

The Independent Education Union early childhood education magazine

BEDROCK

Vol 20 #1, March 2015

**Re-evaluating
the status
of children
as artists** *P11*

**Pollies
steer clear
of preschools**
P14



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Productivity Commission Report: Change is on the horizon

The Productivity Commission's recently released Report on Childcare and Early Learning, welcomed by Federal Social Services Minister Scott Morrison, signals another year of change for the early childhood sector.

The IEU welcomes the recommendations in the report that universal access for preschool programs be continued. However, it should be noted the report recommends extended funding to long day care centres which provide a preschool program as well.

NSW spends less on preschool funding per child than any other state. Unless the state starts spending more on preschool programs this diffusing of funds to long day care can only lead to less funding for preschools.

Of particular concern is the recommendation that the number of early childhood teachers required in a centre should be based on the number of children older than 35 months that attend,

rather than the number of children at the service.

In other words, the Productivity Commission did not see any value in supplying a qualified teacher to under threes, despite overwhelming research which shows that this is the most important time for brain development in children.

The report recommends the Child Care Benefit (CCB), Child Care Regard (CCR), Special Child Care Benefit and Jobs, Education and Training Child Care be abolished and replaced with a single means tested Early Care and Learning Subsidy (ECLS) starting at 85% of the hourly benchmark price for family with incomes at \$60,000 or below and 20% for family with incomes above \$250,000.

The ECLS will be based not on the fee charged but on hourly benchmarked price with some differentiation based on the age of the child in care. The proposed benchmark is \$7.20 per hour for children aged between three and

five. This will disadvantage services that operate in areas where there are higher costs – such as inner Sydney. The report also suggested parents employing nannies who have Certificate III qualification will be eligible for funding. However the government has not committed to increasing the budget allocation to fund nannies.

To receive the full subsidy, families will have to meet a new activity test of 24 hours of work-study or training a fortnight. Parents who are receiving an income support payment, primary grandparent or non-parent carers and instances 'at risk' will be exempt from this test.

The proposed activity test appears to be much more stringent than the current tests for CCB and CCR.

The IEU looks forward to working with the government to ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education, whatever recommendations it carries out.

Editorial – in defence of early childhood education



John Quessy

NSW ACT General Secretary



Terry Burke

QLD NT General Secretary

Early childhood teachers and educators would be rightly concerned with the future of the early childhood sector.

The public release of the Productivity Commission's Report into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning includes an explicit defence of universal access, acknowledging the importance of high quality early childhood education programs.

However, the Federal Government's hesitation to guarantee funding has left teachers and educators with no certainty of the program's future beyond 2015 and puts at risk the long-term viability of the sector.

State governments will also need to commit significant funding to complement any federal contribution to ensure universal access continues in kindergartens and preschools.

The dedication of our members to the sector they work in needs to be matched with a commitment by state and federal governments to continue funding.

Providing adequate funding beyond 2015 will go a long way to providing peace of mind and certainty to teachers and educators in the sector.

Yarning Circle connects to Indigenous culture

C&K Coral Coast Community Kindergarten in Burnett Heads, Queensland, has established a new yarning circle to set up connections and provide opportunities for the children to learn more about diversity, social groups and the many different cultures in our communities.

Director and IEUA-QNT member Samantha Jones said it was a significant milestone in their journey to embed Indigenous perspectives into everyday life at the kindergarten and encourage children to value the similarities and differences of the many people who make up our society.

"We successfully applied for a state government Supporting Diversity grant and decided we would use it to create a wondrous space that we could use every day in our program that would help us to build an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture," Samantha said.

"This project has helped us build connections with the Woorabar Elders, particularly Aunty Lester, who has been very supportive and inspiring in helping us plan and implement the yarning circle."

The journey to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture began even before the yarning circle was initiated, as staff considered ways to introduce interesting and meaningful opportunities for

children to explore traditions and ways of life, she said.

"This has been a collaborative project with ownership being shared amongst staff, the Woorabar Elders and our current kindergarten children and families. In this project everyone had a voice in sharing their ideas on where we should place the circle, what materials we would need, how we would decorate it and how we could represent a fire in the centre of the circle."

Through daily yarns, the children experience the culture first hand and in turn support teaching and learning about the Aboriginal culture, she said. "We have had many yarns and read stories in this special place. Through this process we have made a special connection with our local Elders and will be working closely with them in the future."

Samantha encourages other centres to consider developing a yarning circle. "I would suggest that they research more about their local Aboriginal community. Find out who their local elders group is and phone them to set up a meeting to discuss ideas and plans on incorporating the Aboriginal culture into the service. I would also suggest the educators correspond with families about their ideas and research with the children through internet and pictures."

Kindergarten celebrates friendship garden

Connecting children with the environment and providing an area where communication and social skills can be developed were important reasons for C&K Kin Kora Community Kindergarten in Gladstone, Queensland, to develop a friendship garden.

Co-Director and IEUA-QNT member Naomi Harris said the kindergarten decided to upgrade the garden not only for the benefit of the children, but to also beautify the kindergarten area.

"This area has had many benefits for all those who have been involved in its creation. The children now have an area

which they can talk and interact with their friends, imagine that they are in the jungle, rowing a boat, and if they are not feeling well a place where they can sit quietly. A place where they can look for bugs and birds, and are connected with each other and the environment," Naomi said.

"The highlight of this area is undoubtedly the large rainforest-themed mural. The children absolutely love this painting and the area as a whole. It's vibrant and welcoming and provides many opportunities for them to explore, discover and create."



Dear Lisa,

A colleague mentioned this afternoon that over the December and January holidays, the centre tends to be light on numbers and therefore staff sometimes get to go home early. I have never been in a situation where I was able to go home early due to low numbers and so I don't know what rules apply. I was told by this same colleague that if staff choose to go home early, they can do so, but they have to take that early mark as annual leave. Otherwise, they can stay and get paid for their full hours. I'm assuming that if this is the case, no employee can be forced to go home early and take the rest of the day as annual leave? In the event that I do get asked to do a late shift and the last child gets picked up well ahead of my clock-off time, I want to know what I am legally required to do or what my award provisions are.

G

Dear G,

The IEU would certainly not consider it acceptable that teachers would be forced to go home early using annual leave to cover the remainder of the day. You are employed full-time and you are entitled to be paid your full-time hours, so unless it suits you to leave early and take annual leave the IEU's position is that you cannot be forced to do this. For a part-time teacher, the Educational Services (Teachers) Award only allows for a variation in hours with agreement by the teacher or with four weeks notice. Clearly children unexpectedly being picked up early would not allow employers to meet the requirement to give four weeks notice, so a change in hours could only be with the consent of the teacher.

