

reflections

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Reflections is a quarterly publication by Gowrie Australia for educators and families in Education and Care Services.

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The opinions expressed in *Reflections* are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of Gowrie Australia. By publishing diverse opinions we aim to encourage critical reflection and motivate practitioners in Early Childhood Education and Care Services to respond. Gowrie Australia's privacy policy precludes the use of children's names. Fictitious names are substituted.

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Dear Colleagues,

Since the last edition of *Reflections*, the Federal election has resulted in a change of government with the Coalition now leading Australia. The Honourable Sussan Ley has been appointed as Assistant Minister for Education and is well equipped to take on this portfolio, having previously been the Opposition Minister. Gowrie Australia is delighted to introduce the Assistant Minister to readers in this edition, and we look forward to working in collaboration with the Assistant Minister, the Department of Education and its representatives to support policy and practice that will improve outcomes for young children. In the article, Assistant Minister Ley acknowledges the importance of a play based curriculum for young children and invites readers to engage in the forthcoming Productivity Commission inquiry into how our child care and early learning system can be made more flexible, affordable and accessible, to support the best decisions about the future of the sector. As the Assistant Minister states, this is a once in a generation opportunity, and readers are actively encouraged to contribute to this process.

To mirror the Assistant Minister's recognition of the importance of play, this final edition for 2013 has a strong theme of play, particularly using natural materials to provide a myriad of learning opportunities for young children.

A family day care educator shares how she has embraced the *Early Years Learning Framework* and recognised the focus on learning through play with practical ideas. Her article complements John Mewburn Centre's journey of developing a program to support sustainability. Director, Nicole White describes how staff came to embrace a 'Mud Day', the challenges and the realisation that the opportunities afforded by such an experience are manifold. The statement, "There is no *bad* weather, just different kinds of weather..", indicates that children's learning is central.

With digital media increasing, mobile devices and internet use in Australia is reported as extremely high, and there are differing perspectives relating to the use of digital technology in the early years. The *Early Years Learning Framework* highlights the importance of young children using and accessing digital technology, and values technology as a significant avenue for promoting communication, and for children learning about their worlds.

The article by Professor Susan Danby shares a research project on the mobile technologies in young children's everyday worlds. Two extracts from parent interviews share how the use of technology is managed in a practical sense, and how the use is interwoven into everyday life. This is a thought-provoking article - for both educators, and families.

Also featured is a new resource, *Deadly Cards*, commissioned by the Health and Community Services Workforce Council, and informed and developed by the work of the Deadly River Sisters. Having recently experienced the use of these cards, the images and provocations certainly stimulated reflection and conversation to enhance awareness and understanding of our nation's first people. This is a 'must have' resource to support respectful connections and build cultural awareness.

The article by Freya Lucas reports on a recent study tour to New Zealand to explore the use of Learning Stories within early childhood settings and how the Mindset work of Carol Dweck has influenced the exploration of one particular Kindergarten. The article describes two mindsets or beliefs about our learning ability. It challenges a fixed mindset, versus a growth mindset, and presents key considerations for educators in terms of viewing children in these ways.

In this edition, Gowrie Australia acknowledges a significant milestone for Early Childhood Australia - 75 years of advocacy and commitment to the rights and interests of young children. To celebrate this anniversary, ECA has published its history, highlighting the impact of the organisation. The publication also documents the strong relationship between the Lady Gowrie Centres and Early Childhood Australia during the establishment of the Gowrie Centres, and beyond.

Finally, with summer not yet with us, already bushfires have devastated areas of New South Wales. Many schools, preschools and child care centres were evacuated at the height of the fires, but thankfully no lives were lost. To our friends and colleagues affected by the fires, our thoughts are with you, your families and indeed the broader community.

Until next time,

Ros Cornish
on behalf of Gowrie Australia

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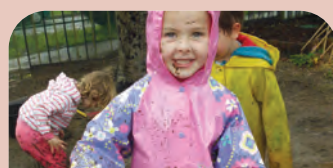
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Message from Assistant Minister Sussan Ley

I recently had the pleasure of attending some activities as a part of Children's Week at the end of October. It was great to meet so many families and people involved in the sector who were celebrating how play-based learning can help children learn through the choices they make, the games they create and interactions they have with each other and the educators around them.

Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine.

Play can also expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn.

In these ways play can promote positive dispositions towards learning and children's immersion in their play enables them to simply enjoy "being". It is an essential part of any early learning programme.

All children, regardless of their circumstances, deserve quality learning through play in a happy and safe environment supported by educators. When you consider that almost every child in Australia will attend some form of child care and early learning before starting school, this sector is critical to the life of every family. I appreciate how the sector plays an important role by developing programmes and activities to help children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they actively engage with people and objects.

As the Assistant Minister for Education responsible for child care and early learning, I would like to see more families and children have access to quality child care that is affordable, accessible and flexible so that families can pursue employment opportunities knowing that they are able to meet their work and family obligations.

The Government supports quality early learning under the National Quality Framework (NQF). However we remain concerned by reports that its implementation has caused administrative and staffing problems, which then may be passed on as cost increases for families. We will work closely with states and territories, and the sector, to improve the implementation of the NQF while always ensuring high quality child care and early learning is provided to Australian children.

I believe we can achieve quality learning for our children without burdensome and unnecessary regulations that can take educators away from what they do best, caring for our children in a safe and challenging learning environment. I'm convinced that with a collaborative relationship between the Government, families, early childhood educators and the child care sector, we can make this happen.

