The winds of change are blowing through the early childhood sector. In fact, some would call it a hurricane. After a lengthy consultation process, the Council of Australia Governments (COAG) is set to deliver its decisions on major early childhood reforms.

’T he pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; and the realist adjusts the sails.’

Never has this phrase been more true! We are catching the wind in our sails and weathering the storm.

The sector has worked steadily on its submissions on the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement (RIS), and the Government has agreed that improving ratios and qualifications should be part of the changes.

As Rattler goes to press the Commonwealth and state governments have announced that every licensed centre in NSW employing an early childhood teacher (ECT), who has a primary contact teaching role in the design, development and implementation of the developmental educational child program, will receive a subsidy for that teacher from the 2011/12 financial year funded from the universal access funding.

Getting inside the minds of politicians is something of a theme in the Spring edition of Rattler—Kathryn Bown shares research that lifts the lid on the political decision-making process and looks at what lobby groups can do to influence early childhood policy.

Bown’s research reveals that a more co-ordinated approach to advocacy is required if we are to achieve widespread political recognition. A relationship with the sector’s new Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, Kate Ellis, will help achieve this. Turn to page 29 where she discusses the challenges of her new portfolio.

Indeed, one of the first tasks Minister Ellis will face is the rollout of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The framework is explored in detail in an article entitled ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’ on page 16.

Rattler readers will be aware that in the last edition we focused heavily on the dire state of affairs of NSW preschool perimeter fencing.

In this jam-packed edition of Rattler, we also update you on the universal access campaign, explore the benefits of bilingual education, and discuss the design merits of preschool perimeter fencing.

Happy reading!

Carol Lynbery
Chief Executive Officer
Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd. (NSW)
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ABC SELL-OFF CONTINUES

The Commonwealth Government has taken ‘a hands-off’ approach to the sale of the remaining 715 ABC Learning Centres, which will now be sold to the highest bidder.

In early September, newspaper advertisements called for expressions of interest from potential buyers. The first round of 241 unprofitable centres was sold to 75 different operators in March, with the process closely monitored by Government.

As the second round of selling gets under way, LHMU Assistant National Secretary Sue Lines has said it is vital for staff and families to have one good operator take over all the centres to ensure continuity of care.

A single quality operator is the most effective way of ensuring the best outcome for both families and workers, she said.

‘Unfortunately, many of the small operators who bought ABC2 centres are finding it difficult to provide the quality care required and many childcare professionals at these centres have had to fight to retain their basic entitlements.

‘That’s why it’s in the best interests of workers and families to have a speedy sale. A single operator committed to quality would go a long way to improving occupancy at the centres,’ Ms Lines said.

WHOOPING COUGH ALERT

Childcare workers in New South Wales are being urged to get vaccinated against whooping cough as part of a national campaign to protect infants.

The campaign comes in the wake of an outbreak that has seen a threefold increase in infections and claimed the lives of three children in Australia.

The campaign will raise public awareness about the need for boosters for new parents and childcare workers and counteract the spread of misinformation about immunisation.

For more information visit www.health.nsw.gov.au

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Egyptian Treasures: Art of the Pharaohs, a new exhibition at the Australian Museum, is bound to capture the imaginations of little budding Egyptologists and history buffs at your children’s service.

Staff and children can journey back in time to marvel at 2,500-year-old mummies, come face to face with towering limestone statues, learn to read hieroglyphics and explore the mystery of Egyptian jewellery, pottery and books of stone.

School holiday workshops include fun activities like ‘Wrap your own Mummy’ and ‘Write like an Egyptian’. Featuring antiquities from Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum, the show is open from 13 September until 6 December – So be quick!

HYGIENE HYPOTHESIS DEBUNKED

A Dutch study in the September 2009 American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine shows that children in childcare from an early age are not protected against asthma or the development of allergies.

The popular theory is that childcare exposes young children to more infection, helping the immune system mature and therefore preventing the development of asthma and allergy later in life. However, the study, which followed 3,963 children during the first eight years of life found there is no protective effect.

The study found that children with early day care had more wheezing in the first years of life, but less wheezing and steroid use between four and eight years of age. At the age of eight years, early day care was not protective for asthma symptoms, allergic sensitisation or airway hyper-responsiveness.

Interestingly, the transient reduction in airway symptoms between age four and eight years was only observed in children without older siblings.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to Werris Creek Preschool, profiled in our last issue of Rattler ‘Up the Creek Without a Paddle’, Winter 2009. The Department of Community Services (DoCS) has told the preschool to expect a funding increase of around $40,000 with a one-off payment of $9,910. The preschool was actually anticipating a decrease in funding in a few years by up to $50,000 — so this is fantastic news!
The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Childhood Education and Care Survey (CEaCS) is now out. It is the first national survey to measure attendance in both preschools and long day care centres.

One of the key statistics from the national survey is that attendance in formal childcare has risen from 17 per cent of children aged 0–11 years in 1999 to 22 per cent in 2008, while usage of informal care fell from 37 per cent to 34 per cent over the same period.

For the complete survey, visit www.abs.gov.au

PARACHUTE IN AND WIN WIN WIN!

Thanks to Educational Experience, one lucky Rattler reader could win this fantastic Kinder Parachute.

Parachute play is popular in early childhood settings—it can be used to promote teamwork and group awareness. Suitable for indoor and outdoor fun, parachutes can reinforce sharing and turn-taking and help develop children’s gross motor skills.

Machine washable, this brightly-coloured, lightweight, nylon parachute will withstand rugged use by children. It measures 3.65 metres and features 24 handles around the edge. The prize also includes the Parachute Play second edition book, which comes packed with more than 100 parachute games and ideas.

To win, simply tell us in 50 words or less how you would engage children in parachute play at your children’s service. Send your entries by 31 October 2009 to rebeccaclifford@ccccnsw.org.au

Meanwhile, congratulations to Kendall Community Preschool! This service won our previous competition by describing how they help keep the planet green. Sustainable practices at the service include the creation of a bush tucker garden, vegetable patch, orchard, chook pen, installation of a solar hot water system and water tanks and the introduction of a waste-free lunch program.
S

ea eagles fly overhead and bellbirds sing in the distance. Views stretch across the lake to the sea and to Gulaga Mountain, a place of spiritual significance to Yuin People.

The setting for Little Yuin Preschool is one of sheer natural beauty. It is framed by bushland and located within the small, remote Indigenous community of Wallaga Lake Koori Village, south of Narooma and north of Bermagui on the far south coast of New South Wales.

Once an Aboriginal reserve, the community is home to about 200 Koori people. There are no shops, only the community hall, Lands Council and Little Yuin Preschool.

Within the same building as the preschool is a new family centre, recently opened by NSW Community Services Minister, Linda Burney.

The NSW Government provided $480,000 to establish the family centre, including funding for a part-time co-ordinator and it is hoped the centre will offer parenting groups, medical services such as early childhood screenings and educational and therapy programs.

‘This centre is sure to become a community hub,’ says Minister Burney. ‘It will be especially important for families who may be socially isolated or disadvantaged.’