Lisa

Closing the gender pay gap



In 2013 the Pay Equity Unit of the Fair Work Commission commissioned an independent report to assist parties in equal remuneration proceedings. Dr Meg Smith, one of the authors of the report, identifies its key features.

There are current proceedings before the Fair Work Commission concerning equal remuneration for early childhood teachers and childcare workers. This case involves applications by the IEU and United Voice. The parties are awaiting an important preliminary ruling from the FWC in the childcare case that may indicate whether the Full Bench intends to maintain or vary the approach adopted in the Social and Community Services case, where it was determined that the work of social and community service sector workers was undervalued on the basis of gender.

What is the gender pay gap and where does it stand?

The gender pay gap is the ratio that converts average female earnings into a proportion of average male

earnings to calculate the pay gap between women and men. The report identified and discussed a number of different ways to measure the gender pay gap included the following:

- 17.5% - this measure is based on the average weekly ordinary time earnings for full-time adults – in other words women earn 17.5% less than men on average using this measure
- 21.1% - this is the pay gap if overtime is factored into the above measure – that is women have less opportunities for overtime
- 9.3% - this difference is based on the average hourly ordinary time cash earnings for full-time non-managerial adult employees, and
- 0.8% - this measure is based on the average hourly total cash earnings for full-time non-managerial adult employees, again factoring in the capacity for overtime.



“A clear finding of those studies is that there is a significant, persistent, ‘unexplained’ wage gap between women and men.”

What factors contribute to the gender pay gap?

A key feature of the report was its review of a number of detailed studies of gender pay equity in Australia that identify explanations for gender-based earning differences. A clear finding of those studies is that there is a significant, persistent, ‘unexplained’ wage gap between women and men. The findings show that only a small proportion of the gender pay gap can be attributed to differences in what are termed productivity-related characteristics of men and women, such as differences in education and workplace experience.

The contributing factors to the gender pay gap include the differences in the types of jobs held by men and women and the method of setting pay for those jobs.

Where women work matters too. Australian studies reveal significantly higher gaps for employees in the private than the public sector, in large workplaces, and at the top of the wage distribution than for those at the bottom.

The regulatory and institutional arrangements of wage determination have an influence too. There’s greater wage differentiation among non-award reliant workers. There are also different levels of discretionary payments made to those in male and female occupations.

Women with family responsibilities have less access to paid overtime and are more likely to be in part-time or casual positions and therefore have less access to training and promotion.

The ongoing undervaluation of feminised work and skills leads to:

- differences in pay for males and females doing similar or comparable jobs
- different job titles (and pay) for the same or similar occupations
- undervaluation of the skills, competencies and responsibilities associated with ‘female’ jobs, and
- gender biases in job evaluation methods, job classification systems, and job remuneration systems.

How does Australian labour law address gender pay equity – what is the recent case law?

The report discussed the pattern of utility of the equal remuneration regulation in Australian labour law in the period following the 1969 equal pay for equal work and 1972 equal pay for work of equal value principles, including new equal remuneration principles in NSW and Queensland.

Currently the most specific set of provisions dealing with pay equity are those in the Fair Work Act. These provisions permit employees, trade unions or the Sex Discrimination Commissioner to apply to the Commission for the making of an order to ensure that, for specified employees, there will be equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value. Such an order may increase (but not decrease) rates of remuneration for the affected employees, if necessary in stages.

At the time of the report, the provisions in the Fair Work Act have only been extensively tested on one occasion. This involved a claim for equal remuneration orders by the Australian Services Union in the social and community services (SACS) sector. In that case, key findings of the Fair Work Australia (now called Fair Work Commission) included:

- There is no requirement for applicants to demonstrate discrimination as a threshold to an equal remuneration claim.
- Assessing whether the work was undervalued was adopted as a key part of FWA’s approach in assessing equal remuneration claims. Applicants are required to establish that the asserted undervaluation is linked or attributable to gender.
- There is no requirement for applications to reference an explicit male comparator group, although such references may be included.
- After extensive proceedings FWA determined that the work of social and community service sector workers was undervalued on a gender basis and awarded wage increases of between 17% and 41%, dependent on classification, to be phased in over eight years.

Using Connections



Most long day care centres and preschools in Australia should have received a copy of *Connections*, a new resource to assist those working in early childhood to build their knowledge, skills and confidence in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children at their service.

The resource was developed following a scoping study carried out by Hunter Institute of Mental Health in Newcastle and the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council on what early childhood mental health training was provided during preservice at universities and colleges. It also looked at what professional development was available to those already practising.

It found that there was widespread support for the importance of early childhood mental health and wellbeing, with teachers recognising and valuing their role in promoting children's mental health and supporting those with additional needs. However the delivery was inconsistent and there was a recommendation to produce a mental health promotion resource universally accessible to all teachers.

"Teachers and educators didn't always make the connection that their practice was having an influence on the mental health and wellbeing of the children," Hunter Institute of Mental Health Child, Youth and Wellbeing Projects Coordinator Ellen Newman said.

There is plenty of evidence to show that improving wellbeing in the 0-5

age group will lead to better outcomes later in life, Ellen said.

Connections provides a range of reflective questions and case studies, as well as links to the National Quality Standard (NQS), Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning.

Practical examples for each area of practice include:

Partnerships

- Make time to listen to any concerns that a family member might have about their child's behaviour or feelings.
- If a child or family receives guidance from a health professional or support agency, implement the recommended strategies consistently in your service, record the outcomes, and communicate the child's progress regularly with the family and other professionals as requested.

Professional practice

- Find out about issues relevant to children's mental health, wellbeing and development, and share information with colleagues and community members.
- If there is a colleague that you respect and admire, meet with them regularly to discuss how best to support children and families, including a focus on mental health.

Environment

- Have areas for active play and quiet time. Create a special calm area

with objects like books, a lounge, pillows or bean bags. Playing classical or instrumental music can also be restful.

- Learn about diversity among the families and children in your service, including cultural diversity, family diversity, individual needs and personal interests.

Social and emotional development

- Discuss behaviours and emotions using stories, songs, drawing or role playing with dolls or other people.
- Acknowledge children's strengths and design learning experiences with their development, interests and preferences in mind.

Early intervention

- When a child is upset, acknowledge their emotions and show understanding; problems that seem minor to adults can be very upsetting for a child.
- Be aware of the potential signs of mental health difficulties and consider whether a child or family could benefit from making contact with an external support agency or professional.

