MARY BAILEY HOUSE
FACEBOOK: FRIEND OR FOE?
EARLY LEARNING DESIGN
AROUND THE WORLD
GRASSROOTS EYLF + MORE
Sadly, it is a case of one step forward, two steps back when it comes to the education and care of Indigenous children. Indeed, the early childhood reform agenda risks becoming meaningless if we do not improve outcomes for this particularly vulnerable group of children.

Last year’s release of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Report was sobering… it affirmed to me that we are utterly failing Indigenous children. One year later, little has changed!

The report found that Aboriginal children fare badly across a range of indicators when measured against other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. Indigenous babies have the lowest birth weight and the third lowest literacy and numeracy skills.

At a time when our Early Years Learning Framework promotes ‘Belonging’ as an ideal, it is pertinent to recall that Indigenous children’s sense of belonging ranks the second lowest in all OECD countries.

Our article ‘Little Hands’ looks at the uncertain future of Indigenous-controlled children’s services and the latest ‘Closing the Gap’ targets.

After reading this, it would be all too easy to look at the statistics and despair. It would also be easy to become complacent and say: ‘The current Government is doing great things in this area… surely these figures will change when these programs get underway’.

But despair is not the answer, nor is complacency… I hope instead that you will be inspired to work with Indigenous communities!

What can you do? Well, plenty! Start by reading Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development. It is only by knowing what governments have committed to, that they can be held to their actions and really close the gap.

I call on you to help just one Indigenous child you are in contact with to increase their sense of belonging—to a childcare centre, a family or a community.

‘Belonging’ is also explored on page 26, in an article in which Possum Place director, Amanda Holt, encourages services to brainstorm the Early Years Learning Framework together.

Have an inspiring and energising summer, and we look forward to bringing you more editions of Rattler in the New Year!

Carol Lymberry
Chief Executive Officer
Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd. (NSW)
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NO MORE SURPRISE VISITS

Last month the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) announced significant changes to its Child Care Quality Assurance systems.

From 1 November 2009, services will be informed of their Validation Visit date and Validation Surveys for Families will no longer be distributed as part of the Accreditation process. Services will now be informed of a specific date or the Validation Visit rather than a six-week time frame. For more information visit www.ncac.gov.au/AccreditationProcessChanges.asp

PRESCHOOLERS INACTIVE, STUDY WARNS

Preschoolers spend 85 per cent of their waking hours inactive, a Deakin University study has found.

The Healthy Active Preschool Years (HAPPY) study shows that only 2.5 per cent of children (aged 3-5) meet the new national guidelines of three hours of activity a day.

The study also found that an average of 97 minutes were spent watching television each day, with 63 per cent of the children watching more than one hour each day.

The study coincides with the release of the Federal Government’s Get Up & Grow: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Childhood. For more information visit www.health.gov.au

SENT TO BED WITHOUT SUPPER!

Where the Wild Things Are will soon hit screens in a film directed by Spike Jonze. Originally published in 1963, this classic picture book has delighted children for generations and sold more than 19 million copies around the world.

Where the Wild Things Are is about a boy called Max who is sent to bed without his supper whereupon his room grows into a forest and he encounters strange creatures—wild things!

Maurice Sendak’s iconic picture book has been made into an animation, an opera and now a feature film. His imaginative work is also the inspiration for Gregory Maguire, the author of Wicked. Maguire pays tribute to the visionary storyteller in Making Mischief: A Maurice Sendak Appreciation.

HAVE YOUR SAY AND WIN WIN WIN

We want to hear from our readers! Rattler is keen to know what makes you wild! Send us your reactions to Rattler stories or comments on childcare goings-on. Please email admin@armedia.net.au and share your views.


Correction: In Rattler 91, the article ‘Jim Greenman: Farewell to a Friend’, incorrectly indicated that both editions of Prime Times were co-authored by Anne Stonehouse, Gigi Schweikert and Jim Greenman. Gigi Schweikert contributed to the second edition of Prime Times only. Rattler apologises for any confusion this error may have caused.

ATS I ECE TEACHERS’ STORIES BOOK

Deadlier with a Degree: True Stories, Many Voices is a collection of the personal stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATS I) early childhood teachers.

The storytellers are a group of 25 Indigenous early childhood graduates from Macquarie University, who share their stories of struggle and success in pursuing a dream of a university degree. It was produced by Alma Fleet and Rosalind Kitson of the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie University with the support of Children’s Services Central and Community Child Care. For your own copy, email Toby Honig at: Toby.Honig@aces.mq.edu.au
**what’s on**

**CONFERENCES AND EVENTS**

- **The Annual Australian Research in Early Childhood Education Conference**
  19–21 January 2010
  Monash University, Melbourne
  More info: www.education.monash.edu/research/conferences/arece

- **12th Unpacking Conference**
  Unpacking listening: language, silence and spaces
  12–13 March 2010
  Presented by Macquarie University, Institute of Early Childhood and Semann & Slattery
  Macquarie University, Sydney
  More info: www.semanns Slattery.com/upcoming-events

- **ACCS National Conference**
  14–15 May 2010
  Novotel Wollongong, Northbeach
  More info: Call Janelle Casey: (02) 8922 6401

- **Early Childhood Intervention Australia Conference**
  20–22 May 2010
  National Convention Centre, Canberra

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**COMPETITION**

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Now, thanks to Educational Experience, one lucky Rattler reader could WIN a Clear Water Activities and Tray Set (valued at $360). The prize is suitable for both sand and water play or can be filled with shredded paper or balls for drought-proof preschool fun!

To WIN simply tell us in 50 words or less what water-wise measures you have in place at your service. Send entries by 30 December 2009 to rebeccaclifford@ccccnsw.org.au

Meanwhile, congratulations to Save the Children Fiji – Mobile Unit in conjunction with METS Training Solutions. Co-ordinator RTO Services, Noeleen Alchin, who has won a Kinder Parachute after writing a poem about parachute play. The prize will go to a mobile play van that travels out of Suva to various villages and shantytowns.

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**Have you got your 2010 diary?**

Order your **2010 Community Child Care Diary** today!

With a member’s price of just $20 + postage or $25 + postage for non-members, the diary is for directors, owners, teachers, FDC carers, room leaders, students and administrators. To order, phone (02) 8922 6444 or email us on: diary@ccccnsw.org.au

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**BLACKTOWN’S BUDDING ARTISTS WIN**

Bob Sinclair Child Care Centre in Seven Hills, Sydney, has won first prize in an art competition.

- Children, staff and families at the Blacktown City Council centre joined hands to create a large-scale collage representing the diversity of Blacktown.

  According to director Suzette Bradford, the children were excited by their win and an outing on the Centrelink bus to attend a small awards ceremony.

  ‘The artwork is now on display at the Blacktown City Library, which is great recognition for the children and families,’ Ms Bradford said.
A Catholic college founded by the Dominican Sisters, the Santa Sabina campus was the leafy location of the popular 1990s television miniseries *Brides of Christ*. Today it is home to a 40-place purpose-built early learning centre for birth to five-year-olds that combines the principles of Reggio Emilia with an interesting model of work-based childcare.

