personal path from the decision to study ECE through to teaching, Academia, Early Intervention, management and some onto retirement. There is a range of stories from the 1930's til now, and you might be surprised at how much change has occurred in our field (politically, financially, and socially) and in the complex fabric of our communities.

You will read of difficulties people have honestly described, but revel in their dedication, passion and commitment in 'staying the mile' because they all believed in themselves to offer the very best quality learning environments for all children.

You will also appreciate the photographs in sections to acknowledge Warrawong and Forest Hill Children's Centres, The journal finishes with photographs of the first Kindergarten Teachers College, Mooroolbeek, Kew which sadly doesn't exist anymore.

In addition to this collection of stories from the field, to celebrate 100 years the AGECS Council felt we needed to shine a different light on the sector, by offering vouchers and mini grants in the recognition of people who are out in the field every day, building on our children's

foundation education and acknowledging the importance of families as the child's first Teacher.

We were pleased with enthusiastic response for the \$5000 grants. Practitioners applied with gusto for projects from outdoor boots for bush kindergarten to collective team learning.

We awarded over \$75,000 to services and also awarded eleven Magabala Book Vouchers to practitioners who were nominated by their peers for excellence in their work.

AGECS has a history enriched mostly by the people who have worked in ECE, but also by those volunteers who have served on Council and in The Foundation.

As Editor, I am indebted to you all for taking the time to write your story, so the 100 year anniversary celebration could enable us to create a compilation of snapshots into the varied ECE lives of a very dedicated group of Educators that otherwise would never be known.

So, a sincere thank you to all the contributors (stories and photographs).

Also thanks to the '100 year anniversary' committee of Alex, Helen, Nichola and Sophie who have collectively made this all possible.

Wendy Grenfell

# History of Warrawong

In 1937 Lieut-Col. Fred Davey donated his country property Ware, in Ringwood East, to the Graduates' Association of the former Kindergarten Training College in Melbourne. The property comprised an old homestead and 25 acres of land and was to be used as a Holiday Home for disadvantaged children from inner city Melbourne. Children were selected by a medical officer and their kindergarten teacher. The average stay at Ware was 3 weeks.

Over the years, the programmes offered were adapted and changed to meet the social needs of the time and to keep current with the latest beliefs in early childhood development. Students, undertaking Kindergarten training, frequently spent their placement time in residence at Ware and many of the costs associated with the running of this Holiday Home were met through charitable donations from J.B. Were and Son. This association continued through to the closure of the Service. With looming financial difficulties, staff shortages, changing social needs and Ware in need of renovation, the Kindergarten Graduates decided to sell the old home and most of the land and to develop a new centre for children on the remaining acres.

In 1957, this new centre, Warrawong, was established as a modern, purpose built Centre designed as a Holiday Home for up to ten children. Later, local children also attended for sessions of Kindergarten and long Day Care. During the sixties change again occurred as the Centre began to offer Emergency Care for families in crisis situations but the financial problems for the Kindergarten Graduates Association continued.

In 1973 further changes took place and from then, to the time of the closure of Warrawong and sale of the property, many innovative programmes were developed on the site.

Davey House was established in partnership with Maroondah Hospital as a Paediatric Outreach Programme and Sage Cottage operated alongside Warrawong as an Occasional Care and three-year-old programme. Warrawong was considered a leader in the development of Early Childhood Programmes. It was managed and run by interested community members, parents and Graduate Kindergarten Teachers.

# History of Forest Hill

In 1926 the Founders established a Holiday Home in the countryside at Forest Hill for children from socially and economically deprived inner city suburbs. They came for nurture during a country holiday and to allow respite for their families. They played, climbed trees, milked cows, and fished in the creek, and enjoyed the space, the freedom and the care. In 1960 it became an emergency residential kindergarten. The Forest Hill Emergency Kindergarten was eventually closed and in 1991, the large property, now surrounded by suburban development, was sold by the Graduates' Association (now known as the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies). Part of the income from the sale was used to establish the Forest Hill Early Childhood Foundation which is now incorporated in the new Foundation. Once a year the interest from the invested money is distributed as Grants to a wide range of early childhood services and projects in Australia.



## Warrawong

*A selection of  
photographs from  
Warrawong*

In order from top to bottom: Warrawong Day Care Kindergarten Sign at entrance, hand painted partition used in the kindergarten room, The Davey Carey Building, repeated

On the left, colour photograph of the Warrawong Day Kindergarten Sign  
On the right, teacher with children, repeated







From left to right: two children with chalk boards playing in yard, Forest Hill House  
Forest Hill Welcome Sign, beds for the children on respite, small group playing in boat, repeated

## Forest Hill

*A selection of  
photographs from  
Forest Hill*

Spring 2022 (8)



# 2022 AGECS Council Contributions

## Getting to live the best version of my professional self

Alannah Dore

There are three things I am grateful for as I reflect on my early childhood career. My parents for urging me down an alternative path, the exciting places and contexts in Victoria that my qualifications transported me to and most of all, the relationships I enjoyed along the way with colleagues, families and especially the children.

How would my life have unfolded if I had not chosen (or been encouraged) to be an early childhood teacher? With my first love always being the Arts, I dreamed of working at the National Gallery of Victoria as an art curator and was so proud to be enthusiastically accepted by a few universities. However, my parents had other things in mind and emphasised a more logical path would be to focus on getting a job at the end of a degree. "How about teaching?" they said. I was not enthused until I discovered the content of teaching qualifications at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Kew (later to be absorbed into the University of Melbourne). I was excited!

An early childhood education career ended up taking me to many places geographically. First, I left a small country town for the big smoke to study. My first teaching job involved making snow

'persons' in Ballarat at least twice a winter (before more noticeable climate change signs appeared). I was later inspired and humbled by families in a high migrant community. Then a move north to set up a new community and education centre with the local council. Around the wine districts, I travelled to early childhood centres and schools to deliver professional development while teaching family studies at Wodonga TAFE. Later, based in Melbourne again, I enjoyed meandering around the state of Victoria in the FKA (now fkaCS) van before going on to consult with teachers and educators on inclusion support, first in the South Eastern parts of Melbourne, then Bayside. Today it is as if the wheel has gone full circle as I find myself teaching at Federation University Berwick. Ballarat is Federation's original campus, so there are times when I have Ballarat students online. Gosh, I may have even taught their parents!

As past president of AGECS, a diversity of incredible minds with other council members and those we meet through projects we engage in, continue to inspire me. The area of early childhood holds endless possibilities for adventure and deep connections and encounters with others that last a lifetime, either as a long-term relationship or as a special place in my heart. The kindest, the bravest, the funniest, and the biggest battles were my great privilege to enjoy a professional relationship with. Inspired by the strength of refugees from lands I knew nothing about until we connected

through their child, dazzled by the expertise and awesomeness of an outstanding work colleague, and amazed at the collaborative, good-natured committee members with the 'can-do' attitude. No matter what we encountered – like our first kindergarten in Ballarat sinking into a disused gold mine! – I found no challenge was too big, and everyone's needs were always considered. Two of the most rewarding circumstances included collaborating on AGECS's first Reconciliation Action Plan with Aboriginal community representatives and receiving a \$10,000 Fellowship Grant. The latter was a video project that required reaching out to numerous early childhood teachers who represented inclusion excellence in their roles.

While teaching, I have continued to expand my early childhood qualifications. Further discipline studies included a Master's degree and post-graduate specialisation while branching out to related areas to understand more and more about children and their carers. These included individual, couples and family counselling and wellbeing group facilitation, and now I am undertaking a PhD in wellbeing for early childhood teachers. Yet my most outstanding teachers were the young children, each with a family, a backstory and a unique way of experiencing life.

Do I regret not focusing on an NGV career? Only a smidgen when I forget the gifts my career has brought me and head off to the next big NGV exhibition...but hey, what did Picasso have that pre-schoolers can't access anyway!

## The first Professor of Early Childhood Studies in Victoria

### Professor Bridie Raban

Bridie was awarded an Honorary University Fellowship by Hong Kong Baptist University. Unfortunately, because of COVID, Bridie was unable to attend the ceremony in Hong Kong but was able to be present via Zoom.

Bridie's association with Hong Kong Baptist University began in the mid-1990s when she was invited to chair the accreditation committee for a new degree program for the training of early childhood teachers at the Hong Kong Baptist University Early Childhood and Elementary Education Division of the School of Continuing Education. She was appointed Visiting Professor of Education in the Division from 2012 to 2014, which gave her a deeper understanding of the role of early childhood professionals in supporting Hong Kong families.

During her time with the University, she shared her insights and experience in open seminars for students, early childhood professionals and parents. She also led a team of academics and teaching staff in a research project entitled "How observation leads to teaching", which changed the focus from assessment of learning to assessment for learning.

Bridie was the first Professor of Early Childhood Studies appointed in Victoria in 1995 and only the second in Australia. Her appointment to the University of Melbourne was funded by AGECS and entitled the Mooroolbeek Professor of Early Childhood Studies. The journey that led to Professor Raban becoming a world-respected authority on early childhood education and care, literacy development and intervention began back in the United Kingdom. Her own childhood had a big influence on how her future would be shaped and what she would later achieve.

Like many young British children at that time, Bridie was packed away to boarding school by her parents when she was just six years old. She was devastated by the experience and recalled crying most of the time. By the age of 15, she had dropped out of school, but that summer she read her first book from cover to cover – *The Loom of Youth* by Alec Raban Waugh. The book, which tells the story of his own parents sending him away to school and how that made him feel, had lifted her spirits and motivated her to move forward.

And so began a long and illustrious journey. Bridie returned to school and went on to study at the University of Hull (BA) in England, becoming a teacher upon graduation in 1965 and supporting children who had difficulties with their reading.

Her experience reading that book had changed the direction of her life – and now she wanted every child to be able to read! After teaching for 12 years, Bridie began to ask why so many children experienced difficulties on starting school. This led to her further researching younger and younger children and the beginning of her academic life, first at the University of Bristol (MEd) and then at the University of Reading (PhD). She later became Professor of Primary Education (Early Years) at the University of Warwick before a pivotal move to Australia, becoming Inaugural Professor of Early Childhood Studies as well as Associate Dean (Research) at the University of Melbourne.

Bridie is now retired and lives in Mildura where she enjoys the climate and the river. She continues in the role of Honorary Professorial Fellow of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

Her passion to educate and inform still burns deep and she continues to write and run workshops through the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies in the state of Victoria.

## Relationships are what really matter

### Emma Boag

I studied at the University of Melbourne and over my time there gained a strong theoretical foundation to start my career in the early childhood field...or so I thought!

What I didn't know then (flush with enthusiasm, ideology and motivation to save the world one child at a time) was that I was at the very beginning of a very long journey of discovery; one which never ends.

One of the best life decisions I have made, both personally and professionally was to travel around Europe – I saw the new millennium in under the Eiffel Tower and then settled in London. I secured a job at a primary school in East London and taught collaboratively in a class of children with significant language difficulties. It was in this classroom of ten children, all with complex disabilities and challenging behaviours, I learned to be intentional in my teaching and to make every minute count. Relationships are what really matter and when you tune in to children and their context, you can truly make a difference.

When I returned home 15 years later, I left the role of Assistant Head Teacher. I was sad to leave but did so with a wealth of knowledge and experience managing people and leading teaching and learning.

I now work at Community Kinders Plus (CKP) and am privileged to mentor and coach around 130 outstanding teachers and educators in my role as Leader of Pedagogy. CKP is a not-for-profit early years management provider for kindergartens in Frankston and Mornington Peninsula. As an organisation we value the individuality of

each community whilst striving for a consistent standard of quality of all our children and families.

I have been very lucky to work alongside some incredible leaders in my life. Like young children, I learn by doing; having a go, making mistakes and doing better next time. My mentors along the way have encouraged me to do this. I can think of four strong, inspiring women who have contributed to my success and growth; they have encouraged me to take risks and supported my decision making.

Casting my mind back to my final year at university, I was asked to write my philosophy. It's a shame I don't still have the scroll it was written on (okay, maybe it's not that long ago!) but I can guarantee one thing; I have learnt an awful lot since then.

## Whitlam had an impact for my Career

### Helen

From an early age, I had made the decision to be a nurse when I grew up. After finishing the Higher School Certificate, I successfully completed the entrance exam to commence training as a nurse at the Austin Hospital. I cannot pinpoint the thought process or catalyst for a change in direction; however on receipt of my HSC results, I decided to apply for kindergarten teaching. I commenced the course in the year of Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister, taking

advantage of a small and helpful fortnightly student payment. Having attended a state secondary school, it was an adjustment to a predominately female institution. There was one male in our year. The training at the Institute of Early Childhood Development gave us a solid understanding of child development and learning. In the first year, I remember visiting a family on a weekly basis to spend time with their child. Through play and observation, and discussion with the family, I documented the child's development and learning over 12 months. We also had 2 x 4-week blocks of practicum in a kindergarten in our first year, and 2 x 8-week placement in our final year. It was a privilege to have many lecturers and tutors who were at the forefront of research in child development at the time.

After 3 years, I felt that I was well prepared for stepping into the role of kindergarten teacher at a local kindergarten. I loved the work with children and, over the next 3 years I learnt much about working with families, a committee of parents as my employer and working as a team with other educators who had a range of views on children's learning.

Throughout my career, I have held positions as an ECT in 3- and four-year-old kindergarten groups, community and school based, at the children's hospital, in early childhood intervention, as a preschool field officer, team leader and now consultant. In these roles I have built knowledge and skills and learnt a lot

about myself, personally and professionally. This ongoing learning has been pivotal and is directly attributed to opportunities of working with highly skilled teams of professionals, learning and working together with families and learning from and with children. I have also taken advantage of professional development and training opportunities and completed a Graduate Diploma in Special Education.

A highlight of my career has been taking a lead role with educator teams to implement the Pyramid Model framework across a large local government area. I had the privilege of working alongside Janene Swalwell, Psychologist, Monash University. Her expertise, knowledge and guidance were invaluable to support educator teams with training, research and mentoring of the Pyramid Model to enhance social and emotional learning and behaviour outcomes for children. For many educator teams the Pyramid Model had a transformational impact for their practices with children, families, and work colleagues. In 2018, through an AGECS Fellowship grant, I attended the Pyramid Model Conference in Florida and visited several Pyramid Model services in Denver. My project involved developing a peer coaching model approach with Educational Leaders. This was an inspiring time as it was evident that Educational Leaders valued the opportunity to network together and over time developed confidence to share video footage of their work with children



and give each other feedback in the context of the Pyramid Model.

Over 40 plus years' experience in the early childhood field, I have learnt the simplest and most complex skill for supporting long-term outcomes for children is: developing respectful and responsive relationships with each child, family and colleagues. This has been an area of continual practice and reflection for me.

My early childhood career has been enriching and influenced a number of aspects of my life.

## I breathe the importance of relationships and connection with children

### Justeen Fitzgibbons

Whilst having been a teacher for my entire professional life, it is the role of Early Childhood Teacher where I feel the most at home and the most able to support community.

As a young person, I was always determined to teach.

Dare I call it a calling? Indeed, I shall!

I started my professional life as a music, art and classroom teacher in regional Victoria in a community who often scrambled to make ends meet. Upper primary school soon became early primary school, each transition between years leaving me wondering if there was

a better way to grow. There had to be, because children who are 8 can't hate to learn (can they?).

I moved to metropolitan Melbourne in 1993 and started to work in early childhood programs as a casual program support person while upgrading my qualifications to encapsulate those critical early childhood learning units. My father still laughs at how many years I've been in training to work with little children..... If only he really knew the knowledge and intuition needed to be a REAL teacher.

It was here in the inner city where I found my place in learning. The honesty of connecting with and sharing learning with little children is to be treasured. The excitement of being in the moment when a child really 'got' something for the first time is irreplaceable. The honour of being in situ alongside families being an integral part of their unit is a real privilege. Suffice to say I have spent the last 25 plus years growing my connection to community, honourably sharing space with children who allow me to join their learning journey.

These days I breathe the importance of relationships and connection with children, of having good pedagogy through multiple perspectives and being sincere in your engagement with the child. That equity is not the same as equality but both are critical and that you never stop learning.

To the thousands of children who've allowed me to share this space- I sincerely and genuinely thank you.

To the children I am yet to meet- I cannot wait to get to know you.

## Being proactive rather than reactive

Liza Farquhar

My journey into early childhood was not dissimilar to that of so many new graduates. The theory of early childhood and play based learning sounds so easy when we study, but learning the nuance of child development and the behaviours of children takes time, as does the ability to critically reflect upon ourselves, our programs and our teams as being a major influence to why children behave as they do.

I taught in London before moving to Melbourne in 2006 at a time before the frameworks had been introduced and initially worked as an agency teacher. This period had a huge impact on me and the professional trajectory I have taken. I was working mainly in long day care and time after time, I would be wished well by other educators before teaching a challenging group, with later in the day, typically rest time, educators coming through the room to see why the group was so engaged and calm.

Following this, I taught at the University of Melbourne ELC and commenced my Master's in Education with a focus on

leadership and quality improvements. I wanted to have an impact on quality and leadership within early childhood services and help teaching teams understand what they could do to support children and themselves during challenges. I completed this just as the frameworks were released and the knowledge I learnt was and continues to be invaluable.

My entry into Inclusion and the Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) program was a sliding doors moment. I applied for a leadership role with the Connections PSFO team for a three-month contract which turned into many years working within the PSFO and Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) programs in a variety of leadership positions.

My greatest accomplishments and sense of pride at what I do, is when I support a teacher to take their team through the enormous challenges that inclusion can present. To start the journey with a teacher, who may be feeling fearful, unconfident and vulnerable to the end of the year where they reflect on their leadership, their practice and realise they have included a child with complex needs and enjoyed and learnt from it, is a wonderful feeling. So too, is the feeling when a teacher reaches out for safe support, knowing they can trust me to hold their vulnerability with respect and compassion and help them to move forward.

As a collective sector, we do not yet think of inclusion as something we embed into everything we do and my favourite leadership phrase is 'be proactive rather than reactive'. Too many still consider inclusion is something we do when we need to and are therefore unprepared when inclusion issues pop up.

I hope through the AGECS role I can help and support new graduates learn how to lead and be inclusive of all families and children.

## Oh, the Places You'll Go!

### Nichola Marriott

Dr Seuss might have been talking about Early Childhood when he wrote the book. Oh, the places you can go with an Early Childhood qualification.

Even with my first year out (of three) of my Diploma of Teaching in Early Childhood completed, my learning took me to New York to nanny (yes, I was a big fan of Mary Poppins) and then onto England for two years. I then decided to return to Australia to finish university and start my career proper in the field.

My first teaching positions were in the country, learning more about sheep and farming when I went on home visits than a city slicker needs to know. It was a huge learning curve and I was lucky enough to have a co-educator who had been there for 30 years help me (she let me trial things when she knew they didn't work for the community rather than crush my

enthusiasm!). There is nothing like working in a small country town to teach you what community engagement is really about.

After working in suburban Melbourne kindergartens for a few years, my feet became itchy so I decided to teach in an international school in Singapore. My knowledge and personal philosophy of running a play based program was tested but I remained firm that three and four-year-olds learn more through play than formal, structured lessons of maths, spelling, social studies and writing. I learnt the importance of cultural inclusion and how all celebrations should be embraced and shared. Singapore does this so well!

Back in Australia, I taught before moving onto a Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) role, while completing my Master's of Education in Early Childhood. What a joy, working in a team that valued inclusion and inclusive practices. From PSFO work then onto a Team Leader role at long day care and kindergarten.

Besides a placement in childcare at university, I hadn't really experienced the long day care setting. What an eye opener. Childcare educators deserve their weight in gold! They provide education and care in an industry that is poorly paid and undervalued. No-one stays and helps cut fruit (I started teaching kindergarten in the good old days where a parent stayed to cut up fruit

and we provided milk). They remain positive and provide such quality of care.

One area I thought my knowledge was lacking was in First Nations people so I decided to work for a year in a remote Aboriginal community in Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia. It provided such profound learning for me. I was taught the ongoing trauma of the Stolen Generation and the sense and strength of community that exists. Luckily, I had very tolerant co-workers that answered all of my questions; taught me how to find the grasses in the billabong to weave into baskets and how to live in Kimberley time ("Nichola, what's the hurry? You're on Kimberley time now"). I learned all about teaching 2-year-olds (wow! What a group!) and how to sing Five Green and Speckled Frogs in Kimberley Kriol. I fished for Barramundi and became adept at living with green frogs that come up through the toilet! What an experience, it is something everyone should be privileged enough to experience firsthand.

I've worked for cluster managers, local governments and now I manage the KISS program at Yooralla. Oh, the places you can go indeed!

So to quote Dr Seuss, "Oh the places you'll go, today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So ... get on your way!"

## I consider myself extremely lucky in my ECE journey

### Sandra McCarthy

I am currently a council member of AGECS and an educational leader and quality improvement support for a community-based early childhood organisation.

My journey started in 1984 when my daughter was two years old. I was working full-time in the banking sector and my mother-in-law had been caring for my daughter. It had come to that time where her father and I decided it was time to put her into childcare.

After looking around and being a very fussy first-time mum, we settled on a lovely community not-for-profit centre. The experience was quite traumatic for everyone and whilst the educators were very accommodating and went above and beyond to support my daughter, I felt there was a gap in understanding how I was feeling, and this is where my early learning journey really began.

I had a friend who owned a childcare centre and called her up to ask if she was interested in selling and just happened to catch her on a challenging day! Within a couple of weeks, we had signed contracts and 90 days later were taking over ownership of a childcare centre.

As a mum I thought I had all the skills needed to run a childcare centre, I mean how hard could it really be? My 10 years' experience in the bank had given me great accounting and staff management skills, I felt I was a great mum, so this shouldn't be too challenging. I had always wanted to be a teacher, so I was so excited about this journey.

I remember the first day! Lack of resources, holes in walls behind furniture and staff needing support and resources to be able to plan adequately for the children. Reality hit big time! Oh my god! What had I done?

I ran out to purchase resources, replace urine-stained mattresses, fix holes in the walls and whatever else needed to provide an adequate program for the children. I also realized that being a great mum to my child didn't necessarily give me the skills to understand other children. In 1988 I enrolled into the Diploma of Teaching in Early Childhood. For the next three years I juggled fulltime studies, running a centre and two children – yes, I had had another baby. I won't say it wasn't hard but it was so rewarding at the end to stand up at graduation and receive my certificate.

My passion and dedication to early learning received attention and I was asked by Victoria University to undertake a program to become an assessor and trainer and started to teach Certificate III and Diploma in Early Childhood courses over the next 30 years.

This attention also led to Ian Broinowski (referred by Joan Farragher from Victoria University) author of the book *Managing Child Care Centres* to contact me (I was the only director of a private centre to be interviewed and felt very proud of this opportunity). From this interview I was one of many profiles to appear in this book and be regarded as stand out role models for students. To date I am pleased to say that I have achieved all the accomplishments I originally set out in the interview and continue to enjoy my journey of growth in this wonderful field of early childhood to which I have seen many changes.

