



**AGECS**

The Association of Graduates  
in Early Childhood Studies

**A**

**U**

**D**

**A**

**X**

**Audax**

*(Latin) courageous, bold, daring*

**Audax 88 – Autumn 2014**

Journal of the Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies  
PO Box 12163, Franklin St, Melbourne VIC 8006

## **Council Members 2014**

**President:** Maree Wiggins  
**Secretary:** Kay Margetts (Assoc Professor)  
**Treasurer:** Avril McHugh

Sue Atkinson  
Alannah Dore  
Wendy Grenfell  
Ron Holmes  
Sandra McCarthy  
Anne-Marie Morrissey (PhD)  
Sophie Patitsas



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear Members,

On Monday 17th March, The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies, held a forum to clarify the new regulations and to discuss the importance of high standards in Early Childhood courses. Thank you to the members of the panel including

representatives from the Department of

Education and ACECQA who answered questions that related to the new transitional arrangements in relation to the recognition of Early Childhood qualifications. There was a strong indication from the audience of Early Childhood Educators and service providers that this new arrangement was a 'watering down' of Early Childhood qualifications to meet the funding conditions of staff ratios.

We note that Honourable Sussan Ley, Assistant Minister for Education, is also "concerned about reports of slipping standards in Early Childhood training" and has requested that the Australian Skills Quality Authority review training and "ensure that courses are up to scratch and not just a 'tick and flick' service to get people over the line". The representatives from the Department of Education noted that the first review had started in February. We do not support any attempts to minimize the training needed by Early Childhood Educators to meet demands for qualified Early Childhood professionals.

We highlight the importance of having Early Childhood Educators who are well skilled to optimize every child's access to a quality program that will promote their further development and education. As Early Childhood professionals we have a significant task to understand child development, how children learn and opportunities that impact children's brain development and emotional resilience.

At birth children's brains are developing rapidly and benefit from Early Childhood professionals having the theoretical understanding and practical knowledge that will enhance children's development.

We applaud the Minister's announcement that recognizes reports identifying the current inconsistencies in Early Childhood training.

The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies inspires, respects and challenges Early Childhood professionals to have the highest standard of delivery in Early Childhood settings that provides access to a high quality of service for all children.

Maree Wiggins



## **AGECS 2013 AGM Tour Notes** 16/11/13

by Vanessa Crothers-James

AGECS AGM was preceded by a tour where we visited some most interesting and inspiring early learning outdoor environments.

### **DAREBIN PARKLANDS - WESTGARTH BUSH KINDER SPACE**

First we visited the special place at Darebin Parklands where Doug Fargher from Westgarth Kindergarten shared with us not only the place but also insights into his experience of setting up and running a bush kinder.

Doug spoke about the importance placed on acknowledging the traditional owners on arrival to this place.

Westgarth Kindergarten runs a bush kinder for three hours once every week.

The bush kindergarten operates in all weathers unless there is a risk, like lightning, and has only ever once been cancelled due to extreme weather.

Doug described children's initial responses to their first weeks at the bush kinder and how they didn't know what to do - where were the slides? They played games that maybe they would play back at the centre, like hide and seek and circle games and they relied on adult participation. Then slowly as they were playing a game like 'Duck, duck, goose, goose' they started

exploring. At about the six week point educators began to see the deeply engaged play of children exploring and involved in the environment. After those initial weeks there are often marked changes in children's behaviours. Shy children became confident, 'out there' and some even loud. The educators have concluded that in the bush there is nothing confronting and even though at the centre they try to make experiences open and inclusive perhaps some are still too confronting for some children - like puzzles where those children questioned 'maybe I can't, maybe I can?'

He emphasised the risk assessment process and how a pet safety program was undertaken with the children as the greatest risks is dogs who are let off leads in the park. He explained the practice, telling us that when someone sees a dog off the lead they call it and everyone stops with their hands down by their sides and looks down to the ground. Other risks that have been planned for are snakes and falls, and educators and children were intentionally prepared to cope with these risks.

A safety check is conducted prior to each session to look for things like syringes or broken glass. Doug noted the importance of having emergency equipment: phone, first aid kits, medications and a toilet. The children are walked around the perimeter of their space and landmarks are pointed out so that they know the boundaries.

Apart from that the above equipment, the program uses what is there from nature and things that might have been left there by people - an orientation flag, a stick. They sometimes use the phone as a camera and as a field guide to find out about things - like identifying spiders and finding out if they are safe.

Children climb trees, play with sticks, make places, investigate, explore, find bugs and are deeply engaged in their learning. Children with loud and even 'wild' behaviour seem to calm down when they are in the bush.