The del Monte grounds are across the road from Santa Sabina’s middle and secondary schools and were donated to the school by the centre’s namesake, Mary Bailey, in the 1950s. A framed vintage photo of Mary can now be found proudly displayed in the centre’s foyer.

The Dominican’s appreciation for creating places of beauty and learning can still be seen on this campus comprised of sweeping lawn and beautiful historic buildings.

In some children’s services, colour and chaos reign supreme but there is a sense of calmness at Mary Bailey, which director Jackie Baxter believes stems from this Dominican tradition.

This appreciation of beauty and the natural environment is not dissimilar to Reggio’s minimal approach to classroom aesthetics.

‘Our college motto is “Veritas” which means truth. So we engage in that by encouraging children to search for truth through exploration and play,’ she says.

Set against this sandstone backdrop is a progressive experiment in human resource management, which has seen Santa Sabina recognised as an employer of choice for women.
by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency.

Ms Baxter, who has a background in work-based childcare provision, says both the school and the centre attract and retain quality teachers and assist teaching families in the challenge of work-life balance.

‘Some staff have accepted positions at Santa Sabina because of our centre. College staff are offered a compressed working week and a special salary package that includes pre-tax deductions for childcare.

‘There is a fall in anxiety for female teachers who can visit their children while at work.’

As a result, there is reduced staff turnover, increased staff morale and female employees can job-share and feel supported in their return to work after having a baby.

While 60 per cent of the children are the offspring of Santa Sabina staff, 40 per cent of families come from the local community. Continuity with the rest of Santa Sabina is appealing to parents who are looking to send their children to del Monte Primary school, she says.

‘They are looking to enter the Santa Sabina educational community which is a community in itself.’

Being on-site means students (often siblings) from the primary, middle and secondary schools can visit Mary Bailey House and teacher–parents are also encouraged to drop by or contribute.

‘We have tapped into the talents of our teachers and have that unique client–colleague relationship. A Year 8 English class came and did reading, a geography teacher discussed the rain cycle, and a design technology class came to cook with the children.’

‘We visit the primary school library and com-
puter lab once a week, and use the college bus to go on excursions.’

The centre’s location also means that the transition to school is relatively seamless. Mary Bailey children are usually the most settled when they start school, she says.

‘There is no fear of the unknown... They see and hear the hustle and bustle of everyday school life. They hear the bells, see the uniforms and meet the teachers.’

The program at Mary Bailey House reflects the NSW Curriculum Framework, but Ms Baxter says her understanding of programming and planning was sealed when she was sent on a Reggio Emilia study tour to Italy.

‘When I visited the centres and heard educators speak so passionately about children, all the pieces of the puzzle started to come together.’

Back home, she set about re-educating her staff in the reflective practices of Reggio.

‘I looked at the “Image of the Child” with staff, many of whom had to rethink their teaching—not always easy when you are sharing control of the curriculum with the children.’

The emergence of brain research, attachment theory and growing awareness of the early years also created a shift in her understanding of emergent curriculum.

‘We realised curriculum was not a watered down preschool program but could be customised to the child.’

Record-keeping and observations at Mary Bailey have also taken a technical twist since visiting Italy. Staff take photos and write daily reflections (anecdotes, journal samples, language transcripts) about the day’s events. Rather than printing, these are stored electronically on the centre’s shared computer server. They can be read by the director or staff or inserted into portfolios and project information sheets. They can also be copied onto a USB stick for parents to view at home.

The centre is currently trialling e-portfolios—a collaborative document for children, parents and staff and effectively an electronic record of a child’s experience at Mary Bailey.

‘Parents love to be able to record their children’s lives but working parents are time-poor. We contribute centre documentation and parents can contribute too. So, it becomes a wonderful journal of childhood.

‘In time, I would love for parents to be able to access records off-site and add their data. We haven’t got to that stage yet, but the portability of e-portfolios is extremely valuable.’

Another Reggio principle put into practice at Mary Bailey House is the allocation of a primary carer who stays with the same group of children throughout their time at the service.

One of the first services to put the 1:4 ratio into practice, staff at Mary Bailey are rotated from room to room, she explains.

‘Staff are constantly shifting—working with each other and different age groups. There isn’t the attitude of “being stuck in the babies’ room again” and staff soon realise the unique qualities of working with each age group.

‘Similarly, it’s not about who has the most qualifications—it’s about who has the expertise or interest in an area.’

She says this approach helps connect families and creates centre–community partnerships.

‘Children become very attached to that staff member and, naturally, so do parents. I have less parent grievances as a result. Trivial things that would once come to my attention (a lost sock, for example) no longer do.

‘Plus parents can also ring straight into the playroom and talk to their primary carer.’

There are three playrooms, each named after an Australian National Park: Cradle Mountain...
room (birth–2 years) Lilly Pilly Gully room (2–3 years) and the Daintree Rainforest (3–5). ‘However, we do not categorise our rooms by age but group children according to interest or capacity. A child might stay in Lilly Pilly Gully beyond the age of three because a small group better suits their temperament.’

A Triple P (Positive Parenting Programs) practitioner, Ms Baxter works together with Sabina’s school counsellor to facilitate the Triple P seminar series. She is also completing a degree in psychology and is particularly interested in how children’s temperaments influence their behaviour.

Ms Baxter has also taken this approach to staffing, providing personality questionnaires and insisting staff write the service’s conflict resolution policy together. She encourages collaborative decision-making and, where possible, diffuses competition between staff by getting them to appreciate each others’ strengths.

‘I have always said to my staff: “If you think you know everything, that’s when you should leave”. Early childhood is such a dynamic field of education, and we are constantly researching and reflecting on practice.

‘We are a community of thinkers and reflective practitioners here at Mary Bailey House.’

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Aboriginal childcare is at a crossroads as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) announces ambitious Closing the Gap targets.
The Australian Government is determined to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children with its National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development.

However, the consensus is one of caution for Aboriginal organisations that have had their hopes raised then dashed before and are sadly all too familiar with ‘closing the gap’ rhetoric.

While Australia has taken some steps forward, the reality is we are still a long way from ensuring every child has equal access to a quality preschool or early childhood experience.

Indigenous children are still the most vulnerable group of children in Australia with the gap between Indigenous and other Australians continuing to widen.

COAG has set targets to:

- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; and
- to ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education in just five years’ time.

While some have called the Agreement ‘a band-aid measure’ and say it is an attempt to remove Indigenous control, others welcome the announcement of, among other measures, 35 new holistic childcare centres or ‘hubs’. These centres will co-locate a range of maternal and child health, parenting support, childcare, early learning and development services in the one location. However, it remains to be seen whether these services will be run for and by Aboriginal people.

Indigenous control of Indigenous affairs

Frank Hytten, executive officer of SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) has particular concerns about the language used in ministerial press releases about the 35 new childcare centres targeted for urban, regional and remote areas with high Indigenous populations.

He points to an apparent change in terminology from ‘Indigenous Children and Family Centres’ to ‘Indigenous focused centres’ and now ‘Children and Family Centres’.

‘I’m told the disappearance of the word Indigenous means nothing and I am reading too much into it… I said if it doesn’t mean anything, why take it out? Why not put in the words “Aboriginal-controlled”?’