I have held many hats in the field of early childhood such as owner/director in child care, kindergarten teacher, consultant, director for private child care, professional development facilitator, mentor, assessor and trainer, educational leader, quality improvement support and council member of AGECS.

I have undertaken an independent study and research in London, Ontario for six months looking at their early learning systems and been lucky enough to have travelled around the world attending conferences, workshops, summer schools and seminars. These opportunities have fed my appetite to keep up to date with current practices and research that supports best practice for educators which leads to best outcomes for children.



I consider myself extremely lucky in my journey, I have met amazing people that have had significant and positive influences on how I look at the world and how to model this to others. I now enjoy being able to share my knowledge and skills with others in the hope that we can all continue to learn, grow and find better ways of knowing and doing to support children in being the best they can be.

## I get up each day and find the joy in what I am doing

**Sarah O'Donnell**

I literally fell into kindergarten teaching, and to this day I do not believe that Kindergarten teaching was on my form for university when I finished VCE. When my Mum called to tell me she had read the results in the paper that I had been accepted to kindergarten teaching at the University of Melbourne, I told her they had made a mistake, I wanted to study drama, be a librarian or I was happy to work in a newsagents.

Turns out that the universe had chosen for me, and from my first placement I knew that I was passionate about ensuring that every child was given the opportunity to succeed. I had no idea at that stage that it would be a path that I could not predict and that I would remain just as passionate as I was on that first kindergarten placement. After university, I spend some time nannying to save to go

overseas, and I was lucky enough to experience working in London for a year. Another opportunity to reinforce my belief that having quality outdoor spaces is so important for children in their learning. I used to cringe out in the yard with the large concrete play spaces.

Finally settling back in Melbourne, I commenced 10 years working for the City of Knox in the preschool program. I am truly grateful for my time here, where I was lucky enough to be nurtured by my manager and her team to learn broadly about early childhood from hands on teaching and programming, to including me in mentoring and leadership programs. I was particularly grateful for learning at Knox about Family Centred Practice which has remained a key part of my philosophy. When I doubted myself, I was encouraged to step up and this included the opportunity to participate in a Rotary Group Study exchange to Iowa (USA), with a team of other young professionals. After completing the study in which I had the opportunity to learn more about early childhood development and early intervention, I was ready to spread my wings.

My first leadership position was as the leader of the PSFO program for the City of Casey before moving to the Department of Education in both ECIS intake and team leader of Specialist Children's Services in Frankston area. The time provided me a real opportunity to understand the needs of families living with trauma, and probably was a pivotal time in my career,

as the passion that has stayed with me for ensuring that every child has an opportunity to succeed to their fullest abilities, still guides me daily in my work. I am as passionate as ever.

The next few roles meant that I had the privilege of building, developing and opening the first integrated hubs in Victoria, and had the opportunity to work with some of the most amazing people. I truly loved working in a community in which nearly all our families had English as a second language, and I was grateful to become such a large part of the community. Linking me with other integrated services, I have developed friendships that will last a lifetime during this time, and to meet other educators who work their backsides off to ensure each child gets a good start in life.

Time as a leader in a diverse local council, with a team of over 150, taught me a great deal about learning to prioritise, the importance of leading with heart, and was the start of learning that I needed more balance in my life. Slowly, I have transitioned away from positions in which I manage staff and find myself back in a PSFO role. With all the knowledge that I have gained in some many positions over the years, I am loving working in a role that coaches and mentors educators. I love working with the educators' strengths and helping them to face the many challenges that educators are now facing. I get it; it is hard work out there in the field. I am grateful for AGECS, for the Fellowship in which I was granted the

funds to train in EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) and that I now have the opportunity to work with educators using EFT to reduce their overwhelm and manage their stress. I hope that over coming years, I will have more and more opportunities to do this holistic work, which makes my heart sing. So where am I now? I reflect back and still feel that early childhood education found me. Perhaps the universe at work. Still loving being a PSFO, thrilled to work in my own business supporting educators with EFT and meditation, and President of AGECS. I do my best to balance work and life. I am keen to make sure that I get up each day and find the joy in what I am doing. I look forward to supporting AGECS to grow, and meet the needs of the early childhood community. There are many challenges for us to face, but if we move forward with kindness in our hearts, support for each other, an openness for flexibility in our thinking, then I believe that anything is possible.

## The gifts I have cherished in a long career

### Dr Sue Emmett

I have had a long career beginning my qualification in 1979 at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Melbourne. I was proud to be offered a place to qualify as a kindergarten teacher although the qualification also

allowed me to work as a primary teacher. I viewed it as a privilege to attend the course and to gain the knowledge and skill to work with our youngest children and their families and to become a specialist in these critical years of development and learning. The insights I acquired about the holistic development and learning of children the vital nature of child-centred, play-based learning and the way the environment can be creatively planned to integrate multifaceted learning were the first gifts I was given. The next gift was the thorough understanding of how to teach art, music, movement and drama. These subjects were studied each year of the program, building upon previous learnings and deepening understandings. I now realised how blessed I was because these kinds of practical skills that were linked intensely with theory, provided such a strong and rich foundation that I have built upon consistently throughout my years of teaching.

Over the next 40 years I have worked with children and indeed adults from birth to adulthood. I started off in my first teaching position with 32 girls ranging in age from just 3 to 5 years in an extended hours kindergarten which was part of the most orthodox Jewish school in Melbourne. The children came from very large families often comprising 8-10 siblings and adhered to very strict religious beliefs. Many traditional Jewish traditions were celebrated as the girls had religious education every day for up

to one hour. I was enriched by exciting Jewish history and the beauty of the Jewish religious holidays, but my greatest gift was learning to be very open-minded and supple in my thinking as I adapted my program to the interests and strengths of the girls. Their families did not have television and I can remember the strong oral language skills that the children possessed as they constructed complex imaginary stories and planned and enacted what they called their "shows" which were sustained over many days.

An exciting time was my move to the Gowrie Child Centre in inner city Melbourne and this was where I had a growth spurt as a teacher. My skills were expanded and consolidated as I was challenged and deeply inspired. Gowrie had just moved into the area of long day programs for children from babyhood to school age as well as the traditional sessional kindergarten programs. It was a time of significant change in response to societal change where many women were returning to the work force and required long day care and education for their young children. I was most fortunate to be a part of this transformation. I worked with babies, toddlers and kindergarten aged children and augmented my understanding of developing sensitive and responsive relationships with children, families and colleagues. The power of the skilfully planned indoor and outdoor environment and the multifaceted learning

embedded in children's daily routine experiences enthused me. I gained a deep knowledge of the resplendent opportunities for children's learning inherent in open-ended play experiences. I began to think intensely about sustainability and to write about its inclusion in early childhood education contexts. With two other colleagues we began *Environmental Education in Early Childhood* which was the first association of this nature in Australia. I had a thirst for translating theory into practice and I continued my study into early childhood education as a night-time student and I completed a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. Further, I learnt to confidently interpret educational philosophy, curriculum, and pedagogies to a wide range of visitors to the centre and this was a gift that has stood me in excellent stead through the years that would follow including my work in a range of tertiary institutions, early childhood teacher education and consultancy. The ability to speak with knowledge and conviction about one's professional practice should never be underrated.

I moved to a children's centre under a large inner-city high-rise estate with predominantly refugee families and after this I started and led two community-based, long day children's centres, one of which was in a rural area on the outskirts of Melbourne. My experiences provided valuable insight into the diversity of communities in which I was immersed. I deepened my appreciation of the ways in

which philosophy and curriculum must be constructed *with* the community for it to be authentic, meaningful and inclusive for those within the setting. The range of families within these contexts and my interest in reflection gave me another most valuable gift. I was able to deepen my understanding of responding to families and children who had experienced trauma and I learnt how an approach that focuses upon developing emotional attunement and the open expression of feelings works to promote emotional wellbeing and to build resilience.

However, the gifts that I received were also hard lessons and were at times anxiety provoking; but these kind of experiences transformed me both professionally and personally. I moved to the TAFE sector to teach early childhood education I discovered amidst some positive experiences that a toxic culture pervaded where many employees were diminished in their capacity to achieve because of deficient leadership where bullying was commonplace. I could not flourish in this climate and unfortunately, it took me some time to gain understanding of what was really happening. I needed time for reflection and analysis. I learnt from this experience the merit of leaders within workplaces constructing an environment where compassion and indeed self-compassion facilitates growth, motivation and creativity and where diversity, inclusion and respect flourish

and high quality is rendered. However, I was able to take a leadership role in establishing the first Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree with a credited pathway for students who had studied a TAFE diploma in early childhood. I was so pleased that this provided an opportunity for many educators to continue their studies in early childhood education.

A PhD in emotional learning and development beckoned and, I moved to Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory of Australia where I was fortunate to research and support the development of literacy skills in remote communities including Arnhem land and the Tiwi Islands. The three years I spent working in magnificent remote locations where I gained insight into indigeneity, were some of the most enriching times of my career and changed my perspective regarding diverse ways of learning and teaching. I have also cherished my academic work at the University of Ballarat (now Federation University) where I have been privileged to teach many early childhood students who live rurally and may be the first in their families to attend university. My teaching and research including my work as a PhD supervisor and mentor sustains and inspires me. I am so looking forward to the gifts I will gain in the next 40 years!

## Carrying equipment in and out of a shed every day

Wendy Grenfell

Attending IECD in the '70s was a lot of fun.

There were many of us to start, split into two cohorts as the building couldn't hold us all at once, but numbers dwindled over the next 3 years. We were the first group to spend our third year in the Abbotsford Convent complex, traveling between the two campuses. We spent summertime (between lectures), beside the pool there, under the disapproving gaze of the Nuns. We also graduated the year the Principal (Heather Lyon) retired, so our graduation ceremony became a career salute to her as well.

Teaching positions were advertised in September through the newspapers so we all applied at once; keen to find out who got interviews and hopefully a job secured for the following year!

We were called 'Director' of the Kindergarten and were expected to wear smocks, often employed directly by the parent Committee and had to set up the outdoor area every day, turning the sand over, carrying the long boards, swings and all portable equipment, only to put it all away in a shed at day's end. Sanding and painting Linseed oil on all timber every year too!



My first position was at Niddrie Kindergarten, where I had to stop reading stories or conversing when the Lear jets took off from Essendon airport across the highway. The children never seemed to notice!

I went on to work for three local Government Organisations, Committee of Management and an employment Agency.

I held many positions over time. Teacher of sessional kindergartens, in Early Intervention, Toddler Group Teacher, Playgroup Facilitator, Preschool Field Officer and Team Leader in Management.

I went overseas for two years and registered as a casual teacher but ended up working for a university in a program supporting parents (of a child with additional needs) with strategies to use at home. I was the only teacher, alongside psychologists and OTs, and I found my philosophy differed from theirs in many ways. This taught me to constantly question and reflect on the validity of my own Teaching pedagogy and my training in Melbourne. I only worked with the parents in this program and never met the child, so a contrast to being a teacher. I was seeing the child and the home environment only through the eyes of the parent.

Reflecting on my 40 plus years, I have learnt to value empathy, compassion and seeing the child as one important part of a family and their community.

The families I encountered in the Dandenong Ranges opened my eyes to the varied cultures and complexities of each family unit. There were families experiencing hardship, trauma and disadvantage, so I learnt to not always follow the 'rules', as family needs often did not fit the textbook. This led me to further studies in a 'Special Education' Degree at Monash, complimenting what the local families taught me about partnerships.

This was a time where I learnt the power of listening. It can be the most important skill in teaching, and it helped me to discover each child and family's unique culture and strengths, so I could work with them to find the right support or resources, and sometimes having to think outside the 'procedures' box to do what was right for them at the time. Occasionally we took in the kindergarten children and siblings out of session times, when we sensed the family home was not a safe place to be, while I scrambled to find some support services.

Those years of experience gave me the skills to become a PSFO, where I could listen, sometimes cry with, develop trust with, and work together with Teachers and parents, on plans, strategies and referrals. I joined the voluntary PSFO Association too, working with Government and other agencies to advocate for ECE. Those years gave me the incentive and confidence to work directly with Practitioners in a mentoring/management role. I was in awe of how dedicated they were and how

much of their own time and energy went into creating the high quality of education for children and families. Again, mutual trust formed the beginning of those relationships which lead to partnerships and therefore personal growth, challenges, learnings, and quality outcomes for me.

These memories make me smile and I feel grateful for all the stories I was part of over a time of many changes, socially and politically in ECE.

I am now enjoying the role of an AGECS Council member where I can give back to the ECE profession through the grants, projects, PDs, AUDAX and leadership support for all practitioners.

# Community Contributions

## To make a positive difference to the outcomes of young children's lives

### Alexandra Heard

I'm Alex, and anyone who follows AGECS has read my work whether they realise it or not. I have had an interesting career journey in the Early Childhood profession so far and I am excited to have the opportunity to share it in writing.

For the first few years of my career, I was working as a kindergarten teacher four days per week and enjoying a consistent three-day weekend. I will use this opportunity to express my love for my kindergarten in perpetuity. Fawkner Kindergarten is a special place, one that I am so proud to be a part of. We are a small, close-knit team who are passionate about inclusion, reflection, community engagement, and evidence-informed practice. Each year we take on multiple preservice teachers, and every one of them tells us that we have been their 'favourite placement' – even if they had to travel far to get to us (we have many cards and empty boxes of chocolates to attest to this). I have no intention of leaving Fawkner Kindergarten, and the beauty of our profession – for me, at least – is the flexibility for part-time roles. I can stay at Fawkner whilst also

embracing other opportunities that come my way. This is not something I took advantage of until recently, however.

When my husband and I took out a mortgage in 2019, I started using my 'day off' to work as a CRT. This was hard work, and I found showing up at different services every Monday morning and having to work in a different environment with different workplace cultures and values to be incredibly exhausting. It was fascinating to see the operations of different settings, but the stress and fatigue was overwhelming. I decided after less than a year that I could not do it anymore and had the intention to find an elusive one day per week role at the beginning of 2020. Almost as soon as I started looking AGECS advertised an 'Event Coordinator' role on an Early Childhood Facebook page. I felt that my volunteer experience with the Moreland Early Years Network – where we organise an annual conference – made me a prime candidate. For a few different reasons, including a global pandemic, I didn't step into this role until September that year. Not long after I stepped into the role, the name changed to 'Engagement Coordinator' to reflect the work I was doing outside of events, including the social media channels, the 100 year anniversary celebrations and the RAP Committee. I have been so fortunate that the Council appreciated my knowledge and perspective as a working teacher

and encouraged that to be incorporated into my work. I felt (and still feel) energised by the role, and it made me want to look for other opportunities to expand my network and portfolio. Which I did, with reckless abandon!

Between September 2020 when I started at AGECS and now, I have also been:

- A consultant on early childhood app Pok Pok
- A ghost writer on an early childhood blog
- Educational Leader at a privately run LDC
- Clinical Specialist Tutor at the University of Melbourne
- Collective Mentor at the University of Melbourne
- An Apiary Fellow

I was so excited at every opportunity presented to me that I said yes to them all. This was not sustainable, and I learned quickly that the only roles I could feasibly take on were ones that directly and positively impacted on my kindergarten and AGECS roles. This led to a lot of reflection regarding my values and my motivations, and several difficult conversations when I had to step down from roles I had committed to. Ultimately, I remembered why I got into early childhood teaching in the first place: to make a positive difference to the outcomes of young children's lives. I can do that directly in my teaching role, and I can do it indirectly through working with the adults who work directly with children.

The next step in my professional journey is the submission of my PhD proposal, which I am hoping to have ready soon, so that I can start in 2023.

## Princess of my playdough

### Alison Floyd (1934 to 2012)

Alison was born Alison Helen Cairns on August 18, 1934 in Maryborough. Her father and grandfather owned the local general store in Dunolly and Alison grew up as a country girl. After attending the Dunolly Primary School, she travelled to Maryborough for her secondary education, completing her Leaving Certificate in 1951.

Alison continued her education when she attended the Kindergarten Training College in Kew. She graduated as a Kindergarten Teacher in 1955 and began her career in Melbourne.

She met her husband to be, Eoin Floyd through the Presbyterian Fellowship Association (PFA) youth group. They were married in the East Kew Presbyterian Church on December 10, 1960 and soon moved to Horsham, where Eoin worked as a Lands Officer. Alison worked at several Horsham kindergartens over the years there and also found time to have four children. In 1976 the family moved to Bendigo where Alison worked for many years at the Bendigo Crèche before stopping full time work, and then spent

time relieving at various kinders around town.

Alison was a popular kinder teacher and was remembered many years later when one of her students, Brian Nankervis, of Rockwiz fame, gave her a copy of his book of poems with a lovely note for her. Many children in Melbourne, Horsham and Bendigo will also remember Alison as their "Princess of Playdough".

For Alison...

Queen of my pre-school heart...

Princess of my play-dough...

Teacher of French songs...

How I miss your gentle voice,

In the kinder room of my mind,

I know peace, security and the excitement of learning

Oh Alison, we'll always have Chelmsford Street!

Brian

## Progressive pioneer of children's right to learn through play

### Sister Anna Dublé OAM

*This article has been written in collaboration with Sister Anna Dublé RSM OAM, formerly Sister Mary Antonia RSM, to recount her time as a kindergarten teacher in the late 1940s and the 1950s.*

*What will become clear is that Sister Anna was and is an extraordinarily intelligent, progressive and brave woman, who taught a program that would be recognisable and aspirational for any early childhood teacher working today. The reason for this? A deep understanding of and care for our youngest citizens.*

Sister Anna was born Anna Dublé in 1930 in the small town of Montalbano Elicona, Sicily. She came to Australia, aged 4 ½, in 1934 with her family and recounts the hostility of the locals towards them when they arrived as very early migrants. It was this migrant experience that ingrained in Sister Anna a purpose and drive to work with immigrants, which would later lead to her role at Co.As.It. Carlton and her being awarded an OAM in 1996. But back in the past...

After finishing school, she started work in 1947 as a kindergarten assistant. She was 17 and working with over 40 children. She was given no training, her training 'was the work'.

The following year she entered the Sisters of Mercy, founded by Catherine McAuley in Ireland. Her mission was to educate and help the poor. This was the first stage in her journey to becoming a Nun.

When she went out into the world as Sister Mary Antonia it was to be a kindergarten teacher to some of the most needy



children in Melbourne. She was appointed to this role because of her previous experience as a kindergarten assistant. Having done the basic training, followed by the ITC first and second class, she was then appointed to St Margaret Mary Kindergarten in Brunswick. She stayed in the kindergarten teacher role across various services in Melbourne for the next 12 years. The services in which she worked were densely populated by migrant families, nearly all Italian and some Maltese.

First in Brunswick at St Margaret Mary Kindergarten, then in Fitzroy at St Joseph's Kindergarten before heading back west to West Melbourne's St Mary's Star of the Sea Kindergarten. After this, Sister Maria Antonia returned to St Margaret Mary Kindergarten. She stayed here until they were forced to close the kindergarten, and she was moved across the street into St Margaret Mary Primary School. This was heartbreaking for all involved.

The work itself was not very different from what we would recognise as kindergarten today. The enrolment forms featured the children's names and an address, and a phone number if you were lucky. The four-year-old children attended from 9am - 2.30pm, five days per week. Sister Anna remembers each place distinctly, and has clear memories of the communities she taught in.

In the way we are encouraged to connect with families today, Sister Anna built strong relationships with the children and parents attending her services. Recently, she was invited to the PhD ceremony of a former pupil, now aged 60, which she speaks of fondly. This is just one of the many relationships she still has with the children and families she taught.

Regarding the working conditions, Sister Anna describes them as tough and challenging. The job was as physically demanding as it was emotionally, with the number of children regularly sitting at 40 or up to 60, with only two adults. Sometimes she worked with assistance, sometimes without. As well as teaching the children and setting up the space, she also had to provide hot milk, a whole meal sandwich and a piece of fruit (she called it the 'Oslo lunch') for each child. She also had to set up forty stretchers, for them all to lie down and sleep, and then pack them away when they were done. This sleep was resisted by many.

Sister Anna describes a program that featured unstructured indoor and outdoor play. The children had clay, jigsaw puzzles, paints, doll corner and a pretend kitchen as well as more structured time for games, reading stories and music. Outside they would enjoy the sandpit, running races and sports. It is a program that would not look out of place in today's setting.

Sister Anna speaks of Inspectors from the Department of Health coming, unannounced, to sit in on sessions. She speaks of a friend who would fall to pieces every time she had an inspection, but Sister Maria Antonia recalls using her own visits to impress the importance of play, freedom and happiness to the Department officials. Perhaps we could learn something from her perspective, when considering our own Assessment and Rating visits. Department officials would stare in shock when her young children would enact plays of stories from the Bible, using their bodies as props and their memory to recall important lines, asking 'how do you *make* them do this?'.

In fact, Sister Anna is an enormous appreciator of the arts: drama, music and dancing. She recounts the changing faces of many children when she would play music from the Nutcracker. We have ample research that shows the positive benefit of drama and music for young children's development now, but back then Sister Mary Antonia just had her own intuition to rely on. Sister Anna speaks of 'free interpretation' of music through movement. She would play a piano and give the children the opportunity to dance to the way the music felt. She speaks of a 'plain' girl who would 'simply transform' when the music would play, confidently and happily dancing around the room.

'I used to do drama with the children, you know'. This is an understatement, as we learned she would put on entire productions with her kindergarten children, so much so that they became an annual feature in the Herald Sun. She would also invite parents to concerts and operettas where the children would sing and play musical instruments, dressed in lavish costumes they had made. Sister Anna acknowledges that it was hard work, but that it was worth it for the enjoyment and pride of the children and families who worked hard and participated.

In terms of behavior management, Sister Anna also had some incredibly progressive practices. She discusses the importance of positive reinforcement, 'children respond to praise' she says. 'If you congratulate one child for sitting nicely, suddenly everyone wants to sit nicely.' She had little trouble, although there was always the child who needed a bit of extra help, including the child who bit her on the ankle when he first arrived and wanted to go home but had to stay, what we would now recognise as separation anxiety.

It seems to be that Sister Anna's natural ability for teaching can be attributed to her love for children, her concern for their welfare and her respect for each child as an individual. She loved kindergarten because of the freedom and independence, something she took with

her when she moved to the school system as much as she could. She recognises that she was a renegade compared to many, but not all, of her colleagues.

Speaking with Sister Anna was a privilege. Her story reminds us that the curriculum we have now was built from the work of pioneers throughout the past 100 years. It also was a reminder that the basics are important, and that high quality comes from thoughtfulness, care and considered risk-taking. While we may feel drowned by paperwork at times, we have a lot more support and protection than the 17 year old Anna Dublé, who would go on to dedicate her life to educating and supporting children.

