



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Whatever the election outcome, ECA will remain a strong supporter of the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) and the quality reforms agreed by the Council of Australian Governments in December 2009.

ECA's position is that these reforms are so strongly needed and are of such significance for the babies and young children attending early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, for their parents, and ultimately for the economic and social wellbeing of the nation, that they should be adopted by all parties and implemented no matter who is in government. We also remain strongly committed to reconciliation and to equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and will continue to advocate for this, whoever holds office.

The ECA 2010 Biennial Conference being held in Adelaide in late September will be a real opportunity for all of us to act on these commitments. We can expect to be informed and inspired by keynotes and seminars. Needless to say, all conference speakers and presenters know the challenge to improve quality that we all face in our workplaces, both in implementing the EYLF and in working with the structural realities of our services. They will have this in mind as they work with us at the conference. The conference sessions on the EYLF, Prof Lester-Irabinna Rigney's keynote, as well as information about ECA's work with Reconciliation Action Plans, will provide particular focus to 'fuel the fire' of our commitments in these areas.

Early Childhood Australia takes its obligation as an advocate for young children very seriously. We constantly have the wellbeing of all young children at the forefront of our minds. We are especially focused on the wellbeing of infants and young children in ECEC services, and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across Australia. These

commitments inform and guide all aspects of our work, including e-communications, publications, face-to-face forums, projects, contributions to community and government committees, liaison with other groups in the sector, policy responses and direct conversations with government.

It is important to say, however, that much of the energy and knowledge for this work comes from you—ECA members and friends all around Australia. Please keep talking to us—whether by direct communications to our National Office and CEO Pam Cahir; to your ECA National Board member; or through your local state or territory ECA Branch—by writing to our publications and by participating in the forums we facilitate.

The ECA conference makes a very special opportunity for these conversations. If you are not yet an ECA member, the conference is a great time to join up, to meet people from your branch and ECA nationally, and to renew your commitment to quality.

To everyone—while you are at the conference, please do take the opportunity to talk to us about your hopes and dreams and the challenges in your work with young children. Learning about what YOU think about quality improvement and what YOU are doing to support it will help make our voice even stronger.

Margaret Young
National President
Early Childhood Australia

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Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, Being And Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework For Australia*. Canberra: DEEWR.

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NATIONAL SNAICC CONFERENCE

There are moments in your career that you invariably look back on. The first conference you went to, an encounter with a family or the day a project with children came to fruition. For me, my recent attendance at the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) conference in Alice Springs will be remembered as one of those significant moments; one that will shape who I am as an early childhood professional.

For Our Children Local Strengths, National Challenges—Ampe Anwernekenheke: Rlterrke Akwete Aneye was the fifth national conference of SNAICC. SNAICC, in its role as the national peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, offered over 1000 people (professionals, academics, policy-makers and community elders) an opportunity to meet together to share our commitment to Aboriginal children and families. Over three days we talked and listened, watched and participated and above all—and in the words of the conference objectives—‘challenged others to acknowledge history and respect culture’ in the name of children. There is much to say about an experience of such stature. I will share with you three moments that have stayed with me.

Professor Dorothy Scott’s (Foundation Chair in Child Protection and the Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia) keynote presentation on the second day was captivating and immensely moving. Such a contrast from the fiery passion of Cindy Blackstock (Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada) who spoke on the first day of the First Nations legal action in Canada. Dorothy, on the eve of her retirement, shared a series of personal reflections about her life and work—with and beside—Aboriginal children and their families. They were powerful reminders of the complexities of the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and of the unanswered questions in need of urgent and respectful solutions.

Second, the opportunity to hear about work that is making a difference to Aboriginal children was a privilege. As a representative of Early Childhood Australia (ECA), this is particularly significant. ECA has made a commitment—through its strategic plan—to speak up about the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait children, as well as offer constructive solutions. We can only do this when we know what these issues are and consider how they can be addressed, with input and ideas from the people involved, who know best. There is much to celebrate and many people to support. The news of these achievements will not go untold.