He says there is also a suggestion that the Multifunctional Aboriginal Childcare Services (MACS) could ‘top up’ their funding if they surrender their MACS status as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services.

SNAICC questions why the allocated $16.8 million isn’t being used instead to top up existing MACS centres or to create new ones.

Decision-makers need to understand the sensitivity and suspicion surrounding Indigenous community control he says.

‘SNAICC has been assured that there is no ulterior intent in the term “focussed” and that if MACS accept extra funds they would be neither disadvantaged nor have [their] community-controlled status compromised.’

But as these processes are still under development, no promises can be made, and he says a ‘close watch needs to be kept on the unfolding process’.

One of Government’s assurances is that Indigenous people can be voted onto centre committees, but he says Aboriginal people are unlikely to stand for election.

‘They don’t feel confident or comfortable in a room full of “whitefellas”. The whole point of having Aboriginal “run”, “managed”, “governed” or “controlled” services is that history shows most Aboriginal people are not comfortable using [white] services.’

‘This shift, however unintended, seems to me to be another attempt to “mainstream”. Turning what were once funded as Aboriginal managed services into something else entirely.’

MACS were introduced in 1987 and are based loosely on a hub model. They are the forerunner to COAG’s proposed new centres, which are also being pitched as multifunctional. MACS

‘It has taken us 200 years to get to where we are... it’s going to take a little more than a three-year plan to get us out of it.’
services are specifically Aboriginal-controlled but have received only one funding increase in their 25-year history.

‘The multifunctional aspects initially offered by these MACS centres have disappeared as the funds have dwindled away, making them mono-functional.

‘You have to read between the lines… if you have a good working model why wouldn’t you develop and extend it? Why create something new?’

Mr Hytten does, however, congratulate policymakers on making the COAG Agreement last beyond the current Government (until 2020).

‘It has taken us 200 years to get to where we are… it’s going to take a little more than a three-year plan to get us out of it.’

Rosalind Kitson, Lecturer and Institute of Early Childhood Field Co-ordinator at Macquarie University, is also concerned about the future of MACS services. She too questions the reality of the agenda and says there is no reassurance that centres will be Indigenous-controlled.

Ms Kitson is currently working on the Child Care Choices of Indigenous Families project, funded by NSW Community Services (formerly DoCS).

She says while the Agreement is promising on paper, it’s unlikely targets will be met without a concerted focus on training Indigenous staff.

‘I just don’t know where they are going to get the staff from? Every family in our study has said they want more Indigenous staff.

‘In our Yarning Sessions, a quote says: “We need more Aboriginal faces that you know when you first walk in... We’ve got to feel comfortable”. When asked how to improve services, they say: “Get us staff with backgrounds that understand how Koori kids are”.

Is a one-stop-shop really the answer?

The concept of multifunctional centres is far from revolutionary, according to Frank Hytten.

‘Hub is the latest word Government is using. One-stop-shop was what was being used 10 years ago,’ he says.

In theory, hubs could provide first point of contact for counselling or information on domestic violence, for example, but without the need or shame of visiting separate services. However, everyone may not welcome the idea, in part because Indigenous communities are so close-knit.

‘They might not want to use a multifunctional centre because their aunty works there.’

The key will be in the implementation and degree of community consultation, and it is Aboriginal people who should determine which services are most relevant to their community.

‘Where the centres go is meant to be decided state-by-state in consultation with the community but, from what I hear, a lot of unilateral decisions have been made prior to consultation.

Natalie Burns, B.Teach Co-ordinator at Macquarie University’s Department of Indigenous Studies, Warawara, says she has heard this ‘hub’ discussion before. A Tubba-gah (Dubbo) woman of the Wiradjuri nation, she is experienced in all levels of childcare and says it is ironic because this multifunctional approach is ‘already happening’.

The disappointing part of the Agreement is there is little reference to the education and training of Indigenous early childhood teachers, which is central to the debate, she says.

‘We need to be training up and qualifying the local people who are already out in the communities. They are there for the love of land and for the love of the community and they’ll stay.

Ms Burns is also cautious of a clause in the Agreement, which identifies Government can make changes at any time.

‘Even though throughout the document it says “community consultation”, it appears it can still be changed.’

Deb Mann from SDN Children’s Services has
mixed feelings about the hub model.

‘As a parent, if I could access everything I need under one roof, providing I trust everyone in that space, I would jump at it.

‘In reality, however, establishing a community hub with agencies, people and services that suit everyone’s needs is unrealistic. I think there is a danger that too many players with their own agendas could alienate families.’

Manager of the SDN’s SCAN (Supporting Children with Additional Needs) and Aboriginal Programs, she says there is also the risk of creating a service model in which adult needs overtake the child’s.

‘Often, the parent client (in a hub model) becomes the primary focus, and the child is secondary. It all sounds fantastic on paper, this one-stop-shop that solves all needs, but sometimes children and families need their own space that focuses exclusively on them.’

Ms Mann would also like the level of community engagement to be spelt out to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.

‘What exactly does “community engagement” mean? If you take an Aboriginal community in Redfern, the dynamics are enormous. What works with one family in Redfern will not work with another family in the Northern Territory or South Australia.’

She questions the Agreement’s use of the word ‘partnership’ and says such a power relationship is rarely equal.

‘What does “partnership” mean? Just having a token Aboriginal person on board doesn’t make it a partnership.’

She says to really close the gap, Aboriginal children should have access to free education: early education, school and university.

Similarly, she believes 35 new centres across the country is a drop in the ocean.

‘Opening 335 centres would could help bring about change and would signal that Government is serious,’ she says.

Mt Druitt: A case study

Judy McKay–Tempest co-ordinates the Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU) NSW & ACT, which is sponsored by DEEWR and managed by Lady Gowrie. A Wiradjuri
woman, she has worked for various Aboriginal organisations and previously as an administrato r for a MACS centre. She is also part of an Aboriginal Early Childhood action group in the Sydney suburb of Mt Druitt, which is a site for one of the new child and family centres. (New centres are also planned for Campbelltown and Ballina.)

‘I had concerns about what these centres would look like, how they would operate and be managed—will they be a long day care centre, a preschool, occasional care or mobile service and who would support these services’ professional development and resource requirements?

‘I was concerned Government representatives might come in, pretend to consult and then dictate but after our first meeting, I am more positive. They are listening to the community and consultation is taking place on the ground,’ she says.

Ms McKay–Tempest says she is hopeful that, if done properly, the new child and family centres could create a workforce for the local community and provide employment opportunities for school leavers.

‘Building, refurbishing and staffing the new child and family centres could create jobs… We need to look at what skills each community has and build on these.’

‘This is an opportunity to unite and work together for the betterment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,’ she says.

Aboriginal needs fall on deaf ears

In the Northern Territory at least, there is an overwhelming sense that Canberra is not listening to the wants and needs of Aboriginal people. President of the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (COGSO), Michael Duffy, says while COAG’s intention is ‘well meaning’—being well meaning isn’t always enough.

He says the ‘education conversation’ is nothing new, and he knows communities where it stretches back for 40 years and more.