Among the experiences that Doug shared was how the kindergarten carefully explored the idea of lighting a fire as a natural method of warming and how they connected with the authorities, local community and with Ranger Pete for permission. As lots of house and bush fires have been lit by young children, they made a decision to educate children about how dangerous, how powerful and yet how wonderful fires are. They now light a small fire if required, with minimum smoke as agreed with local residents. They are mindful of a huge fine if the fire brigade is called but believe the learning benefits far outweigh the minimal risk.

Doug believes that children need to have more time outdoors, to explore more natural materials, to play in the rain and to splash in puddles. He described days with pouring rain as fantastic. Families were now craving to

enrol their children in the centre as children were spending more and more time indoors at home and the benefits of this program had become more and more apparent to them.

Benefits extend beyond kindergarten. Children who have gone on to school often return on student free days to this space in their community. It seems that once the children are exposed to the wonderful experiences offered by the Bush kinder, more aware of nature and are accessing it outside of school.

From his experience, Doug strongly believes that when children play in the bush they get a better education, better connections with families are formed and educators are more inspired. Doug challenged us. As the world changes, we in the early years profession need to change - we have a responsibility to children to keep them connected to the natural world. It equips them with the confidence, resilience and ability to problem solve, explore, investigate, wonder, create, collaborate, engage in shared thinking, to become connected with and value the natural world.....the learning opportunities are open ended, inclusive and endless.

\*Doug recommended a book by Antoinette Portis titled *'It's not a Stick'*

## COBURG CHILDREN'S CENTRE



Michelle Hocking the Program Manager introduced us to her educators, provided a brief overview of the Centre history and a tour. We were then free to explore and chat to the educators.

Coburg Children's Centre is well known for Sustainable Practices of which the natural outdoors is a part - all the centres Policies and Procedures around Sustainability are available online. The outdoors has been intentionally designed to include natural materials for children to touch, explore and

experience and to support brain development through ground level changes and the importance of different types of spaces, textures, colours and smells. The kindergarten children from this centre also spend one day a week in a bush area. They walk 25 minutes each way to a bush area along a nearby creek and the traditional owners of the land are acknowledged at the beginning of every visit.

We were introduced to Heather Neyland who works during the week in the kindergarten room but is also allocated 4 hours non contact time each week as Team Leader of the grounds. The children respectfully call her 'The Gardener' and learn as she trims, plants and cares for the environment. There are small group nooks and crannies, and tunnel ways made by children through hedges, all defined by careful planting of trees and shrubs. Sustainability practices are in evidence even in the water-filled creek (with a pump at one end) as waste water from the drinking tap is released into the creek.

This centre is soon to be relocated and educators are already planning their approach to the spaces and planting at the new centre.

## BUBUP WILAM EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE



Our final visit was to the Bubup Wilam Early Childhood Centre at Thomastown. Bubup Wilam in Woi Wurrung language means 'Children's Place'

Following an introduction by Janet McLean the Director, we were able to wander around. Janet spoke of her passion for social justice, and how she had returned to the profession after retiring to lead the development of this new and growing centre which has been operating for 22 months. Aboriginal elders worked with architects to create the centre, which seeks to instil and strengthen children's sense of Aboriginal identity and personal self-esteem as their foundation for lifelong learning, health and wellbeing. This equates to children with the support of their parents and extended family, taking a lead

and responsibility in owning and developing their play, space, interactions, learning and engagement with others in a confident and supported way.

## **AGECS Forum Event 1, 2014**

### **ACECQA Transition Arrangements 2014-2015 EC Qualifications: Who? Why? What? How?**

Wow! What passion, knowledge and concern emanated in the room! Those who attended were extremely fortunate to be able to discuss very sensitive topics with the people in positions of relevance.

Chris Martin from ACECQA was articulate in answering questions with honesty and knowledge. David de Silva and Joan ten B from DOE, also were listening and responsive to the audience. Kay Margetts spoke passionately from an academics point of view and Martel Menz put forth the union's perspective.

Educators and other EC professionals were expressing their concerns about a perceived 'watering down' of hard earned qualifications, educators not completing the higher qualification and the inexperience of students taking on responsibility they are not ready for, and implications for children and families when educators are not fully trained.

The forum provided hearty discussion and offered us all an insight into the different stakeholders involved and how varied their views are.

*Please go to the AGECS website for the podcast if you missed the evening.*



# Notes from The Field of Parenting in The Early Years.....

- **Children dealing with Death**

When someone close to your child dies, your child might have strong feelings – sadness, despair, anger, confusion and anxiety. These feelings are normal. You can help your child by providing a safe and supportive environment as your child learns to deal with the feelings.



