Response to feedback on the proposed facilities for the preparatory year

Recently, members of the Early Childhood Australia (ECA), Queensland Branch were invited to view and provide feedback on the proposed facilities for the preparatory year. We value the opportunity to respond on behalf of children.

Our aim is to ensure that the physical and aesthetic facilities provided for children participating in the preparatory year provide environments that elicit exploration and investigation and positively influence teaching and learning opportunities and outcomes.

Our response is based on play space principles as outlined by Prue Walsh, Early Childhood Play Environments specialist and on the ECA Early Childhood Australia) recommendations for appropriate space in early childhood classrooms, as cited in the articles â€œPolitics, the Provision of Physical Amenities and the â€˜Push-down' Curriculumâ€• by Loraine Corrie, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, in Volume 24 Number 3 September 1999 of the Australian Journal of Early Childhood, pages 5-10. We strongly urge that these recommendations be adopted as a minimum standard for Queensland preparatory facilities.

Firstly, ECA refer to the allocation of useable space and urge that the highest quality environments, as defined in the ECA document, be provided as minimum internal space. That is, 4.64 sq m per child x 27 children = 125.28 sq m. Currently the provision of 3.4 sq m per child for a minimum of 25 children provides less than good quality environments: 3.9 sq m per child x 27 children = 105 sq m and closer to basic quality environments: 3.25 sq m per child x 27 children = 87.75 sq m. In addition, the space needs to be useable and unencumbered.

In addition outdoor play spaces and facilities must be provided immediately adjacent and joined to the preparatory classroom to ensure opportunities for gross motor experiences and provide space for investigation and development of spatial concepts. Outdoor play space refers to the total playground area and comprises the usable space which is defined as the area which can readily be viewed by a single adult turning in an arc of 180 degrees (Walsh, 1988). It includes accessible terrain and does not include narrow boundary clearances. The recommended playground space is 25 sq m per child (Walsh, 1994).

We recommend consideration of the following design features to ensure maximum usable indoor spaces:

- Wet areas to a child scale

- Setting up zones

- Clearly defined walking areas

- Storage

- Placement of â€œinâ€• and â€œoutâ€• access points

- Shapes of indoor spaces

- Levels of and within indoor spaces

- Supervision of wet areas

- Inclusive practices and special needs provision

We especially advocate for useable wet areas and the adequate provision of storage. Currently, both these areas are undersized and, therefore, will effectively limit their useability and opportunities for children's learning and teacher's abilities to provide optimum learning environments.

In addition, teachers in the preparatory year must have sufficient storage space to house large outdoor equipment, sufficient open shelving and secure storage for general learning materials and access to water, including hot water in the kitchen area.

Toilet provision is another matter for concern. We contend that each preparatory classroom should be required to have proximity and access to a wet area, an appropriate open space, easily accessible toilets, that is, no further than 30 metres with visibility at all times from the prep room and at an appropriate height for both girls and boys.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the preparatory year classroom design process. Our suggestions and recommendations reflect early childhood research and current knowledge about children's growth, development and learning.

Early Childhood Australia Queensland Branch