In this issue:

Young children’s understandings of the measurement of mass

A fine balance: Understanding the roles educators and children play as intentional teachers and intentional learners within the Early Years Learning Framework

Equity and quality: Challenges in providing early childhood educational opportunity in China

and more …
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Laura McFarland-Piazza, Sydnye Allen and Rachael Webb
This edition is a potpourri of articles that show that thoughtful academic and theoretical discourse is alive and well in the early childhood sector across the world. The areas probed in this issue range from thinking and research in curriculum learning areas such as mathematics, music and literacy to issues of quality and equity, insights and challenges of dominant discourses, transitions and the variation in teacher ratings of behaviour. In reading these articles I have been challenged and inspired, also made uneasy at testing some of my own ingrained truths. I think that is one of the great strengths of presenting such as array of research, opinion and analyses as it tests what you know.

In the curriculum area of music, de Vries reports on the technologies teachers use to facilitate music learning in Australian preschools within a metropolitan area. It is interesting to note that the author describes children’s music practices in the home are changing due to technology and children engage in music at home in multiple ways such as singer, listener, instrumentalist, composer and dancer. Yet as an educational experience in preschool, he found that teachers use of music technology is constrained by such as aspects as cost and lack of teacher knowledge about using technologies with children. While in mathematics, McDonough, Cheeseman and Ferguson describe insights into young children’s (six–eight years) understandings of mass measurement from findings of rich teaching and learning experiences on the concepts of mass. The authors suggest that while the basic idea of direct measurement may look simple, the learning of mass measurement involves complex mental accomplishments.

In the literacy/language curriculum area, Mackenzie and Veresov use Cultural Historical Theory and Genetic Research methodology as tools to explore and analyse the relationship between drawing and early writing development. They argue that through their drawing children may create more complex and meaningful texts than using conventional symbols alone. This is fascinating research illustrating what children can do when drawing is available alongside the conventional written language learning journey. Still in the area of literacy, McLean in her article considers the potential of a symbiotic or mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology in children’s literacy learning that challenges the traditional ways that technology has been applied. The author suggests that reconceptualising Cambourne’s Conditions of Learning (1995) may provide a lens through which technologies are conductors for communication that influence literacy practices.

The role of the educator as an intentional teacher is explored in the article by Leggett and Ford as they examine the idea of intentional teaching as presented in the Early Years Learning Framework. They describe the relationships between intentionality, required documentation on outcomes and the different approaches encountered in the indoor and outdoor environments. The authors draw upon the current literature of early childhood educators and their emerging identities as intentional teachers as well as analysing the tensions between curriculum construction and the role of the educator. They argue that a focus on intentional learning as well as intentional teaching will create a more effective treatment of the teaching/learning relationship.

Stuart draws on a genealogical review of economic arrangements, practices and forms of knowledge that have guided early childhood education in New Zealand to suggest some future possibilities. She uses New Zealand as a case study of a neoliberal economic theory, Human Capital Theory and the growing alliance with early childhood education to portray the trinity of mother, child and teacher who together grow the present and future workers of the national economy. This article asserts that the dominant thinking constructs mothers as workers, teachers of trainers of children and children as the future workers—a trinity that narrows human potential. A thought-provoking article that challenges a dominant discourse.

Discussion and research of issues with equity and quality in early childhood service provision are well known in the international early childhood education arena. This is an interesting overview of the challenges in providing equity and quality in service provision and policy in early childhood education in China by Qian. The author describes the complexities and challenges of this movement and the role that local and national governments play in the translation of policy to practice and the need for fiscal support.

Arnold and Dobbs-Oates report on their research of 26 teachers that used the Teacher Report form on the Child Behaviour Checklist (Achenback, 1991) of children’s behaviour for 132 children in classrooms. They describe the variance of agreement between teachers and report predictors for agreement. Such an examination of variation in agreement they argue is important towards improving reliability and validity of ratings used in early childhood research.

Transitions, the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) report, offer “opportunities and challenges” (p. 16).
This is what McFarland-Piazza, Allen and Webb found when they did an exploratory study of the transition experiences of children, families and staff from two early childhood services into an integrated early childhood service. Results identified stronger support for staff, leadership, policy and infrastructure as areas to facilitate integration of early childhood services. They also found that active involvement in pre-planning and commitment to an iterative process led to more favourable outcomes for families.

A potpourri of articles worthy of investigation.

Lennie Barblett
Edith Cowan University

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The use of technology to facilitate music learning experiences in preschools

Peter de Vries
Monash University

THIS ARTICLE REPORTS ON the technologies preschool teachers use to facilitate music learning experiences for children in their classrooms and why they choose to use or not use technologies. A questionnaire was administered to 185 teachers in a metropolitan Australian city focusing on the kinds of technologies being used, for what music activities, and reasons for using and not using these technologies. 81 questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 44 per cent). Nine of the respondents agreed to a follow-up day-long classroom observation and interview with the researcher. Results revealed that CDs dominated teacher use of technology to provide song repertoire and a model for singing this song repertoire. However, multimedia-based technology was also utilised for music learning experiences (i.e. DVDs/video, television, internet websites). However, more recent digital technologies such as digital music players/recorders, musical toys with digitised components and tablets were rarely used. While preschool teachers value technology to facilitate music learning experiences for young children, constraints in using technology were identified, including cost and lack of knowledge about using these technologies with young children.