## **What children might feel after a death**

There's a big range of normal when it comes to children's feelings after a death.

Many children do show sadness, anger and anxiety. Some might be confused and struggle to understand what has happened. Some might not seem affected by the death at all. Or they might feel

guilty that something they said or did caused the death.

Your child might also show signs of separation anxiety and be scared that you or another caregiver might also die. can help to know that **your child will react more strongly to the death of someone who he saw regularly** and liked – for example, a friendly neighbour– than to the death of a family member he rarely visited. Young children can also react in the same ways to the death of a loved pet and the death of a person.

Strong feelings can sometimes overwhelm young children. Some children might get quiet and withdrawn, and others might behave in challenging ways. Our articles on encouraging good behaviour and connecting and communicating with your child might give you some ideas for handling these situations.

## **Talking about feelings**

Children – especially younger children – can have 'big' feelings when someone dies, but they don't always have the words to express their feelings. This can be confusing and frustrating for them. So it's often a good idea to start by **helping your child identify how she's feeling.**

Then you can let her know that her feelings are normal. You might tell your child that you feel something similar. For example, 'Meg, you seem really angry that Nanna died. I'm feeling angry too because I really loved her, and I don't like it that she can't be here with us anymore'.

If your child knows that **it's OK to talk about how she's feeling** – and that you can cope with her feelings – she'll be more likely to talk more. And if she can talk more, she'll be better able to seek help when she feels overwhelmed. For some children, using toys, books, music or drawing might help them to express or show their feelings.

Sometimes it can help to give your child ideas of **how to cope when he's having strong feelings**. For example, 'Dimitri, when you're feeling really sad and missing Grandpa, maybe you could come and give me a cuddle. Then we could do something that makes us feel a bit happier'.

Over time, and with help from their parents and caregivers, most young children learn to cope with strong feelings. As your child finds these feelings easier to manage, you'll probably find things easier too. If you're concerned about how your child is coping after someone dies, talk with your child's GP, your child and family health nurse or the wellbeing coordinator at your child's school.

### **Tips to help your Toddlers and preschoolers cope:**

Children in this age group understand death as a move to another place, but they don't understand that the person is gone forever.

Your child might ask if they can visit the person who died and when the person is coming back. They might ask the same questions over and over. This is their way of trying to understand what has happened.

Some of your child's old habits might return – for example, they might wet the bed or start waking at night.

You can **help your toddler or preschooler** by:

- trying to keep to a routine
- answering questions openly and honestly – for example, 'Aunty Nala died. She isn't coming back so we won't see her again'
- supporting, reassuring and comforting your child– for example, by giving your child a cuddle when they are sad
- being patient with repeated questions
- letting them know that it's OK to play, be happy and have fun gently reminding your child that they won't be seeing the loved one anymore, if you think your child believes the loved one is coming back telling your child's educators what has happened so that they can provide support.

- **Pocket money a must for children's development**

***More and more Australians are finding themselves in debt as times get tougher financially. Some of this is due to the economic climate but in some cases a lack of fiscal training in childhood is a contributing factor. Credit cards, loans and HP agreements make it easier than ever to accrue debt without really realising and getting out of it can be hard.***



According to the Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia (ITSA) the number of people taking out debt agreements has nearly doubled over the last decade. Pat Mesiti believes we could bring this number down significantly if we teach our kids how to manage money from a young age - starting with pocket money. "Kids need to learn early how money works and how to save, spend and share it. A healthy respect for money and an understanding of how to control it is one of the best gifts you can give your child for the rest of their life." he says.

Here are Pat's chief reasons for starting pocket money with your kids, even from as young as four years old:

1. **It creates a habit for them so they create a positive money story for themselves.** While children are young they are extremely inquisitive and open, so they will build a positive relationship with money if you teach them to. If you can build confidence in their ability to make money they believe from a very young age that they can pursue all their dreams and aspirations and live a prosperous life.
2. **It teaches a child how to share and be generous with other people.** If you train kids from young that they should always share part of what they earn with others, you are setting them up to be a good, kind person as they go out into the big wide world.
3. **It teaches children the basics of investing and saving.** Children soon figure out how it all works, without you even needing to explain. "I do jobs for Mum and Dad, they pay me pocket money which I can spend immediately or save up to buy something bigger I really want." Great start to fiscal responsibility which is hopefully ingrained by the time they work out what a credit card is! **Jane King** [www.parentingaustralia.com.au](http://www.parentingaustralia.com.au)

# INDIGENOUS RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

- **Gotta Go!**

Getting children to school is the Australian Government's number one priority for Indigenous people. That's because going to school and being at school every day gives every child the best chance for a good start in life.