‘Bureaucrats that fly in and fly out are not very good learners or listeners… Aboriginal people have been telling us what they want for years.

‘There seems to be a lot of talk but not much listening, and lots of rushed talk.’

He says the Government’s time line of ensuring universal access for all four year olds within five years is ‘completely unrealistic’.

‘It’s always a rush… that’s the reality of the political cycle. There is always pressure to come up with something new, evaluate its success and to achieve it [fast].

‘This talk of closing the gap—reducing disadvantage—sounds terribly earnest, but it’s not realistic unless Aboriginal people are part of the solution,’ he says.

Mr Duffy says he’d like to see politicians and policy-makers ‘take a deep breath and sit down’

‘As well as closing the gap, people are always talking about “building the bridge” but they are building a bridge for one-way traffic only unless Aboriginal people are properly consulted.’

Training Indigenous people to work in these centres is also fundamental but needs to take

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**Centre Locations Announced**

Of the 35 planned Children and Family centres, 20 will be in regional and remote locations and 15 in urban areas. According to DEEWR, not all sites will include the construction of a new centre. Additional locations will be announced over the coming months.

**Northern Territory:** Yulara, Milingimbi, Gunbalanya, Palmerston and Ngukurr. **Queensland:** Mt Isa. **Western Australia:** Halls Creek. **Tasmania:** Bridgewater, with outreach to Geeveston. **Australian Capital Territory:** West Belconnen. **New South Wales:** Campbelltown, Blacktown and Ballina.
place at a grass roots level.

‘There’s a lot to be said about “growing our own” and having skilled people in the communities to run these services… There is no point dragging them in and out—that model has never worked well.’

Mel Hazard co-ordinates the Bachelor of Children’s Services course at Charles Darwin University. She is also reluctant to believe COAG’s targets will be met and doubts it will differ from previous initiatives.

‘Basically, I think governments make the same mistakes over and over again… I should be hopeful but the cynic in me questions how,’ she says.

Even though the notion of universal preschool is a good thing, she says there are still significant problems with training, infrastructure and physical access to remote communities that will not change in the desired five-year time frame.

‘There needs to be lengthy consultation, which means bureaucrats have to really listen. Aboriginal people say it to me all the time, “why don’t they just listen”?’

**Multifunctional success story**

Aboriginal childcare worker, Veronica Johns, from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory says she welcomes the Agreement but says any initiative should also involve Aboriginal childcare worker, Veronica Johns from the Batchelor Institute.

Footprints in Time study

The majority of Aboriginal children (75 per cent) do not attend formal childcare, according to a landmark longitudinal study, Footprints in Time.

Of those who reported attending an early childhood education program, most (34 per cent) reported that their child attends a preschool program in a non-school based setting. Many, however, reported that their child attends pre-year one (or kindergarten) at a school (30 per cent) or preschool in a school (29 per cent).

In terms of childcare, 21 per cent of parents reported that their child attends a childcare or day care facility. A small number (2 per cent) reported that their child attends family day care. Of the total sample, some parents (29 per cent) reported that the child had attended a playgroup, mother’s group or similar group in the past month.

Parents were asked who else looks after the child. Care giving was mostly provided by the child’s other parent (51 per cent). Grandparents (49 per cent) and other relatives (30 per cent) were also a large source of additional care giving.

Footprints in Time is tracking the long-term development of 1,687 children and will allow researchers to look in depth at the early childhood experiences of Indigenous children.

The importance of maintaining strong links to culture is also a key finding of the study. More than two-thirds of parents had taken their child to an indigenous cultural event, ceremony or sorry business. Around 44 per cent had taught their child traditional arts like painting, dancing, singing and making ceremonial dress, while more than 40 per cent had taught their child traditional practices like collecting food or hunting.

In wave one, nearly half of the parents had experienced three to six major life events in the past year, with the most commonly reported events being pregnancy or giving birth, a death of a close family member or friend and housing problems.

Parents surveyed said they wanted their children to receive a good education and have the opportunity for a good career as well as being healthy, happy, independent and successful.

While almost all parents (97 per cent) rated their children’s health as either excellent, very good or good, the data also reveals ear problems (20 per cent), chest infections (15 per cent), asthma (13 per cent) and eczema (11 per cent) are quite common.

*Footprints in Time is a key part of the Australian Government’s Indigenous Early Childhood package. The study looks at indigenous children aged between six months and five years from 11 sites across Australia—along with their parents and carers. The families will be interviewed yearly over at least four years.*
The Kalgoorlie–Boulder Indigenous Early Years Development Project helped identify the ‘silent barriers’—those challenges for Indigenous children to attend inclusive early years education in the Kalgoorlie–Boulder/Coolgardie regions of Western Australia.

Funded by the then named Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the project engaged 600 Indigenous children (under the age of seven), 700 Aboriginal parents, 30 government and community services, 12 schools and one prison.

The framework was based on building strong partnerships between Aboriginal parents, families, community/government services and early childhood educators. The project actively promoted stakeholders to share the responsibility of improving the education and wellbeing of young Aboriginal children.

One must build trusting relationships, as this is vital to Aboriginal families if they are to informally engage with staff and share their yarns and ideas. Previous negative experiences and a history of institutionalised care have made some Aboriginal families wary of the current education system. Some Aboriginal families are transient, which naturally impacts enrolments and attendance.

There is also the view that because preschool is not compulsory, it is not important. Many families have little understanding of the purpose and value of early childhood education. Current restrictions of school bus services and the challenges of isolation decrease enrolments and negatively impact attendance. Inflexible enrolment closing dates can also hinder participation.

It is important for ECEC services to think about how they engage with Aboriginal communities. It is also important to remember mainstream school and early childhood culture is based upon ‘whitefella’ values, structural contexts and curriculum.

Typically, ECEC staff have limited knowledge of local Aboriginal culture, so there needs to be
a concerted effort to acknowledge Aboriginal family networks and create cultural inclusiveness and awareness in the early years environment and curriculum. Many families who are Aboriginal prefer contact with an Aboriginal person or a person who they see as having formed rapport with—this may not always be the early years teacher.

Recommendations

One of the recommendations stemming from the research is for ECEC services to market early years places with television and radio campaigns to educate parents about the importance of early education. Where possible, it would be more effective for Aboriginal parents to be involved in production, as the ‘voice’ of this vital message. This can be done by developing links with local language centre for support with Aboriginal and bilingual resources.

ECEC services play a key role in the reconciliation process. Through reflective practice and a unity of cultures reflected in a curriculum that conveys awareness and respect of Aboriginal culture and identity. One way to do this is to display school signs and posters that use Wangkatha or other local language and/or artwork.

It is important to look for community-guided ways of increasing parent participation within services/schools. This can be achieved through community consultation and listening to the wants and needs of families. Language and educational concepts should always be user-friendly when engaging with Aboriginal families.

Developing reflective practice

Reflective practice and professional self-awareness are essential when working with Aboriginal children. This means being emotionally aware of how a person’s education and practice along with personal history, language, body language and personality can impact upon others.

These considerations will improve capacity to engage and support Aboriginal families and create positive community-directed changes that are sustainable beyond a term of employment.