More details and electronic copies of *Connections* are available at www.himh.org.au/connections

Language learning starts young



“I’m hoping the trial creates that worldwide awareness that children often find hard to understand.”

Children at Queensland’s Rockhampton South Kindergarten are about to say ‘konnichiwa’ to a new language studies program after being selected to take part in a national trial beginning this year. IEUA-QNT Communications Officer Elise Cuthbertson explores the new language initiative for kindergartens.

The \$9.8 million Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) trial, announced by the Federal Government, will give children in 40 kindergartens across the country the opportunity to experience a play-based approach to learning an additional language.

Participating preschools will trial one of five languages—Mandarin, Japanese, Indonesian, Arabic or French. The trial hopes to improve students’ interest in language studies across their schooling years. The percentage of Year 12 students studying a language other than English has dropped from 40% in the 1960s to approximately 12% today.

IEUA-QNT Member and Rockhampton South Kindergarten Director Julia Greene said children at her centre will be learning Japanese as that is the language taught in the majority of surrounding primary and secondary schools.

“Children in primary and high school often spend only a few hours a week in language studies and can struggle to adapt, so hopefully early exposure to the language will lead to an improved,

alternative way to provide language education,” she said.

The language program will be delivered by a series of play-based, interactive applications, with educators from participating kindergartens to be trained in using the applications ahead of the program’s launch.

“Each centre will get five tablets and on those tablets there will be seven apps. When we have the technology in hand, it will be a matter of working through those apps with the children.”

Julia said teachers are not required to have previous knowledge or training in language studies to deliver the program.

“We don’t need language training. In a way it will be a dual learning opportunity because we will learn the language alongside the children.”

Julia said she was amazed that the centre was selected to take part in the trial out of more than a thousand kindergartens that applied.

“Parents are really excited that their children are getting this opportunity. Our staff members are nervous and excited for the challenges the trial will bring. It affects the whole centre so we’ll take it one step at a time and see how it goes.”

Julia is hopeful that despite the new technology and uncertainty that can accompany a trial run the program

will help to raise cultural awareness and create interest other cultures.

“I’m hoping the trial creates that worldwide awareness that children often find hard to understand. I hope it energises their little minds and promotes language development and maybe even helps to improve oral language delays.

“I’m a little hesitant with technology so to think it’s all going to be implemented through apps is daunting but I am interested to see how it works. The fact that kindergarten students will be given this unique opportunity to learn a new language can’t be a bad thing.”

Further information about the ELLA trial can be found on the Department of Education and Training website, <http://education.gov.au/early-learning-languages-australia>



Strength in numbers

“Cluster management aims to free up our qualified early childhood teachers so they can spend more time engaging with children, families and staff.”

This year marks the start of a two-year Cluster Management Trial providing support to groups of community preschools, Bedrock Journalist Sue Osborne writes.

NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli announced last year that \$1 million would be invested in a trial which has evolved out of recommendations from the Review of NSW Government Funding for Early Childhood Education carried out by Professor Deborah Brennan in 2012.

There will be four groups of 10 preschools in the trial. Community Child Care Cooperative will manage the Sydney metropolitan and New England areas, the Samaritans Foundation will offer the service in Newcastle and CareWest will cover the central west of NSW.

‘The two-year trial aims to reduce the burden on volunteer committees that are often under pressure to deal with matters including business planning, fee collection, marketing, staffing and fundraising,’ Mr Piccoli said.

“These responsibilities often cause legal issues and penalties if compliance standards are not met,” he said.

“Having one organisation to manage the administration of these functions for a number of preschools will help improve efficiencies and transfer successes from one preschool to others.”

The responsibility of managing governance and compliance matters currently falls to a community preschool director, especially when there is frequent turnover of management committee members.

“Cluster management aims to free up our qualified early childhood teachers so they can spend more time engaging with children, families and staff,” Mr Piccoli said.

Community Child Care Cooperative Leader of Sector Solutions and Manager of Children’s Services Danielle Gallacher said the free service for preschools addressed many of the problems teachers and directors have been raising for a long time.

Danielle said the trial would be focusing on supporting volunteer parent-run management committees to

improve governance, service delivery and professional development opportunities for educators.

“We are trying to tailor it around improving the governance, policies and procedure and supporting professional development,” Danielle said.

“We have a Cluster Coordinator from Community Child Care Cooperative who will visit services to work with directors and committees to look at how to improve quality.

“The State Government stipulated seven areas they wanted the trial to focus on:

- governance support and professional development for committees
- compliance and assessment rating support
- policy and procedure development
- professional development and training educators and directors
- development of a business plan and annual reviews
- tailored professional development to preschool educators, directors and management committees, and
- onsite support visits and support through the use of electronic communications.

“It’s the burden on parent-run management committees that is the problem. A lot of them are mums and dads or people that work in unrelated fields,” Danielle said.

“Things like the NQF [National Quality Framework] can be quite foreign to them and this support will really help improve their knowledge.

“Obviously this will benefit teachers and directors working in those centres.

“Some committees desperately need guidance and support, especially when they are small services with less than 20 places. They can’t afford to outsource for support on these issues.”

Is your preschool part of a cluster? Let us know if you think it is working. Email: bedrock@ieu.asn.au

Re-evaluating the status of children as artists

While there has always been an emphasis on art and being creative for children in early childhood settings, the creative practice of getting messy and being sensory-aware has started to diminish. Bedrock Journalist Fiona Stutz speaks with education and arts researcher Dr Barbara Piscitelli on how to successfully elevate the status of children's creative practice.

Literacy and numeracy in early childhood is as important now as ever, however, this can be to the detriment of children's learning of the arts, being creative and using imagination, Dr Piscitelli said.

To help invigorate the arts in early childhood settings Dr Piscitelli has conducted professional development for educators in a three-part online master class series to

encourage them to elevate children's creativity.

"It's important we are not over-stimulating children with too colourful an environment so that they can actually pour their energy into creating colourful creations themselves."

"People don't understand the value of arts and cultural practice so the theme of the conversation was around re-evaluating that. Let's look again at children's drawings and paintings, let's look again at how they work collaboratively in classrooms to create imaginative play spaces and reassign some value to that. Let's talk that up with your parent community and your local community to elevate the status of this very important part of our human existence."

The sessions dealt with the environments in which children's creative practice takes place, the normal developmental patterns for children's creative practice and the social interactions between the teacher and children.