Through the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy (RSAS), the Australian Government is engaging local people in 40 priority communities to make sure every child goes to school, every day.

Over the years, communities have found unique and interesting ways to encourage Indigenous kids to attend school, including using art, graphic design, dance, comedy, and music and culture.

One such example is Legendary frontman of the Warumpi Band, George Rurrumbu Burrarawanga, a Yolngu man from Elcho Island in Arnhem Land. George has left a lasting legacy for kids in the Northern Territory through an animation and music video called Gotta Go.

Gotta Go was produced to encourage school attendance among local youth and get them excited about going to school. It was written by George, an icon of Aboriginal rock music who passed away in 2007, and his colleague Michael Hohnen.

“Gotta Go is a music animation that puts the call out to everyone that school is very important, school is how people in remote communities can get ahead,” Mark said.

“He was passionate about education, he was in that generation where everyone attended school and came out with a pretty good education,” Mark said. “He used to get really cranky when he saw kids running around a “So he was very passionate about education and essentially he and Michael sat down and wrote the text and the song to the animation and they are his very strong ideas that are in the song.”

**[www.Indigenous.gov.au](http://www.Indigenous.gov.au)**

- **Early childhood education and care services support culture**

[Early Childhood Australia](#) has recently published two case study resources on valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

The '[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in early childhood education and care](#)' resources examine why it is important to value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures within ECEC services.

Through case studies, the resources show how services can promote, respect and embed culture in their learning and care programs.

The resources have been developed to support the National Quality Standard (NQS) principles, and to promote programs and services that help children learn about the history, culture and lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/news-events/fx-view-article.cfm?loadref=32&id=1249>



## ***Entertainment for Educators.....***

**At the  
Movies**

### **Wadjda (PG)**



The film's eponymous lead character is a sweet and street-savvy 10-year-old who lives with her mother in the suburbs of the Saudi capital, Riyadh. She is still young enough to be able to freely explore the streets between her home and school and hang out with her friend, Abdullah. He chases her and steals her lunch, but the contest is unfair, because he has something she cannot have: a bicycle.

Bicycles are taboo for females. Even Wadjda's comparatively liberal mother fears a bicycle might compromise her daughter's virginity. But Wadjda wants to race Abdullah and win, so when she sees a green bike for sale, she plots and schemes to raise the money.

### **Half of a Yellow Sun (M)**

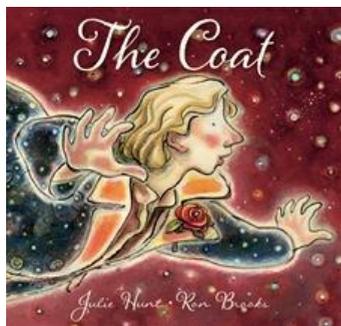
It is 1960 in Lagos. Nigeria has just declared its independence from Britain and Olanna (Thandie Newton) and her sister, Kainene (Anika Noni Rose), daughters of one of the country's richest businessmen, are about to join the celebrations. The outbreak of civil war changes everything and the film finally comes into its own. Old newsreel footage is used to streamline the exposition, but once the fighting begins, the causes of the war and their complexities cease to matter. You are swept along by Olanna and Odenigbo's efforts to keep one step ahead of the troops and the bombs.

Any sense of the film's datedness is also shaken off as the ferocious tribalism at the centre of the conflict finds its parallels in today's African wars.

## Books

### Winner, 2013 CBCA Awards - Picture Books Category

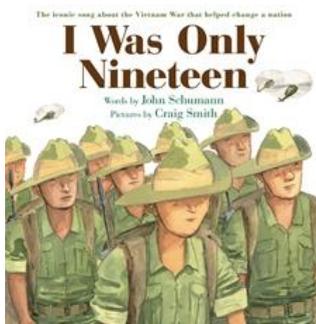
---



The Coat stood in a paddock at the end of a row of strawberries. It was buttoned up tight and stuffed full of straw and it was angry. 'What a waste of me!' it yelled. Then along came a man. 'I could do with a coat like that,' the man said. Together, swooping and swinging, they travelled to the Cafe Delitzia, and had the night of their lives.

**Julie Hunt and Ron Brooks.**

### I Was Only Nineteen



A powerful and moving picture book about the Vietnam War based on the unforgettable song.

*'Townsville lined the footpath as we marched down to the quay. This clipping from the paper shows us young and strong and clean. And there's me in my slouch hat, with my SLR and greens. God help me, I was only nineteen.'*

John Schumann's unforgettable lyrics about the Vietnam War are etched in our memories and into our history books. Now they've been warmly brought to life by one of Australia's best-loved illustrators.