Among the Government's first priorities is the Productivity Commission inquiry into how our child care and early learning system can be made more flexible, affordable and accessible, so we can make the best decisions about the future of the sector. This is a once in a generation opportunity. I encourage you to engage in this process and put forward your views and ideas on what the future of early learning and child care will look like. I will have more details on how you can engage in this Inquiry by the end of the year, so if this interests you please keep a check via my website-sussanley.com

I appreciate the strong engagement I have received from the sector so far and I'm excited about what we can achieve together to improve outcomes for children, families and the whole sector.

The Hon Sussan Ley MP
Assistant Minister for Education

75 Years of Early Childhood Australia

Author:
Ros Cornish
President
Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) celebrated a milestone with the recent launch of its history, *A voice for young children - 75 years of Early Childhood*, researched and written by Drs Fran Press and Sandie Wong. The organisation was first established in 1938 as the 'Australia Association for Pre School Child Development'. Since then the name has changed three times with its current name adopted in 2003.

ECA has overseen an impressive legacy of long lasting initiatives, including the Lady Gowrie Child Centres, the Organisation for Mondiale Pour l'Education Prescolaire (OMEP) in Australia and the Code of Ethics for the Australian early childhood profession. Branches in NSW, Victoria and Queensland piloted child care accreditation before any Australian government thought the accreditation of early childhood education and care services mattered.

Of course ECA is well recognised for the quality of its national conferences – the first organised in 1939, there have been 28 to date. The organisation has a formidable publication record with the production and provision of information for the sector supporting better experiences for young children.

In the publication, the Lady Gowrie Child Centres are featured prominently as part of ECA's history. As the first national conference was being planned, the Association was also charged with the task of establishing and developing six Model Demonstration Child Development Centres – the Lady Gowrie Child Centres. This establishment was a significant aspect of the then Federal Government's response to improving child welfare.

In reading the history, the Association oversaw everything in establishing the Centres. From the height of toilets, shelving and doorknobs, to a safe storage space for teachers' purses! Careful attention was paid to the material and equipment to be used by the children but staff were encouraged to shop 'intelligently and economically' - some things never change in the early childhood sector as this continues to be encouraged today!

The sites for each of the centres were secured and they opened in the period between December 1939 and October 1940:

- Melbourne – Carlton
- Perth – Victoria Park
- Adelaide – Thebarton
- Brisbane – Spring Hill
- Hobart – Battery Point
- Sydney – Erskineville

Since the initial establishment of the Centres, the relationship between ECA and the Gowries has altered to reflect the changing nature of early childhood provision and social and political changes. Regardless, the long history and synergy between the two agencies remains an integral part of the early childhood sector journey and the relationship is highly valued and respected and forms an important part of both ECA and Gowrie history.

A voice for young children - 75 years of Early Childhood is a publication which not only celebrates and records the significant impact of the organisation and its relationship with the Gowrie Centres, but also outlines many of the achievements and challenges during those years. As such, this publication is a valuable resource, and a 'must read' for the profession.

The authors' Dedication reminds us of past commitment and present endeavour: "This history of Early Childhood Australia is dedicated to the many people who have built its voice over the years – all those advocates for young children who, quite simply, would not – and will not – give up."

This message is certainly relevant today as many within the sector continue to advocate as a strong voice for young children *and will not give up*, just as those tenacious, visionary and committed advocates - our predecessors - have done over the past 75 years.

Happy 75th Anniversary ECA and thank you for the ongoing commitment to the rights and interests of young children - to be '*a voice for children*'.

Reference:

Press, F., & Wong, S. (2013). *A voice for young children – 75 years of Early Childhood*. Canberra, Australia: ECA.



Reflection on Global Citizenship and Developing a Sustainable Future

Author:
Nicole White
Director
John Mewburn Child Care Centre
Gowrie NSW

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12) states that children should have the right to express their own opinions and to be heard in matters that affect them. Importantly, it is the decisions we make today that will affect children as our future citizens.



Substantial research shows that education for sustainability must start early in life, as it is in a child's early years (before they are five) that they begin to develop the basic values, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that they will carry into their adult life. Early childhood educators have a professional and ethical responsibility to support children to become moral agents and 'world citizens'. A moral citizen is defined as having the ability to reflect, take responsibility and act in support of their own and others' rights and in support of justice and the wellbeing of others at both a local and global level (Johansson, 2009). As pedagogical leaders we can build upon young children's knowledge to transform their thinking, practices and relationships by empowering children to express their concerns about rights, justice and the wellbeing in day to day routines, interactions and learning experiences.

There is a need for further evidence-based research to be undertaken on education for sustainability within the early childhood education sector. It has become apparent that many educators are either unaware of, or fearful of the extent to which change is required to achieve a sustainable society. There has recently been a shift in the focus on promoting sustainability with the introduction of the National Quality Framework. However, educators need to understand that creating a sustainable society is more in-depth than simply having a worm farm, recycling or creating 'green spaces' in their setting; it is also about questioning moral issues, and critically reflecting on the interconnection between economic, social and environmental issues. Teaching for sustainability is about creating a culture of community learners; the Swedish National Curriculum for example, embraces the concept of community learners within its curriculum and has successfully taught children global citizenship skills.

We are often over protective of our children, and shelter them from 'real world' problems by avoiding discussing issues such as climate change, poverty and the effects of urbanisation. However, children are exposed to these issues every day through the media; turning a blind eye to them simply delays the child's process of making sense of a world of which they are already a part. Moreover, education for sustainability is not all doom and gloom; it is 'transformational' education that empowers children to be engaged in taking action in their own environment and creating social change.