And third, the conference dinner; memorable not so much for the food or the complexities of getting it from ‘bush wok’ to table, but for the opportunity it gave me to join with some new and old friends, in the shared joy of working together towards a common goal. Nina, Christabelle and Sharon diced the onions while Rene and I coaxed the fire to behave. Is this not what true reconciliation is all about? Agreeing to find a shared interest and abandoning our incessant need to make the other the same.

I know these memories will influence the work I do as an early childhood professional. It will remind me to be passionate and reflective; to find ways to work together and to work tirelessly for the life chances of every Australian child.

Catharine Hydon
Early Childhood Consultant

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As Early Childhood Australia's National Conference '*Garla Baudoni: Fuelling the fire*' draws near, we turn the spotlight on some of the conference keynote speakers to discuss how their presentations link with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the issues facing the sector.



John O'Toole

Tell us a little regarding what you will be speaking about at the ECA conference?

I'll be exploring, both in practice and in theory, the organic relationship between play, art and learning, which first manifests itself in early childhood but is just as important in adulthood. Children's play is far more sophisticated and full of complex skills and artistry than we adults usually recognise, because we have ourselves forgotten both how to play, and how to read play. Manipulating and controlling the sensory media we use in art forms is central to children's play. Learning emerges from this artistic and playful management of media. Obviously, creativity and imagination are closely bound up in this. So if you outlaw or restrict either play or art in early childhood, you limit and inhibit learning. If you encourage them, you get skillful players, emerging artists and deep learners.

How do you think your talk links with the Early Years Learning Framework?

In devising the Shape Paper for the Arts in the National Curriculum (ACARA, forthcoming), we aim to build on the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009). To the extent that the EYLF supports this philosophy outlined above, I endorse it admiringly, and will use it as a foundation for the P-12 curriculum—but it does not go far enough, as I shall try to show.

What are your views of the primary/dominant issues facing the childcare sector today?

There is one issue which relates centrally to my theme; the age-old dilemma facing the childcare worker or early

childhood educator, which is severely exacerbated in our contemporary society: enterprise versus compliance—the clash between the need to take risks and the need to be safe. Physically and intellectually, learning is risky. The best kind of learning—which produces creative, resourceful and independent thinkers and doers, that become active citizens in the world—is not the absorption of predigested knowledge, and recitation of skills and precepts. Effective learning includes trial and error and experimentation in order to explore and discover. Educational systems mediate against these attributes in patterns set from early childhood learning settings onwards, in at least two major ways:

1. by providing a basis of certainty (a curriculum, subjects and set knowledge) that is taught to students, by teachers who are repositories of knowledge, and who have right answers. Wrong answers—that is, the errors in trial and error—are penalised, increasingly heavily and with greater consequences as the child gets older
2. by the increasing needs (especially physical, electronic and systemic) for compliance—the legal requirements of carers and schools are so fierce that wherever possible, the slightest risk is eliminated in the interest of caution and fear rules over venture every time. The inevitable casualties include creativity, resourcefulness, independence and social innovation.

What are your hopes for early childhood research/practice/understanding in the future?

That my own grandchildren are among the beneficiaries of a more humane, tough-minded and creative system of education.



Dave Brown,

Artistic Director, Patch Theatre Company

Tell us a little regarding what you will be speaking about at the ECA conference?

As the artistic director of Patch Theatre Company, I'm responsible for programming and co-creating theatre productions for four- to eight-year olds that are staged nationally and internationally. This engages me intimately with the interests and concerns of early childhood.

As theatre-makers, we seek to provoke, tickle, prod and beguile children with performances that celebrate the experience of childhood; the joys of play; the whims of the imagination; the struggle to make meaning; and the challenge of growing and developing through the most complex and telling phase of their lives.

Our mission statement—*keeping the artist alive in the child*—is guided by a Pablo Picasso quote: 'Every child is an artist; the challenge is to keep them so' (Picasso, 1881-1973).

I'll be speaking about what that challenge means and how it can inspire and guide our approaches to early childhood learning and development.

How do you think your talk links with the Early Years Learning Framework?

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) is a brilliant document that encapsulates the essence of what it is to engage effectively with children. My talk celebrates the broad tenets of this document and highlights the challenges of achieving its objectives in a culture that undervalues many of the principles it is attempting to promote.