## We need to be more like children; curious, open and keen to explore

### Anne Morgan

I attended Brisbane Teachers College from 1961 to '63, where the mantra was that:

The environment was of extreme importance, set things out to inspire children to explore and have resources to extend their learning, always asking open ended questions.

To be a learner yourself.

To seek out the children's learning style and what was of real interest to them.

I was fortunate to gain a NT scholarship that meant I had to work at least 2 years in NT. I ended up in Batchelor Township, a Rum Jungle Mining area. The preschool shared a hall with the Scouts and Guides, so I had to pack up and set up each day. I was 90 minutes away from Darwin. This job was my first introduction to working with a local Aboriginal population. Here I learned that I was not infallible.

I learned that assistants knew more about the children and certainly knew about how to get families onside and they knew how to negotiate their way through the hierarchical system that is an isolated mining town village. I learned the value of a well-developed sense of humour.

We did things differently to these days of OH&S procedures. Children took the bus without seatbelts or an open truck from the cattle stations, swimming in the fresh water croc pools, hosing off the children in the shower who had gastro, and children stripping off to jump into the inflated pool or hosing each other.

I was invited by the principal of Brisbane Kindergarten Teachers College to teach in the newly established Demonstration Centre for student teachers and to lecture in Children's Literature and students' practical work. I spent two years terrified that someone would find out that I didn't know anything worth sharing even if I was skilled in sharing it. The practical

teaching experience was joyful and something I was happy to share.

From Brisbane, I took a position at Lady Gowrie in Melbourne from 1968 to 1971.

Observation booths were available for teaching and medical students to watch us daily. It was here that I cemented the learning that no matter what is happening in your personal life, when you walk through the door of the centre, you plaster on a smile and act your way through it. I often think that teachers are really actors as well as entrepreneurs. You are the one who has to make things happen and to make the audience feel you are comfortably in control.

One day, I heard a gasp from the booth which alerted me to check the dramatic play, partially out of sight. One of the children had swapped the plastic scissors for one of the sharper set in the collage area and I found a long hank of blonde hair on the floor!

Whilst I was at Lady Gowrie, we were all involved in a research project led by Dr Phyllis Scott related to developing a preschool curriculum. This was an in-depth study aimed at listing the learning, attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that would be commonly expected to be gained by and observed in a five year old child.

Teachers involved in this study, learned quickly to observe children in a meaningful way and to record the behaviours, to reflect, and determine

what was the next step to assist the child to move forward.

This is not rocket science, but it taught me to break down required learning into smaller manageable steps whose success could be readily recognised by the child and lead to further learning.

I learnt to make the best, smoothest finger paint and crispest potato cuts under the eagle eye of Frances Derham. The motto was, only the best materials and well-presented are good enough for children. I learned to articulate the pedagogy and the development of the children, to inform and answer questions from a wide range of visitors.

Lady Gowrie suffered funding cuts too, and they had to lose the more experienced staff. I left and started teaching in a sessional kindergarten in the Kew area. Here I realised I could not keep up the high standards I had come to expect of myself in Lady Gowrie, where there were two trained teachers and we had every afternoon for planning, reflection, preparation, etc. I had to let go of the non-essential tasks and concentrate on what was needed and possible to provide a still exciting and provoking program. I learned to listen and work with families in order to work better with them and their children.

From 1974 to 1979 my next position was as the inaugural teacher at the soon to be built Eltham College Early Learning Centre. I had the fun of choosing all the equipment and I had a free hand with the

curriculum as the principal truly believed in the importance of the early years and was prepared to put his trust in me and lots of money too. As there was multi sports and activities offered to the children, I was expected to coach and referee for soccer training and matches. Less said about that the better except that my acting skills were further honed!

I moved onto Knox at the end of 1979, having heard how advanced the Preschool services were there. I soon learnt that Knox justifiably had that reputation, and it was a vibrant group of management and educators who were keen to support each other, to continue learning and to provide a high quality experience to children and families. I really learned the value of collaboration and mutual support.

In the 1980s, we had regular excursions to the National Gallery, the ABC concerts and even to the snow.

I started assisting with the management team as the services grew. By early 2000s, I left teaching and became full time management. My colleagues challenged me more than ever before and I experienced real joy working with people who were passionate about high quality programs and services for children and families. I worked for Knox from late 1979 to 2021!

What I now reflect upon is:

- Families know lots more about their child, his world, skills, likes and

dislikes than we do. We need to give them opportunities throughout the year to tell us about them. We need to listen more and talk less.

- Families have goals and aspirations for their children that are more practical and family needs based than ours. This is what is important to them, and we'll never know if we don't listen.
- In order to help children to be active learners we need to be more like children, curious, open, keen to explore and experiment, and we need to provide a learning environment rich in provocations, print, open ended questions, accepting of efforts and needing to be FUN!

## A Sense of Community Ownership and Pride

### Avril McHugh

I graduated from MKTC in 1972. Reflecting on my career, I feel that my early years of teaching in outer Melbourne, and in the country preschools, is where I made the biggest difference in expanding children's ideas about their world and their relationships. Today there are so many outside influences on children that teachers have to be particularly sensitive to the 'the push down ideas and pressures' of society. They need to

ensure that these do not impinge on children's happiness and wellbeing.

I started at Dalton Road Preschool, Lalor. It was a brand-new preschool built by the Shire of Whittlesea to serve the growing population of young families in the area. The Preschool Committee had to raise \$3,000 dollars to equip the preschool before the Shire would build it! It was very much a learning curve for everyone involved with the preschool but there was a real sense of community ownership and pride in their Preschool. I had two four-year-old groups coming for two and half hours, four days a week. Very few mums worked, so this was possible. I had two preparation sessions per week which enabled teachers in the area to meet once a month on Friday afternoon to listen to a speaker or to see other preschools and their programs. I also organised parent meetings for the mums to get to know each other and talk about topics related to their children. Working bees building the playground were fun with children playing while the dads worked and mums organised a barbecue or picnic. The children were delightful, absorbing the new experiences painting, clay, collage, etc. Life was much simpler, and I felt I made an impact in developing the children's knowledge about their world.

After five years my husband moved us to Bendigo where I taught at the Maldon Preschool for a year. This was quite a different experience in that all the families and children knew each other before

coming to preschool! The preschool operated five mornings a week with a core of 15 children from the town coming each morning. About another ten children from outlying farms came two or three mornings a week depending on their family's routine. The group dynamics and interests changed depending on which children were present. There were walks around Maldon in Autumn and Spring which were delightful, passing the local school where siblings attended (so would they), and visits to farms to see the shearing of sheep and milking of cows for the townies.

I remember the subject of space was very popular particularly with the boys as 'Dr Who' was a show on ABC. Teachers spent some time at our monthly meetings discussing if it was suitable for preschoolers, as some families didn't allow the children to watch it, whereas others with older children did. Oh how things have changed with technology!

A ten-year break for my family then another country kindergarten this time in Moriarty, Tasmania, which was part of the local primary school. Country children who came two full school days and replied they lived in Tasmania when I asked which country they lived in. After some discussion I told them they lived in Australia to which there was a chorus of 'that's on the mainland'!

Next position was a year at Ulverstone Primary, where I taught in the Literacy Recovery in the Infant area. During this



time, I became acutely aware of how socio-economic factors impacted families and their children's ability to make the most of their education opportunities.

Back to the mainland where after a few years I started at Yarralea Children's Centre in Alphington in a wonderful Literacy Program developed by Janet McLean. I remained there for eighteen years teaching the Three-Year-Old group with some Four-Year-Old teaching too. Times were changing with mothers back at work or studying, so longer session times. Fortunately, still lots of parent involvement on the Committee but also lots more paperwork for teachers, accounting to parents about their children through photos and written assessments because parents were unable to be as involved.

There are many pressures on children and parents today from societal expectations, technology and the pace of life. Towards the end of my time at Yarralea, Stephanie Willey, the Co-ordinator developed a Bush Kinder program in Darebin parklands where children enjoyed and learnt about their natural world and relationships in a relaxed environment.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as an early childhood teacher and contributing to the AGECS Council. It has been my way of giving back to the profession, which advocates for all teachers and children in the early years.

## A pocket full of magic

Beth Jordan

I reached into my pocket while heading home from work today and pulled out a collection of items. To the unaware observer they would have looked like a mess of clutter and rubbish, but to me, they were treasures with a magical story behind each one. Before I tell you about the magic, let me tell you of my journey of how I came to see this magic.

Even as far back as my teenage years in Canada I wanted to be a teacher, I enjoyed caring for and educating children and I connected with them, and I always had fun with them. I think children knew that I liked being with them and therefore it was reciprocated. Having children of my own particularly inspired me to see child development as something that I could affect, and I studied all that I could get my hands on about learning theories, strategies, parenthood and teaching pedagogies. For 24 years, teaching has been my life and my soul. I have taught primary students and high school students, younger than one years old to over five years old. It has always been more than a job; it is who I am and I take great pride in it. I have taught in Canada, USA, Mexico and India and now Australia for the last seven years where I have been an early childhood educator and teacher. At times, I warm-heartedly call myself and my colleagues "child-developers" for that is what we are doing day in and out. It feels

even more significant than teaching of a certain set of outcomes and products, but rather that we are a momentous part of nurturing the citizens of the future of this planet.

Over these many years I have grown in my teaching so monumentally and I know that it is because I deeply believe that in order to be the most effective teacher today, I have to adapt to the children of today and cannot rely on past philosophies and strategies, not even those of last year. This thought keeps me yearning, learning and engaging in action research and reflection as often as possible and because I am constantly learning, it keeps me from becoming stagnant and stuck in my practice or burnt out in a profession that has certainly taken some big hits through covid times. As I write this, so far as the three-year-old kinder teacher I am challenging myself through reflection in practice in the areas of gender equity in early learning, outdoor learning environments, and embedding Aboriginal perspectives.

So back to my pockets full of magic, there is a triangle magnet, a coloured remote, a small toy dog, and a bead.

The triangle magnet reminds me of how a child joined the triangles together as he created a sphere made up entirely of triangles as I helped him wonder about his spatial perspectives, shapes and dimensions which he then flew around the room so proud of his 'spaceship'. The

colour remote reminds me of the child who was so interested in the remote and the buttons that she sat in front of the light box changing the colours and rhythms for over 15 minutes, then talked with me about the changes she could see and the ones she could make with the remote and which ones were her favourites. The dog reminds me of the child who spoke to me about his dog at home and what they did together and how much he loved his dog and we had a beautiful conversation that connected us. And the bead, well the bead was 'treasure' found by a child who loves gathering and we like to hunt for treasure together and today she brought me this bead and said, "you can have my treasure". A generous giving from the heart of something she cherished. So yes, my pockets get full of random things at the end of each day, my legs are tired from the 10,000 steps, my voice is hoarse from all the magnificent conversations, but along with it my heart gets full of the magical moments I have with the children around me and I can't wait to do it all again tomorrow. This is because I know, this job, this profession, is no ordinary trade, it is a profoundly important calling to support children in their very own unique, unpredictable, imaginative and innovative journeys.

## Some of the best play occurs in natural surroundings

Catherine Beckingham

It all started with... *"are you a teacher?"*

Like so many, after finishing school, I had no idea what I wanted to do. The Army had appeal – the ads made it look so fun! Hospitality was "hip" – so many groovy Melbourne bars and restaurants to choose from... but I thought I'd found 'my calling' as a real estate agent. Property was awesome – beautiful homes, interesting people, lots of socialising... fast forward 15 years and the birth of my two children... And here I was at Mother's Group with my new "mummy" friends. Playing with the children, one of the mums asked me, "Are you a teacher?". "No, I just enjoy being with the children," I replied. And that was the moment I realised... my career in property was over... being with children had won my heart!

And so, when my eldest child started primary school, I started a university degree! Whilst studying, I worked as a preschool music teacher and educator at a local kindergarten. I was very fortunate to have the support of my wonderful husband, and well-behaved children who went to bed promptly at 7pm so I could get a few hours of study done in the evenings.

During my studies, I met some amazing people, some from within the university and others through networking opportunities. I discovered another thing about me that I didn't know existed before, that I. Love. Nature. So much so that I joined our local Scouting group and became a Cub Leader, but that's a different story!

Upon graduating in 2019 with a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood), I started work as a teacher. I was just finding my feet when Covid hit! Like so many teachers, I had to make a quick pivot to online learning. This was so foreign to me and my colleagues; we had to learn Zoom, plan 'lessons' to deliver online, create video content that was as engaging as Playschool without the production team, all whilst incorporating children's interests and fostering those invaluable relationships with families. Despite the challenges, we were able to deliver a wonderful online program, which eventually transitioned (in part) back to onsite teaching and learning; a state which we yo-yoed and navigated for the next 18 months.

What I learned in those first two years of teaching, was that some of the best play experiences occurred in nature. Nature provided resources that all families could access (handy for online learning!) and Bush Kinder was able to continue throughout most of the lockdowns (to my heart's delight!). When restrictions allowed, we were able to gather children and families together for "Night Walks",

on which we visited local parks and discovered suburban wildlife such as Tawny Frogmouths, possums, and bats.

My takeaway from these natural experiences has taught me that whilst nature-based experiences can be challenging in built-up suburban areas, teaching children how to engage in 'slow' play enhances their skills in observation and curiosity; they really begin to notice small things. This has inspired me to continue to engage children in learning in, with and about nature.

I am only at the beginning of my journey as a teacher, and there is so much I want to achieve. The discoveries I have made about myself so far have been incredibly rewarding. Who knows what's next, but I'm excited to find out!

## The story of my teaching life

### Charmian Wright

I think my life's desire to be a kindergarten teacher started when I was around three years old. I followed my sister who went to Ivanhoe Girls Grammar Kindergarten and I really enjoyed every minute. The teacher, Miss Weaver, was inspired, very musical and a true delight.

The building was basic and I remember looking to the south facing verandah and seeing churches and schools in Kew. Miss Weaver and Mrs Low had a lot of music sessions, percussion groups dancing to rhythm, etc.

The desire to train as a kindergarten teacher made me look at the subjects I studied in high school. In Year 11, I applied for a Teaching Bursary from the Health Department. I received one of these and it did help a lot with finances. During the training at Melbourne KTC, we all did training at varied kindergartens. I worked at Hopetoun Kindergarten in Flemington. A large building with a built-in delightful housekeeper (Mrs Jesse) and being a Melbourne City Council centre had a superb playground.

Training at Ivanhoe Girls Grammar School was with an inspiring teacher, Norma Campbell Smith. Just to get things tangled, I taught Meg and Charles Low (twin children of Heather Low) at this centre.

A busy time followed at St Andrews Clifton Hill with a delightful group of parents and children. Not so much with children but being 1956 and having an evening job at the Olympic Village Centre as a waitress was great fun and it influenced my life.

After graduation, I had happy years at Lady Huntingfield Kindergarten in North Melbourne, another MCC centre. During my time there I had a super shock. I was lucky to get a car lift with our neighbour in Eaglemont. One morning, on arriving earlier than other staff and putting the key in the front door I realised No result. Then horrors!

Masses of water oozing out of the bottom of the large front door. On gaining entry, I saw to my dismay, blocks floating, dolls

doing likewise and the ceiling, being made of Cainite, just crumbling and falling to the floor. Absolute chaos! A super working bee had to take place with staff, parents, council staff all working to clean it up and fix it. This centre had been built during WW2 and was set up for day sleeps and meals. The renovation made the building a better one.

After this job, I went to London and other parts of Europe for three years. I returned home and then worked at Powlett Reserve Kindergarten in lovely East Melbourne. This was a super centre with an excellent assistant teacher who had trained as a play leader. We also liaised with the Health Centre Sister who gave us a good background. It was a happy centre with a good program.

I was then married in East Melbourne by the Priest who was a father of one of our dear little pupils. After some time, my husband and I produced two suitable future kinder kids. When the second child went off to school, I was approached by the City of Knox to fill a director position in a sessional kindergarten. I chose to go to Rowville which was delightfully rural. Cows in the nearby paddocks, horses everywhere, birds galore. In the early days, the mothers had to battle to get to necessities. There were no shopping centres, doctors or chemists. They had to get to Ferntree Gully or Dandenong and most of them did not have cars.

I find it hard to realise that I was there for 19 years before retiring happily.

Due to the influence of Mrs Heather Low, I became involved with the Graduates Association (now known as AGECS), working for the two residential kindergartens: Forest Hill and Warrawong. These were built by the Graduates Association in the 1920's and 1930's. These buildings were sold, and the finances used for the establishment of Special Grants and continue to this day.

## Learning from others ignites my own passion for learning

Darren Halim

My journey as an EC practitioner hasn't been the smoothest pathway or the easiest. It was full of tiny little obstacles that seems to aggregate sporadically, but I wouldn't have changed it any other way as I have gained numerous skills and lessons through the hardship. I have been fortunate to hold different positions from casual educator, kindergarten teacher, educational leader and centre director.

Being a male early childhood teacher with an immigrant background in a highly underappreciated and feminised sector was the initial challenge. Fellow teachers, educators and families often made preconceived perception on my intentions, teaching skills and my overall professional identity.

These are short anecdotes on key areas that I found crucial to rise above the

challenges posed in our sector and to becoming a successful EC practitioner: inspiring mentor(s), striving for excellence and a reflective practice.

A positive and supportive work environment and management are imperative to any educator's work wellbeing and performance. As a graduate or even experienced teacher, seek out a mentor that can be your work colleague, director or someone who is outside your work circle. It can even be multiple fellow educators that you look up to and can learn best practice models from observing their teaching. I find it inspiring to see, engage in discussions and build connection with these teachers and educators that display consistent effort to strive for excellence, role model positive hard and soft skills and show their contribution in many little or big ways. Seeing the influence and passion in their work also ripples to me and ignites my own passion to strive to become a better EC practitioner. I have had the privilege of being led by excellent directors that are firm, highly skilled in their pedagogical understanding. It is a memorable event when my director actually actively listened to my feedback and concerns instead of multitasking to check off their long exhaustive list as a director or quickly brushing it off. That power of being listened to has motivated me monumentally.

Striving for excellence and reflective practice are heavily interconnected in the power they feed each other, as they

are also the key principles and practice in the EYLF. Sometimes, there are many work issues in early childhood that involves the family and staff, and we can get caught up so much in that, and that can dampen our fire slowly.

One powerful question I always ask myself is "what are the children's needs, and what can I do as a teacher to address their needs?" Not the staff's needs, family's need per se, but come back to the core question of what does the child need.

Use this question and the answer it provides to give you power to advocate for the child. Use it to drive the difficult conversation you need to have. Use it as your basis, direction to give you confidence and self-assurance that you are doing things for the children's learning and wellbeing. I see this often in excellent EC practitioners who are able to see the bigger picture and the key priorities and not get muddled up in the tiny things.

Striving for excellence also entails finding out more about best practices and the different practices in different settings as well. Do research, read a lot and engage in discussions about ideas. To complement this, I often reflect on my own practices and use the insights I gathered to sharpen my skills as a teacher, whether it is the hard skills as a teacher or soft skills in how to be a better communicator or team player.



## I've seen so many changes to inclusion and care

### Dawn Meldrum

I began my career in 1972 as a childcare assistant in a centre called CARE run by the Baptist church in Broadmeadows.

I started my mothercraft training in 1973 at the Broadmeadows Babies Home. This was a live-in training where we cared for newborn babies waiting for adoption and children up to the age of five who were in care as state wards. Some of these children had complex needs that often meant they were not considered for adoption but waiting for foster care. Our training included the full-time care including overnight. The training was for 18 months.

The home also cared for unmarried mothers waiting for the birth of their babies and then giving them up for adoption. In hindsight, a very sad situation but great care for these women.

After completing this I decided I would like to further my career and continued on to begin general nursing training in north Queensland. This experience provided me an opportunity to experience working with and caring for many aboriginal children and their families. This was a time of unrest for the Aboriginal community as they were prevented from

living within the township, but often needed medical care.

After 12 months I decided this was not for me and returned home. I gained a position with Melbourne City Council in an occasional care service in the heart of Melbourne, Heffernan Lane. The centre was situated on three floors with no outside play area other than a concrete roof top. Children were enrolled to attend for a four-hour period designed for families who may have had a medical or other appointment in the city. The children were issued with a number on arrival pinned to their back and taken up in a lift to the age specific room. Quite horrendous now that I think about it.

After a year I thought I might try somewhere different and gained a position in a casual relief pool still within Melbourne City Council working across many services within the CBD. One service asked me to stay on as a permanent staff, Debney Park Children's Centre in Flemington at the base of the high-rise commission flats. There we had many first placement families from many different cultural backgrounds. Some of the cultural groups were struggling with political aggressions and sometimes one group of mothers would wait outside the gate until others had left. Most of these families were factory workers with little or no extended families or supports.

In 1996 I moved again and gained a position with Latrobe University within their children's centre in Bundoora. Here I

worked with three-year-old children. In those days we could take a group of children on a walk around the neighbourhood on a whim, with no parent permissions.

During that time the qualifications for childcare staff changed from the mothercraft training to the TAFE course. I completed this training at Footscray Institute that included what was called a Preschool Certificate that had an emphasis on planning an education program. Quite different to the original care emphasis in my first training. I moved into a 2IC position in this 120-place centre

In 1978 I was married, and my husband and I moved to Belgrave. I then gained a position as a coordinator of a small family grouped service for Knox City Council.

In 1981 I left to gain firsthand experience, having my first child. During that first year as a mum, I began as a family day care mother (that was how we were described in those days) until I had my second child. I then took on Knox playgroup association president and running the Boronia playgroup.

I did not return to work until 1989. I then gained a position again with Knox as a kindergarten aid for a child with high physical support needs. When I think about this there was no real evidence of inclusion, I often had to take her out of the group so that she wouldn't disrupt the session.

After that year I then moved into a full-time kindergarten assistant role with the opportunity to work with four-year-old children in a preschool setting. I moved a couple of times to different kindergartens over a nine-year period. The qualifications changed again, and I completed a bridging course to complete an associate diploma in children's services.

After moving on from preschools, I gained a position in an OSHC program as coordinator. This was a service between two schools. Over the next 8 years I built the service to a 60 place ASC, 30 BSC and 30 VAC. I applied for many grants and successfully purchased and renovated three portable classrooms as a permanent OSHC venue. We supported the inclusion of many children with additional needs sometimes without additional funding when this was not available.

During that time, we went through National Quality Standards for the first time. I trained as a validator and visited many OSHC program both in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria supporting them through that process. I also trained as a peer mentor supporting new OSHC coordinators.

I completed my Certificate IV in workplace training and assessment and taught units at Swinburne TAFE for five years, providing assessment to students in their workplaces.

In 2005 I gained a part time position as a CSRDO with Knox whilst still working in OSHC and teaching in TAFE and then through an on-line portal.

In 2006 the CSRDO program ceased, and the Inclusion Support Program began. I continued part time until 2007 when I moved into a full-time position and team leader of the Inclusion Support Program. I remained in that position until 2016 until the ISP was tendered out to a state-wide provider.