Like many Indigenous communities, Wallaga Lake struggles with issues such as high unemployment.

But Little Yuin Director Lea Sutherland says the community already has great respect for the preschool and family centre, which, together, form an important meeting place.

‘When you drive through this community, the contrast is apparent. You pull up in front of Little Yuin and it’s like a little oasis in the community,’ says Sutherland.

‘There’s so much respect for the preschool and during the building of the family centre, not one thing was broken or vandalised, not a thing was stolen, everything was left. It’s a pretty special place within the community.’

For a community that is run on the support of extended family, the preschool and family centre provide the perfect mix.

‘There are classes for people in the community and the women are coming down and just having a cuppa and doing pottery, which is really healing for them—because many still bear the scars of the Stolen Generations.

The family centre is having a lovely flow-on effect, where Grandmothers and Aunts might be doing a bit of pottery next door and mums are popping their head in to see how their children are doing.’

Meanwhile, many of the children at the preschool are siblings and cousins, and Sutherland says the children thrive in such familiar and welcoming surrounds.

‘It seems the more cousins and friends they have around them the better they do… We’ve seen them become very, very close to other children and they just blossom. It’s great.’

This sense of family involvement was extended to the men in the community last Fathers Day, when Little Yuin held a barbeque in their honour, which doubled as the first community performance for a local dance troupe.

‘There was a group of boys in the community who had formed their own dance troupe, which just blew us away, for a community that has had so many ups and downs we were so impressed by the initiative of the boys,’ says Sutherland.

‘One local father had taught his son traditional music and dancing and his son went to school...
and started teaching the other boys. We asked the school if the dance troupe could come and dance for their community for the first time.

‘A couple of the boys got into trouble that week at school, but it all came together on the day and the sun shone and all of the community turned out. It was really very special.’

Sutherland started with Little Yuin as an outreach worker after the preschool re-opened in 2006. She took over the director’s role in 2007. The service had closed down due to governance issues and had its funding withdrawn from the NSW Department of Community Services (Little Yuin also receives funding from Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations).

It is believed that funding was offered to at least one preschool in a nearby town to provide places for the Indigenous children from the community. However, the community stood strong and rallied for its doors to re-open.

‘The community said “No, we have our own preschool and we’re not going to send our children anywhere else”,’ says Sutherland.

‘They just fought to get the preschool up and running and they got a new committee and they did all their governance training. They jumped through all the hoops they needed to jump through to show the funding bodies they could do the right thing. And since then, the preschool’s gone from strength to strength.’

‘We now have a wonderful working relationship with our funding bodies. They offer us so much encouragement and support—it’s great.’

Sutherland and the committee have worked hard to publicise the preschool in local media—and its enhanced reputation is confirmed by increased numbers and the fact that two non-Indigenous children recently started there.

‘One little boy lives in Tilba and the other little fellow lives at Beauty Point, so the good thing is they’re going to their closest preschool. It’s actually being seen as an option, whereas I don’t think it ever would have been in the past.’

A volunteer program recently introduced at the preschool is already providing results. The YESS (Youth Education Support Services) volunteer group was formed by local community member Frances Perkins to help primary and high school students in the region. Sutherland convinced them about the benefits of early childhood education and in May, some of the volunteers agreed to attend Little Yuin.

‘It’s been beautiful,’ she says. ‘We have one to two volunteers most days in our morning and afternoon session and they station themselves on the lounge so they’re there just to read or help with the puzzle table for me.

‘It’s wonderful to have that support—someone who’s sitting there saying “I’m here, I can read you a story”. Many of the volunteers have had teaching experience which is an added bonus.’

With its views of the lake and the bush, the outdoor space at Little Yuin is a children’s paradise. It includes a swing set, a substantial vegetable garden (funded by the Mumbulla Foundation) and a big strawberry patch is planned—all the children love strawberries.

The strawberry patch is being funded by Gunawirra, as part of the Eingana Garden Project, which works with Coles and Landcare on projects for selected Aboriginal preschools.

‘We even have Uncle Gary’s free range chickens roaming the outskirts and keeping the children company,’ says Sutherland. ‘We often have to shoo the chickens off our bus.’

The indoor space offers a quiet room and a

‘There are classes [here] for people in the community and the women come down and just have a cuppa, which is really healing for them—because many still bear the scars of the Stolen Generations.’—Lea Sutherland, Director

— Lea Sutherland, Director
large play area, where Sutherland, alongside her two assistants, offers a stimulating program which has an emphasis on Koori culture.

Since starting with Little Yuin, after a 20-year career in Sydney, Sutherland says she has enjoyed seeing the community come into its own.

‘There is the misconception in the wider community that non-Indigenous people would not be welcome here but this has certainly not been the case. For the first week, I was wondering what I could possibly hope to achieve, I was also fearful that I wouldn’t be accepted into the community.

‘Thankfully, it’s been really rewarding. The preschool’s thriving and within the community there have been a lot of improvements in the short period of time that I’ve been there.

‘Personally, I’ve never felt threatened at all. I’ve just been really welcomed into the community and it’s a great place to work… I love it.’

Notes
1. Little Yuin is 20 years old and is run by a volunteer Aboriginal management committee. Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council is the land owner.
2. Gunawirra is a not-for-profit organisation providing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from birth to adulthood.

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Above, from left: Little Yuin committee member ‘Aunty’ Shirley Foster pictured with Minister for Community Services Linda Burney at the opening of the Little Yuin family centre in April; children at work and at play; with its views of the lake and the bush, the outdoor space at Little Yuin is a children’s paradise.
On 4 April 2009, early childhood professionals around the world were saddened to hear that Jim Greenman had passed away after his battle with multiple myeloma. Leanne Gibbs writes about the inspiration of Jim Greenman and urges all early childhood professionals to dip into the wonderful legacy he has left us.
Jim Greenman devoted his over 30-year career to early childhood development and education. His professional life encompassed the roles of administrator, researcher, college instructor, speaker and consultant. Above all, he was an advocate for children and for those who have made children the focus of their lives.

It was his good sense and straight talking that really appealed to me, as a young early childhood professional and director of a very dilapidated neighbourhood children’s centre. Our team was constantly engaged in the challenge of creating wonderful learning environments and picking up Jim’s book Caring Spaces, Learning Places, made us look at the world differently.

The concepts of ‘loose parts’, ‘teachable moments’, ‘the living changing system of child care’ were explained in ways that allowed whole teams to have animated conversations on how things happened in spaces for children.

He was a gifted presenter and communicated his ideas using poetry, song lyrics, popular culture and some very powerful visuals. Jim’s presentations had the capacity to make awe-inspiring changes to people’s views and practices.

His capacity to make people rethink their whole approach to early childhood settings was founded in a complete dedication to quality and excellence but with the pragmatism that comes with an absolute grasp of the realities of working in childcare.

Anne Stonehouse, prolific and respected early childhood author and consultant, worked in partnership with Jim and describes him as a close friend and a colleague. Together with Gigi Schweikert, they worked on the two versions of Prime Times, a Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddler Programs, presented many joint presentations on various topics at conferences, collaborated on the international edition of What Happened to MY World? and jointly authored articles in Child Care Information Exchange.