**John Schumann and Craig Smith**

## Phone Apps



## Old Macdonald had a farm

For phone/ipad, designed for children with hearing or language impairment.

Designed by Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children. \$0.99

## My Child's eHealth Record

**iPhone, iPod, iPad and Android** - Parents or representatives who have registered their child under the age of 14 for an eHealth record can view a range of information, such as growth charts and reminders about health checks and immunisations.

Australian Government, Department of Health. Free.

## T.V.

**Brain Games**, Tuesday at 7.30pm National Geographic  
**C31**, Sundays, a variety of shows from other countries Eg. Sri Lanka, Vietnam

**The Checkout**, Thursdays, ABC1, 8pm., exposes bizarre claims and marketing for products and services.

**The Gods of Wheat street**, Saturday 8.30pm ABC

# *What's on Around Us.....*



## **May 15 -21 National Families Week**

National Families Week is a time to celebrate with your immediate family, make contact with your extended family and friends and share in the enjoyment of family activities within the wider community. It is a time to celebrate the meaning of family and to make the most of family time.

[www.familiesaustralia.org.au/familiesweek/index.htm](http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/familiesweek/index.htm)

## **August 4**

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day

***Kids in Culture — Strong, Proud, Resilient.***

This aim of this year's theme is to:

- celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their strengths and their connections to culture
- draw attention to the wellbeing and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and highlight the crucial role that culture plays in keeping children safe. [childrensday@snaicc.org.au](mailto:childrensday@snaicc.org.au)

## **May through to December**

Rock-A-Bye Baby Music Sessions – City of Yarra

Fitzroy Town Hall at 11am.

[www.yarracityarts.com.au](http://www.yarracityarts.com.au)

## **September 4 -7**

ECA national conference, Melbourne *'Season of change'*

[www.econference.com.au](http://www.econference.com.au)



# *Some Internet sites for recent news and research in the Field of Early Education*

- **Young Children's Play Fighting and Use of War Toys**

**JENNIFER L. HART, MEd and MICHELLE T. TANNOCK, PhD**

## **Introduction**

Adults often perceive young children's play fighting and use of war toys as violent or aggressive behaviour rather than beneficial to their development. Movies (e.g., Star Wars), books (e.g., Harry Potter), national figures (e.g. military forces), community helpers (e.g., police officers), professional sports (e.g., rugby) and commercial toys (e.g., Nerf guns) influence young children's desire to engage in such play. In spite of that, educational programs often either discourage or ban this controversial form of play resulting in contrasting societal messaging for young children related to the appropriateness of play fighting and war toys. For example, fencing, an international sport, where those who excel are awarded medals, features three types of bladed weapons manoeuvred in actions representative of fighting. Further, police officers use stun guns, firearms, and tear gas, yet are often recognized as instrumental for any society seeking to protect citizens. A closer look at the characteristics of children's play fighting and use of war toys will indicate that the behaviour is voluntary, choreographed, enjoyable and usually proceeds with caution and care.

## **Subject**

Parents and educators struggle with the appropriateness of young children's play fighting, and interest in war toys (e.g., guns, swords, bombs, light sabers and blasters) in home and school settings. Play fighting with symbolic weapons or war toys is a form of socio-dramatic play predominantly observed amongst boys ages three to six years. Play fighting is defined as verbally and physically cooperative play behaviour involving at least two children, where all participants enjoyably and voluntarily engage in reciprocal role-playing that includes aggressive make-believe themes, actions, and words; yet lacks intent to harm either emotionally or physically.

## **Problems**

Educators are pressured to disregard the benefits of aggressive socio-dramatic play resulting in prohibition of various forms of the play, particularly play fighting<sup>4,9</sup> and engagement with war toys. However, the elimination of play fighting and war toys by parents and educators may have a significant

impact on young children's development. Research suggests that the optimal education and development of young children, particularly boys, is not being met when playful aggressive tendencies are forbidden. Further, educational programs that restrict play types may foster play deficits, which inadvertently will leave children unprepared for future experiences. While educators are often uncomfortable with play fighting and with war toys, it can be argued that the omission of these forms of play in early childhood programs limits opportunities for development of social, emotional, physical, cognitive and communicative abilities in young children.



- **PRC report to Productivity Commission makes recommendations on early childhood learning**

The Parenting Research Centre has made recommendations to the Australian Government Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning. Our recommendations focus on improvements to parenting support, advising that outcomes for children could be significantly improved by an early childhood sector that also extends a positive influence to the early home learning environment and engages and supports parents more effectively.