"We went right back to the basics of how do you set up the room, what kinds of equipment and materials are essential for children's creative practice and the benefits of working in a neutral environment. It's important we are not over-stimulating children with too colourful an environment so that they can actually pour their energy into creating colourful creations themselves."

The second session focused on what it is children learn during creative practice such as drawing or painting, collage, sculpture and installation work.

"We looked at the developmental cycle from early explorations to more full development of figures that are highly recognisable and which tell stories. We talked a lot about using tools and encouraging the development of fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination. We talked about ways in which we can either set up the environment or set up the social interactions to encourage children to go beyond where they can go on their own ... make the leap cognitively and technically."

The final session explored social interactions. "Not all teachers feel comfortable working with that kind of learning approach so we talked about opening questions that you can have, comments you can make and then ways of setting up social interaction between children so that they encourage and excite one another and learning from each other."

Dr Piscitelli believes everybody is artistic and educators have the knowledge base required to help children gain the technical skill and the language to talk about their art through "understanding the nature of colour, the nature of shape, the nature of form, the nature of design, all of those things we know already. From there on it is a journey of discovery as the children lead you to things that you never knew that you needed to know."





Mr Frog jump starts sustainable program

It was 'Mr Frog's' unlucky day and lucky day all rolled into in one when he was run over by a car and then rescued by a father at Kurri Kurri and District Preschool, Bedrock Journalist Suzanne Kowalski-Roth discovers.

The father was on his way to work and noticed dozens of squashed green tree frogs on the road. Shocked, he stopped to collect those still alive in a lunchbox to take home and look after. The frogs had been displaced during development on the F3 freeway. Mr Frog had lost one eye and had a smashed up bottom jaw.

Mr Frog visited the preschool with the rescuer's little boy who told the other children about what had happened.

"When he told the children the story about how the frog had been run over and how we were destroying their habitat, they were just

devastated and said, 'We've got to build a safe place for them', Director Janelle Gallagher said.

Janelle was initially apprehensive about having water and children in the same space and the work health and safety issues it would present. However the project quickly took on a life of its own with parents applying successfully for funding and building a pond.

The pond is a huge focus of the preschool's program. There's a breeding section and children watch the lifecycle of frogs unfold before their eyes. The preschool also has a productive vegetable garden, worm farm, chickens, waste reduction and energy efficiency programs.

The amphibian tragedy proved the catalyst for just one program for this Tidy Town 2014 Early Learning Centres Winner and illustrates how

the preschool embeds sustainability into all aspects of its work, moving beyond the 'this is what we're doing for sustainability' into full program integration.

A sense of reverence is key to the preschool's achievements.

"The children are like custodians of the land. When the judges from Tidy Towns came to the preschool as part of the judging process the children walked them around and showed them the different spaces and explained how they had developed and how they look after them for future generations," says Janelle.

Stories are handed down by children to other children providing a continuity that stretches, in the case of Kurri Kurri preschool, across generations. Children create project books and staff video the children who are about to graduate



“When ideas come from the children you won’t stop them”



to primary school talking about special places within the preschool that they think next year’s children need to know about.

“The children have a look at the project books and sometimes they see their sibling in it. There’s this lovely culture of ‘My brother built this so I want to know where it is,’” Janelle said.

The children also wowed the Tidy Towns judges with morning tea they picked from vines and trees at the preschool during the judging and served at the ‘Crazy Chair’ café where seats have been reused and cut off to match children’s height.

Waste is another area the preschool has tackled. One big sustainability project came from a comment from a little girl who said during morning tea ‘Oh, we have so much waste’.

“She was looking at the table where there were so many wrappings and yoghurt and dip containers and little biscuit packages,” Janelle said.

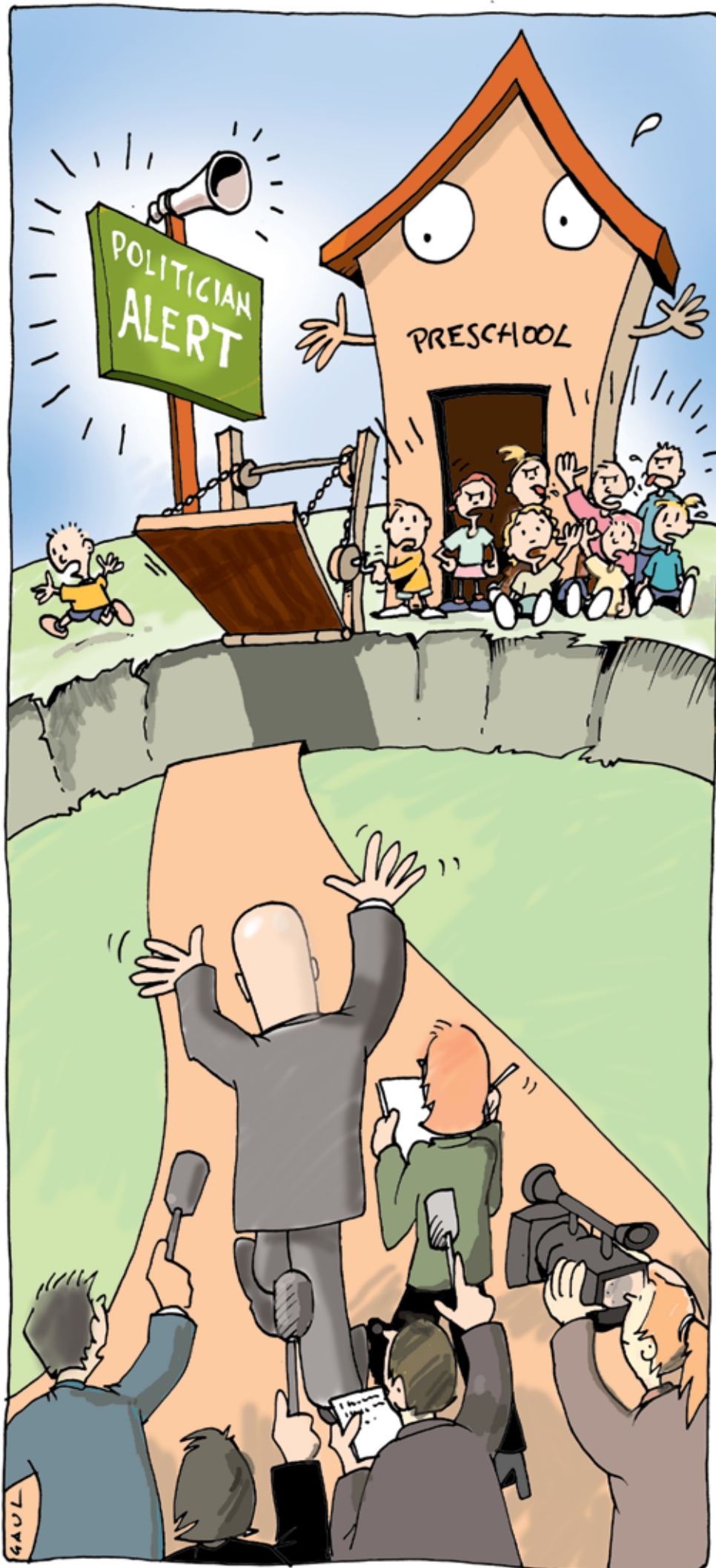
The girl suggested they make statues out of all the waste they collected in a day. So they made statues of angels and put them in the front garden to show parents how much waste they produced at preschool. Council officers came to talk to the children about recycling. The preschool then held a ‘No Plastics Day’ and wrote a letter to families asking them to send lunch and morning tea in containers.