Anne first met Jim in 1985. She had admired his writing for years, particularly his capacity to straddle the breach between the realities of childcare and the ideal, and his use of humour, popular culture and the world outside of the early childhood field to express concepts.

Anne recalls his creative approach to delivering messages and one of her favourites was his message on environments for very young children: ‘Some infant toddler rooms must be like living in a Jimi Hendrix poster’.

When Jim passed away, Child Care Information Exchange created a place for online tributes. Anne is sure that beneath that façade of irreverence, Jim would have been deeply touched by the honouring of his memory by some of the most respected voices and hardworking practitioners in the field.

Early years educator and author Paula Davey Zeece wrote: ‘I was deeply saddened to learn of Jim Greenman’s death. His work and his presence has been of tremendous importance to so many people in early childhood education, in his work as a child advocate, and in all the other places touched by his ideas, his energies, and his friendship.

The field has lost an inspiring colleague and an outstanding teacher. Children everywhere have lost a champion for their need and right to have nurturing places and beautiful spaces that are uniquely theirs’.

Margie Carter, author of Designs for Living and Learning also wrote a tribute: ‘Jim’s message about creating places for childhood has always kept me grounded in my work. His ideas and lyrical writing are needed more than ever in this time of standardising and commercialising childhood. His passing leaves a big hole in our hearts and our professional landscape.’

Above all, Jim was a visionary who had a unique and creative way of passing his message on and ensuring children are truly central to the issue of care and education. His legacy is his extensive writing and the thoughts and memories of those who were privileged to read his words, hear him speak and work with him.

Take some time to look back into Jim’s extraordinary body of work and reflect on his words… “There are thoughts here to play with, to sort and twist and store in the back of one’s mind” and in thinking about the world we inhabit with children… “Is this a good place for me to spend my time?” and “Is this a good place for me to spend my days with the children?”

A selection of Jim’s work and references
Children feel like they are part of the world if they can see beyond a fence. 1. Mia Mia Child and Family Study Centre, 2. (and inset) Summer Hills Children’s Centre, 3. A service on the North Shore, and 4. Earlwood Children’s Centre
In Scandinavian countries, the Forest Schools don’t have fences—children are allowed to roam nearby woods. Here in New South Wales, the size and style of a childcare centre’s perimeter fence is still one decision that’s left open to interpretation, as Katie Sutherland discovers.

High fence, short fence, one that allows children to see out, one that doesn’t allow people to see in? What sort of perimeter fence does your service have?

The NSW Children’s Services Regulation states ‘any part of the premises of a children’s service designated for outdoor play space must be fenced on all sides.’ This Regulation came into force on 30 September 2004.

The Regulation, however, does not stipulate how high a fence should be, only that it ‘must prevent children from scaling or crawling under or through it and must inhibit or impede intruders from entering the premises.’

According to the Department of Community Services (DoCS): ‘It is not simply the height of a fence that determines its safety and therefore whether it complies to the Regulation. Even a very high, for example 1.5 metre, wooden paling fence may not necessarily be safe and, therefore, compliant if the horizontal slats permit children to climb the fence’.

Despite the ambiguity of the Regulation, there appears to be a growing trend for childcare centres and public schools in New South Wales to erect two-metre high steel fences, usually black or dark green.

This has provoked some concern within the early childhood education sector that high fences not only make children feel enclosed, but also sends a message to society that young children should be sectioned off from the community.

Roberta DeSouza, the Director of Summer Hill Children’s Centre (commonly called Moonbie Street) says the decision about perimeter fencing is as much about aesthetics as it is about a service’s philosophy. Her service is set in the middle of an inner city suburb, next to a road, but has a small, see-through fence surrounding its play area.

‘We are very much a part of the Summer Hill community and there is a philosophy behind having a small fence,’ she says. ‘It is the children’s community out there and they need to feel a part of it. We want them to see outside and feel that they belong.

‘We want them to see people walking their dog, children on their way to school, cars driving past.'
We explain to the children that they can talk to friends, brothers and sisters, and neighbours through the fence. We just tell them not to tell strangers their names. It’s a good life lesson. And our philosophy is preparing children for life.’

She adds that the smaller fences help children to have a sense of space and freedom that they may not have at home, as many of the children live in terrace houses with small backyards.

Not far away is Rozelle Child Care Centre. Located within a park, but next to a couple of carparks, Rozelle was told to increase the height of its fence to 1.8 metres or risk losing its licence.

DoCS thought children could drag equipment to the fence and climb over. But at a cost of $15,000, Director Will Blomfeld says this imposed great financial pressure on the service.

He also feels the new fences were not entirely necessary as the situation was being managed by talking to children about road safety and the importance of staying on the centre premises. Additionally, the service employs a high ratio of staff to keep a close eye on the children in the playground.

‘As well as aesthetics, I think it also comes down to a service being able to demonstrate that it has policies and practices in place to manage the safety of children,’ says Blomfeld.

A DoCS representative says it is unlikely that a children’s service would have its license revoked purely for having a fence of inappropriate height—but it will take action if the Children’s Services Advisor (CSA) deems the situation ‘unsafe’. ‘If a fence or gate of a children’s service is found not to comply with the [Regulation], the service will be given the opportunity to fix the fence.

‘If unsatisfactory fencing impacts upon the safety of children, placing them at risk of harm, for example, children escape from the premises, DoCS will take enforcement action.’

A two-metre high steel fence was recently erected at Earlwood Children’s Centre after a child scaled the previous, smaller fence and wandered over to the park.

‘One child was enough to make us realise there was a risk,’ says Karen Roberts, Children’s Services Manager of Canterbury Council.

‘The fence was actually in a state of disrepair and after this incident we decided to fix the whole lot. It was a considered decision.’

Mia Mia Child and Family Centre offers children sweeping views through its perimeter fencing; 2 & 3. Director Will Blomfeld at Rozelle Child Care Centre was asked to raise the height of his centre’s fence or risk losing its licence; 4. Earlwood’s fenced play area.
situated within the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University, so there is no risk posed by a busy road and there are limited passers-by.

Director Wendy Shepherd agrees it is important children feel a part of their local surroundings. And in a service where aesthetics are a priority, the perimeter fences are no exception.

‘We’re lucky enough to be situated in a really lovely environment, but even if our service was next to a busy road, I’d create viewing platforms or bubbles [to look through] so children felt they were a part of the world.’

Shepherd and her team have used mixed media to create a fence that is subtle, yet interesting—allowing views across a gully of trees and a creek, bird life, nearby sports grounds and surrounding university buildings.

Wrought iron sculptures scatter the fence-line. One part of the fence is inspired by a child who used to bring sticks to school every day. Another area has a Balinese feel to it with flags blowing in the wind.

‘The idea is that the fences aren’t noticeable to children and blend into the circumstances of the building,’ says Shepherd.

‘Fences can send such a signal of an institution—or help a service to feel welcoming.