How can today's children be the voice of tomorrow if we do not provide them with learning opportunities that allow them to be active citizens in the world in which they live? Let's work towards creating pedagogical programs where families, the community and children are all active participants in unpacking local and global issues.

Our Journey

At John Mewburn Child Care Centre we are only at the beginning of our exciting journey in developing a pedagogical program that unpacks a deeper understanding of what it means to be sustainable for all of our stakeholders, including our children, families and educators. Our story so far has been one of reflection, discussion and collaboration, planning for change, trial (and sometimes error!) and, most importantly, learning for all of us.

First Steps: Reflecting and Sharing

We started our journey with educators reflecting upon and sharing their professional learning around the 'Early Years Bush Connection' program. This program, developed by Sydney TAFE, is an early childhood program based on the principle that through learning about nature in a natural setting, children are more likely to grow up respecting and caring for the environment. Their reflections and discussions led educators to think about how they connected with nature and played as children. Some of the educators come from the area in which our centre is located in Malabar, which is a coastal suburb in Sydney's southeast. These educators spoke about their experiences of exploring the beach and rock pools in the local community as children; other educators shared stories about how in their home country they did not have what many of us would consider to be toys as children, instead sticks, rocks, mud and chickens were considered to be their toys. The discussions took place in non-formal meetings, like a yarnning circle. You could see the joy in the educators' eyes as they talked about their childhood memories. We then discussed how the elements of what they had valued as play, when they were children, could be added into the context of the centre philosophy - for example, nature place spaces and the use of natural materials.

Initially educators and children worked together in the outdoor environment to create 'green spaces'. However, despite our enthusiasm, after several weeks many of the plants and shrubs we had planted died. The educators and children reflected together on why this may have happened. *Did we care for the plants properly? Are these the best conditions for these plants to live in? Do different plants need different types of care?* This process of reflection eventually led to an investigation into what plants, rocks and animals are native to our area, which in turn led to a further investigation into our community and brought us to consider *Who did this land belong to before us?* We discovered that the Eora people are the traditional custodians of our land, and that our centre's outdoor area already grows many native plants including the Lilli Pilli tree, which produces a fruit you can make into jam, and the Coastal Wattle which flowers when the whales are migrating. As part of the development of our outdoor space we now work with the children to research and plant vegetation that is native to our area.

We have also established a chicken coop and vegetable and herb gardens, although we do not see these as an end in themselves in terms of educating for sustainability. Rather, we believe that it is the discussions that happen everyday with children within these spaces that make these learning experiences meaningful investigations towards sustainability.

Rain, Wind and Mud: Connecting with Nature

We believe that facilitating each child's connection with the natural world and helping them to understand and respect all aspects of nature is fundamental to educating for sustainability. Last winter we noticed that many of the children enjoyed running out into the rain and washing the plastic dinosaurs in the water that was running off from gutters and higher ground. The children continually voiced their enjoyment of playing in the rain, and as a team we began to question ourselves 'Why do we stop children from running in the raining?' Is it because it is harmful for them? Or is it inconvenient for us as educators? Or perhaps it is something that we think parents will not be happy about. We decided to investigate this further, and to our surprise discovered that many parents were supportive of letting the children enjoy the outdoors in all kinds of weather.

We sent the following article to our families:

<http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/2013/06/say-yes-to-outdoor-play-in-winter.html>, and asked them to tell us what they thought about their children playing outdoors in the types of weather that we usually tend to avoid. Responses included:

'I think it's great for kids to play outdoors in all kinds of weather as long as they are kept warm etc.'

'I know [my child] loves nothing more than going outside in the rain with her raincoat, umbrella and gumboots and jumping in muddy puddles!'

'It may be a good idea to let the parent know what's planned so we can send extra clothes or make sure they have their raincoat and umbrella for example.'

'...I definitely say yes to outdoor play in winter! I'm happy to pack an extra set of clothes in case [my child] gets wet and to pack a raincoat. At least they shouldn't get sunburnt in the rain!!!'

'I'm all for kids playing outdoors in different weather, they just have to be suitably clothed and have a spare set of dry clothes! Getting wet and stomping in mud puddles is the best fun – you only have to look at the smile on their faces.'

However, we also had some families who were not so keen, and who were initially concerned about their children's health and wellbeing. It was essential that each family's values and beliefs were respected, and at no time were children (or educators for that

matter!) forced to play in the rain or wind. Nevertheless, as the weeks past, more and more children began arriving at the centre in their wet weather gear and many brought along spare clothes. The culture and attitude towards outdoor wet weather play had changed for many, and some families who initially were not so keen, began to reflect on their own personal experiences as children and remembered the joy that they themselves had received from playing outside in different types of weather.

There is no **bad** weather, just different kinds of weather...

In celebration of our first small win towards sustainable development and connecting our children with 'real' nature, our John Mewburn Child Care Centre held a 'Mud Day' this year. The children played outdoors in the mud and rain all day. Many children, families and educators participated in this special day of exploration, learning and fun. This day was a milestone for us. Only two months earlier many families and educators were uncertain about letting children walk in the rain, let alone encouraging them to wallow gleefully in the rain and mud! The culture of our centre has started to change. Excursions to the library or local shops used to be cancelled due to 'bad weather'; these days we go on our excursion regardless of rain, hail or wind!