Professional self-awareness means expanding one’s thinking and actions, looking and listening, asking the Aboriginal community questions, facilitating Aboriginal community consultation and capacity building.

This also means questioning one’s self, looking from the outside in and considering how actions may be perceived. It could also mean questioning the systems and structures of a workplace and being a voice for those who are not heard.

Anne Fletcher has a Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Applied Science (Disability studies), a Post Graduate degree in Policy and Governance (Community Development) and a Master of Professional Education and Training.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Some techniques ECEC practitioners might consider when working with Aboriginal people include:

- Take the extra time to build trusting relationships with parents/carers;
- Accept that more than just the immediate parents will be responsible for that child’s upbringing;
- Invite Aboriginal parents/carers/family members to assist with activities at the centre;
- In a group meeting, don’t single out a parent/carer to speak unless they are comfortable;
- Never underestimate the power of word of mouth to spread information in Aboriginal communities;
- Don’t expect that every adult can read and write;
- Look in your library, language centre for suitable local books and resources. Question your library if they do not stock any such resources;
- Engage the Aboriginal community in creating new resources (capacity building);
- If you suspect your Aboriginal parent has limited literacy/numeracy skills, don’t ask directly as this may cause shame;
- Don’t get frustrated when notes are not handed in or appointments not kept.
The last few years have seen a growth in 2.0 Web technology—the so-called ‘social media revolution’—and with it has come unprecedented transparency and transfer of information between individuals and organisations.

Some early childhood staff have become avid ‘bloggers’, while others are dipping their toes in the Facebook waters to socialise, communicate and collaborate.

But with no official guidelines written for the children’s services sector, and with the technology still largely in its infancy, confusion and miscommunication are commonplace. So, are these sites a fad or a fundamental shift in the way we communicate? And are children’s services banning or embracing the technology as a tool?

Popular social networking sites include MySpace and Bebo as well as a growing community of education bloggers, commonly known as ‘edubloggers’, but perhaps the poster child of social networking is Facebook.

With 250 million users worldwide, it is certainly the most popular. Facebook is open to individuals or businesses and allows users to create or join networks or group pages that can be organised by workplace, school or region, for example. It is here that the lines between the personal and the professional can blur and where social networking can indeed spill into the workplace.

One of the biggest concerns is that users mistakenly think they are posting or writing for a closed group of friends. They are often unaware the information they have posted may be read by a wider audience.

A quick search on Facebook revealed several schools, centres and kindergartens that have created profiles to market their service.

One Western Australian-based childcare centre has a Facebook group of 25 members. Staff...
post items about upcoming team meetings, fundraising events and social gatherings.

However, the director of this centre did not set the privacy settings, leaving it as an open group for anyone to join. As a journalist, I was able to learn the location of this centre as well as staff names, qualifications and even the names of several children.

Bernadette Dunn, National Manager of Children’s Services at McArthur Management, says early childhood staff should be mindful of the parent–staff relationship when using social networking sites.

She knows of several instances where staff and parents have become ‘friends’ on Facebook, which ‘blurs the relationship line’ and is inappropriate from a professional perspective.

Ms Dunn says the entire sector requires policy on social networking technology so a director can negotiate appropriate online behaviour with staff. Such a policy should cover the use of photography and remind staff that discussing the centre, colleagues, parents and children is highly inappropriate, she says.

‘There is so much protocol about privacy within childcare, so why would a staff member think it is OK to discuss anything work-related on such a public vehicle?’

Online is forever
An important part of ‘digital literacy’ is knowing that what we put online affects the impression we make on people, Ms Dunn says.

‘We all make choices about how we interact within our personal and professional worlds. One of those choices is about how we use technology—how we communicate and present ourselves.

‘When you are a teacher or work in children’s services there is a certain amount of decorum and privacy required.’

Jason Wilson, lecturer in Digital Communications at University of Wollongong, says staff have to consider their personal reputation, the reputation of the organisation and the reputation of others.

‘It is not like a conversation at the pub, it is archived and it is searchable.’

He believes there should be professional development on the pitfalls of sharing personal opinions while representing an organisation.

‘It is easy to say something you later regret. This information is so easily reproduced and can spread far and wide. You might delete your little indiscretion but it could have moved beyond your social circle.’

Early childhood teacher, blogger and children’s author, Amanda Gray, says many educators use two different accounts with a clear separation between the two.

‘One would be a private, “hidden” account to connect only with “friends” so we can speak freely when de-briefing after a long, hard day at work. The other is a more public account, where comments are measured and kept professional.’

A general rule of thumb is the more ‘friends’ you have, the more careful you need to be, she says.

‘Don’t say anything that would negatively affect parents, children, your school or your career if it got out. Once it is in writing, it is permanent.

‘It’s much better to de-brief with a real person face to face than it is to post something online … This [will] keep your private opinion private,’ Ms Gray says.

‘Online is forever,’ warns TAFE lecturer, Edublogs community facilitator (http://thedublogger.edublogs.org), digital educator and passionate blogger, Sue Waters (http://suewaters.com), who agrees users need to consider their digital identity.

‘Think carefully about what is and isn’t appropriate to say. If you wouldn’t say it in front of a large audience then you shouldn’t say it online,’ she says.

An early adopter of blogs, Ms Waters runs workshops on e-learning and has a particularly active online presence, but says professionalism is a must in both personal and work-related communications.

It is important not to blame the tools and to focus instead on appropriate use, she says.

‘Tools like Facebook and Twitter are often blocked in workplaces yet educators are using them to share, collaborate, exchange ideas and innovate.

‘It’s not uncommon for educators to say they learn more each day from their personal learning networks than they’ve achieved in years of traditional professional development.’

She says blanket bans and the ‘walled garden’ approach does not teach students or staff digital citizenship skills or appropriate online behaviour.

‘The trouble with a “walled garden” approach is it doesn’t necessarily teach appropriate online behaviour.’

More Dialogue and Debate
Together, The Edublogger and Rattler asked educators what they thought of the Facebook phenomenon. Read a broad range of responses posted online at http://tinyurl.com/rattler92
Mr Wilson agrees technology bans are counterproductive and says rather than wishing it away, managers should teach staff how to use technology wisely.

Referring to the so-called ‘Facebook Five’ (five Government employees who had their employment threatened after complaining about work online), Mr Wilson says organisations can inadvertently harm themselves by taking this knee-jerk approach.

‘Large organisations and educational institutions tend to be risk-adverse. They see the risks but not the benefits of this technology. At the end of the day, these platforms are about sharing information.’

However, he warns it is easy for staff to overlook the privacy implications.

‘It is all very well to have privacy settings and site permissions that allow users to restrict access but staff need to know how to correctly use them,’ he says.

The benefits of blogging

Perhaps eclipsing the use of Facebook are blogs or ‘weblogs’ that provide commentary on a particular subject or alternatively function as a personal online diary. Blogs typically combine text, images and links to other blogs.

And it seems ‘blogging’ has become a popular pastime in education circles. Educational blogs allow users to write content that is public (viewable by anyone) or private (only viewable by their school, class or people invited).

These sites are often used to help students develop literacy skills and keep parents up to date with excursions, homework, class projects and samples of children’s work.