‘Of course, cost is the big factor—every childcare centre is built on a shoestring. But it’s still possible to be creative on a low budget.’
In the lead up to the 2007 federal election the Rudd-led Labor Opposition launched their election campaign on a platform of an ‘education revolution’. With the broad aim of improving Australia’s productivity, one aspect of this ambitious plan was to improve the quality of children’s early childhood experiences to ensure that all Australian children get the best start in life and learning.

Since coming to power, the Rudd government has announced a raft of early childhood reforms that have seen the announcement of a proposed National Quality Framework with agreed standards and a rating system that will combine current state and territory based regulations along with the national quality assurance system.

The stated intentions of the reforms is to ‘… focus on improving child outcomes and foster the health and wellbeing and productivity of our next generation’ (COAG, p.4). This clear focus on future productivity is one of the key drivers behind the reform agenda and is reflected in the EYLF through articulated expectations about what children should experience when they attend an early childhood setting.

The EYLF is a first for Australia—a national framework for early learning designed to guide educators in their curriculum decisions. Previously, each of the states and territories of Australia had their own approach to early childhood curriculum development. Some states have produced mandatory curriculum documents for use in preschools and kindergartens, others have resource documents that are used on a voluntary basis, while some states have not previously developed early childhood curriculum documents.

The EYLF is a national statement of commitment by all states and territories about the agreed principles and practices that underpin learning in the early years along with stated outcomes that early childhood services will use as a guide to support children’s learning. As part of the National Quality Framework and Standards, the intention is that early childhood settings will be required to show evidence of their use of the Framework in designing and delivering children’s learning opportunities.

The development of the EYLF began soon after the election of the Rudd government with a development of a background literature review undertaken by RMIT, Melbourne and a discussion paper developed by Monash University. Finally, a tender was awarded to a consortium of early childhood professionals led by Charles Sturt University to write the EYLF along with some supporting documents. From the outset the task was ambitious and the time frames tight. By comparison, a similar curriculum document in New Zealand, Te Whariki was developed over a six-year period (Carr & May, 2000).

As such the EYLF is really the beginning of much longer conversation that will take place across Australia over the coming years. Rather then viewing the document as the final word on curriculum, we encourage educators to use it as a reflective tool to continue discussions and debate about curriculum issues. It is, however, an important first step as it formally recognises the immense learning that takes place prior to full-time schooling and the significant role that educators play in making early childhood experiences relevant and meaningful.

Developed to cover the years from birth to five and the transition to full-time schooling,
the EYLF will be used by a wide range of early childhood settings including long day care, family day care, kindergartens and preschools, and occasional care.

‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’ were selected as the key framing devices to give emphasis to the uniqueness of learning in the early years. Importantly, these three concepts emphasise the complex nature of learning and the importance of viewing these aspects of a child’s life in balance. All three contribute to learning and this is a way of acknowledging that experiences should emphasise learning about belonging and being as much as they do about becoming. There can be a temptation to give prime focus to what is to come next and ensure that each child is well prepared for the next phase of their life.

Belonging reminds us of the importance of having a sense of connection and contribution—to family, friends, community and culture. Children learn about belonging as their experiences and contact with others expands over time. Being reminds us that children are active participants in life and learning. Their contributions change and grow over time but the importance of the here and now is acknowledged and their interests, questions and challenges contribute to the richness of curriculum. Becoming acknowledges the future and the potential within each child to grow in wisdom and skill. It challenges us to see each child’s potential and provide learning opportunities that extend and enrich children’s lives. All three aspects reflect the strength and capabilities of each child and reflect images of children as active agents and citizens in their own and others learning.

The EYLF presents three dimensions of curriculum—the principles that underpin curriculum decisions, the practices that guide our pedagogies and the learning outcomes that we expect for each child. Each dimension reflects contemporary understandings of how children learn and grow. While the terminology may be familiar, we encourage educators to take time to reflect on how each dimension is represented in their work and to enter into reflective conversations with colleagues to better understand how each aspect is understood and practiced.

Principles
These describe some of the most core aspects of educators’ values and thinking—those things that underpin curriculum decisions. Things that are often easy to talk about but offer great challenges and contradictions in practice—respect, relationships, partnerships, expectations and reflection require us to think deeply and urge us to want to understand more. They are aspects of our professionalism that can contribute to a thoughtful and responsive curriculum.

Practices
These reflect the ways that the curriculum is lived and experienced. Influenced by the principles, educators reflect the importance of play, responsiveness, integrated learning and cultural competence when they plan for children’s learning. They reflect their knowledge of child development along with other theoretical understandings of the importance of culture, community, power and equity when
they think about the best ways to encourage and promote learning opportunities. The practices highlight the important role of educators as active participants in children’s learning through shared attention to children’s experiences. It also acknowledges the importance of educators’ insights in assessing children’s progress and planning further learning.

Learning outcomes

These statements of intent provide a scaffold to guide curriculum decisions. They represent broad expectations for children’s learning. Used as a guide, educators are encouraged to use their knowledge of each child and the context of each setting to ensure that children’s learning is relevant, meaningful and interesting. Provision has been made for each setting to contribute their own examples of evidence of children’s learning that are culturally and contextually appropriate to each child and their setting.

The EYLF presents the early childhood sector with many opportunities. Formally recognising the importance of learning in the early years, it has the potential to raise the status of early childhood education and educators. It does not prescribe how educators must work nor does it limit possibilities for curriculum innovation. The EYLF intentionally provides many possibilities to approach working with young children through a range of theoretical understandings and in ways that suit the diverse contexts of our early childhood settings. There is scope within the document to use a range of curriculum approaches.

Of critical importance will be how educators use the document to promote reflection, thinking and encourage curriculum conversations. No document alone will change or improve practice.

The success of the EYLF will be partially influenced by how educators use and promote the document among families and the broader community. Primarily, this means realising the significance and complexity of children’s learning and using this knowledge to advocate and promote the importance of a qualified workforce. It is in this way the EYLF will be able to achieve its highest potential.

Jennifer Sumsion is Foundation Professor of Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst where she leads the Investigating Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care research group. She is currently co-leader of the CSU-based Consortium that is developing the Early Years Learning Framework.

Sandra Cheeseman is a lecturer in Management, Social Policy and Leadership at the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University, Sydney. She is currently part of the CSU-based Consortium that is developing the Early Years Learning Framework.

References:

The success of the EYLF will be partially influenced by how educators use and promote the document among families and the broader community. Primarily, this means realising the significance and complexity of children’s learning and using this knowledge to advocate and promote the importance of a qualified workforce.
Universal access to a preschool program was one of federal Labor’s election commitments in 2007. Lisa Bryant assesses how the path towards universal access in NSW has increased funding for community-based preschools in NSW.

’The universal access commitment is that by 2013 every child will have access to a preschool program in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling. The preschool program is to be delivered by a four year university qualified early childhood teacher, in accordance with a national early years learning framework, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year. It will be accessible across a diversity of settings, in a form that meets the needs of parents and in a manner that ensures cost does not present a barrier to access.’