**Our Early Home Learning Study** has helped inform these recommendations. Recommendations were influenced by our recent analysis of the impact of poor quality jobs on parent mental health and child outcomes and the implications for parent support, based on research data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children research project.

The submission focuses on the potential of early childhood education and care services to optimise children's early learning and development – in particular, looking at ways to improve outcomes for children vulnerable to poor developmental outcomes.

Six broad recommendations have been made to the Inquiry:

- Build capacity for parenting and parent support to families and children who are vulnerable to poor developmental outcomes.
- Develop worker skills in engaging parents.
- Increase the positive impact of services on the home learning environment with strategies such as modelling and coaching.
- Embed online information supports into early childhood services.

- Increase workplace flexibility, decrease workplace stress, support employers to have positive and constructive conversations with employees about work-family balance, plus provide access to affordable high quality childcare.
- Access ‘parent voices’ on early childhood services through Raising Children Network (raisingchildren.net.au) parent forums.

## ● **Childhood Trauma**

We have just released a new report (March 2014) on the evidence of prevention and treatment of childhood trauma: *Approaches targeting outcomes for children exposed to trauma arising from abuse and neglect*. The report summarises the international evidence base for approaches to supporting children who are exposed to trauma associated with child abuse and neglect. It also explores implications for Australian policy makers, services and professionals aiming to meet the needs of these children. The report was written in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health at the University of Melbourne and funded by the Australian Government.

[www.parentingrc.org.au](http://www.parentingrc.org.au)

## ● **Children’s Health and Development**

Centre for Community Child Health

- Early literacy

Did you know that one in five Australian children start school behind in language and communication? Let’s Read have launched new eLearning packages for early childhood educators to help kids develop a solid language and communication foundation that can set them up for life.

Let’s Read online professional development helps to:

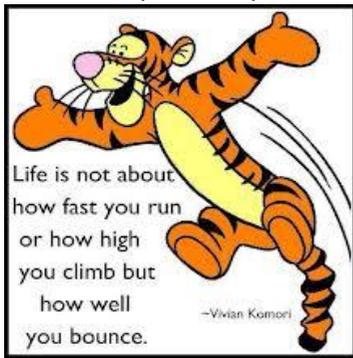
- foster emergent literacy with children—from babies to pre-school age
- create environments and experiences that support language and literacy growth
- encourage families to share books, songs and nursery rhymes with their children
- address features of the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard.

*Let’s Read is a national early literacy initiative promoting reading with children from birth to five years. Let’s Read was developed by the Centre for*

*Community Child Health at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital. The Australian Government is working in partnership with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Smith Family to deliver Let's Read.*

## • THE AGE NEWSPAPER

There's now a fourth R in education: Resilience.



In the past few years, there has been an exponential growth in social and emotional learning in Australian schools. What has been a major educational trend in the US for more than a decade is starting to take off here as emerging research shows aggression, anxiety and stress can be reduced through emotional literacy programs. In part, the push is in response to concern about alarming rates of mental health problems,

bullying and youth suicide. But there is also evidence that children who are in touch with their feelings perform better academically. While once, IQ was seen as the No.1 predictor of life success, many educators now believe EI (emotional intelligence) is equally, if not more, important. While some might label this “touchy-feely” New Age learning, intuitively, a calm, contented, well-supported child is better equipped to learn than one who feels agitated or socially isolated and is unable to express it. Calming exercises – such as deep breathing, a six-second pause, or even laughter – can cause physiological changes in the body that help change mood. Stress hormones dissipate, the heart rate slows and the blood is oxygenated.

There is evidence that practised regularly these exercises cause changes in the brain, boosting traits such as patience, optimism and even empathy. “As soon as you ask a child to verbalise their emotion, the child accesses the brain’s prefrontal cortex, which is the part they use for language and to process what’s happening. It takes them out of their amygdala, the lower region of their brain, which is responsible for those strong emotional reactions, and it helps them to calm down because it controls their impulses,” says Associate Professor Lea Waters, a psychologist and director of the Masters in School Leadership at the University of Melbourne, who

believes emotional literacy should be a cornerstone of teacher training at universities.

Beyond the classroom, there is hope that if children are taught skills such as impulse control, conflict resolution and resilience from an early age, we will ultimately have fewer relationship breakdowns and a more cohesive, compassionate society.

“This is more urgent than for previous generations. We live in a much more fast-paced society; there are more kids coming from broken homes; they’re bombarded with technology and aggressive marketing telling them they have to look and act a certain way in order to be accepted. We need to help them cope with these demands,” Professor Waters says.