For our children, this journey has opened up many possibilities for new experiences, joy and learning. Recently the children set out for a walk to the library while it was sunny, but were then caught in a sudden unexpected downpour of rain. The children all walked back to the centre sheltered under a large piece of tarp. They described this particular excursion as the "best library day ever!"

We still have a long way to go on our journey of achieving true education for sustainability across all aspects of our program. We know that change is a slow process that requires reflection, collaboration, motivation and the capacity to question why we do what we do, and to see whether we can make real changes to our embedded practices. The next stage in our journey is a potential plan to take the children on walks to our local beach and nature reserves. The idea has been shared with educators, families and children and we are now working collaboratively with our stakeholders to make this happen in ways that will enhance children's learning and experiences while ensuring their safety and wellbeing.

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Johansson, E. (2009). 'The Preschool Child of Today? The World-Citizen of Tomorrow?' *International Journal of Early Childhood*. 41(2), 79-95.

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved September 23, 2013, from: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

“DEADLY”

means cool, awesome, wicked!



Author:
Jan Ungerer
Workforce Consultant
Health and Community Services Workforce Council

The Deadly Cards are an exciting and innovative new resource designed to stimulate reflective conversation and build culturally aware practice across organisations, groups and individuals.

Comprising 64 cards, the resource promotes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion and the sharing of traditional ways of being and knowing. On the front of each card is a key visual image, extended by conceptual questions and provocations on the back. These images and provocations enable conversation and reflection, and support the journey to enhance the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and traditions into our service delivery and strengthen our connections to community.

The Deadly Cards were commissioned by the Health and Community Services Workforce Council, and informed and developed by the work of the Deadly River Sisters. An action research group comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous early childhood educators explored questions around the central provocation: *‘What is at the heart of acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and embedding cultural practices in our community?’* Engaged through the action research methodology, the Deadly River Sisters generously shared personal and professional experiences.

The project set out to deepen understanding, providing a sense of belonging, being and becoming. It linked with the National Quality Standard and approved frameworks to unpack the cultural competence and cultural integrity of the early childhood education and care sector. The project enabled connections with local traditional custodians, elders and community members

to support real and ongoing partnerships on deadly river country. The project invited educators to explore and critically reflect upon assumptions, bias, cultural competence and ideology in relation to their community and contexts.

There is no wrong way to engage with the Deadly Cards. Find a peaceful place. Pick a card, look, reflect, question, share and discover. See where the journey takes you!

‘There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about. Ask ‘What’s possible?’; not ‘What’s wrong?’ Notice what you care about. Assume many others share your dreams. Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters. Remember you don’t fear people whose story you know. Real listening always brings people closer together!’
Margaret J Wheatley

The invitation is to build more culturally conscious individuals and organisations, aware of their purpose and their impacts on the families and children in the context of their community.

The Deadly Cards, as a resource, are a deliberate attempt to translate that purpose into respectful connections that recognise and acknowledge Australia’s first people.

The ‘Deadly Cards’ resource can be ordered from the Health and Community Services Workforce Council Ph: 07 3239 3094

THE VOICE OF THE EDUCATOR:

Who needs toys?

We have dirt and water and grass and wind and stones and sticks and flowers and, best of all, we have imagination.

Author:
Rita Moar
Wanslea Family Day Care
Educator, WA.

Rita Moar is a Wanslea Family Day Care Educator who recently became a state finalist in the 'Australian Family', Early Childhood Educator of the Year Awards. Rita was one of 6 educators who made the final list of nominees for Western Australia. Her passion and enthusiasm in providing children with natural learning opportunities is demonstrated in how she sets up her learning spaces, and we invited her to share her story about adapting her family home to create these opportunities for the children she cares for.

Christine Baker,
Wanslea Early Years Executive
Manager.



When EYLF was introduced it was daunting. I'm not going to lie. As soon as I heard about it I thought, "Here we go, another way of doing things that was designed by someone who is probably sitting behind a desk and has very little interaction with children." Boy was I wrong. While this article is not specifically about the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*, it has to be mentioned. Why? Because it is awesome. It has allowed us to take a step back and let children enjoy growing up and learning through play.

Play and leisure activities provide opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine (EYLF, 2009: 15).

It's as though someone has finally listened to what I have been saying for years. I have always been a big fan of the outdoors and learning through our environment. When I was looking for our current home the biggest requirement for me wasn't the size of my kitchen (which is tiny), the first thing I looked at when deciding if this home met my needs, was the outdoor space.

It wasn't a child's paradise, it was barren, dry, overgrown in areas with no shade or anything pretty, but there was potential. Time to get started.....

The first thing we did was excavate a 3.5m x 2.5m hole. This was to become our mega sandpit. My amazing husband dug it by hand and then finished it off with edging and added timber benches surrounding the sandpit and a shade cover to provide protection from the sun. The sandpit is used for many hours almost every day. We have 'cooking classes' in there, complete with an outdoor oven and saucepans, cake tins etc. The older children turn it into *Masterchef* headquarters, complete with 'plating up' and 'judging' the food.

The sandpit is also a great place to learn about science without even trying. For example, just recently one of my day care children was trying very hard to make a sand shape using a plastic shell container. Time and time again he filled it with sand and carefully tipped it onto the table. When he removed the plastic container his sand shell did not hold its shape. His little face couldn't hide his disappointment. We talked about why it wasn't working. We concluded that the sand was too dry. Solution? Let's get some water.