—National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education

With no fanfare or announcements from the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS), funding for most community-based preschools in NSW has been substantially increased. This is certainly good news and preschool campaigners are rightly celebrating. Will this additional funding result in the promised ‘universal access’ to a preschool education for children in NSW? That remains to be seen.

One of the key components of the Labor Party’s election platform during the 2007 federal election was the Early Childhood Education Plan, promising universal early childhood education for all four-year-old children, as well as a range of other early education and care commitments. In this plan, the Labor Party spoke of two possible implementation mechanisms: the first—funding early centres directly through a Commonwealth grant, based on the number of children in each early learning program; and the second—delivering new support as a Specific Purpose Payment to state and territory governments, to be passed on to early childhood services offering early learning programs.

Less than 12 months after the 2007 election, the second mechanism was put into place with the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments signing a National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education. The Agreement outlined how they would work together to ensure universal access for children to quality early childhood education in the year before they commenced school.

Essentially, the Agreement works towards increasing participation of children in a preschool program, while ensuring that the cost of this participation is not a barrier, especially for Indigenous and disadvantaged children. The Commonwealth Government pledged to provide $278.6 million to the NSW Government over the next five years to enable this to occur.

The intention of universal access was that it would be delivered across a variety of settings such as long day care centres, government funded and community-based preschools. At the time, NSW community-based preschools expressed skepticism, questioning how many services of their type would still be around to deliver the universal access agenda.
Back in the early 1980s, DoCS funding covered 80 per cent of preschool operating costs—by 2008, this had fallen significantly.

Under a new funding system introduced in 2008—the Resource Allocation Method (RAM)—48 per cent of community-based preschools were deemed by DoCS to be ‘overfunded’. It was announced that although the funding for these services would be maintained at 2007/08 rates for five years, they would then revert to the level they should have been funded under the RAM. If implemented, this would have seen many preschools facing substantial funding cuts. Organisations such as Community Child Care Co-operative warned that there was a high possibility that many services in this situation would face closure. With even less preschools on the ground, how could NSW possibly achieve universal access?

Preschool campaigners were not the only ones sceptical of the ability of state governments to implement universal access. In June 2009, Sophie Mirabella, the Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Childcare, said that ‘the states have presided over the appalling situation we have now—it’s akin to putting Dracula in charge of the bloodbank’. She also added that ‘while the cost of preschool in some states and territories is relatively low, the fees in states like NSW and Queensland are prohibitively high. Even low-cost preschool will place it out of reach of those children from families unable to pay anything—those children who often need such early education the most’.

The Australian Government has negotiated bilateral agreements with state and territory governments which ‘specify the actions and strategies to be undertaken by each jurisdiction to achieve universal access. ‘Under these agreements, states and territories will undertake specific activities to improve the accessibility, quality and affordability of early childhood education. These activities will vary across jurisdictions and will take into account the different challenges facing each jurisdiction’.

Funds from the Agreement have already begun to flow from the Commonwealth to the NSW Government and then on to community-based preschools.

Although the exact details have not been announced, funds from the Agreement have already begun to flow from the Commonwealth to the NSW Government and then on to community-based preschools.

Services have received funding letters from DoCS stating ‘the agreement with the Commonwealth has enabled the Department to increase the per child funding rates in the preschool funding model’. The 85 per cent of services that received this increase also received an additional one-off payment that brings the last quarter of 2008/09 funding into line with the new funding rates for 2009/10.

It appears as if the entire 2009/10 allocation from the Commonwealth Government ($21.3 million) has been used to fund these increases. The new rates are substantially higher than the old rates—funding, per child, per year, has risen for Indigenous children, from $3,000 to $3,300. For children from low-income families, it has risen from $1,750 to $3,000 and, for all other children (base local government area rate), it has risen between 60–83 per cent, with services in local government areas classified as poorer receiving a higher increase than those classified as wealthy.

So what are preschools going to use this funding for? The letters from DoCS to services explain that the funding received for children from Indigenous and low-income families must be used to ‘reduce fees and barriers for children of these families’ and warn that monitoring will be introduced to ensure that this happens. When costed, the increase to the Indigenous rate should enable a service to reduce the fees for a child from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds attending preschool for three days a week, by an additional $2.50 a day.

A service could also decrease the fees of a child from a low-income family attending three days
Anecdotal evidence suggests that some services are using the remainder of their increases to reduce fees across the board, while others are using it for expenses such as maintenance.

Around 15 per cent of services will receive no increase; 40 per cent will receive increases of less than $30,000 per year; around 30 per cent will receive between $30,000 and $70,000 per year, with 12 per cent of services receiving increases of more than $70,000 per year. Increases of this magnitude, for services that have not received substantial funding increases for many years, will make a significant difference.

The National Partnership Agreement states: ‘for the first two years of implementing universal access [2009 and 2010], national priorities include: increasing participation rates, particularly for Indigenous and disadvantaged children; increasing program hours; ensuring cost is not a barrier to access; strengthening program quality and consistency; and fostering service integration and co-ordination across stand-alone preschool and childcare’. The increases in funding to community-based preschools in NSW certainly seem to be in line with these aims.

Julia Gillard, the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, was questioned in Parliament about how the Commonwealth Government would ensure that any money allocated to NSW would go directly to community-based preschools, enabling them to reduce fees and make preschool more affordable for NSW families.

The Minister assured Parliament that progress on universal access would be monitored, saying that the Agreement ‘will contain a series of agreed deliverables and timeframes for actions in the first two calendar years’ and that ‘the National Partnership and the Bilateral Agreement will be reviewed after 18 months to assess progress’.

One of the most significant aspects of the increased funding for NSW community-based preschools is that many services which were previously due to have their funding reduced because they were ‘overfunded’ are now no longer in this situation.

There may just be some preschools around to deliver universal access after all!

STOP PRESS

At the time of printing, the Bilateral Agreement between the NSW and Commonwealth Government had just been released. Twenty-six separate actions to increase access to a preschool program have been agreed upon between the governments including providing a subsidy for each service that employs a teacher.

Lisa Bryant is an early childhood education and care consultant.
The idea of integrating bilingualism into early childhood education programs is still largely in its infancy here in Australia. This is despite the fact that Australia is both multicultural and flamboyantly multilingual.

According to researchers, educators and early childhood specialists, the best time to introduce a foreign language is when the child is young, before language and speech patterns are fixed, making preschool the ultimate time to expose young minds to multiple languages. Indeed the earlier, the better.

Young children are already engaged in learning their native language and learning a second language follows the same process. Children use the experience gained in mastering their primary language, that is, they strengthen a skill they already possess.

The benefits of learning more than one language in the early years are significant. Research suggests that it can enrich brain development and form the building blocks of language, so that each new word taught is another block in the overall structure of language.

The benefits of bilingualism

When children are exposed to foreign languages early it leads to an interest in the process of learning a language. It can also mean that future language learning comes more easily, effectively paving the way for additional languages to be learnt.

Bilingualism strengthens the speech competencies of children and enables them to develop an understanding and acceptance of other cultures. It also improves their English comprehension skills.

Children have fewer inhibitions than adults to express themselves in the foreign language.
so they have significant advantages in the acquisition of correct pronunciation—usually the biggest problem when learning a language at a later age.