The element that differentiates humans from all other creatures is our capacity to imagine and create. These qualities lie at the core of our capacity to survive and prosper at a personal and a societal level. The EYLF promotes a child-centred, play-based, teacher-responsive model of learning. In practice, it means that teachers need to embrace the uncertainty of how their children's learning may unravel on any particular day. The notion of releasing control is scary and it is human to want to avoid it. However, uncertainty

is a core ingredient of all creative practice, be it making a play or supporting children's learning. In this context, I suggest that a better understanding of the nature of creativity, may inspire better educational settings for children.

What are your views of the primary/dominant issues facing the childcare sector today?

As a theatre director, I'm not qualified to identify these primary/dominant issues for a sector I'm not directly involved in. However, from the perspective of what I'll be discussing in my keynote speech, I will make the observation that we often get caught up in the practicalities of early childhood learning and development and the needs of the temporal world. The dominant issues often relate to physical wellbeing, protection and nurture. It's because these challenges are tangible and practical solutions can be identified. As important as these are, they form only half the picture. Wellbeing, learning and development are as much about the inner child as they are about the physical child existing in the external world. One, of course, feeds the other and I fear that too little attention is paid to how we engage with the inner child ... the whimsical child, the magical-thinking child, the power of childhood wonder, the exploratory child, the imagining child, the creative spirit.

What are your hopes for early childhood research/practice/understanding in the future?

Early childhood learning and development is the most important challenge of any nation. The first six years are fundamental to all

that comes beyond it. It is fundamental to our future. There is nothing that is more important than this. We neglect it at our peril.

Many things can wait; the child cannot. Now is the time their bones are being formed. Now is the time their minds are being developed. To them we cannot say tomorrow. Their name is today.

(Gabiella Mistral, 1889–1957)

The EYLF is a document. It is a small beginning, a miniscule part of the effort required to put into practice the principles it advocates.

My hope is that we have the politicians, policy-makers, researchers, agitators, educators, artists, parents and carers, who, with the appropriate level of funding and intent, use the EYLF to take us beyond paying lip-service to good practice to actually becoming world's best practice. It won't happen without the political will to make it happen. The attention we pay our children is a measure of what kind of civilisation we are. I hope for visionary leadership and a vision realised.

References:

ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) (forthcoming). *Shape Paper for the Arts in the National Curriculum*. Retrieved 23 August, 2010 from <http://www.acara.edu.au/arts.html>.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, Being And Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework For Australia*. Canberra: DEEWR.



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PAID PARENTAL LEAVE SCHEME

Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme—an initiative of the Australian Labor Government—is set to finally commence on 1 January 2011, after years of Australia being one of only two Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries to not have such a scheme in place (Australia, Senate, 2010).

The positive effects of a mother being able to stay at home following the birth of a child are well documented. According to the Family Assistance Office, these benefits include higher developmental outcomes for children; the possibility for mothers to breastfeed and to have the necessary time to recover from childbirth; assisting families to develop a better work-life balance; and keeping women in contact with the workforce.

At present, access to employer-funded parental leave is not equal—it is an initiative implemented voluntarily by some private organisations that want employees to return to work in their organisations after childbirth or adoption, and are in a position to be able to offer parents this financial incentive. In 2007 only one-third of employed women with children received paid parental leave from their employer (Family Assistance Office, 2010). This may be partly accounted for by the fact that, under current circumstances, parental leave is not available to part-time, casual and seasonal employees, contractors or the self-employed. These facts may also help to explain why women's participation in the workforce during the peak child-bearing ages between 25 and 44 years is significantly more reduced than women in other OECD countries (ACTU, 2009).

Considering that women now make up 45 per cent of the workforce (Family Assistance Office, 2010), the Paid Parental Leave scheme provides a strong conduit to boosting Australia's short-term and long-term productivity levels by 'putting downward pressure on inflation and increasing the labour supply at a time of serious skills shortages' (ACTU, 2009, p. 2). Another benefit will be to reduce the financial stress on businesses who want to retain employees but still be able to support their employees' familial needs. 'These flexible staffing arrangements are especially important for small business, the engine of Australia's economy' (Australia, Senate, p. 4040). Given the current inconsistency in the provision of employer-funded parental leave across Australia, the estimated cost of \$1.04 billion over five years (Australia, House of Representatives, 2010) to provide this service to new parents is considered a worthwhile investment for the expected increases in overall short-term and long-term productivity.