We mixed some water with the sand and then tried again. It worked. He was so excited. He then made about twenty of them. He couldn't wait to tell his parents. Now, if you were looking on, you might think that all he did was 'play' in the sandpit for twenty minutes. But it was so much more. Whether you have a clamshell or a mega sandpit like I have, there are so many opportunities and so much fun to be had. Yes it means you have to vacuum the floor in the house a lot more, but trust me, it's worth it. Just make sure you cover it every night - there's nothing worse than discovering a cat has used your sandpit as giant kitty litter.

Over the years, we have also transformed our garden so it is now a very tactile, inviting, wonderful garden that allows the children to explore and learn about their environment, sustainability and to have fun. We have introduced native plants, a vegetable garden (that the children help me maintain and eat from), compost and a worm farm. They have created an area they call 'the jungle' where they love playing with dinosaurs, animals and trucks amongst the shrubs, leaves and, most importantly, the dirt.

For a while that is where I stopped. And then EYLF inspired me to do more... It all started when we had to re-locate our vegetable garden as the harsh summer sun was not very kind on our plants. Then there was this 'space' that was just asking for a 'nature play' area. Yes we could have planted it with natives and put a garden edge on it, but that would have been no fun at all.

When creating fun, inviting spaces for children, you really have to stop being an adult for a while, get down on your hands and knees and think back to when you were a child and what it was that you loved doing in the garden. For me it included some key things:

- dirt
- water
- sand
- sticks, leaves and branches
- tree stumps
- a creek bed (but clearly that is not going to happen in my FDC environment)
- friends
- imagination.

The best thing about creating a nature play area in your day care environment (or family home), is that it doesn't have to be expensive or large. You can work around whatever space you have and use as much or as little money as you'd like.

Some of the things we did include:

- a mud pie kitchen
- a truck and dirt area
- an outdoor classroom
- a tepee
- water
- fairy garden and dino land.

Reference: Commonwealth of Australia. (2009). *Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra: Council of Australian Governments and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

How to get started:

- **The mud pie kitchen.** All children need is a table or bench, some old kitchen pots, pans, bowls plates, utensils and some dirt and water. If you don't have anything old to use, a trip to the \$2 shop can pick you up some great bargains. One of my children's most favourite things to use in the mud pie kitchen is a recycled milk bottle.
- **The truck and dirt area.** It's simple - trucks and dirt. By setting up an area for digging with trucks, it helps to stop your beautiful flower garden being dug up by the digger of a truck. Trucks are also fun to push around the entire nature play area.
- **An outdoor classroom.** I was lucky enough to find some amazing tree trunks on a roadside collection. They have now been recycled for use in our outdoor classroom. The children love them. We have 5 of the smaller ones nestled under a tree and a blackboard. They are used as seats but also to stand on to perform, to jump on, to balance on, to put toys on and sometimes to just sit and have a quiet chat.
- **Our tepee.** Initially I made the structure out of bamboo poles held together at the top with a strong rubber band. When we first made it, we covered it with branches from a palm tree but now we have made a canvas cover for it. Both are equally fun. It's personal choice really. The tepee is a great area for the children to hide away, read a book, chat, play with toys, or just play with their friends.
- **Water.** I am yet to meet a child who doesn't love playing with water. We have a hose set up so the kids can get little bits of water when they want (unless of course I turn the tap off). But the best source of our water is rain. We love finding water in little containers that we have set up all around the garden. This water gets used to make homes for animals and making mudpies in the kitchen.
- **Fairy garden & Dino land.** We purchased a few cheap pots and filled them with soil and grass seeds. On one we made a little fairy house out of wood and planted a pretty flowering plant, we sprinkled some fairy dust and tiny little fairies arrived. In the other we added some rocks and a big leaf plant. We bought some cheap little dinosaurs from Kmart and it was an instant success. Now add a little water and sunshine and then these pots came to life... The grass grows in the pot and creates many learning opportunities. One of our favourite things to do is take some scissors outside and trim the grass.

The size and type of outdoor space you set up for your children really comes down to how much area you want to use, and what resources you have available. The most important thing is to stop being an adult for a while, get back in touch with your 'inner-child', and have fun.



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A Mindset for Learning: using a growth mindset within early childhood

The image of the child in the Reggio Emilia approach is one of a rich, competent, capable theory builder. This construct could be the image of the teacher as well, but to accept this image we must first embrace theory in our practice. One such theory was recently explored by Gowrie SA team members, both at the June 2013 conference “Young Minds – How do we grow a good person?”*, and on a study tour of several early childhood services in New Zealand. This theory is the work of Carol Dweck, and the concepts of mindsets or beliefs about children’s (and our own) abilities to learn and progress.

Carol describes two mindsets or beliefs about our learning ability that affects how both adults and children respond to challenges: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset. While both mindsets exist on a continuum, and people can learn to channel and change their mindsets, if we continue through life with the belief that intelligence and ability is fixed and can’t change, this can limit and undermine our motivation and learning, and can place limits on the lenses with which we view the children in our care.

Holding a fixed mindset, educators and children are likely to believe that performance and product are the goals, that learning is a pre-determined destination, and that, in the face of challenge, ability is the only way to overcome setbacks, devaluing effort and the opportunity to trial a number of different solutions. Often those with a fixed mindset view that which does not meet their expectations (such as an unexpected result, or a planned experience not working the way they thought it would) as a failure, and as a sign of something lacking within them. Linking these perceived “failures” to their own lack of ability, those with a fixed mindset can opt out of

“difficult” learning and can be reluctant to embrace change and trial new things.