‘Web 2.0 technologies are effectively bringing down the classroom walls,’ according to Ms Waters.

‘It provides parents greater access to what’s happening in the class environment and enhances their ability to provide feedback on their child’s work.’

Penny Ryder is one such blogger. A primary school teacher, Ms Ryder began her blog, Teaching Challenges (http://teachingchallenges.blogspot.com) just over a year ago. She has already had 10,000 visitors and currently has 90 subscribers made up of friends, fellow teachers, and often parents.

She sends a weekly email that directs parents to her blog for greater detail. The technology allows her to reflect upon her teaching and she believes makes her more accountable as a teacher, as parents often subscribe.

Ms Ryder says it is a great way to connect with fellow teachers but warns bloggers need to be prepared to do whatever is necessary to maintain the privacy of students.

At her school, Twitter and Facebook are blocked on the student network as is YouTube, and her [state] department is not in support of class blogging. She is quick to point out that her blog is personal and, for this reason, she avoids any mentions of her school or location.

‘My blog is just that, “MY” blog. I carefully select photos that do not show student faces. I try to avoid photos with identifiable school logos and do not publish student work.’

At her school, staff were emailed information on how to conduct themselves on Facebook and she says she also found this site—www.allfacebook.com/2009/02/facebook-privacy—helpful for privacy restrictions.

‘I rarely use my Facebook account and am wary of who is taking my photograph when I am socialising. [When using] Twitter, I am cautious about what I write and conscious it is a public forum.

‘It is important to realise that everything we post is creating a digital footprint that can be accessed by the world both now and for years to come. We are creating a lasting impression of who we are and what we value.’

GLOSSARY: TECHNO TERMS

Blogs (from the term ‘weblog’) are a type of online diary, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary (text, photos or video) on a particular subject. People are invited to read blog entries and post comments in an interactive format.

Digg is a social news website to share content by submitting links and stories, and voting and commenting on submitted content typically news stories. It is essentially a centralised voting system for links. Digg users can ‘digg’ (vote-for) a link. For example, Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com) and Slashdot.

Facebook is a global social networking website. Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Facebook helps people to stay in touch and share information with others. It is a way to send messages to people, instead of using email.

Twitter is a free social networking or micro-blogging service that allows users to send and read text messages known as ‘tweets’. Tweets are text-based posts displayed on a profile page and delivered to followers. Tweets are short, allowing quick information sharing and relief from email fatigue. Users can send messages from Twitter websites on their computer or from their mobile phone or handheld device.

YouTube is a video sharing website on which users can upload and share videos. Adobe Flash Video technology is used to display user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos.

Wikis are websites that use wiki software, allowing the shared creation and editing of interlinked Web pages. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites.

Teacher Heidi Kadry’s first blog was a personal site detailing her adventures while living and teaching in Japan.

She created her current blog, Classroom for the Little (www.blogcatalog.com/blog/classroom-for-the-little), after searching her computer for lesson ideas and realising these could be shared with others.

She says Facebook can also be a venting place and a way to debrief online after a stressful day.

‘Often teaching can be the source of frustration and it can be a wonderful relief to gain support from others who understand.’

Ms Kadry is vigilant about confidentiality on Classroom for the Little and says there are plenty of ways to protect individuals, services and children.

‘It would be disappointing if we avoided technology out of fear or cautiousness.’

Early childhood staff should do their research and choose a tool that best suits their educational setting whether that be a website, blog or Facebook. If Facebook is inappropriate as a networking tool, it is worth looking into other programs that offer group functions.

Blogging for social change
Amanda Gray has taken a different approach to her blog Learn2beBuddies (www.learn2bebuddies.com.au). It provides practical suggestions for working with children with social, behavioural or emotional difficulties.

Visitors to her blog include early childhood workers, therapists, special education teachers and parents, who she connects with on online social networks such as Twitter or Facebook.

‘I use Facebook to connect with people who are involved in teaching or parenting children with disabilities. We share ideas, update each other on events, and occasionally unwind by playing virtual games.’

A former childcare director, Ms Gray says if she were managing a service she would carefully monitor its use with staff.

‘I would develop overt guidelines about what is appropriate to discuss online about work, even if the staff are using social networking in their private time. We still need to have a sense of responsibility to parents and children even when we are off-duty.’

Responsible resources
Facebook Privacy: www.allfacebook.com/2009/02/facebook-privacy
Cybersmart—Internet and mobile safety advice and activities: www.cybersmart.gov.au

**BLOGGER DOS AND DON'TS**

- Implement an ICT policy for your children’s service with the collaboration of all staff members.
- Always be mindful of what you post and how you behave publicly online.
- Do not name your workplace, your location or the children on a personal blog.
- Do not create an official blog or Facebook page for your service without the permission of your Director.
- Do not post pictures or videos of other people without written permission (for example, parents, staff members, friends).
- Think carefully about use of images of students and how much identifying information is appropriate to share. Photograph students from behind so they are not identifiable.
- Select photographs that do not show student faces or blur faces. Avoid photographs with identifiable school logos or uniforms.
- Educate parents on what’s appropriate to write and what type of digital information is suitable to share. Send home a paper-based guide for using a blog.
- If nothing else, always set your profile to ‘private’ so only friends can see your profile, photographs and wall posts.
- Always block or report anyone who sends you inappropriate material.

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**LATIN AMERICAN MUSIC SHOWS/WORKSHOPS**

**THE AMIGO SHOW**

Would you like your children to experience the music of Latin America?

Latin American musician Raul Bassa is offering music shows/workshops for preschool children. The workshops cover music from different parts of Latin America played on a wide variety of traditional instruments – pan pipes, bamboo flutes, bongo drums.

‘It was fantastic. The children loved every moment. Even the staff couldn’t help dancing to the music with the children. A great multicultural experience for everyone.’

Cardiff Community Child Care Centre, September 1995

For bookings and enquiries phone (02) 4751 5768
As an architect who has only recently been exposed to the philosophies of early learning, I am intrigued by the impact each school of thought has on the design of children’s facilities.

On a recent study tour across Europe, Scandinavia, the US and Japan, I visited 50 children’s centres and saw first-hand how educational philosophies can influence physical environments.

The Fröebel schools I visited placed a particular emphasis on the centre being to a child’s scale. Fröebel viewed the child as autonomous. ‘Children learn by doing’ was one of his famous axioms, and this is reflected in designs that provide for such autonomy and accessibility.

At the Cowgate Centre in Edinburgh, a self-declared Fröebel school, the kitchen is positioned within a playroom featuring a child-height bench between work and play areas. A storage area along a corridor has built-in steps so children can put away their own things. The main focus, however, is the fluid ramp or ‘transition corridor’ that links the indoors and outdoors, celebrating the children’s freedom to move in or out.

Continuing with the forefathers of early learning, perhaps the best example of Rudolf Steiner’s architecture is the building he himself designed in Switzerland. Inside, colour is used to evoke emotion and geometry takes on a symbolic role. There are no straight lines, which reflects Steiner’s theory of humanity as a ‘three-fold manifestation’—of not just the intellect but the spirit and body as well. Steiner’s building is as much temple as it is school.

