

# T ransient times and nurturing the pride of the profession

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*Production of a scholarly journal is a characteristic of a profession. The Australian Journal of Early Childhood (AJEC) and its predecessor, the Australian Pre-School Quarterly (APQ) share a remarkable tradition of scholarship in education. Based on the minutes of the AJEC editorial committee's meetings and the contents of the journals, this paper reflects on the important place occupied by APQ and AJEC within the early childhood profession.*

## Introduction

This year marks 26 years of uninterrupted circulation for the Australian Journal of Early Childhood (AJEC). The journal, with its predecessor, the Australian Pre-School Quarterly (APQ), have together established a remarkable tradition of more than 40 years of scholarship, shaping the history of the early childhood profession in Australia. By tracking the progress of their publication histories, this paper reflects on the important place occupied by APQ and AJEC within the early childhood field. The discussion is based on analyses of contents of the journals and the minutes of the AJEC editorial committee meetings.

Characteristics of a profession include the mastery of specialist knowledge; familiarity with its history, traditions and terminology; and the availability of systematic training (see Ebbeck & Clyde, 1988; Katz, 1987; Keith-Lucas, 1989; and Radomski, 1986). Katz (1987, p.11) stipulated that 'professionals take responsibility for disseminating new knowledge relevant to practice by producing scholarly journals'. This view was recognised and acted upon by some clear-sighted people in Australia. Accordingly, for four decades, by disseminating information and knowledge, and by stimulating debate and discussion about current issues, theory, policy, and practice, both APQ and AJEC have facilitated the ongoing review and validation of the early childhood profession in this country.

## Context of development

Both APQ and AJEC symbolise changing political landscapes which underpin the development of children's services and the early childhood profession in Australia. APQ came into circulation in 1960—a time when the rapid growth of preschools was at its peak—and reflected the passage of kindergartens from philanthropy to education. With the advent of the Child Care Act in 1972, the Commonwealth revised its policy priorities in children's services. By November 1976, Commonwealth funding for preschools had been whittled down to an annual, unindexed block grant administered by state governments (Brennan, 1998).

The false dichotomy, cemented through the separation of funding between federal and state governments with regard to child care and preschools respectively, is now well entrenched. The birth of AJEC in 1976, however, is one of the first clear indicators emanating from within the early childhood profession, heralding the growing recognition of the importance of adopting an integrated approach to early childhood. As Langford and Sebastian (1979) remarked, AJEC was more favourably disposed to carrying articles on both the care and education perspectives. From its inception, this re-orientation is obvious, as reflected in AJEC's thematic editions (see Appendix 1). It is also clear that over the years AJEC has remained faithful to its original objective in publishing a diversity of papers across the field,

covering education, care, health, and welfare perspectives.

The Australian Pre-School Quarterly (APQ) was initiated by Jean Adamson and Phyllis Scott, who were both Alice Creswick scholars. During their time of study abroad they became aware of educational journals published in other countries. With the loan of 100 pounds from the Graduates Association of the Brisbane Kindergarten Training College, the first volume of APQ was launched in August 1960. The Australian Preschool Association (APA), the coordinating body for preschools in Australia (which adopted the name Australian Early Childhood Association or AECA in 1979), was invited and agreed to become the sponsor for the APQ. Jean Adamson, the principal editor of APQ throughout its 14 years, coordinated its production while being employed full-time as the Director of the Lady Gowrie Child Centre in Melbourne. With other editorial colleagues based in Brisbane, and with limited finances and technology, Adamson's ability to keep APQ afloat for more than a decade is indeed a remarkable achievement.

By 1972, APQ's production difficulties were in crisis. A review undertaken in 1974 concluded that the work involved in putting together a professional publication such as APQ could not be sustained by volunteers alone. The review noted that APQ's subscribers perceived themselves as 'consumers' or 'readers only' and 'not as potential contributors' who could write articles (APQ Report, 1974, p.3). Internal and external forces, including the shortage of suitable copy, rendered APQ economically unviable. Members unanimously agreed that APA must publish an early childhood journal and that its production be based at the national office in Canberra (APQ Report, 1974, p.4). The final edition of APQ was published in August–November 1974. With funding from the Bushell Trust to manage its first year of operation, AJEC was successfully launched in 1976 (AJEC Minutes, February, 1976, p.1).

## Management and administration

Available records show that APQ usually functioned with a five-member committee, and nine individuals carried an editorial role at various times. AJEC, with eight to 10 committee members at any time, has been

led by at least eight editors (excluding those who have stepped in for short periods in an interim capacity), and the majority have been academics. In recognition of his contribution as the founding editor of AJEC, Stewart Houston's name continues to appear on every copy (AJEC Minutes, February, 1980, p.3). His colleague Jim Clough, having notched up almost 20 years of service since its inception, holds the longest record for AJEC's committee membership. Throughout the good and bad times, Clough played a key role in differing capacities, including editor and business manager. Four other committee members, Narelle Hargraves, Chris Kilham, Linda Hort, and myself have each served more than 12 years as committee members. As members of the current editorial committee, Hargraves and Kilham continue to contribute directly as AJEC embraces changes of the new millennium.