Those holding a growth mindset, however, are able to be resilient in the face of frustration and “failure” and believe that effort can lead to success. Process and evolving product become the malleable goal, with our self-efficacy¹ shaping our attitude, motivation and commitment to learning. Dweck believes that a growth mindset leads to a desire to learn, to embrace challenges, to persist in the face of setbacks, to see effort as the path to mastery and to find lessons and inspiration in the success of others. This links with the image of the child as one who is rich, competent and capable, and links too, with learning frameworks which call upon educators to be deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and interactions (DEEWR, 2010).

So what might a growth mindset look like in action? How can educators incorporate Dweck’s ideas into their reflective thinking, philosophy and documentation?

Recently educators from Gowrie SA were lucky enough to attend a study tour of New Zealand exploring the use of Learning Stories within early childhood services. One consistently powerful thread of learning they found woven through service explorations was Carol Dweck’s work on mindsets.

At Roskill Kindergarten in Auckland, educators have been undertaking team reflections on how the Mindset theory manifests in their service, noting that the research they have undertaken into mindsets links into their beliefs that children are highly motivated, self-directed learners.

*Self-efficacy is the measure of the belief in one’s own ability to complete tasks and reach goals.



In Roskill's "bush kindergarten" children are provided with environments in which they can take calculated risks, learning to assess the situation at hand and adapt to the environment and the climate. This adaptability, and the opportunity to explore risk in the context of trial and error, is developing the children's views of themselves as people who possess a mindset of growth – challenges are good things, challenges allow for growth and learning. Educators report that by viewing children with a growth mindset, they can see that the effort and skills the children are achieving give them a sense of empowerment to seek out and set further challenges.

Any service wishing to adopt a growth mindset within their team may wish to consider the following in relation to their individual context:

Context for learning

- How does your service support risk taking, and the opportunity to learn from mistakes, trial and error?
- Is this culture supportive only of the children, or are educators and educational leaders also encouraged and supported in their reflections on things that did not go so well?
- Is effort talked about and valued in your community?

Content for learning

- Are children given opportunities for challenge?
- Are attitudes and aptitudes such as resourcefulness and resilience noticed, promoted and celebrated?

A broad worldview

- Are co-workers, contemporary theorists and other significant people within the community used as resources for reciprocal learning?
- Are ideas and alternative pathways given careful and equal consideration?

A time rich environment

- Is time for reflection and self-assessment and evaluation made available?
Time for such things can promote a growth mindset in both educators and children by giving space for children to get to know their strengths, acknowledge what has worked well in the past, and identify how they can move forward in their learning journey.

* The author attended the "Young Minds 2013 – How do we grow a good person?" as a guest of the Vajrayana Institute Inc

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Smart Phones and Tablets in the Early Years: a waste of time or a valuable opportunity for accessing information and communicating?

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New digital media surrounds us. Everyday, we see young children using smart phones and tablets, whether it is at a café, in a shopping centre, a medical centre, or travelling on public transport. Open any toy catalogue and you'll see advertisements for tablets designed specifically for toddlers and children, with some even able to be attached to strollers. The prices of smart phones and tablets are dropping, and tablets can be purchased now for less than one hundred dollars in some chain stores. These mobile devices are competing for the consumer dollar alongside other more traditional toys and experiences, such as bikes and board games.

Little is known, however, about the influence of technology devices such as tablets (e.g. iPads) and smart phones on young children's lives in home and school settings, and what it means for them throughout their schooling and beyond. Most research to date has focused on children aged six years and older, and much less, with a few exceptions, on preschool-aged children. The commonsense view has been that children need to be literate in reading and writing in order to engage with the technologies of text and image. Anyone, however, having watched a two-year old engage with an app on a smart phone or tablet knows that lack of literacy attainment is not necessarily a barrier to successful engagement.

It is no surprise that recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) data show the extremely high uptake of internet use in Australia by families and young children. Approximately 90 percent of Australian children aged 5-14 years in urban and rural settings access the internet at home, and we can assume that younger brothers and sisters are also engaging with their older siblings. The most popular purpose is for educational activities. By the time children attend early childhood classrooms, many come with experiences and understandings of what games and activities can be done on smart phones and tablets. Parents and early childhood educators are making decisions everyday about what this rapid uptake of technology means for family life and in early childhood classrooms.

Among parents and teachers there is a diversity of perspectives related to young children's use of digital technology and a continuum of beliefs about its value in the early years. On one hand, early childhood teachers are embracing the new media technologies in their personal lives and in their classrooms. Others, while embracing technologies for personal use at

home, are more wary of the value of using technology in their classrooms. Some teachers feel uncomfortable with the pedagogy of introducing technology into their classrooms, and others are strongly opposed to technology in classrooms arguing that the traditional activities based on foundations of play are most important. These differing views were most evident at a recent early childhood education forum in which I was a member of a panel. Audience members, many of whom were early childhood educators, parents and grandparents, discussed their views of young children using technology – their concerns about possible dangers such as internet safety and social isolation, and also their passion for what they saw as valuable in digital technology.

With national agendas of accessible broadband to families across Australia, and the strong endorsement of engaging with technology in national early childhood curriculum documents, parents and educators are immersed in a national context where mobile technologies are everywhere. For example, the *Early Years Learning Framework* (2009) highlights the importance of young children accessing and using digital technologies, and values technology as a significant avenue for promoting communication and for children learning about their worlds. Given this national emphasis, understanding how parents and teachers make decisions and manage this new digital environment with children is important for understanding children's changing everyday lives.