Children have been asked to write a part of the preschool’s sustainability policy. “Last year’s children have gone to school and they wanted to leave something behind to guide the new children on their journey.”

The connectedness between children, families, staff and the wider community allows the sustainability work to flourish.

“When ideas come from the children you won’t stop them. It’s all driven by them. It’s not something extra you have to fit in. it was easy enough once we unpacked it to fit it in with what we were already doing,” Janelle said.

Keep Australia Beautiful organises the annual Tidy Towns Awards to encourage, motivate and celebrate the achievements of rural and regional communities across Australia. Kurri Kurri and District Preschool won the award for Environmental Education.



Pollies may want to steer clear of preschools



Lisa Bryant

Babies and politicians often go hand-in-hand during the lead up to an election, Early Childhood Consultant Lisa Bryant writes.

But as many three-year-olds dissolve in tears when they discover they can no longer enrol in their local community-based preschool, the pollies may want to steer clear.

At the start of the year for the past 30 years or so, families have taken their three-year-olds for their first day at preschool, a rite of passage a few years before they moved on to 'big school'.

This year it won't be happening. Due to a quiet change in NSW government policy, community-based preschools will no longer receive funding for three-year-olds unless they are from low-income families or are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The funding has been removed to encourage preschools to ensure all children have access to preschool education in their year before school and that children from the so called 'equity groups' of low-income and Aboriginal families have two years of access.

The plan looks good on paper - all children get some funded preschool



education and those who will benefit the most get more of it. It also matches the federal government's desire that every child will get at least 15 hours of preschool education in the year before school.

About 90% of preschools in NSW are community based and all are subject to the changed funding rules. Although preschools can still theoretically enrol three-year-old children at cost price, few families can afford the unfunded fees and many preschools have been forced to cut their three-year-old places entirely to ensure they receive enough funding to survive.

The core of the problem lies in the NSW Government's chronic underspending on early education. And it's not just a problem with the current government. The previous Labor government did no better.

In most states in Australia (WA, SA, TAS, ACT and NT), more than 70% of families can enrol their child in a preschool for free.

In Victoria, 90% of families pay less than \$24 per day. In NSW, the fees vary from town to town but more than 30% of families pay between \$30 and \$54 a day. The reason for the discrepancy is the amount of funding each state spends on early education and care. The ACT Government spends \$540 per child. Victoria spends \$279, South Australia \$563 and WA \$664. NSW only spends \$210 per child.

Soon after his appointment as Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli promised that the funding discrepancy between NSW and the other states would change when money became available.

Almost four years on, nothing has changed. Budget after budget in NSW has seen the same funding allocation being made to community-based preschools. Funding from the Commonwealth under a national partnership designed to ensure universal access to preschool education has had little effect on the issue, except for allowing the NSW Government to shift blame to their federal counterparts.

Families are getting angry that they can no longer enrol three-year-olds because services need to ensure they are receiving funding for each enrolment. Women are having to delay their return to work. Local MPs are sick of getting an earful from preschools in their electorate. Some preschools are considering closing or are being forced to close classrooms. Without three-year-olds to ensure full occupancy and with fees too high for their communities to afford due to chronic underfunding, they are no longer viable. Families are reluctant to enrol children for just one year. In many small towns preschools are part of the glue that holds the fabric of the town together – and it's beginning to unravel.

Preschools operating in Aboriginal communities are doing it tough too. Although they can get funding for three and four-year-olds, they can no longer cater for the two-year-olds many have always enrolled. All of this is happening at a time when the benefits of preschool education are so well known. Even US President Barack Obama has taken up the cause. Australian research shows that children who have received a preschool education score 15-20 points higher on their Year 5 NAPLAN test. Research from the international OECD exams shows that children who have had two years of preschool education score, on average, a full year ahead of their counterparts at age 15.

NSW preschools will be campaigning on the issue around the state election. There will be a number of parents who have discovered when they went to enrol their three-year-olds that there is no room at the inn for them. Both major parties may need to consult their discretionary funding buckets to see if they can increase funding for early education to the level of other states and importantly to see if there is enough to restore funding to three-year-olds. If the other states and territories can provide their children with low-cost preschool, why can't NSW?

This article originally appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.



Feeling safe and secure can be more important to low income families than access to formal education and care when it comes to choosing an early childhood service, a study has found.

The research project, Families at the Centre, funded by the Australian Research Council and conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW was designed to “deepen understanding of how early childhood education and care fits in the lives of low

fortnight does not recognise this flux in the lives of low income families.

“Further if the process of claiming subsidies is too complex, families will make mistakes with costly consequences, Services need to explain and guide families through the subsidy system.”

The Summary said the families in the study stressed the importance of professional listening and responsiveness. “Attention to children’s learning is not enough: they want

“If all children are to benefit from early learning, then the policy needs to enable services to stay connected with families through difficult times or to reconnect with families quickly.”

income families and to explore how well services meet the needs and reflect the values of low income families,” the Executive Summary said.

The Summary said when it comes to early childhood services, “we learned from parents in our study that safety and security can take precedence over access to formal education and care”.

“Once families feel that their needs for safety from violence, secure housing and financial stability are being met, they can focus on early childhood care.

“If all children are to benefit from early learning, then the policy needs to enable services to stay connected with families through difficult times or to reconnect with families quickly.”

Obviously affordability is crucial to low income families, and the Summary makes the point that the Productivity Commission proposal that early childhood subsidies be limited to families where the sole parent or both parents are working, training or studying at least 24 hours per

services to listen to them and respect them. They want to communicate their expertise about their own children”.