I then gained the state manager for Yooralla as a consortium member of the Victorian Inclusion Agency where I still am.

Throughout my career I have seen childcare move through quality standards both in long day care in 1988 and then OSHC in 2005. I have seen child safety standards change and the move to successfully include and plan for all children including children with additional needs.

## We learn so much from children

### Diane McLennan

I am lucky I had the opportunity to become a kindergarten teacher courtesy of Gough Whitlam and free university education, in 1974.

I moved to Melbourne from the country and lived independently, while studying, completing teaching practice for long periods in the suburbs, travelling on

public transport. I met and was supported by such lovely people; some are still my very good friends 48 years later!

I feel so privileged to have been a part of so many lives in each kindergarten, mostly positive (and some challenging), helping children, and their families. The most important thing to me was to achieve Trust from the parents/caregivers, so that they could trust us to educate their little people.

Children are so giving and trusting and joyful. We learn so much from each other.

The National Quality Frameworks helped me to understand myself and my relationships with other educators, staff, parents, families, committees of management, Council, and schools; as well as nurturing each child's identity, wellbeing, learning, communication, and community. It made a difference to me about how children learn - by engaging in meaningful play, learning from day-to-day experiences together, building on what they already knew, engaging with the community, and giving children a Voice.

Very importantly we gave children a voice - by listening, questioning, encouraging them to ask questions, and teaching them resilience - to stand up for themselves, and to not feel threatened or overpowered by others.

# Photos from contributors (1)



From left to right: Nancy Robertson's Graduation 1940, Kay Hirst's (nee Wragg) Graduation 1957, A series of photos from Sr Anna Dublé: Nativity play, children painting indoors, musical group time, current day photo



## Great readers and writers work here!

### Dorothy Connop

I did my undergraduate teacher training at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Victoria, in the mid-late 70's, on a Health Department scholarship. My first teaching position in 1978 was a 12-month maternity leave position in the country. It was a very happy year and I can still remember the names of many of the 50 children that were in my two four-year-old groups. I would have very happily stayed in this position, in this county area, but with the year passing quickly and the teacher returning from her leave, I moved back to Melbourne.

The Bachelor of Early Childhood Education was introduced just as I completed my 3rd year of the undergraduate Diploma of Teaching and there was a stipulation that prior to commencing the B.Ed. you must have completed at least one year of teaching. I did not need any further prompting to enrol in the B. Ed and did so in 1979. Over the two next decades I also completed multiple graduate diplomas, one in special education, one in educational administration and one in movement and dance, and finally a master's degree in education.

My studies were led by my professional interests and the positions I held over time. I had always known that I wanted to

move into special education and this happened quite quickly when I took a position in, what was then known as, a Day Training Centre. Here I taught pre-school and primary aged children. From this position I moved to a Supervisor (Principal) role at an Early Intervention Program.

During my years in special education I have been happy to realise that as a society we now offer more respect to those with additional needs, welcoming them into all aspects of mainstream life, raising our expectations of Government for adequate and equitable provision for all members of the community and for recognising the valuable contribution that all community members offer. One of the things I have loved witnessing is Special Education come under the Department of Education and Training.

When I first commenced teaching in Special Education, the responsible department was MRD – the Mental Retardation Department. The name made me shudder at the time and still does! Special education settings then became the responsibility of the Health Department, another ill-fitting situation, before finally landing appropriately in the DET. I spent some years at this Early Intervention Program, working with many staff members, families and children. The parent run committee were an inspiration, having commenced the program themselves when no other educational provision was available to them in the area where they lived.

My next position was at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (now Vision Australia), where I was employed as a Home Adviser, working with babies and young children. During my years at RVIB I was awarded The Vera Scantlebury B Memorial Trust Scholarship and travelled to the USA to study, visiting various special school settings and attending conferences to gain insight into the field from other perspectives.

When I moved to the UK in 1990, I worked as Deputy Head Teacher of a school for young children, which was operated by the Royal National Institute for the Blind. After three years in this position I became the Acting Head Teacher, before deciding to move back to Australia. My next teaching position was in TAFE, where I taught the Diploma of Children's Services and Certificate III in Child Care courses. My interests then lead me to a teaching position as a Literacy Support Teacher in a primary school. While at this school I trained in Reading Recovery and spent time working across three other schools in Reading Recovery teaching positions.

I then began working as an inclusion support facilitator, supporting early childhood educators working in long day care, family day care and outside school care settings to include children with additional needs into their programs. This role was later revised and renamed and under a new employer I worked as an inclusion professional.

My teaching philosophy was always based on a desire to build confidence in the children, and to assist them to know that they had choices and a voice in life, that they had control.

Watching children grow in knowledge, confidence and pride was always a joy for me. When working as a Reading Recovery teacher, I would meet children who had very little confidence in their ability to learn, so I would take the onus for the learning off them and tell them that I knew they were going to be readers and writers because I was a great teacher. With this responsibility delegated to me they were able to relax and enjoy the various tasks we undertook together. The posters I made to put on my classroom door read, 'Great readers and writers work here!', and soon enough they were all great readers and writers, amazing their classroom teachers with their now strong work ethic and ability to participate in class.

My work with young blind and vision impaired children was, of necessity, work with the whole family. Teaching families how babies and young children can learn without the sense of sight, working with them to reduce sudden and potentially frightening experiences, such as picking up their baby without forewarning with voice and a light touch. Reassuring families that language will come, but is likely to be very delayed without the ability to see the object that is being labelled, as sighted babies can. Sharing that development will occur, but needs to



be carefully guided and nurtured and may not follow sequential milestones.

Discussing the training and use of any residual vision, learning the value of the haptic sense (learning about the size, weight, texture and shape of objects through touch), considering methods for later reading and writing through the use of braille or other methods, amongst many other things.

It has been a privilege to be invited into the homes and lives of many families over the years and to share with them the love and joy of watching their children grow.

## Inventor of finger painting for Australia!

### Frances Derham (1894-1987)

Not many can boast a life as full and rewarding as revolutionary children's art teacher and researcher, Mrs Francis Derham. Today's educators owe a lot to her. She devoted a lifetime to observation, research and work with children. She stresses the importance of preschool education, but despairs at the lack of children's art education. "Preschool is absolutely essential. It helps children develop their skills in all sorts of ways and their ability to relate. One year is just not enough."

Frances was a trained artist and art teacher; she invented finger painting for Australia. She is remembered for compiling a practical guide for children's

art teachers – *'The Art for The Child under Seven'* in 1961. She was compelled by necessity to write the book as overseas books were not readily available.

After teaching at Preshil School in Kew for four to 12 year olds, she lectured at the Kindergarten Training College in Kew for more than 30 years and after her experience teaching children, was able to teach more practically. She taught by observation at Preshil as she didn't know everything about children then, but quickly set about learning all she could. She encouraged the children to draw and could see each child through the child's drawing. Her collection of children's art work then began. There are 10,000 pieces of children's art housed in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.

Frances believed children express themselves through their art and reveal their responses to their immediate world honestly in this way. She had high regard for the Lady Gowrie Child Centre in Carlton which she helped to establish in 1939 where children can be observed behaving naturally from the one-way seeing glass observation booths. Her only regret in life is that she did not know a lot about child development or children's art when raising her own children. She has, however, traced the development of some of her 28 grandchildren.

She was a foundation (1968) and life member of the Advisory Council for Children with Impaired Hearing.

Reprinted from AUDAX – 1987

## They made me feel confident and courageous enough to become a leader

### Genine Go

My journey as an early childhood practitioner started in Australia, but it was not a profession I ever thought I would pursue. I was born and raised in the Philippines – in a society where school set the parameters for job opportunities and future success in life. This certainly did not make for a positive school experience, especially when teaching methods were outdated and teachers worked for test results and school ratings. Despite my love of learning, I resisted the notion of even looking into teaching when it brought about anxiety and a lack of confidence in me. I took a different path in university and found myself dissatisfied. So, when my sister invited me to come to Melbourne, I found that I was eligible to undertake a Master of Teaching degree in early childhood at Victoria University and surprisingly, I was captured by it. It was a terrifying prospect starting from scratch, but I found that I could envision a future when I thought of teaching children.

Coming to Melbourne as an international student affirmed this choice. I was astonished by how different early childhood education was viewed in Australia. I gained knowledge of child development, teaching practices and

importantly, the significance of culture, social justice, family background and society to children, that when I did, I knew there was no turning back – I found a profession I could potentially make a difference in. Placements allowed me to catch a glimpse of teaching in action and I was fortunate enough that my first mentor was the embodiment of a teacher. She gave children a voice and respected their identity all while being consistent, kind, and empathetic. She was able to work as the director and the kindergarten teacher, while also supporting the educators around her. However, it was not until my last placement that I felt the real possibility of me being a teacher. I saw that despite coming from a different background and not having a lot of experience, I could easily relate to families and create deep connections with children.

In the middle of working through the Graduate Diploma aspect of my degree, I was offered a casual role in a long day care centre where I had done my placement. I was thrilled that an organisation found potential in me and that I could finally be part of a team. However, even after finishing my degree and being eligible to teach I knew that it would take a while to build up my confidence. At the time, I was being stubborn, that I needed to take the plunge and that many other teachers were in the same boat.

However, I knew the drawbacks of rushing and I had a vision of how I was going to

find my way through this profession. I felt that children deserved the best of me, and I could only give that if I understood every aspect of early childhood. The goal was to learn about children from the youngest age and slowly work my way up. So, I took on the role as a casual with children aged 0-3 for a year, before being a full-time assistant educator to both the 3-yr old room leader and the 4-yr old kindergarten teacher. Not long after, I became the 3-yr old room leader myself. These critical years not only helped me achieve my goal, but also allowed me to explore different teaching and learning styles.

After working for four years and having experienced all possible roles, I could not let the position of 4-yr old kindergarten teacher pass me by.

Majority of my first year of teaching was finding my feet – knowing what to say to families, how to approach different organisations and learning to teach with other educators.

When you become a teacher, you become a leader and there are numerous things you are expected to know and be on top of. My most significant stressor was the feeling that because our kindergarten program was within a small long day care centre, it was being viewed more as a child-minding service than the educational program that I knew it was. So, I took it as a challenge to raise the standard of quality,

not just to bring families in, but to bring to life the vision I had of making a change.

I wanted to teach children about the world, but it was important for them to experience it for themselves, so I started weekly excursions to parks, playgrounds, nurseries, and the museum. The children visited nursing home residents every month for two years prior to the pandemic.

I also found it strange that I was meant to prepare children for school, when I had not once been inside of a prep classroom in Australia, so I took the children to local primary schools and from there, I created relationships so that I could network and find out about what I can do as a kindergarten teacher to prepare children for school. It was from professional conversations like these with various prep teachers and early years' coordinators that I came to form what my program would focus on for years to come, which is life readiness with a strong focus on social and emotional skills.

It took many years for me to feel confident and during the last four years as a kindergarten teacher, there were certainly numerous times when I found myself feeling like I could offer more than I was. However, looking back at those years, I was also unknowingly making a difference to individual children, their families, and our local community. The goal to help and support pushed me to create partnerships with allied health professionals and involve preschool field

officers into discussions with families even when I found the tasks daunting. This was particularly integral and gratifying during the pandemic when I felt my role was to guide children through change and unpredictable circumstances.

Over the last two years, I was fortunate to have been surrounded by supportive educational leaders, who believed in me, pushed me to challenge myself, but also showed me what a great leader can look like. They made me feel confident and courageous enough to step into the educational leader role early this year. If I were to name one significant contribution as an educational leader, is that I also pushed for bravery in our educators – to stand up for what is right, but also to challenge themselves as I did, to go beyond what feels safe in their practice to make a bigger change in their workplace and profession. The arduous journey I chose to take to becoming a kindergarten teacher seems futile when I did still experience burnout and have since left my role as a kindergarten teacher. However, I feel that this reflects the need for change to occur in our sector and a push for better conditions for all educators.

In addition, I would have never experienced the satisfaction of supporting families and understood the importance of early intervention had I not become a kindergarten teacher.

I am now starting a different role as an early childhood coordinator, one which allows me to combine my expertise as an early childhood practitioner and focus on my interest in early intervention. I do still hope to contribute to early childhood, and this seemed like the perfect opportunity to take a step back but also continue to challenge myself. I am eager to learn more about the support that children and their families have available to them from their communities, councils, and different organisations and agencies like the NDIA.

I still wish to contribute to early childhood, but I have realised that this is not just done with children. Having engaged with all the inspiring professionals I have; it has also motivated me to share the knowledge and experience I have with other people starting out in our profession.

Later this year, I also hope to mentor and give back; to share my knowledge to beginning teachers and offer a different point-of-view, to inspire as I was inspired.

## A journey through teaching

### Helen Walker-Cook

I graduated from Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers' College, as it was then, in 1969. How can it be over 50 years ago? We wore long virginal white dresses as we made our way across the stage of Wilson Hall in front of our family and

friends. Then we were on our own out in the field.

Like most of my contemporaries, my first job was at a single unit kindergarten in the Melbourne suburbs, run by a parent committee under the administration of the Pre-School Unit of the Victorian Health Department, headed by Miss Beth Stubbs, who had seemingly been there forever!

I was in the unique position of being the director of a kindergarten which I had lived opposite during some of my childhood. My younger sister had attended this kindergarten, but unfortunately I had not 'gone to kinder,' as we lived in the country at the time I was eligible. Maybe this lack of kindergarten experience had influenced my career choice in order to make up for this missed opportunity!

My assistant, who had been in the position for many years, had also been my Sunday School teacher for a few years when I had been a child in the area. She was also the cleaner at the kindergarten, and on the committee, and I was meant to be her boss! Of course, all the parents knew her well and approached her, not me, to discuss any issues with their children. We had been given the impression in classes at college that the parents would talk to me, the teacher, as I was the professional and the expert at the centre (at 21 years old and childless!). What an eye-opener this was, one among many.

Some years later I was appointed as director of an inner-city church kindergarten, under the high-rise flats, where most of the children and families lived. It was the late 1970s, the terms 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism' were almost unknown, but my kindergarten had children from a wide range of backgrounds, though predominantly Greek and later on Vietnamese families were the main attendees. It was wonderful to discover Priscilla Clarke and the Multicultural Resource Centre at the FKA in Church St, Richmond. What a lifesaver it was, with its cultural information and knowledge, also teaching resources and bilingual storybooks, carefully translated by the bilingual workers, taped or glued on underneath the English text.

I really enjoyed having students at the kindergarten, they were a great help, especially since the assistant and I had the children on our own for six hours daily except Fridays when they finished at lunchtime, no coffee or lunch breaks, let alone planning time. After six years I changed direction and moved to Prahran TAFE, later Swinburne, where I taught childcare students, or Mothercraft nurses as they were known then. I loved the camaraderie and professional support at TAFE after the isolation of kindergarten teaching, working with other teachers with such a diverse range of professional backgrounds was very interesting and led to very lively planning and staff meetings!

Going out into the field to assess students on placement in childcare centres, kindergartens, home-care, after-school or family day care was an important part of the work, and learning about childcare was a whole new world to me. I have been so privileged to be part of such a growing and changing profession for so many years and to see the many challenges it has faced and continues to work on with so many inspiring educators and pedagogical leaders to provide knowledge, guidance and support.

## From kindergarten teacher to early intervention coordinator

### Jaqueline Leung

Having my first baby during the COVID-19 pandemic was extremely challenging. I had limited support as my family was overseas and not able to come. Whilst I am glad we survived the difficult baby stage, it wasn't easy going back to teaching a group of children as well.

After my maternity leave, I went back to teaching a group of three-year-old children two days a week. After about two months of trying to resettle back into work, I realised it was not sustainable with my family circumstance. My then eight-month-old son just started childcare and he was getting sick every couple of weeks. We had to take him to the hospital once because of how sick he was. My work could be up to a 40-minute drive each

way and it was stressful and worrisome to try to pick him up from childcare as soon as I could after work, especially on nights when my husband worked late.

Whilst I have always enjoyed teaching, it is both physically and mentally draining especially when I have a baby to attend to after work. I often came home with an empty tank with little energy left to engage with my son. It is similar to how a chef would cook all day at the restaurant and come home to have to cook dinner for the family. With my family living overseas and my husband's parents being elderly, we had limited support. I started to become curious what is out there for me that could better suit my family situation when I came across the role - early intervention (EI) coordinator.

My role as an EI coordinator is to work with families with children under the age of seven who are seeking access and support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). We assess the child's developmental progress and provide resources and advice on the next appropriate step that will best support their child. If the child meets NDIS access criteria, we assist families to develop their NDIS plan. We also provide appropriate support to families if their child does not meet NDIS access criteria.

Whilst I have heard about NDIS before, I had little idea what they do for young children. Children under the age of six may be eligible for NDIS if they are considered to have a developmental

delay. In other words, a diagnosis is not needed. Families can also make a self-referral to an early childhood partner of the NDIS if they believe their child has significant delays in their development. An EI coordinator will be able to assist and assess whether the child is likely to have a developmental delay. In many cases, families are flagged by medical professionals such as their GP or paediatrician, the child's educator or allied health professional to recommend seeking NDIS access.

I find my current role challenging yet fulfilling. It is challenging because I am required to have critical conversations with families and to support them to navigate the NDIS system which is not always exactly straight-forward. It is also a busy role as it requires a high ability to manage your own caseload. There is a lot more 'computer work' rather than being on your feet all day when teaching. At the same time, it is a fulfilling job because I get to use my expertise in child learning and development to support families. It is not a role that would suit everyone.

Best of all, I get to go home, and still have the energy to fill my son's bucket. I am very lucky to be where I am today as I do feel a sense of work-life balance that works for me and my family.

## I worked with great teachers and families

### Judith Gallagher

My first qualification was an infant and sub primary diploma, and I was employed in kindergartens in Williamstown and Yarraville. In 1970 Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers' College was offering a two-year part-time transition course. I was fortunate to be able to enrol in this. It did take me three years to complete, due to the birth of my youngest son midway! From about 1974 I was the teacher of the third group at Bena Angliss Kindergarten at Ferntree Gully. In later years this group was extended to two sessions per week at Ferntree Gully and two sessions per week at Boronia. From about 1975 I was also the teacher for a toddler's group in Scoresby. This was located at the Infant Welfare Centre and was led by a teacher and the infant welfare sister. Parents attended with their children and were able to observe and participate with their child in the group, meet other parents, and discuss any problems. Knox had several of these groups in various infant welfare centres. They were supported by the council and co-ordinated by Barbara Mc Laughlin. Eventually however, funding was not renewed and they ceased, many becoming parent run playgroups.

I retired in 1990, having worked with many great teachers and families.



## President of Warrawong Day Care Kindergarten

### Judith Thompson (1936–2021)

Jude graduated from Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers' College in the last half of the 1950s. Her first placement was at Burnley Free Kindergarten for two years before her first son was born.

She returned to teaching after her third child was born and taught at her local kindergarten, Hartwell Preschool.

In 1976 she completed her graduate Diploma in Special Education. This was followed by teaching at Allambie Reception Centre, a residential facility for children placed in out of home care. After which she taught at Canterbury Family Centre.

She was President of Warrawong Day Care Kindergarten, a sister facility to Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten. Both offered long day care in the context of high-quality kindergarten programs.

Jude taught at Sage Cottage, the Occasional Care Centre attached to Warrawong in the 1980s.

During her teaching career, she taught her son Andrew at Hartwell, and her granddaughter Michelle at Sage Cottage.

Jude was a dedicated and committed Kindergarten Teacher and was involved in kindergartens throughout her life. She supported many families and friends, and loved being a part of their lives. Jude

was delighted that her great granddaughter was given her name, Judith, as a middle name.

Vale Judith Mollie Thomson (nee Chesterfield)

01.06.1936 – 07.10.2021

**I have relished in the joy  
of seeing children grow  
and develop confidence  
and agency**

### Julie Smith

After being offered tertiary places to study primary school teaching at Frankston Teachers College, classical music at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and early childhood education at SCV – IECD (State College of Victoria – Institute of Early Childhood Education), I have always been extremely grateful that, as a young 17-year-old, I made the choice to study early childhood development and become a kindergarten teacher, as we were known then.

My career as an early childhood educator in rural Victoria has been wonderful and rewarding.

It began as an almost 21-year-old, in the small town of Beechworth in 1977. With a fabulously supportive and friendly group of committee members, we spring cleaned and sorted all the resources and equipment and painted most of the

furniture during January. The large glass doors, which lead out to a magnificent old oak tree in a beautiful large playground, were opened for the two days of parent/teacher interviews, before beginning the children's reduced hour sessions. This transition period was especially important, as at the time, none of the children had experienced childcare and only a few had ever been cared for by anyone other than their families.

Along with an experienced and supportive assistant, delightful happy country children with very few separation or behavioural issues, and a supportive regional advisor who also encouraged our district Teacher Network with a 'Teachers Buddy Program' in place, I soon realised how lucky I was to have "landed" where I did to begin my career.

After teaching for two years, I began my Bachelor of Education by correspondence in 1979, attending our Kew Campus for a week of lectures each school holidays.

Later that year we moved to the Western District for my husband to take up a new position and before too long, I was offered a maternity leave position at my second rural kindergarten. We ran our program in the supper room of the local hall, which unfortunately resulted in our needing to pack everything away behind concertina doors each time a dance or other function was to be held in the hall the following weekend. Luckily this only happened occasionally and again our

country parents came to the fore and lent a hand.

Being closer to the regional centre of Ballarat, with a much larger teacher's group, and also being within much easier reach of Melbourne, now made networking with other teachers and opportunities for professional development much more accessible.

On completion of this maternity leave position, I accepted a full-time position at a larger kindergarten in our local community, where I very happily remained director for 10 years – my last position in a 'stand-alone centre', working with one co-worker and a committee.

My final position, which I held for 13 years before my retirement, was in an early learning centre in a private school. My leadership skills developed markedly here, as director of a fairly large early childhood team, and also as a member of the leadership group within the school.

Whilst working at the school, the headmaster agreed to partially fund and grant leave to myself and another teacher to attend a Reggio Emilia Study Tour in Italy – a most wonderful opportunity. While our teaching and learning was enhanced in all aspects during the trip, we also found the whole experience reassuring. We were on the right pathway, with our nature and natural material based, indoor/outdoor program, with much holistic, child-initiated learning taking place. The

importance of truly listening, hearing and observing the children was clearly reinforced.

Music has consistently been a huge part of my kindergarten program – I have always had a piano or keyboard, guitar and many other musical instruments in my learning environments. I've used music to gain the attention of and calm groups of active children and to soothe upset children. We've always had loads of fun moving to music and singing together, spontaneously gaining rhythm, melody, language, social and emotional skills, as well as confidence and many other skills along the way.

While I have never formally studied special education, my own lived experience of having a cognitively delayed brother gave me enormous insight into the difficulties and worries that parents of children with additional needs face. Consequently, I worked hard to advocate for them and was always aware of demonstrating empathy and understanding as I supported them in their quest to gain the best possible outcomes for their little ones.