A more contemporary interpretation of an equally well-established philosophy can be found at The Children’s School in New Canaan in the US state of Connecticut. Here the Montessori-inspired centre reflects the simplicity of the child-centred approach. All clutter is removed, hidden away in a series of concealed wall cupboards, conforming to Montessori’s rigorous minimalism.

The activity happens at the child’s level on the floor with steps and pits providing seating...
variety instead of chairs, while Montessori’s emphasis on naturalism is realised with natural lighting and calming vistas.

In total contrast the schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy—with their focus on experience, experiment and expression—are an exercise in multi-layered enrichment. Here nothing is completely open nor completely separate. In the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre preschool, a rich 19th century warehouse has been transformed.

Its voluminous interior and generous timber roof structure contrasts against the plastic lolly-coloured pop modernist fit-out. In this space there is a mix of spatial concepts such as amphitheatre steps, raised levels, a bridge linking two lofts, numerous bay windows and alcoves. There are cut-outs within the walls that bend space and allow children to feel like it is possible to see round corners. It is all about experimentation and creating a multi sensory experience.

In Scandinavia, rather than trying to create an ‘ecology of the artificial’ one school of thought is a return to the outdoors. The Mulle ‘In wind or Rain’ schools function outside, and are based on the belief that it is healthier, stimulating and more fun to be outdoors than in.

Architecturally there are minimal installations within the natural setting but it is still very much designed to provide child-scaled alcoves and secret cubbies, as well as more challenging physical courses and practical skills to keep children occupied throughout the day.

Alison Clark, an educational researcher in London, quotes her inspiration as the Mosaic School, where the child is viewed as an expert. At Ashmole Primary and Pre School, she assisted the architects to design new additions using the children as clients to define the brief.

This led to a typical inner London school building being customised into microcosms that radically altered the way the school is used and perceived. The work done on the school was not statement architecture, it was about creating relevant child-friendly spaces and creating relationships between those spaces and the rest of the building.

While not moving away from the child-centred approach, current thinking is about embracing a bigger picture and looking not 'Current thinking is about embracing a bigger picture and looking not just at the child but towards the child’s context of family and community.'
just at the child but towards the child’s context of family and community. Part of this is the emphasis on integrating children’s facilities with family services and outreach facilities, but there are architectural implications to this.

For instance, in Stockholm, Klisterburken Preschool, ‘the House of Possibilities’ aims not to provide just a centre for children but to provide a place of connections. The preschool and long day care facilities are built around a central communal space that can be utilised by all.

This model is also used in Finland, where several schools are combined on one campus with a central communal space that is often a dining area and gallery or library combined. These buildings are designed to have an impact on the neighbourhood and to be seen as a feature and focus—a beacon within the community.

The importance of both a child’s connection to their community and how the centre fits within its community are current preoccupations. The beautifully modern Marmoutier Preschool in the French region of Alsace, with its complex folding geometries has been designed to sit discreetly within the Marmoutier Abbey grounds.

It uses sympathetic materials, colours and low-scaled forms, while still clearly being a public building. Likewise, the Lanterns Centre in Winchester, England, has been designed in keeping with the local Hampshire farmhouses with a roof pitch of 48 degrees. It is a direct mirror of the roof forms of the houses opposite. Both centres are clearly identified as being an
integral part of that community’s culture.

Where will current directions in early learning thinking lead us? As we place more importance on the early years, is the future in design of children’s centres becoming closer to that of a community learning centre, where the adults and children are both the client?

There is a shared need for communal areas with libraries, cafes, displays and interactive spaces, as well as small private alcoves for individual activities and break-away groups. There is also a need for putting resources on display for the learner to access at will, with interactive play now viewed, not as a way of passing the time but as a valid part of all education, regardless of age.

In the words of Designshare,\(^2\) in reference to schools but just as valid to an early learning centre:

‘Make it a place that celebrates lifelong learning... Make it so kids and adults have access to a wide range of resources but can still feel like they belong to a small caring learning community... Make it safe, but in a way that doesn’t feel prison-like. Connect it with technology to the rest of the world and prepare all learners for the new global society they will inherit. If you do all these things, we don’t mind if you call it a school.’

Sarah Scott is a partner of Scott & Ryland Architects. She specialises in the design of childcare centres, and has recently returned from a Churchill Fellowship studying the design of exemplary children’s centres in Europe, Scandinavia, the US and Japan. Sarah is writing a book, *Architecture for Children* due out in 2010. She can be contacted on: scottsarah65@gmail.com

References

Two heads are better than one, or so the saying goes. But when it comes to interpreting the new Early Years Learning Framework, team talk-overs are even better. Possum Place Director, Amanda Holt, encourages children’s services to brainstorm the Belonging, Being and Becoming document together.

Where do we start? ‘How do we fit the Framework into our already busy working lives?’ ‘Will it mean more paperwork?’ This is a common conversation between early childhood professionals about the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

In August, Australian Community Children’s Services NSW (ACCS) hosted a forum at which two members of the national consortium who wrote the EYLF document—Sandra Cheeseman and Professor Jennifer Sumsion—came together with the early childhood practitioners who were part of the pilot, to discuss the document and the practicalities of putting it into practice.

In response, I was inspired to create a workshop (a support and discussion group) for the many early childhood professionals in the Newcastle region to join in the discussion and debate. This was an opportunity to share insights and critically reflect on our practices as early childhood educators, and to take away practical knowledge of how to put the Belonging, Being and Becoming document into place.

The most common questions participants brought to the workshop were: How does this fit in with the NSW Emergent Curriculum? How does this fit in with the National Child Care Accreditation System and NSW Community Services licensing requirements? How will it look in practice? How do we prove we have included EYLF as part of our documentation?

Putting the principles into practice

The first step was to ‘unpack’ the very terms ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’ by having each participant write one sentence that described what the term ‘Belonging’ meant for them in their own early years. I cited my experience of ‘Belonging’ as being the child of parents who were in the Air Force. As my dad worked in the transport unit, he was the preschool bus driver, so I knew I belonged every day.

‘Children are born belonging to a culture, which is not only influenced by traditional practices, heritage and ancestral knowledge, but also by the experiences, values and beliefs of individual families and communities.’ (Belonging, Being and Becoming, 2009.)

The next exercise was to have participants discuss an activity a child engages in which could be described as ‘Being’ and which supports their ‘Becoming’. A clear example of this is a staff member at my centre who is passionate about her vegetable garden and the gardens at our centre. She was influenced by the many experiences she encountered as a child in her parent’s garden.

Sharing the understandings of the words through practical application was powerful and lead to the common question: ‘So what do we change?’ The answer is… not much! EYLF is
not a prescriptive tool, it is open to interpretation and is adaptable to the context of the early childhood setting in which it is implemented.

The initial draft of the EYLF Educator’s Guide found on the DEEWR website presents information about planning for learning, recording learning, promoting learning, teaching strategies, assessing and documenting learning.

Once each participant present understood that we are already immersed in the very activities described in the draft EYLF Educator’s Guide there was a palpable sense of relief in the room.