Margaret Clyde, perhaps the most well-known committee member, vigorously pursued AJEC's editorial independence and professional integrity as a reputable publication. Records clearly show that Clyde navigated AJEC into success following a period of deepening financial crisis in the 1980s. Clyde's clear vision and commitment to excellence was also instrumental in securing AJEC's high status in national and international arenas as a scholarly early childhood journal. Clyde resigned in 1990, ending a distinguished record of 11 years as the editor of AJEC.

APQ was produced by an honorary committee of early childhood professionals based in Melbourne and Brisbane. The AJEC editorial committee's volunteers, based primarily in and around Canberra, came from multi-disciplinary backgrounds including education, health, and welfare. Names of some 45 or more volunteers appear in the minutes of the meetings of AJEC between 1974–1999, together with another 35 individuals who worked with the committee in a paid capacity. Some like Sandi Plummer, Jean Gifford, and myself, have worked for AJEC in both capacities. The success of the journal relies heavily on the successful collaboration between volunteers and employees.

It is also clear that the continuity and viability of the journals was ensured particularly during the lean years, through magnificent contributions made by many volunteers. The tireless efforts of AJEC's reviewers, who work behind the scenes reading

and providing editorial comments to authors is particularly noteworthy. Initially, the members of the editorial committee also acted as the reviewers. With the increasing number of manuscripts and the degree of specialisation, the committee sought external expertise. A panel of external reviewers was first established in 1988. The first five academics invited to join this panel, namely Vi McLean, Barbara Piscitelli, Jan Kelly, Jill Rodd, and Marilyn Fleer, all accepted. This group, which numbers around 50 today, provides AJEC with an expansive specialist advisory and support base.

### **The audience: the readers and the writers**

It was envisaged that the main readers of APQ would be drawn from 'practising teachers in all types of group settings for young children' and 'parents/ persons caring for children in their own homes' (Stamp, 1974, p.1). Breakdown of subscriptions indicate that the preschool community, consisting of practising teachers, student trainees at tertiary institutions, and parents of preschoolers, were the primary readers of APQ. While the professional base of AJEC's readership broadened to include more readers from child care and health sectors, it lost its appeal as a general parental publication.

A similar pattern is found in relation to the writers published in the two journals. There is a predominance of articles written by psychologists and medical practitioners in APQ. In contrast, AJEC's writers represent a bigger mix of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and politics. Both journals have provided an important venue for early childhood academics to discuss both training and research matters and to consider implications for practice and policy. This blending of theory and practice within the same journal is a critical objective the editorial committees have pursued in selecting articles for publication.

'In its first year, with an annual subscription of 24 shillings, APQ attracted 600 subscriptions' (Waters, 2000, p.51). Costing a mere \$5 in 1976, the price of individual subscriptions to AJEC has inevitably increased over time. Subscription categories also reflect the audience of the journals. It was anticipated that both local and international readers would subscribe, as reflected in the two rates

stipulated for the domestic and overseas buyers. A slightly reduced subscription rate for students is made available by encouraging bulk buying through the training institutions.

Reader reactions to both journals have been both positive and negative. The resultant public debates between readers and/or authors have been published, usually in the form of 'letters to the editor'. It is also not unusual for AJEC to publish 'counterpoints' or commentary on controversial issues by inviting industry experts to write papers. For example, Deborah Brennan was invited to write a counterpoint to an article prepared by the Office of the Status of Women on child care reform and labour market participation by women (see AJEC Vol. 23 No. 3, 1998). This practice is indicative of AJEC's aim to present multiple voices or alternative perspectives on important issues.

Criticism could emanate from within AECA's own members or externally. When the thematic edition on peace education was published in 1985, for example, AJEC came under attack from one of the AECA branches which expressed concern that 'teachers are not appropriately trained to address this issue with young children' (AJEC Minutes, April, 1986, p.3). Peace education was perceived by this branch as a 'political issue, and something that AECA should not be addressing.' However, it was also noted in the same minutes that 'one college reported that it (the peace edition) would be used as a text.'

AJEC built its reputation as a credible academic journal mainly through its peer review system which assesses the suitability of manuscripts submitted for publication. During 1979, review guidelines or objective criteria were developed first by Sandi Plummer, then the National Director of AECA. With the aid of other AJEC committee members, a 'Driver's Manual' was produced, containing a series of policies and procedures to cover various aspects, including guidelines for advertisers and copyright conditions.

From its inception, AJEC embraced internationally recognised standards of quality and adopted the American Psychological Association's publications criteria. Enforcement of these guidelines was not always easy, as was reported, for example, in the minutes of May 1982: '... papers are being presented but are not always of the quality required

for the journal but we refuse to drop standards.' Over time, AJEC's peer review guidelines have been consistently monitored and revised with internal and external input. Today, AJEC's policies and standards are used as benchmarks for other early childhood publications.