As many early childhood educators will have discovered, we are often the people present when parents see their children interact with a group of peers in an educational setting for the first time, and, although having concerns before, come to a realisation that there is a delay in one or more areas of development. It is a very

difficult time and extremely important for us to be there for them.

As I reminisce, I realise what a privilege it has been to play such an important role in the lives of so many children and their families. I have relished in the joy of seeing them grow and develop confidence and agency. I adore bumping into many of the now grown-up children, their parents and their grandparents, who I grew to know so well during their time with us in our centres. Still living in the area in which I have worked, affords me the luxury of often seeing them and hearing about where their lives are headed – it is truly special.

## Cultural diversity in play prepares children for a globalised world

### Karie Tseng

My name is Karie and I came from Taiwan studying a Master of Teaching in Early Childhood and Primary. During my non-study time, I work in a long day care casually. I'd like to briefly share my background, my observations and thoughts on my study and work experience as an international student in Australia's early childhood sector.

Before I came to Australia, I was working at international schools with older students in Taiwan. Studying at international schools in Asia means that the student's family has sufficient

budgets and resources and that the parents value education and are willing to invest in their child's future. In this circumstance, students should be more confident in who they are and have fewer worries, right? But that is not the case.

From my experiences and observations, these teenagers still have challenges in confidence, social problems and worry about their future. This brought me to Australia to study early years because I believe all people have been significantly influenced by their past experiences, which is their early years.

With the experience of the placements and the knowledge from university, I was very excited to start work. I hope that my knowledge can be practically demonstrated in the workplace. With this mindset and having experienced different early learning centres, I have observed several phenomena:

1. Educators come from multicultural backgrounds, but this is rarely embedded in the play
2. Educators generally experience exhaustion mentally and physically, and lacking motivation, losing their values.
3. The salary is not proportionate to the effort.

First, the early childhood sector is a diverse environment with multiculturalism colleagues. These people are often bilingual or multilingual, with educational backgrounds ranging from certificates to master's degrees,

and they may also hold several degrees. Through their backgrounds and abilities, companies can make decisions utilizing these different perspectives to support a more robust performance.

Similarly, in the early childhood education sector, educators from different parts of the world have strengths, including several languages, cultural background, and past expertise. In practical work experience, I have seen some early learning settings using colourful powder in activities in conjunction with Indian festivals or hanging up Chinese spring couplets on the walls.

In my first year of studying here, we were encouraged to speak to children in our own mother tongue and to do our best to support children's learning. However, the reality I encountered is educators often have no power or are even banned from using languages other than English. Other things international educators can do to support their team, is by adopting or combining children's activities from other cultures. This expands the diversity and multiculturalism of the play content and includes children and educators from similar backgrounds, stimulating children's brain development. What's more, it is preparing children to enter the globalised world for later life.

Educators are mentally and physically exhausted and have a lack of motivation to move forward. At work I observed that the educators were largely satisfied with meeting the physical needs of young

children. The routine of changing nappies, putting them to bed, keeping the environment hygienic, children's safety, preparing food and cuddling can be physically and mentally exhausting. From the initial enthusiasm in the workplace, I found that not many people cared about your enthusiasm for education; it was more about whether you could change nappies and other daily needs. As such, it is very easy to lose sight of the intention of joining the profession in the first place. While educators are busy satisfying children's needs, how can we find the motivation to critically reflect and develop a program? To make a real difference, the management team must value educators more and be willing to make a change.

Work is not paid in proportion to effort. We like to use the term "golden age" to describe the early years of development. Australia is a leader in early childhood education and delivery, and we know the early years of development have a lifelong impact. In practice, however, educators must devote themselves to it and the salary they receive does not match the contribution they make. Inevitably, the work involves carrying children, setting up outdoor frames and other physically demanding work; observing children, designing developmentally appropriate activities, and promoting children's learning, as well as communicating with parents, ongoing team communication to ensure everyone is on the same page, etc. All of

these actions use mental energy and contribute to educators' burn out. The most common example I used to describe this situation is driving. Imagine you have to drive for eight hours with crying children in the car; you have to take care of each child, and also have to concentrate on the journey to ensure safety. After eight hours, you will feel physically and mentally exhausted. In other jobs, you can adjust your attitude and actions to suit your current situation and mood (all without having children crying next to your ear), but as an educator, you must work with all your heart and soul for every minute you are on site. If child development is so important and the work is so physically and emotionally exhausting, is the salary of an educator reasonable? If the work of educators is more demanding than other jobs, but the pay is not comparable, and if development for educators is limited and does not provide for or satisfy their psychological needs, it will lead to the rapid decreasing of professionals in the industry.

Overall, these are my observations on the current situation in the ECEC sector. Since I am just a student, this is only part of my observations based on the services I have visited so far. My observations do not cover the overall state and will likely change and evolve as my experience increases. I am also looking forward to seeing more different sides of the ECEC sector and hoping my experience doesn't represent all.

## I studied Greek to work closer with the community

### Kay Hirst

*Kay Hirst (Wragg) (DipKTC, 1957) was born in Northern Tasmania in 1937 and passed away in May 2022 in Melbourne. She had a love of gardens, nature and birds, and a great passion for early childhood education and care. She was passionate about her family and her Tasmanian heritage and pursued a lifelong effort to build family connections and explore genealogical roots. She was a regular supporter of the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies. Kay wrote the following memoir in 2019 which now includes some additions from her eulogy.*

'Every year in the summer holidays, my family went to our beach shack on the far North West coast of Tasmania. Each year, 'Auntie Heather' came to stay with another family holidaying there. This venerable aunt was Miss Heather Lyon, principal of the Kindergarten Training College in Melbourne. She saw me teaching children to swim and row a boat and sparked my notion of being a kindergarten teacher. She endorsed my application, as did my Head Mistress at Broadland House in Launceston, who suggested that I could help with the little boarders there. The seeds were sewn. There was no College in Tasmania. For three years, from 1955, I lived at the YWCA Doery House hostel in Church Street Richmond in the student wing while

studying at the Kindergarten Teachers' College (KTC) in Kew. There was also a big Working girls' wing. All the Navy girls, who also boarded there were very smart in their WRANs uniforms.

KTC students were recognisable in our fisherman's knit jumpers, gabardine overcoats and pig skin leather dilly bags – fashion slaves? The girls living in the other hostels, Princess Mary Club and Chalmers Hall in the city were similarly attired. There were no more residents at the Mooroolbeek property in Kew where KTC was located.

For our kindergarten practicum placements in first year, we had a yellow and blue plaid cotton dress. Sub-primary and school placements in second year didn't require a uniform. The third years' dress was red and blue plaid cotton. We had to make these dresses ourselves. In 1987 for our 30<sup>th</sup> reunion, Joan Gardner (Allan) made little flag invitations from her 3<sup>rd</sup> year dress remnants.

A number of other KTC students came and went from Doery House YWCA Richmond, including Heather Tinney, (Punshon) who was my roommate in 1955. Bev Tinney also lived there, and Heather married her brother. I also married another KTC girl's brother (Helen Hirst 1956). I was excited for my little sister when she started kindergarten in Smithton Tasmania, that her teacher, Dorothy Stratton (Webb 1955), had also lived at the hostel in my first year.

Shirley Frost another Tasmanian and I shared a room for two years, sleeping one week in the bedroom and one week behind the canvas blinds on the big

verandah. The other three Tasmanians in the 1957 graduating group all returned to live and work there - Maxine Geard, Marjorie Smith, Noeline Brook. Oui-Ling Oo was our only international student. Shirley was awarded an OAM for her services to early childhood development in Canberra where she has lived for a number of years with her husband Ian Gollings.

My first Director's position was at the old mouse-ridden, decaying Burnley Free Kindergarten, built in 1908. Nora Semmens was their first (Froebelian) teacher and I was the last. Nora's grainy old photo was on the office wall. Many times my assistant and I left that building with the children to go to the Fitzroy Gardens to collect leaves, or down to the Hawthorn Bridge to look at reflections in the river below. We also went to look at cattle at the abattoirs in Coppin Street and many times to the local Fire Station. We also took the children to the Royal Melbourne Show with the lunch mother as our only helper. No dads on the roster in those days. No ratios either. The dog that followed the line of 25 children holding the rope often came with us on the tram. Companion animal?

In many inner suburban kindergartens affiliated with the Free Kindergarten Union (FKU), the management committee members were philanthropic ladies. At Burnley Free Kindergarten in November 1958 they decided to close the dilapidated building forever. My wedding date was set for January 1959! Urgently, I applied for and was luckily accepted for a new position in the Gospel Hall in Ashburton. On the first day, I was

introduced to the parents as 'Miss Wragg'. I hadn't told them that I had married during the holidays. A new building was under construction in a nearby park and we set up Estrella Kindergarten there in 1960. By then, my husband and I were establishing our new home in Blackburn. Every day there was a mile long walk down unmade Lake Road, train to Camberwell, change for Alamein and another mile walk to the kindergarten. The president was also a KTC graduate (June D'Ombra 1948) and one weekend I took her son and my widowed assistant's little fellow on the train for a holiday at my home. Jeremy developed a very high fever and my husband had to run half a mile to the nearest phone box to ask his parents to collect him. No car or mobile phone back then! By Sunday night mumps were obvious.

In FKU kindergartens, staff generally had an idea when a supervisor, Muffie Paul even, might visit. The Gospel Hall kindergarten was with the Health Department and one day supervisor Romola Woolaston appeared around the back of the church where I was knitting whilst supervising the outdoor play area. I quickly explained that the children loved watching my Geelong football scarf grow.

I stayed at home in Blackburn while my children Sally 1961, David 1963, and Anna 1966 were little until we moved to set up a business in High Street Armadale.

In 1969 I went back to teaching part-time at the Opportunity Youth Club Kindergarten in Richmond. We all went upstairs to the club TV room to watch the moon landing. Sir Eugene Gorman,



honorary Consul for Greece was the patron of the youth club. It was suggested that I study Greek to be better able to work with so many of these families in the neighbourhood. I loved doing that and can still say in Greek “blow your nose”, “sit down – now” and other important phrases – you know the ones!

With the family growing up, I needed more income, so I became full time Director of Indra Preschool in Blackburn South. There were a number of families enrolled who had moved out to the ‘burbs’ and they were very surprised at my Greek greetings.

My marriage wasn’t working so I decided to move back to the city and was appointed director in charge of Brookville double unit Kindergarten in Toorak where I stayed for 25 years (1000 plus families) working with many fantastic assistants.

The very first person I met on my very first day was the mother of one of those children from our family’s beach shack holidays. Her grandchildren were enrolled at Brookville and she was visiting from Tasmania.

After a heart health scare (ICU), I retired from Brookville. I eventually became a McArthur Management agency teacher. One day I was sent to Brookville. There were three grandmothers collecting the children of their children that I had taught. A goggle and a giggle!

While at Brookville, I had met a new partner and between us we had six children including a big David and a little David. We bought a fisherman’s fibro cement cottage in Airey’s Inlet as

diversional therapy. The house burnt down in the Ash Wednesday Bush Fires and the relationship also ended. Eventually, I built a bigger, more comfortable Beach House and continued to enjoy holidays with family, friends and colleagues down the Great Ocean Road. Many of my co-workers from the Victorian Arts Centre holidayed there.

During my time at Brookville, I was very lucky to be accepted as a founding front-of-house staff member at the brand-new Melbourne Concert Hall from 1982. My first shift in charge of program-sellers money was a disaster for the manager. I had no idea about sorting the money and coins – \$1 and \$2 paper notes and round 50 cent coins, so I bundled all of the notes up together and put all of the mixed-up coins into the cloth bag. After 24 years working front-of-house in all of those magnificent theatres, I have figured it out!

In 1991, I attended a CHIP Foundation Summer School at the University of Melbourne to study the identification of children of higher intellectual potential. Over time, I had observed preschool children who could read, had amazing conversation and logical thinking skills. This course was a challenging but very rewarding professional experience. Coincidentally, the lecturer Dr Mirikaca Gross had come across a very clever little three-year-old Charlie Tao who was the catalyst for her special academic interest in this area.

When my daughter in Ashgrove Queensland told me that she was having twin sons on her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday (2006), I resigned from the Arts Centre and went to

live in Brisbane to be helpful grandmother until the boys went to school.

I had a glowing reference to Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) but the boys were my priority. I did get to join U3A and played golf regularly so Brisbane was a great experience all round. I was also asked to set up and manage an out-of-school hours program at the local kindergarten. It was well received and continues to operate as planned.

In Brisbane, I had met up with Prue Walsh, an outdoor playground specialist who has developed her theory about Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD). I am pleased that an awareness and understanding of their environment and their place in that space has always been a feature of my planning for the children – wherever, whenever and whichever group. Planting, collecting, categorising, pet care and nature table displays encourage all children and parents to carefully observe and appreciate the natural world. Recently, I have been invited to set up nature table displays for special functions and visitors to the Williamstown Botanic Gardens – no NDD here but the heart is heavy when there are so many plastic playgrounds. What can we do?

Following my return from Brisbane, I have rented in Williamstown and have been a community visitor at Robina Scott Kindergarten here. The children always ask me if I am somebody's grandmother. Yes, I am, for seven of mine. I have also been on the Brimbank PSA relief teacher list and have spent time in many of their western suburbs' centres.

Recently, at a maritime museum function, I saw a photo of the 'Arcadia' and I was reminded that as part of what I presume was a career guidance/counselling exercise by KTC in 1956 we went on board that big passenger ship to look at the children's nursery area. We also went to Marathon Spastic Centre in Malvern. Our visit to 'Kedesh' the unmarried mother's home down the street from Mooroolbeek was never fully explained.

At KTC, most of the lectures were in the 'Temporary Building'.

Art – Francis Derham

Music – June Epstein

Current Affairs – Yvonne Nicholls

Psychology – Eileen Edwards

Mr Utassy taught folk dancing

Mr Chinnery told us about New Guinea

Miss Anne Dreyer talked about the soldiers who had listened to her and how surprised they were to meet her – so were we who had also listened to Kindergarten of the Air at 9.30am for many years.

While I was at Brookville, a new building was erected, not far away. It was Armadale Preschool Centre. A parent asked me the difference between a kindergarten and a preschool centre. "I don't know and I still don't".

There are many other changes 'in the field'. The director is now known as the early childhood educator. The assistant is the co-educator. There is a huge child care sector. There is STEM, NAPLAN, EYLF, GONSKI, HECS, Transition Statements, DHS. But, for me, the biggest change is turning

our brothers and sisters into siblings. How, when, where and why did this happen? Like Pauline, I say 'please explain'. It's not even an acronym or is it?

A couple more 'small world stories': The husband of the teacher I replaced at Burnley in 1958, Pat Dufty, had stayed with my family when my father had picked him as a hitch-hiker in Tasmania 1952. Elaine Oldham and I first met when we were on a Pioneer bus tour from Melbourne to Sydney in 1952 with our parents. We became pen-friends and met up again at KTC on day one 1955'.

Kay Hirst was a lively and vibrant person, always in pursuit of another experience, a little more fun or a new adventure. She frequently boarded buses, trams, or trains just to see where they may go and would invent a roundabout way of getting home. This curiosity reflected the child who still lived and breathed within her. She was independent, proud, and willing to tackle challenges.

An inspiring role-model!

## My early childhood education story

### Leanne Mits OAM

Learning and teaching alongside the youngest citizens and their families for close to 40 years continues to be a rewarding experience and fulfilling career. Knowing *why* I chose a teaching career, and always knowing what my *professional purpose* is, has enabled me to have a strong, clear and

uncompromised compass for my work with children, families and communities, and for my professional growth and learning.

I graduated in 1984 with a qualification in early childhood education and primary teaching. I was offered a job in a primary school and another at a kindergarten in Alexandra, Victoria. I accepted the kindergarten role and never looked back. Whilst initially daunting to be director of a 75 place community kindergarten at the age of 20, and living away from home for the first time, I settled in and enjoyed every part of this opportunity. Through this learning community I learnt about farming; droughts; hay carting; being resourceful; travelling long distances; family sacrifices so a child could attend kindergarten; the inequities of access to allied health services in regional areas and how to create a family within the community when your own family is far away.

I have memories of organising a public march with as many families and community members as we could muster, down the main street of town, with banners and signs, campaigning for kindergarten funding – some things never change! I joined the union (AEU) as soon as I graduated and have been a member ever since. This enabled me to feel supported and connected to a wider early childhood community. I look back on these early teaching years and see a young advocate for children and education in the making. Advocating for

children and education has simply always seemed the right thing to do. I have always known that early childhood education matters (Stamopoulos & Barblett 2018) and that investment of time, funding and policy in early childhood education pays off (Mahon 2016).

This first teaching job in a regional area, away from the suburbs of Melbourne where I grew up and was educated, turned out to be a life changing for a newly graduated teacher. The position taught me what 'community' means; it gifted me countless opportunities to stretch my professional thinking and to learn *who* I was as a teacher. These were the years when my identity as a teacher evolved and my confidence grew. This took time, practice, mistakes, courage, confusion and times of uncertainty. This experience has led me to encourage others to also consider teaching in regional and rural areas.

After teaching for 15 years, our family (a husband and 3 children by now) moved to Melbourne (2000) and I began teaching at Pope Road Kindergarten in Blackburn. I could never have imagined the joy and rewards that a long standing role at this kindergarten (currently 23 years) would bring.

In 1999, just before moving to Melbourne, I participated in a study tour to Reggio Emilia, Italy, with a colleague/friend... and that changed everything! This encounter was profound. I would never consider

children, education, learning and research in the same way again. What I saw, heard and felt on this study tour shifted me both personally and professionally. I had never seen learning environments or teaching and learning this way. I had never considered the relationship between education and politics like this, and I was introduced to children's rights, democracy in classrooms and the potential of the social co-construction of knowledge. The participation of a city in an educational project was not something I had ever encountered, nor had I witnessed the visibility and celebration of children's thinking and learning in this way. After returning from that first study tour, my work at Pope Road Kindergarten enabled me to explore new ways of documenting children's learning; of considering and offering materials; of working with families and colleagues; and most importantly, of exploring teaching and learning with a new 'image' of the child, and a new 'image' of the teacher, the environment and of families.

I would come to embrace this approach to education and it would inform and provoke my professional thinking and practice to this very day. I have been privileged to participate in and co-lead multiple study tours to Reggio Emilia, through the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE), and my appetite to continue to learn from those engaged in this education project never wains. As my understandings deepen, so

too do my questions and thinking. I am intrigued and curious, searching for more to consider and better understand. I am indebted to the educators in Reggio Emilia for the impact their research and work, and their openness to share this with us, has on my work and life.

The other significant influence came in 2014 when I attended Early Childhood Australia's (ECA) inaugural Reconciliation Symposium, in South Australia. Again, I was shifted, both personally and professionally. This event was the catalyst for me to facilitate the collaborative development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) at our kindergarten, to organise local professional learning events about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culture and communities, by Aboriginal people, and to co-convene an ECA Victorian Branch, Special Interest Group, called *Talking Reconciliation*. Our small community, not for profit kindergarten recently fundraised and donated a travel sponsorship to the 2022 ECA Reconciliation Symposium to support another teacher to attend. We can all make a difference and this space of teaching and learning with children and families through truth telling about our Nation's First Peoples, is my commitment.

So, my big 'aha!' moments as a teacher, the moments that shook up my thinking and practice, were the experience of teaching in a regional area, encountering the Reggio Emilia Approach, and

becoming stronger in my capacity to educate with others about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, culture, language and communities. Knowing that I've come a long way, and also still have such a lot to learn is exciting!

While these experiences shape me as a teacher, other experiences support me in roles of leadership and mentorship. I think it's critically important for us to connect with professionals beyond our own places of work. Being actively involved, as a volunteer, in various roles and for many years, with the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE), with Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and convening a local teachers' network group for 15 years, connects me with a wide and diverse early childhood community. The relationships and experiences that come from participating voluntarily with national and local organisations is instrumental in my longevity as a teacher, and supports me to contribute, *beyond the classroom*, to this important sector of education.

In 2019, at the age of 55, I enrolled in a Masters of Education (Early Childhood Education) at Edith Cowen University, WA. This was a challenging experience academically and resulted in two years of very late nights and little sleep. I was working full time and somehow finding up to 30 hours a week to study. If anyone is thinking of studying, do it! I see evidence and threads of what I learnt through this course every day in my teaching practice

and leadership and mentoring roles. Upgrading my qualifications was one of my best professional decisions and an important gift to myself

So, what have I come to know?

- Teaching and learning with children and families is enjoyable, rewarding, challenging, ever evolving and important.
- Teaching and leadership are complex, and require a capacity to be multi-skilled.
- There will always be out of hours work to do!
- I am driven, knowing that my work in early childhood education makes a positive difference in the lives of others.
- Early childhood education matters and is a child's right.
- Reflection is an essential part of teaching; as a fluid, organic part of our everyday thinking processes, reflection becomes so much more than something we enact retrospectively; the 'reflective of the collective' is more meaningful and powerful than self-reflection.
- Professional learning that provokes us to think is best.
- The most meaningful professional learning comes from unpacking, with others, our own practices, projects, programs etc.
- Leading by example and through participation is key.
- An effective professional learning community requires trusting relationships, mutual respect and member collegiality.

I am ever grateful to the phenomenal colleagues I have worked and learned with.

Fostering and being part of a collaborative and participatory community of thinkers and learners brings me great joy and reward. Together we value, celebrate and progress professional growth to lead to change for new cultures and practices in learning, teaching and education, reflective of the contemporary world (ICPIMRE, 2010).

Sustaining a clear identity of who I am as a teacher and what my professional purpose is, gives clarity to why I work hard in early childhood education. I am honoured to be an early childhood teacher, leader and mentor.

## References

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## My curiosity in early childhood continues

Lilly Ghandchi

I would like to start my story with gratitude for the place we have landed; ways we are working with each other as early childhood professionals, children and families.

My early childhood path commenced when I started to work as a casual educator when qualification of a Certificate III didn't exist and I joined the first relief agency in early childhood, named ABC. Educators in services commented on how 'good' I was with working with children. Over the 12-month period as a casual educator, I learnt how I was impacting children, their families and I enjoyed watching their growth in development over a period of time.

I pursued studying Certificate III in Early Childhood Studies, then a diploma and bachelor's degree followed by Master's of Education via research at the University of Melbourne. Throughout all my studies, I continued to work as an educator full time and apply my knowledge into practice.

I can remember when I was teaching in a sessional kindergarten, the maximum hour of the kindergarten program was 10.45 each week. I look back to those days and continue to engage with other early childhood professionals about how far we have come in understanding better outcomes for children as they participate

in more hours in an early childhood setting.

Whilst I was teaching in a kindergarten, I was curious about our education system and wanted to learn more from different perspectives and lenses. I engaged with FKA about learning how I can support children's cultures in my program and was keen to utilise my own experience of growing up with English not being my first language and attending different educational settings across three countries. I accepted a role at FKA as a consultant and had the privilege of travelling to various parts of Victoria, working with local communities and early childhood settings, supporting children and families who were from refugee background.