The Summary also finds the families want to network with other families to share ideas and give each other support. “Policy can enable skilled educators within adaptable services to help families build supportive networks”.

The key findings from the study point to “a need for flexible, responsive services with wide horizons that are not narrowly focused on education and care for children. Holistic, integrated or wrap around services offer much broader resources than stand-alone care and education services. In this, they are a close match to the service and resource needs expressed by many of the most disadvantaged families in the study.”

Reference

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/...families.../307-families-at-the-centre-policy-snapshot-2014>

Embracing cultures in kindy



Imagine that you have just migrated to a city with a foreign language where you can just get by – communicating with basic words and gestures. After a month of settling in you decide to enrol your four year old in kindy, Bedrock Journalist Martin King writes.

Upon arrival you are given an array of printed information and forms you cannot read – presumably telling you about the kindy and asking important questions about your child's health, allergies, diet, emergency contact information and other information about your family.

Despite the teachers and administrative staff trying to be helpful, you decide that you cannot leave your child at the kindy as you simply don't know enough to trust them. You are aware that the government has a history of investigating and intervening in families based on reports from kindergartens and schools.

These are just some of the experiences and choices made by many recent migrants, refugees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who face personal and systemic difficulties when enrolling their children at kindergartens.

Recognising these challenges, the Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS) gained funding from the Department of Education, Training and Employment to develop the EMBRACE Culture in Kindy Program to

increase kindergarten participation of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds in Queensland.

The training package for kindergarten staff is designed to facilitate increased cultural awareness, teach cross-cultural communication skills, and encourage increased parental participation.

Program Leader Cherie Lamb, said the first three courses offered to early childhood education workers in the greater Brisbane regions of Inala, Logan City, the Lockyer Valley and Toowoomba had proved to be of great benefit to the 86 participants.

"The four part course aims to increase cross cultural awareness and communication in a kindergarten. We cover topics including communication styles and contexts across cultures, supporting language diversity in kindergartens and how to work with interpreter services to enable effective communication," she said.

"We also conduct sessions on working with refugee families, examining the differences between migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We assist teachers to recognise the signs of trauma in young children and provide practical strategies for working with refugee children in kindergarten settings in a way that is reassuring rather than threatening to the family."

At the end of the course participants are asked 'What will you change as a result of this training?'

The most common responses were:

- I will use interpreters more regularly (and many for the first time)
- I will work more closely with agencies who work with refugees
- I will embed more cultural diversity into kindergarten by acknowledging the culture of the children in their classroom
- I will aim to embed community within my kindergarten, and
- I will increase communication with parents.

"At the end of one of the training sessions an educator, who was clearly moved by the plight of refugee children who were seeking asylum in Australia asked me how she could involve her kindergarten children in sending messages of support and Christmas gifts to children in detention. When you hear this feedback as an adult educator, you know that your training has made a difference."

Additional courses are planned for Cairns, Bundaberg, Gladstone, Ipswich and North Brisbane including the Caboolture, Carseldine and Strathpine areas in 2015 and other courses may be held in other centres depending on demand.

For further information about planned courses go to:
www.embracekindy.com.au

Research finds staying still best option for kids



Less is more at KU James Cahill Preschool in Sydney's Waterloo, Journalist Sue Osborne writes.

The team at James Cahill were the recipients of the 2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education Award for Advanced Pedagogy and Practice for a technique which sounds simple – sitting still – but in fact has evolved out of years of research. Director Gianna Black started work at the preschool 11 years ago and it was around that time a research program began.

The preschool was servicing lots of families with complex needs and many of the teachers were burning out quickly. Staff retention was a problem. Waterloo traditionally has a low SES and high Indigenous population, although Gianna said that is now changing.

With corporate funding through the Benevolent Society in partnership with KU, a research project looking at attachment matters was launched.

“KU management at the time could



Step 1



Step 2

The children go off independently.



Step 3

“Good on you for coming back to me.”



"You run around the tree and I'll be waiting for you."

"It gives teachers permission to just be in the moment with the children instead of worrying about the phone or other things."



see there was a need. There was a need for more support for staff and families," Gianna said.

Psychologist Robyn Dolby came on board to work alongside the KU team in a mentoring role.

"We couldn't fix all the needs of the families but we could learn how to give them the best care while they were with us," Gianna said.

Dr Dolby is an advocate of the US Circle of Security program, designed to improve relationships between parents and children. It is not aimed at an early childhood settings, but Dr Dolby felt that it was applicable to the preschool.

"It sat perfectly at the preschool where parents and children's social and emotional development was impaired."

Dr Dolby developed 'playspaces', a structure which influences the whole culture of the preschool.

As part of the research children were videoed for 40 seconds each day as they walked through the gate. It was observed that they looked for their teacher in that first 40 seconds.

"By doing that video, we could observe something that would be lost in the usual morning hustle and bustle.

"The morning and afternoon transition times are the most crucial times where children and parents can be at their most vulnerable.

"Robyn suggested that the teacher should sit still in the same place every morning so that the children would know exactly where she/he would be and where to find a secure base.

"This was explained to the parents too, so they understood why the teacher was sitting still in the same place every morning."

Each teacher is assigned a 'cluster' of children at the preschool, which can take up to 40 children a day.

"This allows staff to focus and be familiar with their children.

"I can tell within seconds if someone is sad, a bit heightened, if we are going to have a tricky day," Gianna said.

Parents have been informed that if they need to speak to a teacher, they should make arrangements to do it at a time other than transition time.

This sitting still technique has been extended so teachers and educators now sit still throughout the day, providing that secure base that children can always go back to.

Gianna has become a Circle of Security facilitator and offers training to parents every year, so they have a deeper understanding of the technique.

One staff member acts as a 'floater' answering the phone and dealing with anything that crops up so the teacher can remain still and focused on the children.

"It gives teachers permission to just be in the moment with the children instead of worrying about the phone or other things.

"I've worked in centres where staff are buzzing about constantly and you don't notice as much.

"Since we have started working under this philosophy our staff retention rates have improved."

Gianna said there is not a requirement for extra staffing for this technique: "If you are committed to it, you make it work and you can see the gains."

The children's activities are also developed around this philosophy. For example, they play a game with Tonka trucks where the teacher would say 'push the truck around the tree, I'll be waiting for you to come back to me'.

When the children return the teacher might say: 'You came back, good on you, I was waiting for you'.

Gianna said this creates the 'circle of security', giving children the idea that adults provide a secure port, in the course of a fun game.

"Sometimes they might have a shopping trolley and we tell them to go and collect leaves and bring them back.