As a QUT researcher, I am conducting an Australian Research Council research project *Investigating mobile technologies in young children's everyday worlds* that seeks to understand how young children access and use online mobile technologies for learning and play in home, preschool and community contexts. This ethnographic study of young children's everyday practices investigates how mobile technologies are part of the flow of everyday home and school life. As well as video recording young children's practices using digital technology, I am asking parents, teachers and children about their views on the role of technology in young children's lives. Understanding young children's everyday practices provides empirical evidence to inform policy development about online use in the early years and to support early childhood educators and families. Studying new forms of practices associated with technology use helps us to understand young children's participation in social interaction (Hutchby, 2001).

Below, I present two short extracts from parent interviews (two mothers) about their kindy-aged children's use of digital technology in their family lives. Both these families had a child in kindy and older children in the primary school settings. These extracts specifically discuss family rules of use.

Parent 1:

Mother:

There are rules because if they wake up in the morning and go straight on to them, they won't get changed, they won't have breakfast, they will stay on their tablet. So I've told them they're not allowed to play on the tablet, it has to stay on the charger, they can go on it after school, after they've done their homework, after they have their afternoon snack and after they've had dinner. That's when they can go on.

They've got their own but fight over each other's. Can I play? I let you play on my one. So the rules are a bit shaky at the moment.

Parent 2:

Mother:

Typically, I try to get them to do it in a room where I'm floating in and out of but only this week it happened again. It was like, what's that noise? So it's really difficult because you can't be around them all the time and we're not adept enough to screen things out or whatever else, so they do hear it.

But yeah, I suppose they need to encounter it somehow and we just try to limit it and make them understand that was right but I don't know. [Aside] So yeah, it is challenging.

Susan:

Do you have rules around the use?

Mother:

There's supposed to be no computers in the bedrooms but it's typical with laptops and iPods that they easily go walking. From my perspective, the silence is bliss until I realise why it's silent and hunt after them.

In these two brief extracts above, both mothers reported that the children were drawn and motivated to use the mobile devices. The children in the home contexts were engaging intensively with the tablets and smart phones. The mothers reported managing the children's use of technology against a backdrop of everyday family life where the mothers constantly

monitored what the children were doing, when they were using the devices and where the activities were taking place.

Following well-publicised guidelines about rules of use, such as keeping the computer in a public area of the home for all members of the family to use and see, seems relatively straightforward. The reality, however, is that following this guideline is not as clear cut as one might think, particularly when the devices are becoming increasingly smaller and more mobile. In these interviews, both parents addressed managing the practical aspects, such as dealing with a flat battery, and they emphasised the social nature and social interactions occurring when children were using these devices.

What became evident in the discussions with the mothers was the role of social interaction around the use of these technologies: about when to use them, who used them, how the children and adults negotiated the conditions of use, and how the children interacted with their siblings. How family members engaged with technology as part of the flow of everyday life was shown in these interviews: how does engagement with the devices co-occur with other more well-known activities of getting ready to go to school, having breakfast and doing homework? How are practices such as sharing and using each other's devices negotiated, and under what conditions of family life?

The bigger question is not just about the technology that is being used, but rather how mobile technologies provide new interactional opportunities for family members to communicate with each other and find solutions to living together in family life. The ways that these matters are resolved by parents and children, and what they see as important issues and matters for attention, are constant matters of negotiation among family members. While the extracts discussed here are from family contexts, these bigger questions about how these devices afford particular types of communication practices are as relevant in early childhood classrooms where teachers also make decisions about how technology is part of the flow of everyday classroom life.

Communication is central to successful social interaction, and an integral aspect of participating in everyday social life of the home and classroom. Studying how young children engage with digital technologies provides opportunities for measuring, in more graduated and distinctive ways, the impact of such technology. Only time and increased understandings of everyday practices will tell the real values and scope of using digital media.

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Community Arts in Early Childhood

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What is community arts?

Community arts can take many forms, including murals, installations, festivals and performances. The work can be produced by artists solely, by artists working with community groups, or by community groups. Community arts can be on a grand-scale covering whole streets, parks or even towns, or small-scale, such as a mosaic in the corner of a play area. It can be extremely impacting and a permanent fixture, or fragile and small and designed to blow away in the wind. But, common to all these different forms of community arts are the criteria that community arts are made in, for and/or by, the local community.

Because of this, community arts are very different to what we might think of as fine arts practice. Community art is rarely a solitary activity but is often collaborative and intergenerational, this is particularly so in festival-based projects, or projects whereby community artists work together with families, school groups or community groups. Additionally, as a contrast to the arts produced as part of the school curriculum, community arts are also often voluntary rather than compulsory, and the aims and intentions for what is produced are less controlled or structured.

Community arts in early childhood
Significant hallmarks of community artworks are their multi-perspectival and multidisciplinary nature. This is because often people work together with different materials, to create artworks that

represent their diverse viewpoints, and they use a range of skills to do this. Adults and children work with equal power and are positively encouraged to share their ideas and experimentations. This collaborative sharing makes community arts an ideal way for those in early childhood to participate in the arts, to understand the role the arts play in society, and how the arts help to build community identity.

Professional learning

It is very important that early childhood educators understand the many ways that children can engage with the arts so, in addition to their curriculum based arts education subjects, all students studying the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) degree at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), undertake a compulsory community arts subject in their final year. The timing of this subject is key in that students get to consolidate their teaching and curriculum knowledge in 'real-world' scenarios that are different to a more formal classroom or preschool space.