Multilingualism itself is a valuable resource. When children notice that the same object can be described in different ways, they begin to reflect on language and linguistic phenomena.

Language awareness is an important prerequisite to reading and writing. Indeed, knowing two languages enhances selective perception, which is required when learning to read.

Children who grow up bilingually and are constantly exposed to a second language must learn linguistic distinctions and develop strategies to express themselves—demands other children are only confronted with later.

Multilingual or bilingual children are not generally smarter than others. However, they usually perform better in specific areas of intelligence and language testing. Bilingual children are, for example, usually better able to handle symbolic representations, which is an important prerequisite of literacy.

Children who have already learned a foreign language in kindergarten show better performance in the areas of listening, comprehension, pronunciation and speech in primary school than children with no such previous knowledge.

How children learn languages

Children learn to understand language by hearing it spoken every day, and this is done best when activities accompany speech.

The following factors are key for effective foreign language learning. Contact with the new language must be:
- for an extended time—and continuous for at least six to seven years;
- intense—ideally all day long; and
- structurally as diverse as possible.

Children learn languages most successfully when they are combined with everyday situations. In linguistic and educational fields this approach is called the ‘immersion concept’.

Immersion as an age-appropriate approach

Froebel centres teach English/German bilingualism through the ‘immersion concept’. Language immersion is when activities are conducted in a foreign language. This means the foreign language is the medium as well as the object of instruction.

In an early childhood setting it means children are immersed in the language. For example, they are constantly surrounded by a specific language and there is one person of authority who speaks to the child only in this foreign language present at any given time. Thus the child

SAYING ‘YASSOU’ (HELLO) TO BILINGUAL PRESCHOOLS

While several early childhood education services provide language lessons, or bilingual learning (like Froebel), it is important to remember that many educators already communicate with children who are bilingual.

The Ethnic Child Care Family and Community Services Co-operative provides training, advice, resources and support to early childhood services to work with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Maintaining and extending a child’s home language or mother tongue is central to this organisation, which celebrates its 30-year anniversary this year.

‘Children are the carriers of their parents’ culture and language,’ according to Vivi Germanos-Koutsoundias, Executive Director and founder of Ethnic Child Care Family and Community Services Co-operative.

‘When a child loses their language, it is a loss to the child, a loss to the community and a loss to the nation.

‘We want children to be proud of their parents’ linguistic background. Often when a child goes to school they lose their language and [are] alienated from their own ethnic communities.’

It is important for children’s services to understand this, and where possible, to prevent this from happening, Ms Germanos-Koutsoundias says.

Bilingual support material is offered to early childhood staff including books, posters multicultural games, songs and programming ideas. Staff are also provided with translation services and cultural information to help them better communicate with parents.

‘Languages and culture are intertwined and teaching a second language helps staff understand the particular cultural backgrounds of the children who come into their centre.’

One of the Co-operative’s best success stories is the Bicultural Support Group, which provides support workers to assist newly arrived refugee and migrant families to integrate into a childcare centre or preschool. The service is free for eligible children’s services and available in a range of community languages.

According to Ms Germanos-Koutsoundias, the Greek experience is perhaps the poster child of bilingual education in Australia, where the Greek language is traditionally taught at Sunday school.

It is a language that is also taught at the Greek Orthodox Community Child Care Centre in the Sydney suburb of Petersham. According to Director, Samantha Damoulakis, there are five Greek-speaking staff employed but other languages are also spoken.

‘Staff who speak a second language are encouraged to use it with the children … so our children learn words in Vietnamese, Cantonese and Thai too,’ Ms Damoulakis says.

Staff are also encouraged to sing songs from their own culture and use different phrases in daily preschool routines such as asking them to wash their hands or go to the toilet.

‘The best resource is the staff working in your service … They are proud of their culture and happy to share it. They might sing a soothing lullaby in their mother tongue. Even though the child mightn’t understand a word, they understand the emotion and instantly relax.’

Ms Damoulakis says parents from Anglo backgrounds intentionally choose to send their children to the Petersham preschool because it is so culturally diverse.

‘The parents love that their children come home speaking Vietnamese or Cantonese words. They also like the strong link between Greek symbols, mathematics and astronomy, for example.’
learns the foreign language in the same way as they would learn a native language.

According to the Froebel motto ‘one person—one language’, all activities in the childcare centre are conducted in either English and/or in the new language. An example is the morning routine, which can be conducted in English by an English teacher and in a foreign language by that language’s respective teacher.

The longer, the more intense and the more diverse the immersion situations are, the better the child is able to develop the skills. The teacher can also use their respective languages during mealtimes, as well as when comforting children.

The new language is introduced in such a way that children (and staff) understand its meaning in the situation without translation. The language will also be included in daily dealings—the spoken word supported by hand gesture and movements, as well as by repeated activities and situations.

Initially, children usually speak only few words of the new language. However, grammar and vocabulary gradually increase, with the first words or phrases in the new language typically appearing after half a year. Froebel sees this approach as a child-specific and age-appropriate method of early language learning.

Parents and staff in a bilingual setting

Parents are also integral to the bilingual teaching process. Staff must explain the Froebel approach to families, being mindful to manage expectations. After that, it is important to keep them regularly informed of the development of the bilingual approach and of their child.

Parents can give feedback—it is important for staff to take their concerns and worries seriously. If parents are not positive, children are less likely to learn the foreign language if they sense that it is not desired.

It is also essential to get the parents involved in their child’s language development. Parents have to know about the importance of the mother tongue and that they are responsible for its promotion at home. They do not have to exercise the foreign language at home—it would even be counterproductive and contradictory to the principle ‘one person—one language’. This also means that the staff need to know about language promotion opportunities and to encourage parents to partake in this at home.

Not surprisingly, staff employed at bilingual childcare centres are highly qualified. They need to know about children’s bilingual or multilingual language development. In the spirit of Friedrich Froebel, they need to understand the principles of immersion and that language promotion is holistic.

**TEACHING LANGUAGES TO TODDLERS**

- Start with a single word and then slowly build up to two- and three-word phrases.
- When naming objects always point them out, as children remember words by visualising them.
- It helps to make a game of labeling items around the centre, get the children involved.
- Use lots of repetition. Repetition is the key to learning a foreign language.
- Sing, play games and practice new words in the chosen language.
- Play tapes, CDs and videos in the chosen foreign language.
- Tune into a radio station and listen to music in the foreign language.
- Encourage families at your service to speak their native language with children at home. Parents should not be reluctant—speaking two languages will not confuse the child.

(Source: *Preschooler Today*)
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Just like kids, we all need a little help sometimes.
A review of the literature found a paucity of social science research investigating politicians’ perceptions of their decision making roles, and even fewer studies pertaining to ECEC. To address this gap, in 2008 I began a study investigating how politicians develop awareness of ECEC policy issues, how politicians make decisions for policy on these issues and what informs politicians’ decisions.

The study involved three sources of data: analysis of policies; interviews with politicians; and two case studies—on the quality assurance system and on the issue of the minimum ratio for children less than two years of age in NSW.