"Not all children have practice of being able to use adults as a resource that can meet their needs. We just give them the message that we're here to help you, we can meet your needs.

"We want them to play independently, but come back to us if they need to. We hope they can take this model to school and throughout life."

Gianna said this model doesn't just work for troubled children; it can apply to any child.

The HESTA award included a \$10,000 prize which the team plan to use to develop videos on their techniques to share with others.

"I'm really enthusiastic about it and happy to talk to others," Gianna said.

She can be contacted by email: ku.jamescahill@ku.com.au

References

hestaawards.com.au

<http://circleofsecurity.net/>

Transition statements – are they worth the paper they’re written on?



WEST ALBURY PRESCHOOL CENTRE INC
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FAX: 02 8021 4390
EMAIL: admin@westalburypreschool.com.au
www.westalburypreschool.com.au

Transition to School Statement

Photo

Early Childhood educator to complete this section

Child's first name	Surname	DOB
Joel	Bedrock	30/12/2009

ATTENDANCE HISTORY Number of years of attendance	CURRENT ATTENDANCE	
	Year	Days per week
1	2014	3 days

1. Briefly summarise your professional views on this child's independence and resilience.
(Outcome 1: Children's Identity)

Joel has confidence in his social interactions with peers. He knows how to enter play successfully and he plays with many different children in the group at various times, as well as having a strong relationship with a couple of special friends. He also has well developed resilience in his interactions with peers. He is able to sort out any conflict successfully and seems to be able to manage any strong emotions that arise independently.

Joel has less confidence and resilience in relation to talking in front of the whole group and in performing tasks where he is unsure of the expected outcome and expectation. For example in group work, he is hesitant to offer his ideas and when asked he is quite nervous until he is reassured. Awareness of this characteristic of Joel's has helped us to scaffold his development in this area, but it will no doubt continue well into school.

WEST ALBURY PRESCHOOL – TRANSITION TO SCHOOL STATEMENT

Transition statements were introduced by the NSW Education Department late last year with minimal fanfare, Bedrock Journalist Sue Osborne writes.

The response from early childhood teachers has been mixed.

Many view it as yet more documentation, on top of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), imposed by a State Government that has not been particularly supportive of the sector.

Finding time away from children to fill out the forms is a real challenge for most teachers. The Best Start tests, carried out in the first six weeks of kindergarten in NSW schools, which are very similar to the transition statement, also has many early childhood teachers wondering if kindergarten teachers will even look at them

But West Albury Preschool Director Jennie Kelly has taken a different approach. Despite reluctance on the part of some staff, she has encouraged them to do the statements, and she said they all want to do them again next year.

"When we were sent the information by DEC I sent it out to all of the staff for discussion at the next staff meeting. Initially some staff were hesitant about doing them in the suggested format, which we all felt was too extensive," Jennie said.

"My point of view is that they presented a great opportunity for professional recognition from our peers in primary schools and even though we have done statements every year at the end of each child's portfolio, the passing on to school was entirely up to the parent. Under the new system

parents get a copy but we send the statement to each school that the children are going to, so that they can then be given to the children's kindergarten teachers."

"We put together our own form, based on the six areas for teacher comments—the five EYLF outcome areas and the sixth section for additional comments, which we wrote in if we wanted to add anything that didn't really fit anywhere else.

"In completing the statements we agreed that we would focus on including the child's strengths, interests, learning style and areas where they may need support, (including techniques and strategies that have worked for us), all within the six sections.

"We agreed that we wanted to be able to give their new teacher an insight the child's character (which can

take a few months to find out), to give a little 'kick-start' to their school life.

"In the interest of saving our time and making the statements of most value to the schools, we agreed that we would only briefly comment on the elements that are covered in the Best Start testing, for example fine motor skills.

"Before we all started completing the transition statements, I completed two samples and showed them to the assistant principal and kindergarten teacher at our nearest school.

"They gave very positive feedback. The kindergarten teacher Lisa said: 'I would love to get information like this on the children that I am getting – so helpful'. We decided to go ahead and do them."

Jennie said the statements were time consuming, but quite easy to write.

"I tried to keep in mind what I thought would be most helpful to both the child and their new teachers. I think that it is important to mention that the writing of the statements was definitely made easier by reviewing the great observations that all of our staff have gathered throughout the year.

"This year we will be a little more prepared and will be able to start a little earlier. We have had very positive feedback from parents and we are looking forward to any comments and suggestions from all of the schools that our children have moved on to."

Teacher Claire Rae said: "I found the process of working on the transition statements very affirming. I found each one to be a reminder to myself not only of how each child has grown throughout the year but also how I have grown as a professional".

"It was a nice way for me to feel closure and pass the children on. I felt they were a meaningful gift for each family and I have had lots of positive feedback to support this feeling," Claire said.

Teacher Anna Friesen said: "We decided as a team what information we thought would be the most useful to comment on, considering the individual child's needs and personality and the school teacher's time constraints to read them.

"We tried to do it as accurately yet precisely as possible. We wanted the classroom teacher to be able to be informed, early in the year, of the more personalised information that could potentially take them months to learn about the child. The stuff that they may not get from the Best Start test."

"Once we tackled a few statements over a few hours, getting familiar with the sections and the frame of thought about each child, the flow of the wording came, and they became less time consuming," Anna said.

"I found it helpful to tackle the children with high needs first while I was in fresh thought. Others I had to think about over a day or two. Three or four statements a day for a couple of weeks and it was done.

"We kept in mind that the information we write should not be anything new for the parents (not previously shared with them) and of course used positive language throughout. The parent feedback has been great so far.

"It's definitely not as big a task as I first thought, especially if you allow yourself to cut back on other forms of documentation while preparing the statements. I think that is very justifiable, as these statements are individual observations after all.

"I liked the idea of transition statements for every child, as in the past, it has only been a requirement for children with disabilities or learning needs. I think it gives each child a great introduction to school in forming relationships with their new teacher. As we know, the polite, quiet, well behaved, attentive children can often be overlooked because they are 'doing well'. The statements give every child a really positive start.

"We are lucky in early childhood settings to be able to have orientation meetings with the new families, meet the children and have discussions with parents before they start, and if possible, use that information to decide which groups or rooms children start in. I think the statements help this process for primary teachers and will be reassuring for their outlook on their classes for the year."

Transition to School Statement
Early childhood educator to complete this section

2. Briefly summarise how you see this child builds relationships with peers.
(Outcome 2: Children's Connection and Contribution to the World)

Having strong peer relationships is obviously a priority for Joel. He joined the year, not knowing any peers, he now has many friends. He is very caring and he likes to make people in general, feel happy. He is able to lead peers and ideas. He has also learnt, through a few experiences, how to take care of others, compromise strategies and reminding others to include peers, when c...