## Structure and content

APQ and AJEC have shared a vision: that the journal was intended as a forum for professional communication. Each aimed to present thought-provoking and stimulating reading on current as well as controversial matters concerned with early childhood. Inevitably, the structure and format of each journal changed over time. Home and family articles directed at parents in APQ were not included in AJEC in the same way. While working with parents has continued as a recurrent theme in AJEC (see Appendix 1), articles have stemmed primarily from a research perspective. State news, which was described as 'From the field' reports filed by AECA's branches, was phased out during the early 1980s, whilst 'Letters to the editor' and book/film reviews have continued.

AJEC has a more systematic approach to theme-based editions than its predecessor. At least two editions annually are devoted to critical and emergent issues in early childhood (see Appendix 1). Examination of these thematic editions shows that cultural diversity, curriculum, staff training and policy matters are recurrent themes. AJEC has also been proactive and fearless in promoting discussion of complex issues such as peace education, reproductive technology, and children's rights. Joint ventures have been undertaken with other organisations, including the Child Accident Prevention Council of Australia, which led to the production of thematic issues such as 'Childhood injuries' (AJEC Vol. 17 No. 3, 1992). These ventures have brought early childhood writers together with those outside the field.

AJEC has kept abreast of highly relevant and significant developments of interest to early childhood professionals. For example, the year before the Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified by the Australian Parliament, AJEC agreed to publish a thematic edition. This edition (AJEC Vol. 14 No. 2, 1989), produced with the assistance of the Human Rights Commission, is a classic reference

reflecting on Australia's participation in children's rights. AJEC committee's minutes (December, 1989 p.4) record that Hazel Hawke, the wife of the Prime Minister at the time, publicly acknowledged 'that AECA was among the key non-government organisations which have had a significant role, along with government, in developing the Convention and the public's acceptance of it.'

Maintaining an international perspective is another legacy AJEC inherited from APQ. APQ aimed to ensure that there was 'always a reference to another country...' (APQ Report, 1975, p.4). Reports on studies undertaken overseas by Australian graduates under the Alice Creswick Scholarship scheme were a regular feature of APQ. Phyllis Scott wrote frequently during her sabbaticals in the USA, under the title 'Report from overseas'. The journal also provided a useful link for networking with early childhood colleagues overseas, especially with those in New Zealand, an avenue promoted by Clyde during her editorial years.

Building on APQ's early interests in internationalisation, AJEC broadened and expanded its approach to cultural diversity. It has published at least three thematic editions dedicated to cross-cultural matters. Inclusion of papers based on research undertaken among two or more cultural contexts is now a recurrent feature of AJEC.

The editors of APQ were visionaries who recognised the importance of including research in an early childhood professional journal. They were clear about their objectives in this regard. The APQ published only research summaries 'which were appropriate for educators and were readable by the average teacher,' and declared that 'if research workers wish to publish their full reports, this Journal is hardly the vehicle...' (Stamp, 1974, p.3).

In its fourteenth year of publication, AJEC's first edition in 1989 was devoted solely to research with the aim of raising 'the readers' awareness of, and need for, research in the early childhood field' (Clyde, 1989, p.2). This edition consisted of a mix of articles looking at primary research, research methodology, and reports on topics under review in four early childhood training institutions. Clyde, the editor, argued that 'those in the field must have a knowledge of research processes and researchers must understand the clear links between their research questions and the real life issues facing

the early childhood field today and tomorrow.' Following the huge success of this edition, the committee agreed 'that "research" be presented more regularly in the journal' (AJEC Minutes, February, 1989, p.2).

This view was subsequently affirmed through the findings of the AJEC's readers' survey in 1990. It showed clearly that AJEC fulfilled 'the need for a vehicle to publish research and articles of an academic nature' (AJEC Minutes, September 1990, p.3). Clyde reiterated AJEC's original objectives thus: 'The intention then was to publish articles relating to the education, health, and welfare of young children. The journal was never intended to be of practical help for teachers' (AJEC Minutes, July, 1990, p.2). By encouraging its authors to discuss the application of research findings, AJEC aimed to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

### The pride of the profession

Published four times a year, first APQ and then AJEC have been the flagships of the AECA's serial publications programs. AJEC is now included as a part of AECA's comprehensive membership package. With the employment of staff with design and publications expertise, AJEC's cover and format have undergone numerous facelifts. Since October 1997, face-to-face meetings of AJEC's editorial committee, once held at least four times a year, have been replaced by an annual teleconference, supplemented by electronic and facsimile communication. The future of its operations is being examined under the review of AECA's publications program, currently underway.

Today, characteristic of its philanthropic origins, AJEC continues to operate as frugally and efficiently as possible, and its volunteer support base continues to provide cost savings as well as professional credibility in a volatile marketplace. As public documents, APQ and AJEC have both promoted community awareness about children's services and the work of early childhood professionals. Above all, by showcasing Australian early childhood research these journals represent 'a measurable feature of professional prestige that can be used to judge society's opinion of the field' (Ade, 1982, p.28).

In raising the status of the early childhood profession, the critical role played by APQ and AJEC is unequivocal. Together, they reflect the

life and times of children's services in Australia, and they are a remarkable achievement of dedicated Australian early childhood professionals. Congratulations, AECA, for sponsoring the pride of the profession—APQ and AJEC, scholarly journals much loved and valued by early childhood professionals throughout the globe.

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