The key message delivered at the workshop was the need for critical reflection by early childhood educators. This was achieved through each small group taking time to discuss one outcome point (outcome 4, point 4 was discussed at this meeting).

The discussion was how each point of evidence, for example, was already reflected in their daily practice or service delivery and how this was evident for children. Every one of the participants was able to cite further evidence of practice and learning which is unique to their service and community.

At my centre, Possum Place staff are taking the opportunity to discuss and reflect on each outcome over a period of time during team meetings. Every reflection is a challenge, not only to the individual but also the team and service as a whole. A challenge which is sometimes met immediately because it is already in place, or sometimes confronting because the need to change is imminent and requires honest acknowledgement of the need to improve practice.

‘In such a climate, issues relating to curriculum quality, equity and children’s wellbeing can be raised and debated.’ (Using Belonging, Being and Becoming in Early Childhood Services: A Guide for Educators, 2009.)

The other common question is how does this fit with the emergent curriculum, licensing and accreditation requirements? It fits because we already undertake such practices everyday, which is evident in our daily interactions and planning.

Documentation and observed practice of interactions will demonstrate the outcomes to each respective authority. This must include the evidence of ongoing reflection and can be achieved through maintaining notes and records of changes.

It is important to take the time to familiarise yourself with the EYLF. Do it as a group and you will feel more confident about its introduction.

The way forward is to improve practice through reflection of this well-written and researched document that supports the role and practice of early childhood educators. This was achieved through each small group taking time to discuss one outcome point (outcome 4, point 4 was discussed at this meeting).

Community Child Care and Children’s Services Central are planning a range of EYLF related professional development (for more information see www.cscentral.org.au) but it is a great idea for services to also organise forums and discussion groups within your own local areas. All of us need to take the time to familiarise ourselves with the Framework—and what better way to do it than with a group of peers! Community Child Care would love to hear about your experiences.

Amanda Holt is the Director of Possum Place Child and Vacation Care Centres, units of Hunter New England Area Health Service in Newcastle. Possum Place cares for the children of health service employees.
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WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD?
Working in early childhood can be very rewarding. What I enjoy most is the support I can offer children and families, and being the first step for children to further their education into primary school and life.

HOW DID THE KOORI HABITAT PROGRAM KICK-START YOUR CHILD CAREER?
My career started with babysitting, then high school work experience led me to get hands-on experience in a childcare environment. I had wanted to leave school but my principal said I could only leave if I had a job or studies lined up. I looked around for work but didn’t get any interviews. I began to look at what programs Nowra offers young indigenous people and discovered Koori Habitat’s CDIP program. I went in and made an appointment to see someone the following day. Now I could leave school! Koori Habitat said they had a preschool looking for a casual cleaner. I accepted because I know you have to start at the bottom of the ladder and work your way up. Later I was offered a traineeship.

WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST JOB CHALLENGES?
The biggest challenge is providing support for children with disabilities, special and additional needs. It pulls on my heartstrings. I was surprised to learn just how much communication, knowledge and understanding [these children] have. I like to make the children smile and do what I can for them to enjoy their lives to the fullest, ensuring they don’t feel different. I go home, knowing the children have enjoyed their day—that’s what counts.

AS A YOUNG INDIGENOUS WOMAN, WHAT ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT?
Throughout my schooling in Nowra I had fabulous teachers who inspired my passion for children and education. Ever since, my goal was to be a teacher. I’m now half way to achieving that goal.

WHAT DO YOU DO THINK ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD CARE?
I would like to see centres upgraded with toys and equipment children are interested in, not what teachers think is best. I also think childcare could be more affordable for families—education is expensive—many parents are struggling to make ends meet.

WHAT CAN SERVICES DO TO HELP PROMOTE INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AWARENESS?
By putting themselves out there and inviting families with different cultures to enrol with their services. This is the most important point because families are often unaware of where their children are accepted. Services can also display photos, paintings, posters and cultural artefacts, provide equipment and resources within their services that make children and families aware of other cultures.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR AWARD?
The CeeCees Award was a once-in-a-lifetime experience! I had just accomplished my Certificate III in Children’s Services when I was told I had been nominated for an award. I had to write a letter about the struggles I’d overcome. Weeks later I was told I was one of three finalists in the Childcare Worker category and that the winner would be announced at the CeeCees gala dinner!

News soon spread to my parents who at first thought I was pulling their legs. When my category was announced and my name called, for a good minute I just sat in my seat and looked from my father to my mother in disbelief. It felt like my mother would squeeze my hand off! I got out of my seat and instead of walking to the stage I ran!

That night I was approached by Maria Pender, who offered me a place with Macquarie University to study for my Bachelor Degree in Early Childhood Education. Of course I accepted, and I am now studying part-time to become a teacher. It was a wonderful night I will never forget. I couldn’t have done it without the support of everyone at Lyrebird Preschool Kindergarten. 🌟
The Princess and the Packet of Frozen Peas
Published by Scholastic Press
By Tony Wilson and Sue de Gennaro
Cost: $26.99
This is a post-modern twist on the Hans Christian Anderson classic, and one that the children in your care are bound to enjoy.

Prince Henrik is the brother of the Danish prince from the original fairy tale. He is an outdoorsy type, and hopes his future wife will like hockey and camping. Instead of 20 mattresses, he finds one thin camping mattress; instead of 20 doonas, he finds one old sleeping bag. And instead of one single pea, Henrik uses a whole packet of frozen peas.

“What’s the deal with the packet of frozen peas”, the wannabe princesses cry! I couldn’t help wondering what Australian-born Danish Princess Mary would make of this rags-to-riches tale in which a hockey-playing, gappy-toothed old school friend, Pippa, wins the prince’s heart.

Mothers and Others: The evolutionary origins of mutual understanding
Published by Harvard University Press
By Sarah Blaffer Hrdy
Cost: $59.95
This thought-provoking anthropological study looks at our ‘cooperative parenting’ history as a species—it’s what separates us from the apes!

Mothers and Others turns back the evolutionary clock, looking at the line of apes that began to rear their young cooperatively.

As a new mother, I found this compelling reading. It came as no surprise that mother apes are obsessively anxious about their babies but that they also rely heavily on shared care.

The text is dotted throughout with black and white anthropological photos that illustrate child-rearing practices, body language, and attachment theory.

This title certainly gives fresh meaning to the saying, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. It is however, no light read, and is perhaps best suited to those pursuing further study or those who do not shy away from a theoretically dense text.

From Lullabies to Literature: Stories in the lives of infants and toddlers
Published by National Association for the Education of Young Children.
By Jennifer Birckmayer, Anne Kennedy and Anne Stonehouse
Cost: $45.95
Childcare providers, teachers, parents, older siblings, and grandparents all have roles to play in introducing a love of language. Packed with practical tips and ideas, this is a collaboration between American and Australian academics including local experts Anne Kennedy and Anne Stonehouse.

Published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), From Lullabies to Literature looks at the myriad ways reading books and other ‘story experiences’ (conversations, songs, poems, rhymes) can increase vocabulary and lay the foundations for future literacy.

This is not a how-to book or a research-driven text but rather a collection of ideas for reflection.
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)
First drafted 26 May, 1998
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