In the public system, numerous social and emotional learning programs are being rolled out. The biggest is the federal Department of Health-funded Kids Matter, which started in 2006 and is now being taught in more than 1600 primary schools, with a target of 2000 by June this year. Response Ability and Mind Matters are among the programs being taught in secondary schools.

While educators and psychologists have offered broad support for the approach, there are some concerns – chiefly that teachers, already overburdened with huge workloads and pressure to deliver academic results – are being asked to become proxy counsellors, taking on a social guidance role that arguably parents should perform.

Psychologist Andrew Fuller, director of Resilient Youth Australia – a charity promoting young people’s mental health – and one of the architects of the Kids Matter program – believes emotional literacy is the key to a more peaceful community. If more young people learnt to recognise and regulate their feelings, we would see a reduction in violence and binge drinking – problems often fuelled by poor impulse control or a desire to mask anxiety.

[www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au)

Well worth a look.



- **Preschool must be free for all** by Rachel Browne

Australia needs to introduce free preschool places for all children if it is to compete economically with other developed countries, according to a leading international expert in early childhood education.

Research by Edward Melhuish from Oxford University has also found that a quality preschool education has a bigger influence on a child's literacy and numeracy skills at ages 11 and 14 than their primary school education - but a mother's education level was the most significant factor.

Professor Melhuish urged the government to follow Britain, Scandinavia and many European countries in offering free early education in a submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into childcare and early childhood learning.

He warned the inquiry that Australia risked falling behind unless the government invested more in the pre-primary years.

When Britain introduced fully government-funded preschool for every child for 15 hours a week 10 years ago, it raised the cost of early education from 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product to 1 per cent. By comparison, Australia only invests 0.3 per cent of GDP on early education, ranking it at 32 out of 34 OECD countries.

The cost of a free program could be offset by an increase in female workforce participation, the creation of a better-educated workforce and a reduction in welfare dependence.

Chief executive of the Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW), Leanne Gibbs, said the organisation supported the proposal for free preschool but believed it would meet political opposition due to the expense.

"It should be outside of the political cycle and in the social policy agenda that all governments agree to," she said. "It's the only way we are going to get ahead in early childhood and in the future."

The previous federal government committed \$1 billion to subsidising preschool places under its universal access scheme but the funding runs out at the end of this year and there is no confirmation about whether it will be renewed.



## GENERAL ARTICLES OF INTEREST

- **We don't need more, we need different**

### **Working across organisational boundaries to solve 21st century problems by *Andrew Hollo***

If you're a strategist, a facilitator or collaboration partner, this paper will help you start a range of discussions with your partners, about what you should and shouldn't tackle, about how much 'value add' is enough, and whether what you're proposing should be done by you, or by others.

Most importantly, it will help you respond when other people say that what's needed is more money, more people, more innovation or more change. Of course these things are always useful. But what we need most of all is different thinking and different types of action.

I observed three things about how people — eventually — come to agreement and clarity.

#### **People invested in a solution aren't the best people to run the dialogue**

They are holders of power and others aren't comfortable tilting that balance. They can't accurately gauge the balance of opinion that supports or opposes. They often become unhelpfully task-focused, pushing the group to conform to a pre-determined outcome.

#### **People enmeshed in old ways of problem solving are those who most need new thinking tools**

People sometimes think they know 'the answer'. They do not. At best, they have *an* answer.

Someone with an independent view can provide a new frame, even without technical or specialist knowledge of the area concerned, because they understand *how to think about thinking* on the issue.

#### **Skills needed are neither conceptual nor interpersonal, they're both**

People often need to be shown that the major skill is not being able to solve a problem, but being able to ask the most potent questions. The use of stories or visuals can help immeasurably in this regard. Experience helps a facilitator hone in on the most important elements within a range of views, even if they're conflicting. Because solving the increasingly complex challenges of this century will require not just integrators, but multi-taskers who can balance several contradictory ideas in their heads at the same time, working on content while they're running a process, designing structures and systems while they're not sure of the outcome, and thinking about the outcome while they're uncertain about how to get there.



## **VICTORIAN EDUCATION EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

*Finalists for the 2013 Victorian Education Excellence Awards will be announced on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

### **THE EARLY YEARS AWARDS- 2013** *Winners were awarded in Children's week*

- **Mahogany Rise Child and Family Centre –Frankston City Council**  
‘A Journey to Access and Inclusion’
- **Northern Area Mental Health Service**  
‘Our Time’ is a supported playgroup developed in partnership by the Northern Area Mental Health Service and Anglicare Victoria Preston
- **The Cities of Ballarat, Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Melton, and Wyndham-**  
The Engaging Children in Decision Making Guide gives policy makers and services the tools for including children’s views in their planning.