In this article, I report on some of the findings of semi-structured interviews with six politicians and a public servant. At the time the interviews were conducted, the six politicians held non-government positions in a state Parliament and the federal Parliament. Two of the politicians were members of a major party; three were members of minor parties; and one was an independent member of Parliament. The public servant worked in a government department. Consent was provided by all participants, and codes used to protect confidentiality.

I also present data on two themes of particular relevance to ECEC advocates and activists: the influence of advocacy and lobby groups, and the influence of research and academics on ECEC policy decision making.

Advocacy and lobby groups
Participants were asked which advocacy and lobby groups effectively advocated for ECEC related issues. Generally, the politician participants did not seem to have a strong knowledge of early childhood groups and organisations that lobby and advocate effectively for ECEC.

There was some discussion of which groups and organisations they knew of, however, the effectiveness of the groups and organisations was not widely known or extensively discussed. The only lobby group that seemed to be well-known and perceived to be effective in influencing participants’ policies was the group conducting the NSW Preschool Campaign, nominated by three of the five NSW participants.

One of the participants commented, for example:

“It was a group that were completely focused on community preschools… the preschool community group would actually get valid data that would prove the case… So that really did work well in terms of influencing policy. So I can say that it influences our policy, but it didn’t influence the government to change one thing— they didn’t change anything.”

Other groups or organisations nominated by participants as influential, not in any order, were: the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care; some parent groups; the unions; the service provider ABC Learning...
you absolutely need advocacy, you need advocates to make government feel uncomfortable… But it would be more effective if it was sometimes more grounded, more strategic policy instead of a wishlist with passion attached to it.’

This view suggests that ECEC advocates may not be achieving effective influence due to an over-riding sense of passion and a lack of strategy. While this is just one participants’ view, it is timely to consider how we present ourselves in advocacy/lobbying efforts to ensure that policy ideas and submissions to government are grounded in rationales supported by evidence.

What can you do to influence policymakers?

The following is a brief summary of the findings with ideas for improving the effectiveness of advocacy and lobbying efforts in ECEC policy. Firstly, the research indicates that politicians do not have a strong awareness of early childhood advocacy and lobby groups. A more co-ordinated approach to lobbying in local electorates might be an effective way to achieve more widespread political recognition.

Early childhood groups, organisations and institutions including children’s services, could contact local members to improve politicians’ awareness of and involvement in ECEC on local levels (local members can be found on the internet at: http://tiny.cc/research and electorate details at: http://tiny.cc/electorate).

Research by Tiina Itkonen in the United States found that ‘hope narratives’ were the most effective way for lobby groups to frame an issue and affect policy, particularly when supported by a ‘civil rights frame and an educational construction’, proving successful in every instance studied. Itkonen’s findings provide helpful guidance when preparing the message or argument being presented to politicians.

Secondly, politicians seem to be willing to be involved in conferences and events that improve their knowledge of contemporary issues. To capitalise on this interest, a range of politicians, not just Ministers, should be invited to attend conferences and relevant events.

Itkonen’s research found that another predictor of lobby group success was repeated invitations from members of Congress to testify, which indicated status and legitimacy. Therefore, reg-
Supporting our advocacy and lobbying efforts strategically by grounding our ideas in research gives credence to our recommendations, as well as giving the government a rationale for policy change.

ularly staying on politicians’ ‘radar’ at a local level, may help to gradually increase their awareness of lobby groups, particularly when inviting different groups and organisations to speak at Senate inquiries.

Thirdly, a perception that ECEC advocates and lobbyists are passionately driven but not necessarily strategically organised or grounded in research evidence was raised. Perhaps this is a reminder that although our efforts may be in the best interests of children and early education and care, if they are only ideologically driven, then it is difficult for politicians to take up policy initiatives on this basis alone.

Supporting our advocacy and lobbying efforts strategically by grounding our ideas in research gives credence to our recommendations, as well as giving the government a rationale for policy change. This however, does not mean that ‘evidence’ should be only quantitative in nature.

The fourth finding of my study, that effective research may be perceived by politicians to be quantitative or numbers based, reflects the findings of other studies in which quantitative research may be perceived by politicians to be ‘evidence’ should be only quantitative in nature.

In the United States, Bloch critically examined the National Research Council’s report on educational research, concluding that it presented a narrow definition of what constituted high quality educational research and placed pressure on it to be presented to government in a palatable fashion.

For example, ‘hard science’ based research, such as brain research, has received extensive attention in government policies, while research such as that of Australian Glenda MacNaughton, who has researched the relationship between equity practices and quality for children in ECEC for over a decade, has not received the same attention in federal Government policies.

One way that qualitative research might receive wider exposure, thus slowly infiltrating politicians’ and policy advisors’ knowledge about ECEC research, is for institutions to assemble a list of current research activities/projects that can be updated when necessary, to be distributed to local advocacy and activists groups. These lists should include all research endeavours, including those projects engaging qualitative research designs. If institutions provide the field with regular research updates, cross-fertilisation during advocacy and lobbying efforts might generate a greater awareness of the benefits of all types of research.

Lastly, parliamentary libraries are regularly used by politicians to produce reports on issues. Further investigation is required to determine how parliamentary libraries gather their data and present it to politicians. However, it might be useful for institutions in the meantime to contact parliamentary libraries to ensure access to a broad range of publications and literature is being sought.

It is important to note that while the participants interviewed were politicians at the time this research was conducted, none held ministerial roles. In addition, the selection criteria for participants included NSW politicians and politicians with portfolio responsibilities for ECEC, and for the most part excluded politicians from states and territories other than NSW (in order to manage the scope of the study).

That said, the role of politicians in opposition, minor parties or as independent members in developing policies and influencing government policies is not insignificant, and attention to how they are influenced remains an important concern.

Kathryn Bown is a Ph.D student at Charles Sturt University and an active member of the Social Justice in Early Childhood group. Previously, Kathryn worked for several years as an untrained childcare assistant before completing her Bachelor of Education (ECE) at Macquarie University. She then worked in a long day care centre before beginning her Ph.D in 2007.

References


WHAT ARE YOUR INITIAL IMPRESSIONS ABOUT THE STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN AUSTRALIA?

The thing I am struck by every time I visit a childcare centre is the energy and potential in the air—rooms filled with colour, creativity, expression, movement, music, play and learning. I’ve also met many passionate and committed early childhood professionals, dedicated to providing young children with top quality care. These professionals are also having a huge impact on children’s health, happiness and development.

DOES THE FACT THAT YOU ARE THE FIRST-EVER MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE REFLECT THE RUDD GOVERNMENT’S LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO THE SECTOR?

The Prime Minister sent a very clear message by elevating this portfolio to the federal Ministry—for the first time in Australia’s history. The Government sees early childhood education and childcare as a crucial part of Australia’s education pathway and this is reflected in the elevation of this area. We absolutely recognise just how important these early years can be in shaping a child’s future.