My curiosity in early childhood continued and was driven by wanting to create a change as much as I could. Moving from FKA, I landed working in various leadership roles across early childhood. In these leadership roles, my learnings have been to work with early childhood professionals and services in the context and capacities of educators and to create space for vulnerability and learning as part of professional growth.





# Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers College

Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers'  
College

'Graduation Hymn'

To you who go forth upon Life's Way  
With steadfast singing hearts  
To you who tread on paths as yet  
untrod  
With ideals lofty, clear,  
May you have joyous fellowship  
And years of wisdom ripened,  
May you have love and faith in all  
you do,  
The little child to guide,  
To minister unto,  
Go you forth, fulfill your dreams,  
Guide, uplift, encourage,  
The dauntless spirit those before  
have shown  
You share. Stand firm and know  
That you are not alone,  
That you are not alone.

From top to bottom:  
Graduation photo, students  
outside Mooroolbeek 1935,  
Lady Huntingfield the  
Patroness of KTC, Students  
outside Mooroolbeek 1928,  
children washing their dishes  
1930s, repeated



From left to right:  
Derham's students with finger painting, students on the lawn of the Convent 1976, Students at the front of Mooroolbeek 1960s, Abbotsford Convent used for IECD students from 1976, Ferntree Gully Kindergarten built by the local community in 1949 from fundraising and a substantial grant from William Angliss



### 1939 MKTC Entrance Qualifications

The applicant must:

- (1) Be not less than seventeen years of age on entry.
- (2) Be in perfect health, and furnish a medical certificate.
- (3) Furnish two certificates of character, one being from the Principal of her school.
- (4) Have passed in any six subjects of the Intermediate Standard of the Melbourne University (English being a compulsory subject) or possess an equivalent certificate.

Leaving Standard is considered a better qualification for this course, and it is urged that each student shall have passed in 5 subjects of the Leaving Examination. The following subjects are desirable: English, European History, Animal Biology, Geography, Domestic Science, Music and Drawing.

- (5) Every student will be given opportunities to develop special interests, such as Music, Arts and Crafts, Speech, Literature, Nature Study, as ability in these lines will greatly increase the student's value.

Country students are expected to live in College, unless parents make other boarding arrangements that are satisfactory to the College.

### 1939 Student Fees

First Year, 21 guineas per year; S

econd Year, 21 guineas per year;

Third Year, 6 guineas per year.

Private lessons in Music, Singing, Speech Work, etc., are charged as extra subjects.

Fixed charge, covering use of library, class-room supplies, of 15/- per term.

Single classes, one guinea per subject per term.

Supplementary Examinations, 5/- each per subject.

Enrolment Fee of 5/- per student, payable upon enrolment.

Fees are payable in advance on first day of each term.

### 1939 Student Requirements

Each student requires

- (a) Two or three Overalls (the material and design obtainable at College)
- (b) Badge Brooch.



# My curiosity for child development and resilience was born

Lisa Knight

It is not hard to recall where my passion began. At the tender age of 13 I was asked to babysit two children after school, 3 nights a week. To be welcomed into a family's home and entrusted with the care of their children was one thing, and to be trusted to care for a child with osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bone syndrome) was not only heartwarming but an absolute privilege, and my curiosity for child development and resilience was born.

At the age of 17 I spent a year volunteering in a kindergarten in Melbourne's Outer East (West Gully Preschool) while I began my studies. I remember telling a child that his shoes were on the wrong feet and he replied, "But these are the only feet I have". While I laughed I also marveled at his young brain, his literal thinking challenged me to think about my language and how children interpret their world. My studies at Box Hill TAFE taught me about typical child development but the greater learnings came from the children themselves. As I listened to, interacted with and observed children, my curiosity grew.

By the time I completed my studies, then known as a Certificate in Applied Social Science (equivalent Diploma Early

Childhood Education and Care) I had begun my career in Long Day Care where I quickly learnt that I needed to understand not only the child but their entire family. As my career progressed to the role of Centre Coordinator, I remember an angry parent threatening me. I was shaken but I had this compelling desire to understand how I had aroused such a response. Was it me or was something else triggering this behaviour? I called our local Children's Services Resource and Development Officer, Jane McCahon, who provided me with some 'strength based' strategies and opened my mind to a world where every person's contributions were valued. Enter Janene Swalwell.

Janene Swalwell was by far the most influential person in my career. Janene's passion for improving the lives of all children, and particularly children who faced adversity early in life, was contagious. Anyone who worked with Janene soon learnt that they would never stop learning. I had to be part of that team! I welcomed a change in career and accepted a role as an Inclusion Support Facilitator (ISF) and for the next 7 years I had the most incredible experiences. I met educators who were hungry for knowledge, ideas and resources. Many of whom already had brilliant skills and knowledge and like the children they worked with they just needed to be shown that someone believed in them; that someone valued the work they were doing and that in

every challenging moment there is a sneaky little gem waiting to be discovered.

One such gem was given to me while I was attempting to comfort a crying child. I sat with him and said, "It will be ok" to which he replied, "stop saying it will be ok, it's not!" And there I was, some 25 years later, still learning from one of our youngest and brightest citizens. The child's father had passed away. How was that ever going to be OK? This child taught me to just be. To sit in the moment, be there, but that is all and everything that he needed in that moment, just be with him, nothing more, nothing less.

Behind the scenes, Janene was continuing to broaden my knowledge teaching me (and the teams I worked with) from the research by Mary Louise Hemmeter, Jack Shonkoff and Bruce Perry. I became a facilitator for Parent Child Mother Goose and Tuning into Kids Programs promoting emotional intelligence and connections between adult and child. I was fascinated by parent/child interactions and after about 7 years as an ISF I moved into a pilot program, Access to Early Learning (AEL program). This program was specifically for 3 year old children who had experienced significant vulnerability in their first few years of life. I worked alongside an allied health team including psychologists and family violence therapists.

18 years in LDC provided me with a lens much like a kaleidoscope of colorful stories blended with my own life experiences along the way. I witnessed the joys of births, the sorrow of death and the hope of futures unknown.

## A 40-year journey through early childhood education

Lynne Byatt

This journey began at the State College of Victoria Institute of Early Childhood Education in the early 1970s in Kew. Later the campus spread to the wonderful Abbotsford Convent campus.

In reflection, the education we received was a humanist, holistic approach. We students had many opportunities to develop our skills and interests to equip us for teaching in different settings. Having such a solid base enabled us to venture into many areas of early childhood development and education, honing our skills and continuing personal and professional development.

As I was on a Department of Health Country scholarship, I headed to the country for my first teaching position in a double unit Free Kindergarten Union setting in a large town. During my stay at this kindergarten, our community was a mixed immigrant community in a new growing suburb. This setting was the wellspring of my interest in

multiculturalism and lingual communities.

Like most of my colleagues, I went back part-time to College to complete my B.ED- ECE. We were amongst the first to graduate with a bachelor's degree in ECE. IECD was an amazing place with incredible support from teaching staff, from colleagues and College community. Who could forget the musical, Orpheus of the Underworld or the graduation ball at the Camberwell Civic Centre?

Who could ever forget the numerous placements both in early childhood and school settings? Who could ever forget the continuing contact with colleagues way after graduation - the weddings, family celebrations and sorrows, teenagers, life after children, all the while developing our professionalism with wisdom and experience? How much life has taught us!

After my initial placement, I ventured to other placements in kindergartens with inclusion of children with additional needs, from other cultures and beliefs. Luckily, I have had wonderful teaching assistants and co-teachers, and nothing for the children's learning and development was impossible.

I became a pre-school officer with Children Services and then with an agency supporting families and autism spectrum children. This included children from early diagnosis to 20-year-olds. Again, an opportunity for enormous growth and professional development.

Supporting this community meant supporting teachers, educational settings, the children and families, and working in multi-disciplinary teams.

Education is all about relationships, trust and in recognising opportunities to move forward in a collaborative partnership or team. We look together for the best possible outcomes for the child and family.

One thing leads to another and doors open. I found myself teaching for many years in early learning centres in two major independent schools. Together with the early learning staff, we facilitated the children's learning following their interests as co-learners. Amazing opportunities to develop creativity, resilience, persistence, and a love of learning. Nothing was impossible for the children.

During this time, three staff and I went to Italy to the Reggio Emilia for the study tour with Reggio Children. We all returned to our centre with strong enthusiasm and new ideas for our early years community. We worked together to develop our practice attending many professional development opportunities, joined REAIE and shared our practice with other centres. We were passionate about providing opportunities for children to learn about their learning, to become researchers and to flourish with awe and wonder. Ten years later, I visited RE again with a European group of teachers and

another set of perspectives and observations.

After many years, I wondered about the state of early education in Europe. The contacts from the trip to Reggio Children were mainly from Australia and New Zealand but there were a few groups from the UK and other areas of Europe. I was granted a year from my school for travel to Europe.

This need to learn was also precipitated by the experience of an intensive educational opportunity, 'Positive Psychology' with Martin Seligman and his colleagues from Penn University for two weeks during a summer vacation. What a life changing opportunity!

Arrangements made, I decided to go to the UK to find a teaching position. I didn't quite get there as I stopped in The Hague, in the Netherlands, to visit a very dear colleague and friend. I went to become an integration aid for a young boy with complex epilepsy, at the International School of The Hague (ISH). This became a co-teaching position and also a support position for several students needing maths support. Little did I know what this opportunity would lead to.

ISH was a fairly young school set up by the Dutch Education Department to provide education for the growing expat population in The Hague. It began as a secondary school and then a primary school was added. A new building was designed for secondary as the student population increased and the growing

primary was allocated two wings of two stories. Classrooms were very small so up to 20 four-year-olds was a sizeable class. The Beetles was my class and out of 22, only two children were native English speakers! Imagine your kindergarten room with a third of the size missing and having 22 children. Many chairs and tables for the children to sit at! There was much re-shuffling due to planning for play and developing language experiences, with large spaces as chairs and tables were removed.

We had become a very close class community and home visits before the children started at school, initiated family/teacher relationships to collaboratively support the children. During the year, we planned many opportunities for parents and grandparents to come into school to share stories, songs, food and other cultural aspects as we moved through our interests and projects.

Teaching assistants were full-time and equally multicultural - Malaysian, Indonesian, Scottish, Lithuanian, Spanish and South African. Teaching staff were mostly native English speakers.

After several years in the early years, I moved into primary teaching seven- to eight-year-olds. Again, over several years with another level in professional learning through experience, both in multicultural and support teaching. We had a fabulous staff of UK, Canadian, Dutch, Spanish and Australian teachers

and teaching assistants. We celebrated Dutch traditions during the year, but also observed the traditions of our multicultural school community. For me personally, it was a culture shock, not just integrating into the Dutch culture and language, but teaching the English Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

The new European School of The Hague (ESH) sprang into action with 100 students in 2012. One of my former ISH colleagues went to join the new school and suggested it would be a great challenge for me too. And yes it was! In 2013, my first year there, I taught P3, eight and nine-year-olds. A new school, a new curriculum, new challenges.

Applying my early years experience and my philosophy about learning, the year turned out to be most memorable. Thirteen children in the class with one native English-speaking child. He left early in the year and was replaced by a child with severe autism and no English. Fortunately, many of the children knew the child and family as they attended the same church. Experience in autism helped enormously. Together with the class, we planned our communication and activities to include him. He had an amazing talent for drawing and contributed to many projects throughout the year. What a year of growth for us all. Again, we shared our cultures, languages and experiences. We engaged the families in our class learning with research and as many outings as we could manage to support the learning.

We explored every nook and cranny of the school as spaces for learning. The children took charge to prepare their classroom to support learning. Such a great class community! Best primary class and primary teaching year ever! Three girls and ten boys.

With a return to early years the following year, I enjoyed the challenge of arranging the environment with the children. Again, too many chairs and tables! We had full time teaching assistants in each early years class, although I had four during this first year! Fabulous parents and early years colleagues. Sharing skills, knowledge, experience, expertise and cultural pedagogy has enriched our early years team. Few early years staff have left in the past nine years and our team including teaching assistants are a team who plan and work together supporting each other, whilst respecting and celebrating our team's diversity. I have been a non-teaching early years section leader for the past seven years. This has been a middle management position, promoting recognition of the unique qualities of the early years in our school and society.

Like most International schools world-wide, ESH suffered loss of student numbers during the pandemic, but is now making a remarkable recovery.

Because of the large number in the EY section, the timetable is split so that the six A groups have earlier break and lunchtime. The six B groups have the later



break and lunchtime so that there are fewer children in the canteen and the EY playground. EY teachers can take their children outdoors for play, games, groups, music, etc whenever and wherever they like, depending on who else is using the spaces. The primary have other playground areas and do not use the EY playground, but the EY teachers make use of all spaces, creative as they are!

Parents are now welcomed back into school for special events, school wide or per class. We have an active PTA and School Council.

EY Teachers use Zoom to contact new families, giving a video tour of the classroom and surrounding locations. Children meet their teachers through Zoom and parents are able to ask questions about the class, school and the additional services, such as bus transport and the school Canteen.

Like ISH, ESH also celebrates the Dutch national celebrations.

As I reflect on my career during these past years, I have been grateful for the rich professional development, provided in my early years of teaching. I continued my career development with personal research and learning. In Europe, there have been less opportunities for professional development, so it has been a collaborative effort to enable the EY team these opportunities to grow professionally.

Networking with other teachers has also been a major factor in personal and

professional growth as an educator and leader. The sharing of beliefs, practice and pedagogy is valuable in early childhood to extend our opportunities for understanding other perspectives,

attitudes, and practice. To be in a multicultural, multilingual setting in another country has afforded me a strong deeper, passion for early childhood education. I have a deeper appreciation for early education and beliefs of other cultures. I also see how children are strong researchers, enjoying learning and are able to share and develop learning.

I'm very grateful for the extensive, specialised education and experience gained at the IECD and the increasing knowledge and understanding with each of my teaching and associate positions since. Play for children is learning, it is innate and biologically necessary for development and growth as a human. Keep playing, so much to learn, even as adults!

## Children are the plants and teachers are the gardeners

### Maree Wiggins

I have always liked the title of kindergarten teacher. Friedrich Froebel described *kinder* meaning child and *garten* meaning garden. He believed that children are the plants and teachers are

the gardeners and the term kindergarten emerged.

Children are the future adults and kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators have a huge responsibility to nurture their education and care.

I worked in Fitzroy during 1977 – 1991 as a student and a teacher, I was fortunate that the IECD agreed that I could do two years at the Fitzroy Kindergarten. My years as a student and later as a teacher in Fitzroy really opened my eyes to a world that I would probably only read about. Through my experiences there, I learned compassion and understanding of families' struggles to survive.

The children and families who attended the extended hours kindergarten were an absolute joy. The kindergarten was open from 9am to 3.30pm; the children brought lunch and had a nap.

There were times when things didn't go well. I recall incidents, which required a lot of courage from me:

- Standing on a chair to get a parent's attention so they would listen to my concerns about their child's development. It took a full five minutes for the parent to stop laughing and sit and have a chat.

- Keeping children inside when there was a gunman loose opposite the kindergarten. The children were so excited by the sirens and the SWAT team, not so much the police as their experiences of the law were varied.

- Organising through Corrective Services for workers to come and do work at the kindergarten, so the children could see their dads.

- The local nuns brought refugee children with their families to visit so I could build confidence with the parents to leave their children. The nuns also used to provide money so we could buy food to supply children with breakfast (donated by other more financially able families).

There are so many stories, and these taught me to respect all attempts at parenting and be flexible to increase my understanding of families. I learned to never make assumptions about people's behaviour. Instead, I was always ready with a welcoming smile and a very calm voice and demeanour. My role was not to judge but to provide a safe environment and a program that reflected and promoted the children's ideas and learning through play.

I worked closely with the social workers who ran a family support program next door to the kindergarten. We had an arrangement where I could send a parent into the program on the pretence of borrowing some sugar/milk/coffee. I also worked closely with Protective Services. This was the most difficult part of the job, where some children needed kindergarten for the time away from harm, past experiences and to be unconditionally accepted by their peers, to be with safe adults and to feel safe.

The children I taught were very streetwise; we often went for walks to the Botanical Gardens or to Hoddle Street to go over the overpass (always pretending we were flying) or to the shop to get an icy pole. (ah, those were the days). They would tell me stories about houses we passed and streets we walked, always in a matter-of-fact way. It always saddened me that the children knew such information and it was important that Kindergarten was the time where they could be children.

## Sharing my professional journey in early childhood education

### Mary Merlin (née Lewis) OAM

As a child I attended a very small country school; there was a very good teacher and some pretty bad ones. Even to a small child the difference was evident, and when I passed from the infant's department, I decided to be one of the good ones.

I was then about eight years old, my parents saw that I never changed my mind, and they found out about kindergarten training.

It was such a pleasure to me, that over the years I have influenced at least five other people to train as kindergartners, they became an administrator, a musician, a specialist with handicapped children, one helped guide church

kinders and one is working with the indigenous community.

As I trained 60 years ago, it was at Mooroolbeek in Kew. That was during wartime, and we had girls from interstate as well as Victorians, from Perth, Tasmania and Queensland. I was a resident student, along with others from far away, and the staff were caring and considerate, saw that we were often homesick, lost in a strange place, and had only each other to turn to for help and advice. Their gentle nurturing attitude showed us how we should treat the children in our care, as they would be venturing into new territory too.

As it was wartime, the little spare time we had was spent working in the canteen at the Postings Depot of the RAAF at the showgrounds in Flemington, helping in the vegetable gardens of Rockingham, a rehabilitation hospital down the hill from College, or as waitresses at the Cathedral restaurant in the city.

There had been pale green uniforms with white MKTC monograms for students working in kindergartens, but with clothes rationing and shortages in general they were discontinued. The earlier students had had them, but we didn't. There would have been about 20 resident students spread over the three years of training.

Most of us slept on an open balcony facing north, we had canvas bedcovers that became furred with moisture in damp weather but remained warm and dry underneath. The food was cooked for

us, but we served ourselves in the dining room, it was a bit complicated as there were coupons for meat and butter that we surrendered. The lecturers were top class, most came from other places for their sessions.

Miss Muffie Paul was Principal for my first year; she had an encyclopaedic memory for details about students, kinders, friends, and things done. When my mother died at that time Miss Paul was very, very kind.

Mrs Edwards from the Children's Hospital was the psychology lecturer, she lived in the next street, was understanding about research projects, and very, very practical about children's development and activities.

Dr A.E. Floyd from St Paul's Cathedral took us for music; he could have made the stones sing in four-part harmony. His knowledge and experience were ours for the asking. I remember him disdainfully holding a pop song up and saying "not very good value."

He enjoyed that we had no set curriculum; he just had to share his love for music and hope we caught some of it.

Mrs Alexander took us for music when Dr Floyd retired, she showed us folk music from all over the world, and June Epstein, another muso, understood the music children understand. Miss Elizabeth Laver was secretary to Miss Paul, but she found the kinder material so interesting that she became a kindergartner too.

Dr Mona Blanch had a medical practice in South Yarra (I think), she taught us about diet and posture and activity, she was scathing about super-hygiene, and she said it interfered with the development of natural immunity. She also ran a free clinic among poor migrants in Footscray and noted the difference.

Mrs Frances Derham was queen of the art department, but I was no artist.

And my very favourite was Miss Auriole Fraser, who led us into an understanding of the enormous influence of good children's literature.

She taught us how to assess the books offered to children, to tell stories properly, and to persuade parents that what children like and what appeals to adults are not necessarily the same things.

In those days kinder attendance was regarded as a "head-start" for the underprivileged, rather than the right of every child, as now.

My pleasure was, and still is, teaching children that their voices are the first musical instrument, and social and practical tools for getting on with others. Use it well, use it often, and use it with care.

After graduation I became the first trained teacher in the Mildura district, and taught with Kathleen Kelly after whom the kinder was eventually named. I was not really welcome there; the first of a whole new way of running a kindergarten, and

Win FitzGerald who followed me after two years felt it too.

There are now 15 kindergarten places in the Mildura district; the old way did have to give way to the new. Then I set up a new kinder in Red Cliffs, working with Jack Isaacs to make a good place out of an old RAAF mess hut from Lake Boga.

I vowed I would never start another kinder from scratch, but a few years later was asked to change the Save the Children Welfare Centre in Robinvale into a kindergarten. That place used every spare minute for 17 years, making it into a place where every eligible child attended willingly.

The program was child and family based, it continued under the guidance of another Mooroolbeek graduate, Rhonda Gorman, née Jury. Now it has become a part of the Aboriginal day care centre. There were always children from every background. First and most important were the Aboriginal children, for whom the place was set up.

There were migrants from various places, locals and visitors, and they were all welcome. We were often way over our allotted numbers, but as mothers were welcome too, the ratio of adults to children was always fine.

As the people had often suffered exclusion, we refused no-one... loudly.

The indigenous children love babies, and many new mums brought their babes to show, bathe them and dress them, with

the children helping and watching. They were so proud of their babies, and were sharing their pleasure.

They love wheel toys, and we had bikes and scooters all through the days when they were frowned on as few of our people had such toys at home.

Alan, a dear friend, kept them repaired long before heavy duty ones were available. He would often scrounge parts from the tip, or make them himself, to keep us going. Jimmy, a talented carpenter, carefully made new pieces for jigsaw puzzles and inset boards, repaired blocks and chairs and cupboard doors.

The parents trusted me with their most precious possessions, their children, and the mums would gather in the kitchen to peep through the serving hatch at what we were doing.

We always had a senior matriarch on the staff, to assure the mothers that supervision was timely and appropriate, and they were welcome to make suggestions and join in whenever they wanted to. One matriarch was the best cuddler in the business, she could calm the most fretful child from any family, and they all turned to her for comfort when things went wrong. Another was a whiz at toilet training, a needed skill as many of the three-year-olds came to us still in nappies.

We had a stock of spare clothes, and another assistant took care of that department; she was also the first-aid lady, it gave her some status. We made

(mostly pants) what we were short of, collected from the op shop, and the more affluent mums didn't forget us as children grew out of pants and dresses.

One mum had a relative who worked in an underwear factory in Melbourne. She gave us offcuts and fabric with faulty designs; we had plenty to work with.

Our swing was a metal bedframe on a big triangular stand, it didn't go high, but a dozen children could be on it together, a teacher pushing it, while they all sang kinder songs.

Most of the children were not up to co-operative play, they still liked to do things together.

We had a pile of assorted cushions, and the children would choose and sit on one for story time. They were quite territorial, would often have a favourite cushion and spot in the group where they felt at home.

A toy shop in Melbourne sent us boxes of broken or overstocked toys, and we mended them, so there was always plenty to play with. But the children mostly preferred the sandpit, the water tray, and the specially designed climbing frame that Geoff and Unc made for us.