*For more information about applying for the Early Years Awards 2013, please phone (03) 9651 3415 or email [beststart@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:beststart@edumail.vic.gov.au)*

# SUSTAINABILITY IN THE EARLY YEARS



# NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS UPDATE

- **Review of the Australian Curriculum, March 2014**

- Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has made a submission to the Commonwealth Government's Review of the Australian Curriculum. [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

- **Update on Serious Incidents in your service**

*If an incident occurs in my service, how do I decide if it is serious and if so, what should I do?*

The intent of the National Regulations is to ensure that regulatory authorities are notified of incidents that seriously compromise the health, safety or wellbeing of children. The regulatory authority is then able to take appropriate action.

The National Regulations were amended on 1 September 2013 to clarify the definition of serious . The definition of a serious incident from the [Education and Care Services National Regulations](#) is Regulation 12:

Examples are:

- Any incident involving serious injury or trauma to, or illness of, a child while being educated and cared for by an education and care service,
- e.g whooping cough, broken limb, anaphylaxis reaction
- any circumstance where a child being educated and cared for by an education and care service
- appears to be missing or cannot be accounted for or
- Appears to have been taken or removed from the education and care service premises in a manner that contravenes these regulations

**You need to notify the regulatory authority within 24 hours of becoming aware of a serious incident.**

Complete the form [SI01 Notification of Serious Incident](#) and send it to your regulatory authority.

- **Notice of your A & R visit and your QIP**

As of April 2014, a service will be selected for assessment and rating and notified of the four week period in which their service visit will occur. The regulatory authority will also ask the approved provider to submit their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) within three weeks. This gives

approved providers an opportunity to ensure the QIP for the service is up to date. The regulatory authority will give the approved provider a minimum of five working days' notice of the visit date.

[www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au)



## M e d i a   R e l e a s e

- ***Belonging, Being and Becoming*** – *The Early Years Framework* (EYLF) has been translated and is now available in ten languages. The EYLF has been translated into Dinka, Arabic, Vietnamese, Turkish, Thai, Spanish, Somali, Korean, Hindi and Simplified Chinese
- **Former Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

On 18 September 2013 the Department of Education and the Department of Employment was created out of the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

- **Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning**

On 17 November 2013, the Prime Minister, Treasurer and the Assistant Minister for Education announced the establishment of an inquiry. This is the first public examination of the area since the 1990s.

The Inquiry will look into future options for child care and early childhood learning, with a focus on developing a system that delivers flexible, accessible and affordable quality child care.

The Inquiry will conduct public hearings and invite submissions shortly.

The Commission expects to deliver its final report to the Australian Government by 31 October 2014.

[www.education.gov.au](http://www.education.gov.au)



## **OBITUARIES**

**Margot Morrison**

**Ellaine Allen**

**Heather Habel**

**Brenda Dorrat**

**Joan Rose**



**We remember and acknowledge all those  
Educators who have passed away during the  
2013 - 2014 year.**



**Rest In Peace**

## 2014 AUDAX

We are offering AUDAX as an electronic Journal to our members.

For those members who have supplied an email address to us, AUDAX will be sent to that address in 2014.

**If you prefer to receive a hard copy instead, you will need to email us at [admin@agecs.org.au](mailto:admin@agecs.org.au)**

*For all other members, you will still receive your hard copy through the postal service.*

**AGECS Members – Where are you?**  
Moved house? Changed email address?

Login to the website at [www.agecs.org.au](http://www.agecs.org.au) to update your details, email us, or phone 03 8344 0990 and leave a message.

**ONCE ONLY MEMBERSHIP FEE**  
**(INCLUDING AUDAX subscription)**

Full membership **once only** fee: \$50.00

No annual fee

Join via the AGECS website at [www.agecs.org.au](http://www.agecs.org.au)  
Please send correspondence and articles for inclusion to:  
PO Box 12163, Franklin Street, Melbourne VIC 8006 or email to  
[admin@agecs.org.au](mailto:admin@agecs.org.au)

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.



The Association of Graduates  
in Early Childhood Studies

## Spread the word...

Join our community of early childhood professionals with a breadth of knowledge that will provide inspiration and encouragement throughout your career

Visit the website  
for online member  
resources



Enjoy  
instructive, entertaining,  
networking events



*Find out more about the charitable grants distributed annually through the Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies*

[www.agecs.org.au](http://www.agecs.org.au)

The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies (AGECS) is a membership-based, not-for-profit organisation providing professional development and networking opportunities for members.