Joel takes a little longer to form relationships with adults, as he seems to have high expectations. We have found; lots of chats and positive reinforcement from him as a peer supporter and leader, good strategies for strengthening...

3. Briefly summarise how this child self-regulates and manages their emotions.
(Outcome 3: Children's Wellbeing)

Joel displays good regulation in peer interactions and growth in relationships. He has very balanced emotions and performs well in larger group, as...

Transition to School Statement
Early childhood educator to complete this section

5. Briefly summarise how you see this child's communication skills.
(Outcome 5: Children as Effective Communicators)

Joel has good speech and language skills and is able to express how he feels, once he feels comfortable in a relationship. Joel will benefit from additional practice in listening, recalling and practised at home as well as at school.

He has a good understanding of pre number and pre literacy skills. He is developing an interest in numbers and letters accurately. He is developing an interest in...

4. Briefly summarise how this child understands and uses numbers and letters.
(Outcome 4: Children's Understanding of Numbers and Letters)

Joel i... Due to reg... we... W... ra... f...

6. Additional comments

Joel has progressed really well this year. He has a beautiful character of others. It can take a while to work out that he is not confident. He has been given the opportunity to pass this information on to the next year.

He is a great boy!

Form completed by:
Educator's name
Jennie Kelly
Signature
Date
15th November

WEST ALBURY PRESCHOOL – TRANSITION TO SCHOOL STATEMENT

BEDROCK GIVEAWAYS

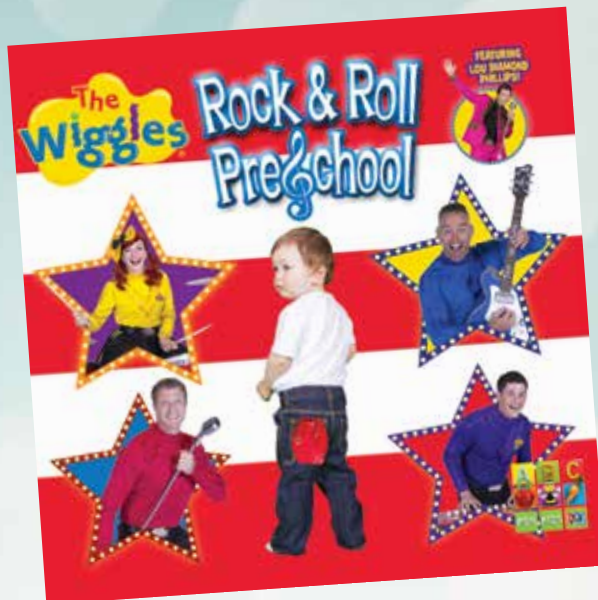
Rock & Roll Preschool

The Wiggles

ABC for Kids

Three DVDs to giveaway

Former preschool teacher Anthony Field of The Wiggles takes pride in the group delivering entertaining and educational musical creativity to preschoolers right around the globe. Their latest offering Rock & Roll Preschool is no exception and stars special guests local crooner, TV presenter and recent dad of three, David Campbell, plus famed American actor, Lou Diamond Phillips. The DVD offers fun new tracks like That's the Sound of Rock & Roll, Wake Up!, Dance with Emma, and I Want a Leather Jacket that are guaranteed to get the kids up dancing.



The Immigrant

Roadshow Entertainment

Three DVDs to give away

Marion Cotillard, Joaquin Phoenix and Jeremy Renner star in a film by James Gray that follows the story of Ewa Cybulski, who sails to New York in 1921 looking for a new life, and ends up falling in with the Mob in Manhattan and gets forced into prostitution. She meets a stage magician who becomes her only chance for salvation.



Thanks
Mrs Appleby

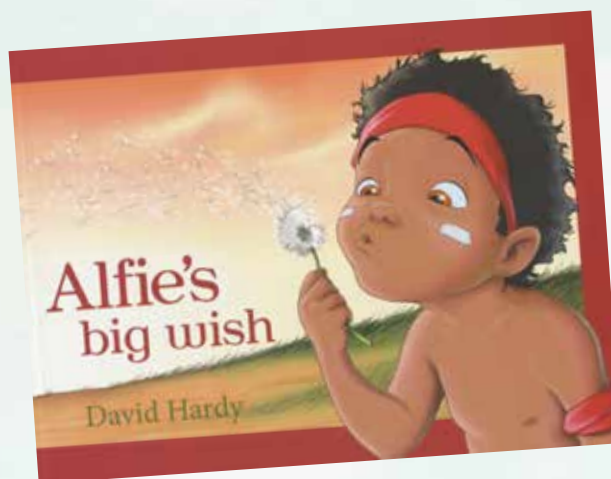
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Alfie's Big Wish

Author and Illustrator: David Hardy

Publisher: Magabala Books

Three copies to give away

Join young Alfie on his quest for companionship. When his friends leave with their parents, Alfie searches high and low for someone new to play with. He encounters older kids and some animals, but at the end of the day he's sad and lonely and makes a big wish. When he wakes up, he finds that wishes sometimes do come true.



To enter one of these giveaways, write your name, membership number and address on the back of an envelope clearly marked with which giveaway you wish to enter and send it to Bedrock, GPO Box 116, Sydney, NSW 2001 by 8 May.

TAKE YOUR CAREER FURTHER

As a **teacher** or **assistant** employed in the early childhood education sector, the Independent Education Union - Queensland and Northern Territory (IEUA-QNT) works with you to address professional issues affecting the sector and improve your conditions.

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- Professional development
- Financial benefits



Join online at www.qieu.asn.au



Helen Knaggs
Kindergarten Director

“

Our union understands what's important in the early childhood education sector.

A strong collective voice is essential to improving my workplace conditions. Our union represents my interests – and that's why I'm a member.

”

The background of the bottom section is a photograph of a brick building at night. A large, illuminated sign on the building reads 'IEU NSW ACT'. In the foreground, there are long, horizontal light trails from traffic, primarily in shades of red and yellow, suggesting a busy street scene.

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Just be sure to let us know via ieu@ieu.asn.au the name of the new member you have recruited and their membership number. Competition closes 30 June 2015.

The logo for the NSW ACT Independent Education Union is shown. It features the letters 'IEU' in a large, bold, red font. Below the letters, the text 'NSW ACT Independent Education Union' is written in a smaller, black sans-serif font.



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