We had a very high attendance rate, the matriarchs had helped design the program, and the Save the Children Kombi van collected the children and took them home when needed. The children really did need to feel comfortable with people outside their

own community, and learn appropriate things to say.

"Hi lidy, I gotta shit" really would not do when "May I go to the toilet?" was meant.

The 1945 graduates have had regular reunions, but the tyranny of distance means that I didn't always get to them.

I do have a life membership of the Graduates' Association, and value greatly the regular copies of AUDAX that keep me up to date.

Storytelling at the three kindergartens in the area and PR work among the indigenous families kept me busy.

Other organizations, meetings and lectures are hundreds of kilometres away, and travel is not my forte. My problem now is that when someone with whiskers or curves says "Hello!" I have to ask who they are; they have changed in the days since they were three years old.

COVID has changed the way things have been done, and now that we are beginning to emerge from the general isolation there are different needs to be filled.

At 96 years old maybe I should think about retiring gracefully.

## How community changed my thinking

Nicole Talarico

My position, as a member of the children's services team at the City of Greater Dandenong, was a significant time in my career. I was in my early twenties, and it remains today, so many years later, the most enriching learning period I have had, in such a short time frame. I undertook a maternity leave position and therefore I only worked in this location for a twelve-month period. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to expose myself to such a diverse community, both within the context of my service, and beyond, through the local community.

It was in a small building in Joffre Street, one of the back streets of Noble Park, where my desk was. The children's services team occupied the largest room at the end of a long corridor. It was here, that I learnt, the true value of a collaborative model of service delivery. You see, I realised first-hand how the children, we would see through our work in early childhood services, were also connected to other professionals in our hub; maternal and child health nurses, social workers, playgroup facilitators, occasional care educators and preschool teachers.

We are talking over twenty years ago, before "hubs" (multi service units) were what councils were renowned for, and before we saw a large volume of research backing, a socio-cultural approach to

working directly with children and their families.

We were already using a framework of consultation and collaboration with others. We liaised with each other, and dialogue was the catalyst to facilitate a holistic understanding, of the best ways to prevent harm and to foster growth, learning and development.

Today, our current National Learning Frameworks align with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model *"Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs"* (Gu-Evans, 2020). I do however want to challenge somewhat, the discourse of Vygotsky's theory, of viewing *"human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society"* (McCloud, 2020).

In this case, children and families were absolutely gaining knowledge from the dynamic interactions, within the environments they were in and through the services they were affiliated with. However, the richest learning that I witnessed was from the families themselves. The child's first teacher.

To achieve integrity in your work you need to know how to be responsive in your contextual environment. After watching a social worker interact with the women



and children in her Afghan playgroup, I could see how rich the connection was, when I observed the facilitator responding much like that of perhaps a student. 'Someone who was keen to understand and had a lot to learn', I knew from that moment, this model of care was the key to reciprocal relationship building. There was always an echo of laughter and pure joy that swept through our hallway when the Afghan playgroup took place, every Tuesday afternoon. The sound of happiness just lingered after every one of those members, had gone home. You see, you don't get that level of enjoyment through experiences, if you are not within a safe, trusted space.

I knew then that respect for a culture, that was not your ethnicity, requires deep listening to the voices of families, and real gratitude for having experiences that gift you insight into someone else's world. I also learnt then that you cannot believe (and nor should you want to) that you will ever become culturally competent in another culture, unless of course you too, are part of that same background.

The early childhood sector is a professional group of educators, who have a fundamental drive to help children thrive. I am so privileged that my individual experience, in that particular role, has continued to benefit the people I work with.

Gu-Evans, O. 2020. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, *Psychology Today*.

McCloud, S. 2020. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development, *Psychology Today*.

## Children may learn most effectively in an atmosphere free from strain and tension

### Norma Campbell-Smith

Norma Campbell-Smith's award of the Scholarship in 1968 had a synchronicity. Norma was a teacher at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre (LGCC) in Carlton. This was one of six centres funded as part of the Commonwealth Government's program to demonstrate good care and education of young children. It had been established 22 years earlier, following upon the lines of suggestions made to NHMRC by Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown.

Norma was a particularly gifted teacher who had graduated from the Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers' College in 1941 and gained a BSc (Ed) at the University of Pittsburgh in 1961. For the next seven years her work had a significant influence on early childhood education practice in Victoria as she carried out a demonstration program with a group of three-year-old children, interpreting the dynamics of child behaviour to groups of kindergarten teachers, infant welfare sisters and mothercraft nurses.

The VSB Scholarship enabled Norma to take a six months' tour of study and observation in the UK and USA in September 1969. Her report is not on file, but like many of the earlier scholars, she

wrote interesting, informative letters to the trustees during her tour – two have been preserved. In England, Norma first re-visited her favourite places and saw an outstanding children's art show at the Tate Gallery. Then it was down to work with a program of observation at four centres including the Rachael McMillan Nursery School.

*"I had heard about it from my earliest student days; one of the first nursery schools in Britain, it had greatly influenced pre-school education in many parts of the world. Another interesting nursery school was in two converted flats on the ground floor of a tower block in N. London, where teachers had been very ingenious in making equipment from very inexpensive materials.... In Peckham, I spent a morning with a group where four deaf children have been enrolled in the ordinary group... At a primary school in St. John's Wood, I saw five- to eight-year-olds who were beginning to read and write in a program incorporating the preschool education philosophy adapted to their level. Another visit was to Tavistock Clinic where I was included in a student group discussing two recently made films about residential and foster care – two of the current major concerns of the Australian Preschool Association."*

In October, Norma wrote from Pittsburgh, telling of her enrolment in three courses in the Graduate Program of Child

Development at the University of Pittsburgh.

*"The first had been planned especially for a group of theological students to help them gain an understanding of behaviour generally and particularly in relation to children and families; the second, Child Development Literature, is a great help in bringing me up to date in research; and the third, the Seminar in Cognitive Theory, relating theory to teaching practice is helpful in thinking about how children may learn most effectively in an atmosphere free from strain and tension. I am also attending weekly case conferences at the Arsenal Family and Children's Centre and participating in weekly discussion sessions with a group of graduate nurses who come to observe children there."*

After three months, she was back in Pittsburgh having travelled many miles by Greyhound bus to Cleveland, Ohio, where she spent a week seeing the innovative family day care scheme initiated there before moving on to New York City. Here the President of the Bank Street College of Education had arranged a stimulating program.

*"Of particular interest was a two-day Conference with participants working with 'culturally deprived' children and their families – mainly teachers, nurses, social workers and supervisors. Their Home Visitor program sounded most effective ... A very profitable morning was spent at the Bank Street Book Store,*

selecting books for migrant children with little or no English attending the LGCC. I also bought some recent publications for the staff library."

A visit to New Haven, Connecticut to spend time at the Yale Child Study Centre followed. The program proved to be very similar to that at the LGCC so many shared experiences were discussed with the Director and staff members.

"I leave for San Jose, California on January 23. I will have a month there at the Berry Street Nursery School at Stanford University. Dr Edith Dowling is arranging a series of visits for me to see work they are doing with students who observe at their school".

Norma returned to the LGCC and resumed her demonstration teaching and lecturing program. She wrote once more to the Trust about the new work she had begun.

*"I have planned some directed observation sessions along the lines I observed in Pittsburgh. Two groups with whom I have worked closely have been 14 second-year speech therapy students from the Victorian school of Speech Therapy and 15 students from St Nicholas Hospital training for work with mentally handicapped children. Both groups have made weekly visits over a term to discuss and observe normal child behaviour prior to working with handicapped children."*

Norma wrote many of the useful leaflets for parents, teachers and caregivers

published in the LGCC series, *Understanding Your Child*. Her continuing interest in new ideas led to writing for the influential *Australian Preschool Quarterly* a range of articles including 'Italian Children in Kindergarten...their first use of English' and 'Children learn from an experience with pets'.

She resigned in December 1976, remembered by hundreds of practising teachers as a master teacher, with a strong adherence to principles together with a readiness to make changes in relation to new knowledge or changing needs.

When appointed as a pre-school adviser in the Health Department's Child Development Division, Norma's knowledge and experience were a vital resource when increased responsibility for childcare services was added to the advisory work with kindergarten teachers and local committees. As the advisers became responsible for monitoring and supporting the groups of very young children who were in care, in-service training of the advisory team became part of Norma's work. She retired in 1983, continuing her service to young children as a volunteer at the LGCC for several years.

*Re-printed from:*

*Changing Minds, Changing Lives: The Legacy of the Vera Scantlebury Brown Memorial Trust 1946 – 2004*

*By Joan Waters*

## Photos from contributors (2)



Wendy Grenfell in 'the smock' 1978, playing upright Piano (a standard feature of kindergartens in the 1970s)



Newspaper cutting. Caption reads: ADDING SMALL FOOTPRINTS to the yielding sand these children, in line of fours, on either side of Miss Alison Cairns, turned eyes right as one individual when the cameraman appeared. They were out for a Bayside stroll from the Ada Mary aBeckett kindergarten.

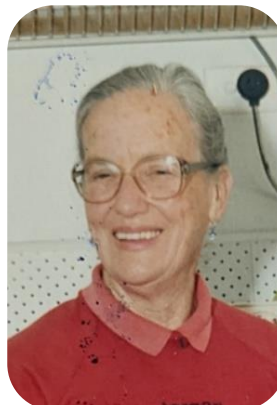
Bridie Raban  
receiving Honorary  
University  
Fellowship by Hong  
Kong Baptist  
University in 2020



June Waites and  
Judith Thompson at  
Warrawong 1992



Photos from Mary Merlin 1980s - 2003



1960s Pilot and Teacher  
Theresia Seidler-Poli



## Our work is meaningful, no matter the title or the venue

### Robyn Tully-Gleeson

I grew up in the Western District of Victoria, on a farm with spectacular views of the Grampians National Park. I was a sick child, diagnosed with bronchiectasis at the age of three. My early education was limited as a result of my illness. When I was six I briefly attended the local primary school for six months. My parents decided I was too poorly to continue to attend, so instead they organised for a governess to be brought to the farm to take care of my education needs. I had a series of governesses over the following years, until my doctor suggested I might have been better off at a boarding school away from the farm for a while. So, at aged 10 I moved to Melbourne and boarded at St Michael's Grammar School. I stayed there until 1962, when I achieved my 'Intermediate Certificate', and then returned to the farm aged 17.

I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher, but as I did not have my 'Leaving Certificate' - these days the equivalent to Year 11 - I was unable to apply for the course. I stayed at home with my parents for a while and worked at the local TV services shop in town. I still wanted to work with children, so my father organised for me to meet with Matron Graham, who oversaw the Mothercraft

Nursing course at the Tweddle Baby Hospital in Footscray. Even back then it was often not 'what you knew' but 'who you knew'. The course was 15 months long and we lived in the hospital and worked and trained concurrently. When we weren't working shifts, we attended lectures. Mothercraft nursing involved working with babies and toddlers. You could describe the teaching as 'tough love'; saying I'd never be able to be in charge of children was Matron Graham's reverse psychology to encourage and motivate me to try harder.

At the end of the 15 months, I still wanted to work in the preschool setting. Fortunately, Matron Graham was able to get me into the preschool course in the city. The course had lecturers and classes, but it was mostly placement-based learning. I was placed at Footscray Childcare Centre and then St Mary's Anglican Kindergarten in North Melbourne. At the end of the year I finished with a Certificate of Preschool Mothercraft Nursing. Thus was the official beginning of my career.

Again, I returned to the farm; this time to work at the Ararat Anglican Preschool Play Centre. I was 20 and I oversaw 15 children per session, with two sessions running per day, along with my assistant. Preschool Play Centres, as they were known back then, were like shorter and more informal kindergartens. We had fewer children and for less time, but we ran activities and experiences like those found in kindergarten settings. We had

puzzles, painting and construction in free play times. We had singing, with musical instruments, and we used puppets to keep children engaged during group times. We would teach topics or 'themes' based on the children's interests, and keep them going for weeks on end. After working in Ararat I started working at the Willaura Preschool Play Centre, which was connected to the infant welfare building. This was much closer to home, and I knew everyone in the community. Part of our job was to document the children's development, and this would be shared with the doctor, who would come and do annual medical check-ups of the children.

I was married in 1972, and moved to Melbourne, in the house that I built and still live in. From here I worked in many roles over the years, first at St Albans, then Maidstone, before heading to the Macedon Preschool Play Centre. In Macedon we would take the children on excursions around town, often to visit the kindergarten children or to roll around in the autumn leaves at the cemetery!

After wrapping up in Macedon I worked in reliever roles for a period. I was a 'regular' reliever at Coburg Children's Centre, and while I was there I enrolled at the State College of Victoria to study kindergarten teaching. I was not encouraged by my workplace to complete this degree, with them expressing that it would be a loss to their service if I were to leave to become a teacher.

My final role in the formal setting was at Strathmore, at the Childcare Centre, where I stayed for 10 years. I made lifelong friends at this place, and overall, it was a wonderful experience but like many workplaces, there was some friction between colleagues at times. During her trips to Melbourne from the farm, I would sometimes sneak my great-niece into the service to play with the other children, and she has grown up to become a kindergarten teacher herself.

Government changes regarding qualifications eventually encouraged me to leave, but I continued working privately with some of the families I had built strong relationships with over the years. I still hear from these children and their parents, decades later, and am kept in the loop of their milestone achievements.

I'm so glad that I pursued a career working with children, even though it was not kindergarten teaching as I had initially dreamed. Our work is meaningful, no matter the title or the venue.

## 66 Years of Teaching combined from mother and daughter

### Ros Molyneux and Jenny Colvin

A passion for early childhood teaching runs in the family. Jenny Colvin (née Ward) and Ros Molyneux (née Colvin) have proudly contributed a total of 66 years to the education of Victorian preschoolers.

They reflected together on what excellence in early childhood teaching has looked like over the years, and both agree that while it is contextual according to the time and location, the essence of excellence in early childhood education remains constant.

Jenny Colvin graduated in 1958 from the Kindergarten Training College in Kew, the same institution where her daughter Ros graduated in 1986 (then renamed the Institute of Early Childhood Development.) Both courses consisted of three years full time study, a broad curriculum and a faculty committed to excellence. Jenny has fond memories of innovative training at the all-female institution, including grounding in many practical subjects such as woodwork, art and music. Students were required to make their equipment, including water buckets made from tin cans and home-made picture collections to promote children's understanding of the wider world.

Mentoring was provided by early childhood pioneers including Heather Lyon, Beth Stubbs, June Epstein and Anne Dryer. Ros studied under Rosemary Milne, Sue Elliott, Jan Millikan and June Factor. Another connection being that Jan Millikan (née Taylor) trained with Jenny, then taught Ros, also connecting throughout her career through the Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange. They both agree the kindergarten training was thorough both academically and practically.

### *Jenny's Story*

Early childhood teaching was not universally recognised in its own right, and many kindergartens were staffed by 'infant teachers' with a program that was similar to school. These teachers did a wonderful job while extolling the virtues of the upcoming teachers with kindergarten training. During a placement in Collingwood in the 1950s teachers did a health check when the children arrived each day, handed out toothbrushes, checked for headlice, and if necessary, cut the children's hair. Children's dirty or worn-out clothing was sensitively replaced from the spare clothes cupboard. Excellence meant caring for all children's needs, whilst spreading the word to parents about the value of attending kindergarten regularly.

Upon graduation, Jenny returned to her home in Tasmania to her first teaching position. Jenny's memories of her early days teaching reflect the large responsibility placed on young graduates, but also the thorough preparation provided by the training course. She confidently embarked on her career, teaching 25 students on her own, not only without an assistant, but also without a working telephone. She took this in her stride at the age of 19, using the church hall, where all the equipment was packed away Friday and set up again Monday morning.

Moving to Victoria and marrying a farmer saw Jenny begin teaching at a rural



Kindergarten, after being begged by the founding committee when they heard there was a trained kindergarten teacher living in the district! Teaching at the only kindergarten in town meant connections were formed with families that have lasted to this day, but it did come with physical challenges. Morning duties included carting wood to light the fire, unlocking the shed to carry all the heavy planks and trestles to set up the playground, and doing the opposite at the end of the day. There were no fences, so duties included checking the long grass in the yard for snakes and ensuring children stayed within the allotted play area. The playground consisted of a large metal slide with a chunk of concrete at the bottom and one large boat swing – both ‘out of bounds’!

In the early years Jenny took her youngest daughter to work with her, gaining a bonus extra year of early learning, such was the demand for a qualified teacher. She also picked up three or four children on her drive to work to ensure they could attend the kindergarten program. The kind policeman’s wife next door would set the mouse traps each night and empty them the next morning before the children arrived.

It took a year for a bathroom to be added to the main building. Prior to this Jenny would carry the children down to the pan toilets in the muddy yard. After two years of operation, the hard-working committee were able to appoint an

assistant, a great step forward which allowed Jenny to focus on the educational program in amongst all these other duties. Lack of regulations meant spontaneous outings could occur, such as when the circus drove past and the children and staff happily set off to join the adventure.

Ros was a frequent visitor to kindergarten throughout her school years, loving interacting with the children and being a regular ballet performer for the children as part of their creative arts program.

### *Ros’s Story*

After growing up exposed to the wonderful world of kindergarten teaching, it was a natural fit to follow in her mother’s footsteps. She also found the holistic nature of the university course very fulfilling, with its thorough grounding in educational philosophy and child development, and high expectations of curriculum knowledge and competency in the creative arts including movement, music and art. These passions influenced her teaching right throughout her career.

She began her career in rural Victoria, proudly using many of those resources made by Jenny a generation before. Further study beckoned and over the years she completed the 4th year of the bachelor’s degree, followed by a master’s in education and a diploma in children’s yoga teaching. She is currently in her 20th year at an early learning centre in an independent school, where she has been the director of early learning for 15 years.

Working predominantly with three to five-year-old children, Ros still gains inspiration from the children she is fortunate to interact with every day. Teaching though the pandemic has of course been challenging, but it has reinforced the importance of maintaining the right of young children to access quality play-based programs for their social, emotional and physical health. Excellence in early childhood education continues to be delivered through play-based programs and by educators who fight for and uphold children's right to play.

Highlights of Ros' career include teaching overseas, working as a preschool field officer, attending two study tours to Reggio Emilia in Italy, establishing a nature play program and leading the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan. Embedding understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into programs is proudly recognised as a sign of excellence in early childhood education today.

Membership of professional organisations has always been important to share knowledge, advocate for the profession and network with other Educators. Jenny is a lifelong member of AGECS, and Ros has maintained this interest in amongst membership of many other current early childhood professional organisations.

Jenny retired after 32 years in the profession, whilst Ros is currently

completing her 34<sup>th</sup> year. They both agree they have been privileged to have the best job in the world.

## The impact of the journey

### Sarah Louise Gandolfo

If you had told me 20 years ago that I would be where I am now, having had the experiences I have had, I wouldn't have believed you. At 15 I was volunteering after school at the local kindergarten where my youngest sibling was attending at the time. I enjoyed my time there immensely. So much so that I stayed on after my sibling started primary school, using my free periods to spend time with the children, reading them stories, playing ball games outside, and helping them with their art and craft experiences. At the time I didn't have a lot of ambition for my life beyond high school. I kind of knew I wanted to work with children, but I leaned more toward secondary teaching and I was even thinking about science and psychology paths!

The lead teacher at the kindergarten, Marina, a passionate early childhood educator who is still there today, stopped me in my tracks. Marina, along with her team, shared with me their love for and commitment to working with young children. They showed me that this could be more than just an after-school hobby and how the education and care of preschool aged children was a noble and

fulfilling career choice. I learnt a number of very valuable lessons while I volunteered, with Marina teaching me so much about work and about children. She taught me about having a professional work ethic, sticking to my commitments, and actually caring about what you do for work. She also taught me about listening to children, understanding their differences, and adapting my teaching style to the individual child.

As the years passed, I went on to study a Diploma of Children's Services at TAFE full time while also working at a local long day care as a casual co-educator and eventually, while working full time, completed my Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies and a Graduate Certificate of Social Science (Pre- and Post-Natal Family Support). As I worked and learnt, I never forgot those early lessons that helped to shape the teacher, and person, I am today. It really does go to show that a good mentor makes a world of difference, whether you realise it (or want to accept it) in the moment or not.

Now, 20 years after meeting Marina and her team, it's my turn to mentor; giving back to the sector in a way that I hope will have impact for years to come. I've finished a Graduate Certificate in Education Studies and a Master of Educational Leadership, and I've been fortunate enough to have spent the last few years working as an early years'

consultant, and am now employed by a peak body.

While some may not agree with the language I'm about to use, the fact is that I love what I do. I love working with children; I love working alongside others as part of a team ensuring children's education and care are front and centre of any curriculum design; and I love helping teachers grow and develop to be the greatest versions of themselves both in and out of the classroom.

I am a passionate advocate for the early years and for ensuring a just future for all. While a career in early childhood wasn't really the original dream, I could not be more thankful for the life I have created and for the early mentorship of Marina and her team who took a chance on a 15-year-old with no direction.

## Journeying with the Elders in the early years

### Dr Sue Atkinson Lopez AM

I am a proud Yorta Yorta woman who has been involved in the early childhood sector for over forty-five yrs. Thirty-seven of these years have been dedicated to the Aboriginal early childhood sector in partnership with Aboriginal communities and our non-Aboriginal allies in Victoria. These years have been the most rewarding, fulfilling part of my career and have made a profound impact on my life.

My work was recently recognized in 2020 when I was awarded the Member of the

Order of Australia for significant service to early childhood and Indigenous Communities I was honored and delighted.

The beginning of my journey into the Aboriginal early years space began with a phone call at the end of 1984. At the time I was expecting my second child Bianca, raising my two-year son Anthony and teaching part time. It was a call that changed my life for the better and informed my career, cultural and personal life for the years that followed.

The phone call was from a member of The Aboriginal Child Care course committee (later to become the Advanced Certificate in Koorie Child care) inviting me to teach on the course which began the previous year under the umbrella of Prahran College of TAFE (later to become part of Swinburne University).

I was excited and terrified in equal measure as I accepted. This would be my first experience of teaching adults and my first experience of the Aboriginal community outside of infrequent encounters with relatives I barely knew. My mother had been raised by a non-Aboriginal foster mother from about the age of six and my father was of Cornish descent.

The origin of the course is what I would now describe as part of the movement to de colonise early childhood spaces. The course was initiated by a call from the local Aboriginal community through the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

(VACCA – <https://www.vacca.org>) for an Aboriginal specific course for Aboriginal Child Care workers.

This call was a response to issues around race which saw Aboriginal people marginalised in mainstream courses and an exercise in self-determination through partnerships between Aboriginal organisations and the mainstream. Such partnerships were central in determining how the mainstream could best meet the needs and rights of Aboriginal people.