HOW WILL YOU DIVIDE YOUR RESOURCES BETWEEN THE RESPECTIVE PORTFOLIOS OF ECCE, YOUTH AND SPORT? AND HOW MUCH PRIORITY WILL BE GIVEN TO ECCE?

Early Childhood Education and Child Care will be a key priority, not only for myself, but also a priority for the Government. It is always a challenge to find the right balance between a range of policy priorities, but I am confident that we can do some really good work in this area.

HAVE YOU HAD MUCH TIME TO EXPERIENCE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION ON THE GROUND IN RESEARCHING YOUR NEWEST PORTFOLIO?

I am really lucky that as the Member for my electorate of Adelaide, I have visited and worked with some great childcare centres. Since taking on the portfolio, I have had the opportunity to visit several childcare and early learning centres and look forward to meeting more children and parents in the coming months.

Early childhood education and care finally has its very own federal Minister. Kate Ellis added Early Childhood Education and Child Care to her portfolios of Youth and Sport following a ministerial reshuffle in June this year. Elected to the Australian House of Representatives in 2004, she was elevated to the Rudd government ministry in 2007. This made her the youngest person ever to become an Australian Government Minister.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN PRIORITIES IN ROLLING OUT THE COMMONWEALTH’S PLANS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION?

As you would know, following the release of the Early Years Learning Framework, we are now working with the states and territories to develop National Quality Standards. At the moment we’re busily consulting with families, childcare professionals and the sector about these important reforms.

Another priority is to ensure we have universal access to early learning for all children in the year before school by 2013. We are providing $955 million to the states and territories to achieve this objective. This will give children a solid foundation for school. It is particularly crucial for disadvantaged children who are currently missing out on a preschool experience.

DO YOU PLAN TO HAVE MUCH ONE-ON-ONE INVOLVEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR?

Yes. I have already visited some wonderful childcare centres and was very impressed with the high quality early learning being provided. I am keen to meet with a diverse range of stakeholders, from peak bodies representing childcare providers, to individual childcare workers. I realise the critical importance of working closely with the sector as we seek to develop and implement our ambitious reform agenda. I am keen to develop a partnership and ongoing dialogue with the sector and with families.
On the Night You Were Born
By Nancy Tillman
Published by Scholastic
Cost: $26.99
The message between the pages of this lovely book is that every child is unique and special in their own right—and this gift follows them wherever they go. The book’s poetic verses appeal to the ego in all of us with such lines as: ‘On the night you were born… the night wind whispered “Life will never be the same,” Because there had never been anyone like you… ever in the world.’ It goes on to use images such as polar bears dancing, geese flying home and ladybugs landing to celebrate the arrival of another individual in the world.

While kind of gushy in parts, The Night You Were Born works for the simple reason that all children should all be reminded that they are valued and one-of-a-kind. The book could be shared with babies, right up to preschoolers.

My Mum’s Got Cancer
By Dr Lucy Blunt
Illustrated by Eloise Osborn
Published by Jane Curry Publishing
Cost: $19.95
Once you get past the confronting title, this is actually a very touching and interesting book that would be useful in an early childhood environment. It is written by Dr Lucy Blunt, whose experience as a clinical psychologist, breast cancer survivor and mother culminate in a most personal story. Told through the eyes of her daughter, the book addresses all of the confusion, fears and worries that a preschool child may feel when their parent is suffering from cancer—as well as the practicalities of living with chemotherapy and radiotherapy. The book is cleverly illustrated by Blunt’s daughter Eloise (she was seven at the timel), which greatly contributes to the story-telling and importantly, helps to put across a child’s point-of-view.

Early Childhood Education and Care
By Susan Edwards
Published by Pademelon Press
Cost: $39.95
This book is drawn from research conducted with preschool teachers from the city of Casey, Victoria, which has one of the highest populations of children aged 0-4 in Australia. Council-managed kindergartens in Casey embarked on a research project to develop new understandings of children’s development—this book is the end result. It traces the development of this project and through teacher examples and commentary shows how ideas from socio-cultural theory are realised in practice. It encourages ‘thinking differently’ and highlights how the early childhood education sector has recycled practices and beliefs—most of them Western in their origin. However, Australia is a culturally and linguistically diverse community and many practices may not be culturally relevant for all children and their families.

How Things Work
By Marilyn Fleer
Published by Early Childhood Australia Inc
Cost: $14.95
Young children are naturally curious about the way things work. Think of how many times a preschooler asks ‘why’, ‘how’, ‘where’ or ‘what’. While such questions can get a little bit tedious, it is this fascination with the things and the people in a child’s world that help them to learn and develop. It is our responsibility as adults to harness this curiosity and steer it in the right direction. This manual from the Everyday learning series looks at how carers can encourage discovery and problem-solving in children.

Well designed, with plenty of break-out text boxes, children’s illustrations and photographs, the book is easy to read and understand. Targeted predominantly at families, some of the information may seem a little basic to early childhood educators. However, I imagine it would still provide some useful food for thought.
Providing collaborative leadership in the creation of a child-focused community

RESOURCES AND ADVICE
Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd (NSW) provides advice and up-to-date information for committee members, staff and families. Please call us to discuss issues, concerns or ideas about the operation or management of your service.

CONSULTANCY
We offer personalised consulting on all aspects of management and early childhood services operations. We will identify solutions by working with you to formulate a plan of action.

TRAINING AND CUSTOMISED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd (NSW) offers training sessions through Children’s Services Central (see calendar at www.cscentral.org.au) and can provide customised training sessions at your service. We also offer a wide range of accredited training. Please see our website or call us to discuss.

ADVOCACY
Community Child Care is the peak organisation in NSW representing community-based children’s services. We have a variety of campaigns running at all times to ensure children and families in NSW can access affordable, high quality early childhood services.

For more information, call us on: 8922 6444
Or go to our website: www.ccccnsw.org.au

Statement of Apology and Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd. (NSW) acknowledges the loss of family, cultural identity, land, language and community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the policies and practices of Australian governments, organisations and people.

We unreservedly apologise for the ongoing suffering and loss that these policies and practices have caused to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, parents, families and communities.

Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd. (NSW) 26 May, 1998
Are you searching for support, resources and professional development in children's services?

Call us on **1800 157 818**. We are here to help you.

**Our 1800 number is free.**

It’s your own help line to support you in all the things you need to know in children’s services.

**Call us for resources, support, training and professional learning.**

**Children’s Services Central** is managed by a consortium of six key organisations that resource and support the sectors of children’s services in New South Wales.

- Community Child Care Co-operative (lead agency)
- NSW Family Day Care Association
- Network of Community Activities
- Contact Inc
- Ethnic Child Care, Family and Community Services Co-operative Ltd
- Semann & Slattery

**Children’s Services Central** is the Professional Support Co-ordinator in New South Wales, an initiative funded by the Australian Government under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

We will make your search for answers in children's services easier.

We are:

- relevant
- reliable
- accessible
- professional

Our website is full of information, resources, discussion boards and training opportunities.

**www.cscentral.org.au**

Building 21, 142 Addison Street, Marrickville NSW 2204

Ph: **1800 157 818** Fax: (02) 8922 6445