The community arts subject requires the students to work in groups to design, implement and evaluate a community arts experience for young children, and to lead, collaborate and participate in communities of learning. These requirements help to develop an understanding of how to engage with diverse community stakeholders in a range of social and cultural contexts, and an appreciation of the value of the arts in community building, learning and development.

QUT Arts Event Day & Out of the Box

There are two ways that the student cohorts participate in community arts. On each 'even' year students design and deliver activity ideas at the Out of the Box Festival hosted by Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), on each 'odd' year students design and deliver activities at an Arts Event Day at the School of Early Childhood, QUT Kelvin Grove campus. Out of the Box is an internationally respected 10-day festival dedicated to arts in early childhood. It attracts over 10,000 visitors who participate in workshops hosted by professional artists and performers. QPAC and QUT Early Childhood students work together to design a space and a concept for children and families to create and make.

By contrast, QUT Arts Event Day is held on one day and is attended by around 180 local school children, preschool children and their teachers, parents and carers. The day is organised into four sessions, and children and adults are free to wander around the enclosed space and try out as many of the activities as they wish during each session.

Benefits of community arts

The two events are very different in scale and content, however each is equally effective in introducing community arts to adults and children:

- Benefits for children - children have exposure to different ways for making art, beyond how they might usually encounter it at home, school or preschool. Community arts is based on equity in learning and is inclusive of diverse abilities and identities so children have greater ownership and control over their ideas and creations.
- Benefits for educators - educators are required to use different pedagogies to respond to the different environments, aims and intentions of community arts. A more collaborative, and less-directional approach is needed to enable children and adult participants to work through their own work through their own ideas, in their own ways.
- Benefits for community - some communities can feel very 'invisible' or vulnerable. Collaborative arts can actively raise the profile of a community and help bring about identity building. Community arts can also bring diverse members of the community together, and this helps to build positive relationships between different groups of people.

Introducing community arts

If you are interested in bringing community arts into your centre or wider area, here are a number of recommendations to help get you started:

- Develop a strong project design - think about why you want to do a community arts project. Is it to produce something permanent like a mural, to get the community together to make temporary things, or to celebrate your area? This will help you to think about size, scale, what funding you might need, what kind of artists you need to use.



- Consider any restrictions - these can include whether you can paint on the walls, put mosaics in the floor, sound restrictions for music performances or safety of your space for dance or drama activities. Restrictions can also be around cultural sensitivity and what is appropriate for people to make or do.
- Think inventively! - murals of cartoon characters are a dime a dozen, so liaise with your local artists and performers to work on ideas and concepts that will be really high quality and well aimed at the participants. Contact your State Government arts department to seek advice on who is in your area.
- Be well prepared - community arts events look really chaotic and ad hoc, but in reality they are very busy occasions and require a lot of careful planning to ensure the enjoyment and safety of all those involved.
- Be collaborative - a really high-quality community arts project is the result of good quality communication, so talk to parents, carers, community members and, most importantly, the children - ask all of them for ideas and suggestions.
- Think about your working space - what is possible? If your area is too small, or can't be wet or messy, is there a local green area nearby, or can the outdoor play area be used instead?
- Think of the end result first! - the best way to develop community arts projects is to plan backwards. This means having an end product in your mind and going backwards from that. This allows you to consider all the small details such as materials, timescales, artists, costs, as well as the installation of a sculptural work, or the preparation of a wall or floor prior to a mural or mosaic.
- The weather! - even though Australia has glorious weather much of the time, unexpected wet days need to be planned for. Outdoor events are also best planned for cooler months rather than in the middle of summer.

Learn more about community arts through these resources and links:

Arts Queensland, State Government arts department:
<http://www.arts.qld.gov.au/>

National Endowment for the Arts, community artists series:
http://www.nea.gov/about/nearts/2010_v4/webf/Artist-role.html

Arts initiative between YMCA and young college students:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2ZhBjCRi5c>

Community art igloo project by Cork Community Artlink:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vxjCeE_60&feature=related

The Australia Council:
<http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/>

National and International CONFERENCE UPDATE



Autumn 2013



Winter 2013



Spring 2013

14th NZ Early Childhood Research Conference

Valuing Research in Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning

6 March 2014

Wellington, New Zealand

<http://www.myece.org.nz/events-calendar/163-nz-early-childhood-research-conference>

Child Aware Approaches Conference

Sharing, Building and Recognising Child Aware Innovation

31 March - 1 April 2014

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Vic.

<http://www.childaware.org.au/>

Young Learners Congress & Expo

The integration of technology into early childhood settings

1 – 3 April 2014

Australian Technology Park, Sydney, NSW

<http://www.acevents.com.au/younglearners/>

The Gowrie (Qld) Inc 2014 Conference

Ways of Looking "Exploration of learning and celebrating individuality"

5 April 2014

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, Qld

<http://www.gowrieqld.com.au/conferences/>

Global Summit on Childhood

Bright Futures for Every Child, Every Nation

10 - 13 April 2014

Vancouver, Canada

<http://www.acei.org/programs-events/summit.html>

Children's Healthcare Australasia (CHA) & Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) Conference

Linking Up for Kids

14 – 15 April 2014

The Menzies Sydney Hotel, NSW

<http://www.childwellbeing2014.net.au>

2014 World Forum on Early Care and Education

6 – 9 May 2014

San Juan, Puerto Rico

<http://www.worldforumfoundation.org/get-involved-2/2014-world-forum/>

Gowrie Australia

Promoting and supporting quality services for all children.

Our Mission

Nationally committed to optimal outcomes for children and families.