References:

- Family Assistance Office (2010). *Paid Parental Leave scheme—Information for parents* (Booklet). Accessed online 6 August 2010 www.familyassist.gov.au/news-and-updates/paid-parental-leave-scheme.html.
- Australia, Senate (2010). *Debates*, no. 7. Accessed online 6 August 2010 www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/dailys/ds220610.pdf.
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- Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) (2009). *Paid maternity leave: A new employment standard in 2009* (Fact sheet). Accessed online 6 August 2010 www.aefederal.org.au/Women/PMLFS.pdf.



Early Childhood Australia National Conference

'Garla Bauondi: Fuelling the fire'

29 September – 2 October 2010
Adelaide Convention Centre, SA



The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) sessions

The EYLF recently became the first early learning framework to be nationally endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments. The EYLF guides the provision of learning environments for all Australian children and is for use by educators in a range of early childhood settings.

The EYLF will be a high focus at the ECA Conference. The sessions will provide delegates with the chance to look at opportunities and challenges posed as educators implement this first Early Years Learning Framework. These sessions will be facilitated by people involved in the development of the EYLF and practitioners already working with the Framework.

For more information please visit: www.ecaconference.com.au

To join our mailing list for updates and announcements email: conference@earlychildhood.org.au

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RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA AND RECONCILIATION ACTION PLANS

How many of us wholeheartedly support the goal of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians, but don't know how or where to start acting on our principles and good intentions?

As the peak national organisation working for and promoting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, *Reconciliation Australia* is well aware of the challenges in this. For *Reconciliation Australia*, reconciliation 'involves building mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and other Australians that allow us to work together to solve problems and generate success that is in everyone's best interests', with a particular focus on closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

Based on ongoing experience, *Reconciliation Australia* has identified a number of areas of focus in its work to support progress towards building mutually respectful relationships:

- **awareness—expanding knowledge of the facts**—finding out about the history and its effects, cultures and contributions; and the diverse array of current-day realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- **attitudes—shaping values and behaviour**—increasing self-knowledge about the attitudes we have and how they influence our behaviour
- **perceptions—understanding what we think of each other**—examining the assumptions we make about one another and the extent to which these are based on stereotypes and misinformation
- **action—taking and supporting action**—turning good intentions into meaningful action.

Reconciliation Australia has developed resources and strategies to help ordinary people and organisations to make progress in these areas. A major resource is the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), a tool to help organisations build positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The RAP helps inform and

support individuals to take action towards common goals, which can be a daunting prospect if you are acting alone. *Reconciliation Australia* says about RAPs:

- they give you a format for exploring how reconciliation can advance your business/organisational objectives
- they provide an avenue to make a public contribution towards the national effort to close the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children
- they formalise your contribution by encouraging you to identify clear actions and realistic targets, as well as lessons learnt
- while each organisation shapes its own RAP, all plans include a creative blend of relationships, respect and opportunities
- developing a meaningful RAP takes time, but the final product is a simple, easy-to-read plan of no more than five pages
- *Reconciliation Australia's* RAP Tool Kit is a guide on how to get there.

Reconciliation Australia's website www.reconciliation.org.au gives full information about the organisation's work and Reconciliation Action Plans.

Early Childhood Australia has committed to work on Reconciliation Action Plans nationally and in each ECA Branch. The ECA conference will provide a chance to talk to ECA about this work. Maybe you will decide to make a contribution through ECA, or maybe even get the RAP ball rolling in your own service, workplace or community group.

Margaret Young
President
Early Childhood Australia

How to grow your super savings

Your super is an investment in the future – your future.

But the basic amount your employer contributes to your super on your behalf (known as Super Guarantee or SG contributions) may not be enough to support you when you retire. Fortunately, you have two options, so you don't have to rely on just the contributions made through your employer.

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If you're under 50 you can have up to \$25,000* in before-tax contributions, including salary sacrifice and your employer's SG amounts. For those aged 50-plus this amount doubles to \$50,000* (until June 2012, when it will revert to the \$25,000 threshold).

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