The central position of the local Aboriginal community in the construction and the conduct of the course was embodied in the Aboriginal Child Care Course committee. This committee consisted of representatives from organisations such as VACCA, Yappera Children's Services Co-operative <https://yappera.com.au>, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service and local Aboriginal Elders. The curriculum was written in partnership between Prahran college of TAFE and this committee. Every subject was immersed in local Aboriginal culture.

Aboriginal teachers were employed, and non-Aboriginal staff needed to demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal culture and identity. The involvement of the Aboriginal community, especially Elders, was particularly significant drawing on a wealth of experience and knowledge and emphasizing the Aboriginal pedagogy of intergenerational learning.

From the time I entered the course I had much learning and unlearning to do. This was largely provided by my interaction with Victorian Elders who shared their knowledge as teachers, mentors and committee members on the course.

Using the Aboriginal pedagogy of the oral tradition these Elders stories of mission life and political activism educated me in the genealogy of a community and the history of a culture that survived in spite of a devastating dispossession and dislocation.

I have continued to draw on this knowledge of identity, culture, history and intergenerational learning throughout my life. One example of this is my Ph.D. Thesis, *'Indigenous self-determination and early childhood education and care in Victoria'* which I completed in 2008. This research constructed with the support of the Victorian Aboriginal community addresses race, racism, culture and identity in early childhood spaces.

When collecting data I interviewed Victorian Aboriginal Elders, some graduates of and some former teaching staff of the course, Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal early childhood allies with strong connections to the local Aboriginal community.

My thesis demonstrated that one of the persistent themes in the decolonisation of non-Indigenous early childhood spaces and the construction of de colonised Indigenous early childhood

spaces is the voices of the Elders through their direct or indirect presence in these spaces.

The existence of the Child Care course which ran in Melbourne until 1991 meant that in the long-term issues around dispossession were being addressed on an intergenerational scale. The course produced skilled Aboriginal child care professionals who would then work with Aboriginal children from a culturally empowered position.

Two of the many notable graduates of the course are Annette Sax a Taungurung women and Delta Kay an Arakwal and Bungalaung woman. Annette founded Yarn Strong Sista with Delta and I in 2001 as an Indigenous early childhood



consultancy. Yarn Strong Sista has expanded and is thriving 21yrs later with Annette as its Creative director. Delta now passionately shares her culture on her traditional home land in Byron Bay. I continue to provide advice to Yarn Strong Sista in an informal way. In 2013, Annette and I published three books Bartja and Mayila, Yurri's Birthday And Yurri's Manung. The books were dedicated to the late

Aunty Iris Lovett-Gardiner a Gunditjmara Elder and supported by Aunty Fay Carter (AM) a Yorta Yorta and Dja Dja Wurrung Elder and Aunty Lillian Tamuru a Yorta Yorta Elder with their advice and endorsement.

Both Aunty Fay and Aunty Iris had been involved in the Aboriginal Child Care Course as guest speakers, teachers and advisors and the first of the books *Bartja* and *Mayila* was launched at the Aboriginal Community Elders Service which bears Aunty Iris's name the 'Iris Lovett Gardiner Centre'.

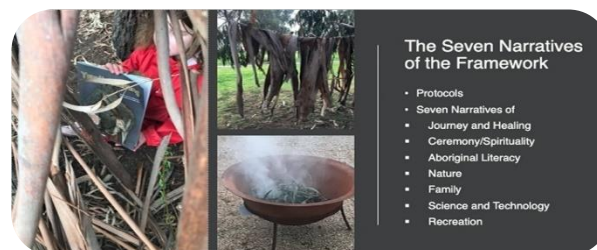
In 2017 funded by the Warrawong Foundation, I led the Possum Skin Pedagogy project, authoring *Possum Skin Pedagogy: A Guide for Early Childhood Practitioners*. This document is aimed at non-Aboriginal educators as a resource to strengthen the voices of Aboriginal Children, Families and Elders in early childhood programs. The impact of this document is captured in two further publications funded by the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies (AGECS) , *Reflecting on the Possum Skin Learning Project: Journeys and Outcomes* and *Possum Skin Pedagogy: A Chain of Allies in the Early Childhood Landscape* .

The Possum Skin pedagogy document was initiated by a request in 2015 to Action on Aboriginal Perspectives in Early Childhood (APPEC) by two non-Aboriginal early childhood practitioners as members of APPEC with strong ties to

their local Aboriginal community. This request arose from a presentation to celebrate National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day led by BoonWurrung Elder Aunty Fay Muir which focused on the possum skin as a sign of the survival and revival of Aboriginal culture in Victoria.

As I led the project to provide a teaching framework for embedding Victorian Aboriginal perspectives in the early years, I was informed by the voices of Elders and senior members of the Victorian Aboriginal community.

The knowledge and experiences of these inspirational people informed the seven narratives of the document: Journey and healing, Ceremony and spirituality, Aboriginal literacy, Nature, Family



Science and Technology and Recreation.

The training that followed, like the Aboriginal Childcare course, was led by Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people with strong connections to the local Aboriginal community.

Unlike the Aboriginal Child Care course, the participants were overwhelming non-Aboriginal people.

The feedback from the participants indicated that they now understood how



Aboriginal perspectives must be layered within all dimensions of the program following respectful protocols.

In 2020 APPEC was awarded a special acknowledgement in the Hart (Helping Achieve Reconciliation Together) awards in the Schools and Early years category for the Possum Skin Pedagogy. This award acknowledged AAPECS' work in driving systematic change.

Currently I am working with Angela Ditchmen from fka *Children's Services* to develop kits to complement each of the narratives in the Possum skin pedagogy. I am delighted that we can now draw on local Aboriginal authors and artists in children's books and experiences in a way that was not available in the 1980s. The Elder whose session on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Children's day was central in initiating the Possum Skin Pedagogy, Auntie Faye Muir is one of the authors whose beautiful stories of intergenerational knowledge are included in these kits.

These kits will enable early childhood practitioners to foreground and embed Victorian Aboriginal perspectives in the program reflecting a growing recognition of Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land.

Reflecting on the years since 1986 until today I have observed a gradual shift towards the positioning of Aboriginal culture as central to early childhood spaces, in terms of philosophy, policy and practice. More specifically I have seen

this unfolding around the moral imperative of social justice and environmental activism.

The principles that informed the Aboriginal Child Care course underpinned by self-determination and sovereignty; respectful partnerships, the central position of Aboriginal voices especially those of the Elders and Aboriginal pedagogy remain the foundation for the moral and intellectual authority of the Aboriginal community in the early years programme and will continue to drive systematic change.

My story is but one among the many of Aboriginal people in the early childhood space in Victoria. I would like to acknowledge their activism, dedication and passion and the Elders who have led us all since the beginning.

## My professional journey in early childhood sector

### Sue Brear

My early childhood journey began 40 years ago, teaching in sessional kindergartens in metropolitan Melbourne. This included both three and four-year-old groups.

20 years ago, I completed a post-graduate in special education, then began working with Yooralla at their inclusive kindergarten at Narre Warren Central with Ann Slater. Ann was instrumental in establishing this centre. This experience has shaped my career



and passion for early intervention. Ann was a wonderful inspiration and mentor, a passionate and dedicated teacher, who was always advocating for families of children with disabilities. We worked as a very cohesive team, which included physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologist, early childhood teachers and educators. Further training allowed us to conduct groups for children and families with disabilities, including family networks support groups, Mother Goose parent child playgroups, fathers' support groups aptly named Papa Bear, supported playgroup for children on autism spectrum, and swimming/aquatics program.

Part of our philosophy was to ensure we built strong, nurturing, relationships with all families, children, and team members, to ensure we were then able to support and build the capacity of families to support their beautiful children in a way that worked for them.

During this work, Ann introduced me to the Pyramid Model and the work being done by Professor Mary Louise Hemmeter from Vanderbilt University and her team. This aligned well with the work we were doing supporting families.

From this experience, I continue to work with Yooralla in the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service as a specialist consultant supporting teachers in the successful inclusion of all children. The experiences I had at Narre Warren

Central kinder have truly given me the skills to achieve this.

I completed a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment to enable me to have the skills for training, coaching, and supporting teachers and their teams. During this time, I trained as a trainer and coach in the Pyramid Model with Professor Mary Louise Hemmeter. I was fortunate to attend the Pyramid Model conference in Florida, in 2016, and visit services in USA to observe their implementation of Pyramid Model practices.

In Melbourne, I was part of a team as a coach, which supported a research project with the late Janene Swalwell.

I continue to support teachers in my role with Yooralla, and as a coach and trainer in Pyramid Model practices. These practices underpin all my work with teachers, families, and children. I have had a wonderful journey in early childhood and worked with amazing passionate people who always put families and children first.

## Pedagogy of Hope

### Tessa McGavock

*Theresa McGavock has been an early childhood practitioner more than 40 years, teaching and/or managing in community-based, local government and private services during that time. For a decade she managed multiple local government sites. Tessa is currently the*

*director at WSU Early Learning Penrith, and is also a sessional academic.*

I graduated from Auckland Teachers' College in 1977 and have been teaching or managing early years services ever since, including a decade managing multiple sites in local government.

I could share literally hundreds of stories, but the one I really want to share relates to updating my qualifications (to an Australian EC degree) followed by completing a master's in education and I am now on the tail end of a doctoral study. The journey over the last 14 years of study has included being awarded university and industry awards and participating in some amazing research projects with the children.

The latest research project, initiated by me with ethics approval was collaboration with the children in my centre looking at bushfire recovery and regeneration. Using a creative-arts based approach and inquiry-based learning, together we developed a Pedagogy of Hope (it is transferable to other places and teaching contexts), developing practical actions and advocacy skills with the children.

## I never had a better time in my life

### Theresia Seidler-Poli and Pat Graham

Theresia was the first Teacher at Lake Park Kindergarten in 1965, in the City of Coburg.

Few women were getting into the cockpit when executing a series of barrel rolls in the skies over Melbourne's south-east. It was the early 1960s and Mrs Seidler-Poli admits it was "a bit glamorous" to be a female pilot at the time. The young mum knew she was risking her life, but she also knew that the children in the recently developed Lake Park estate needed a kindergarten. The committee set up to lobby for a preschool, had to raise money and Mrs Seidler-Poli took a punt that a female pilot performing aerobatics would draw a good crowd of people who were prepared to dip into their pockets. "I had to get the courage to try and do it," Mrs Seidler-Poli, now 83, says. When she finally landed the Chipmunk aircraft at Berwick aerodrome, Mrs Seidler-Poli's face was white. But the risk had paid off and the show raised a packet. Fifty years later, Lake Park Kindergarten stands as a tribute to Mrs Seidler-Poli and the dedicated local community which worked so hard to have it built. Mrs Seidler-Poli went on to become the

kindergarten's first director when it opened in 1965, remaining at the helm for 21 years.

In an amazing twist, Mrs Seidler-Poli was succeeded by her own daughter, Pat Graham. Between them, the pair ran the kinder for 42 years, but both women are adamant it was all a team effort – that community has always been the cornerstone of the kindergarten. After all, it was an overwhelming desire to put back into the community that motivated Mrs Seidler-Poli to form a committee of local ladies in the early 1960s dedicated to establishing the kinder. This group called themselves the 'Lake Park Improvement' Committee. Mrs Seidler-Poli was the natural choice to become president of the committee. She had qualified as a kindergarten teacher before migrating from Austria in 1956 and once in Australia did a Bachelor of Education.

At the time the nearest kindergartens were in Coburg, Merlynston and Newlands – a long walk, especially for those mums pushing a pram. The committee of six set about garnering support for a kindergarten and raising money to show the City of Coburg that they were serious. They baked cakes, held street stalls and dinner dances, went door-to-door and sold raffle tickets.

And, of course, Mrs Seidler-Poli, who had gone for her pilot's licence on a dare, put her flying skills on show. After six months of meetings, gathering

signatures and leg work, the City of Coburg allocated some land to the project – a former tip site – and promised to build the kindergarten.

"The mothers were really proud of what they had achieved," Mrs Seidler-Poli says. "I couldn't have done it on my own, that's for sure."

As part of the bargain, the committee had to fit out the kindergarten. But for Mrs Seidler-Poli, the real work was just beginning.

When the kindergarten finally opened, children made their way over the old wooden bridge and along the dirt road to get to four-year-old sessions every morning, with sessions for three-year-olds two afternoons a week. The kindergarten must have been sorely-needed, with every available spot filled from day one. The playground consisted of a concrete pipe set into the ground, a sandpit and a climbing frame made from old tractor tyres.

Mrs Seidler-Poli went on to teach hundreds of preschoolers, including her own two grandsons and the sons of current kindergarten assistant Rose Marin.

Thirty years later, the boys remain close friends, while Mrs Marin has been a long-time assistant at the kindergarten. Mrs Seidler-Poli says that teaching music was her favourite activity with the children and one to which they all responded. She also loved storytelling

and sport, as well as the regular excursions to her farm between Wallan and Kilmore, where the children took short rides on a horse.

"I never had a better time in my life."

The reward was being remembered so fondly by the children. Mrs Seidler-Poli says she could hardly ever go into Coburg without someone recognising her. She had an amazing ability to uncover the children's strengths, only to have parents tell her years later how accurate she had been.

"I always looked at each child as an individual and tried to get the best out of them." Mrs Seidler-Poli says the kindergarten was always a place where families were welcome. "It was a home away from home."

For Pat Graham, some of her earliest memories are of walking the streets of the Lake Park estate gathering signatures of support for the kindergarten.

Mrs Graham fondly remembers all the cups of tea and biscuits that were passed around when the local ladies got together to discuss what had to be done to make their dream a reality. But Mrs Graham never intended to go from petition co-ordinator to kindergarten teacher.

That all changed when Mrs Seidler-Poli broke her leg in a car accident. "The doctor said 'I really don't think you are well enough to teach full-time anymore, but I don't think it would be a

good idea for you to give up teaching because this is your passion'," Mrs Graham says. "She threw her heart and soul into that place."

And so Mrs Graham, who had been teaching in a primary school, ended up job-sharing with her mum. She took over full-time about 18 months later. For an accidental kindergarten teacher, she ended up staying for a long time. Mrs Graham says she "loved it to death". "I didn't think I could breathe without being in that place. Mum would say that to you too. It wasn't like going to work; it was like going to a different room in your house. It's like an old family friend. I made some great friends while I was teaching down there." And she has only fond memories of her time there.

She remembers a day in the 1980s when she noticed there were helicopters flying overhead and thought she should usher the children inside.

Mrs Graham managed to hail down one of the police out the front of the kinder only to discover they were trying to catch a Pentridge Prison escapee who was thought to be lurking in the parkland at Coburg Lake, which was overgrown and fenced off in chain mesh.

Then there was the handsome young expat who turned up at the kindergarten one day. He wanted to see if it was still the way he remembered – and if there were still frogs in the sandpit.

And there is the little girl who used to enthral Mrs Graham with all sorts of tall

tales. Years later, a relative of the little girl told Mrs Graham: "she still talks about you and thinks you're the best teacher that she ever had."

"Every year there has always been one you think 'I could take that one home'. Even the ongoing saga of the kinder's sinking floor brings back memories for Mrs Graham. Having been built on an old tip site, the floor would gradually sag over time. The kindergarten was restumped at least three times before the old timber floor was completely removed and screw piles were driven into the ground. But one of Mrs Graham's favourite memories is of the kindergarten's centenary celebrations in 1988. Children came dressed as characters from Australia's history, they built a fire in the hole under the swing to cook damper, they made butter out of cream, danced and put on a concert for the parents. "It was absolutely phenomenal. It was one of the best days." There were also countless Christmas plays, performed entirely by the children. "There wouldn't be a dry eye in the house," Mrs Graham recalls.

Mrs Graham believes that the kindergarten, born of community action, survives today because of the continued community commitment. "Together the staff, families and children who have been involved with the kindergarten throughout its history have known what it is to feel connected, to have a sense of belonging and to have had the opportunity to learn, to grow, to enjoy and

to become all the better for having been involved."

It is this community spirit, together with State Government funding and a cash injection from the Moreland Council, which helped fund a makeover for the kindergarten in 2012. Under the directorship of Jeanine Nigro – only the kinder's fourth director in 48 years – Lake Park secured new playground equipment, building upgrades, a bike track and shade sail.

## I enjoy challenging myself and sharing the 'small moments' with a child

### Tracy

Becoming a teacher was something that I have always wanted to do as far as I can remember. My parents often tell me stories about how I used to put my toys together in my room and pretend to teach them, and I have a photo from my kindergarten year reading a book to my friends just like the teacher.

I have always enjoyed being with children and used every opportunity to do work experience and volunteer work in playgroups, kindergarten, and early primary school. By the time I was in year 12, I knew I wanted to focus my future study to work in early childhood.

My first teaching experience was as a part time educator with a group of children that required additional support in many areas. Although there were many challenges for a beginning educator, it was also a great learning experience, which created my interest in wanting to learn more about sensory processing, autism, emotional regulation and trauma.

As I enter my 26<sup>th</sup> year of teaching, my practice and pedagogy continue to reflect what I have learnt, both from ongoing learning, as well as through experiences with different children and families over the years. Some experiences in my own life have also built my understanding to best support the children and families in the community.

I have been at my current kindergarten for 10 years. Within this community, I support families from vulnerable backgrounds, mental health, trauma, domestic violence and children with varying needs. As much as some days can be challenging, I feel it has built my capacity as an educator. I enjoy challenging myself and sharing the 'small moments' as a child builds relationships and trust, uses strategies to support their regulation, or tries something for the first time.

I value my work with children and families and am passionate about making a difference in a child's life.

## Weaving webs

### Dr Tracy Young

I have always felt that my teaching, research and contributions to the field have been richer because of working in children's services, the VET sector and higher education. I completed all of my studies part-time, including a graduate diploma at IECD, bachelor's degree at the University of Melbourne and master's and PhD at Monash University. One of the pivotal turning points in my career was attending the 1996 Weaving Webs conference at the University of Melbourne (I still have the conference folder) that opened me up to the possibilities and excitement of early childhood teaching, when we embrace the expansive aspects of research and practice. These expansive career opportunities are something I share with current pre-service teachers as we explore the range of roles, expertise, and significance of being a part of the early childhood profession.

## Chinook helicopters would fly low over the centre

### Val McDonell

I began teaching in 1979 in a four-year-old sessional kindergarten on an army base. I received my qualification from the

Institute of Early Childhood Development (IECD) in Kew.

As I settled into my role, two thoughts became apparent. One was thinking how lucky was I after completing college, I could acknowledge that teaching was the job for me, and secondly, what was I doing as a civilian in an army base? Army life had its own set of rules and way of life which were foreign to me.

My recollection of my three years there was that I felt, at even 20 years of age, I was older but less worldly than the parents of the four-year-olds. Their life appeared to be already established. They had their families, they had relocated many times, had learnt how to navigate life without much external support and often with absent fathers. Their happy attitude to their way of life often surprised me.

The rank held by the fathers determined where the families lived and socialised within the base. The president of the committee of management was to hold a ranking of warrant officer or higher. The position was therefore often appointed rather than elected. Perhaps not so happily!

Having a president with a high command did work to the centre's advantage. I remember a date had been set for a working bee on the playground. Early that morning, to my surprise an army truck arrived with a dozen or more army privates whose job that morning was to complete all the tasks set by me.

Everything ran by military time and timetable. Trying to find someone on base to help on a Friday afternoon was near impossible as it was sports afternoon for everyone! Chinook helicopters would fly low over the centre and land on a nearby field, army tanks would go rumbling down the road and the centre would shake from nearby artillery exercises. The children would continue on with their play showing no interest, whereas I was fascinated (and must admit distracted) by the events.

I learnt so much in my role as teacher from the two wonderful assistants I worked with and from the families and children. Since then I completed my B.Ed and worked in other kindergartens, child care, kinder gym, before and after school care, delivery of certificate III in child care and inclusion support.

Adults have a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in a young one's life. I hope we continue to treasure the life of a child. To let them be a child in an ever-changing world.

## My professional journey

### Vicki Gazis

*Vicki Gazis is a lecturer and director of Stepping Forward Early Years Consultancy. She has been invited to Reggio Emilia – Italy, Hong Kong and Co presented at the EECERA conference in Europe.*



I started my journey in primary then moved to the early childhood sector where I was director of a stand-alone kindergarten for over a decade. I have worked in various platforms of early childhood including academic. I am thankful that I can continue to be involved and have the opportunity to visit a variety of early years' settings from preschool to long day care as a consultant, mentor, educator or as a lecturer.

There have been so many changes in the early childhood sector in the last two decades. In Victoria we had a major overhaul of Victoria's child education program, three-year-old children can access an additional year of the funded program.

There are multiple benefits of an extra year of childhood education, including better cognitive and social skills when children eventually start school, so this is such an important step valuing education and most importantly recognising the importance of play. We still have a long way to go, and it is evident that we have so many divisions between Scandinavian countries – Finland, Sweden and Norway top the Index, thanks to sustained, long-term investments and prioritisation of early childhood development, which is now deeply embedded in all aspects of their culture. As a nation, the early years need to be a priority in our society where early intervention and funding is accessed

early, family participation is valued and there is a work life balance.

One thing that I am very humble about is that males are slowly entering our profession which ordinarily was dominated by females. According to the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2019), fewer than three percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers are men – and this figure has not changed substantially in recent decades. Having both genders in an early year setting provides so many opportunities to role model gender bias issues. Male educators encourage children to develop their gender identity, and promote respectful, harmonious relationships so let's hope that we can have a more equal gender balance and provide educators with a higher income.

There are always conversations about our sector and positive intentions which I hope will see the value educators bring to the sector. My aspiration is that in a few years I am able to reflect on this journal entry and report back that we have a curriculum which includes partnerships, body safety, risky play, early assistance support services and our education structure is not a separate body of early years – primary and secondary – instead we work together.

Let's wait and see...

# 100 Years of Excellence in 2022

## AGECS Council 2022

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## 100 Years of Excellence Awards

The following people were nominated by their peers for an AGECS 100 Years of Excellence Award. Recipients received a certificate and a \$200 Magabala Book Voucher. Congratulations to the following:

Felicity Morley

Kerrie Gould

Kim Bodribb

Laura Pearce

Louise Fitzpatrick Leach

Melissa Adam

Melissa Mugford

Patricia Beh

Rachael McBrien

Rifka Ash

Sarah Louise Gandolfo

## Mooroolbeek House

The Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria commenced teacher training in 1909. A two year course was run in cooperation with the Education Department in 1910-14, but from 1917 the Union trained its students independently. In 1922 the Kindergarten Training College was established in Mooroolbeek, Kew. In 1965, the institution, as the Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers' College, became an entity separate from the Union, and in 1973 joined the State College of Victoria as the Institute of Early Childhood Development. It subsequently amalgamated with the University of Melbourne to become the Department of Early Childhood Studies and moved from Madden Grove, Kew, to 234 Queensberry St, Carlton, early in July 1997.



# INSPIRING FUTURE GENERATIONS

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in AUDAX do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies. Articles are published to provide a forum to share news and provide opportunities for discussion.