Introduction

A growing body of research from around the world has demonstrated that, prior to attending school, young children have had a multitude of home musical experiences that revolve around engagement with and through technology, and in particular digital technology (Barrett, 2011; de Vries, 2009; Ilari, Moura & Bourscheidt, 2011; Lamont, 2008; Lum, 2008; McPake, Plowman & Stephen, 2012; Roulston, 2006; Young, 2008, 2009). As Young (2009) writes, ‘Digital technology, where available to children, is changing the nature of music and musical practices, particularly in family homes’ (p. 695). Young’s (2008, 2009) research has demonstrated that technology in the home environment has expanded the way in which children engage with music at very young ages. As McPake, Plowman and Stephen (2012) write, digital technologies in particular ‘have the potential to expand young children’s repertoire of activities’ (p. 1).

Despite this engagement with music through and with technology in the home environment, the studies that do exist suggest that teachers of young children are not adopting such technologies that children use in the home in their own facilitation of music experiences in preschools (Roulston, 2006; Simms, Cecconi-Roberts & Keast, 2011; Young, 2006). The aim of this study was to determine what technologies preschool teachers are currently using to facilitate music learning experiences in their classrooms and why they choose or not choose to use the kinds of technologies that current research indicates children are using in the home environment to engage with music.

Literature review

Studies that focus on children’s use of technology in the home environment tend to identify a range of technologies, including musical toys, often with digitised components (Campbell, 1998; Ilari et al., 2011; McPake et al., 2012; Young, 2008, 2009), television and radio (Barrett, 2011; Ilari et al., 2011; Lamont, 2008; Lum, 2008; Marsh, 2004; Young, 2008), karaoke machines (McPake et al., 2012; Young, 2009), CDs (Barrett, 2011; de Vries, 2009; Ilari et al., 2011; Lum, 2008; Roulston, 2006), DVDs and videos (Barrett, 2011; de Vries, 2009; Ilari et al., 2011; Lamont, 2008; Lum, 2008; Roulston, 2006), computer games (Lamont, 2008; Lum 2008),
digital music players such as MP3 players (McPake et al., 2012; Roulston, 2006), and the internet (Lum, 2008; Nyland, Acker, Ferris & Deans, 2012).

Although young children clearly use these technologies to engage with music as entertainment (Campbell, 1998; de Vries, 2009; Lamont, 2008; McPake et al., 2012; Young, 2008), studies also indicate that these in-home experiences also afford young children specific opportunities to engage with music in multiple ways, including listener of music, singer, instrumentalist, dancer and composer (Barrett, 2011; McPake et al., 2012; Young, 2009).

One of the key findings across a range of these in-home studies points to engagement with music occurring through mixed media sources. That is, where the focus is not solely on the auditory, but through multimedia such as computers and other screen-based media (Campbell, 1998; de Vries, 2009; Ilari et al., 2011; Lamont, 2008; Lum, 2008; McPake et al., 2012; Roulston, 2006; Young, 2008). Studies like the one conducted by Roulston (2006) focusing on young children’s music preferences demonstrate how important technology such as CD players and radio are in children’s in-home musical experiences, and in particular how parents use such technologies with their young children to experience music. Young children listened to music through a diverse range of technologies in the home in this study, including DVDs where music listening was ‘inextricably interwoven with viewing’ (p. 11). Similarly in a study of the home musical environments of young children in Singapore, Lum (2008) found that the television (and television with DVD player) was a way that young children engaged musically with each other and their families, as witnessed through their dancing, singing and improvisation with television content. Television programs also served to introduce young children to musical instruments and song repertoire. Lamont’s (2008) study of young children’s musical worlds also revealed the dominance of television, along with computer games, as the way that young children were exposed to music. As Lum found, these children did not passively consume this music but were active in deciding what music they wanted to listen to using these technologies and were active in joining in with songs heard via these technologies. Interestingly, de Vries (2009) found that one of the key reasons parents provided their children with CDs and DVDs with a music focus was because they did not understand what kinds of music and music making were appropriate for their young children, relying on these technologies to provide their children with what they saw as engaging music activities.

Young children engage with music through technology in multiple and complex ways. For example, McPake et al. (2012) documented three-year-old Kylie’s use of a karaoke machine, which resulted in shared singing with her mother and other friends. The karaoke machine afforded Kylie the opportunity to expand the repertoire of songs she sang and to ‘focus on aspects of performance that might once have been less salient, such as keeping time, using dynamics and responsiveness to audience’ (p. 8). Young (2009) also documented young children’s singing using a karaoke machine in the home. She noted that the girls engaged in a range of auto-didactic music-making and performing decisions, such as selecting songs for their vocal ranges, practising the songs, and adopting vocal techniques in their singing imitated from video versions of the songs or siblings. Young noted that the Singstar™ karaoke machine used by the girls provided visual tracking of pitch and rhythm as the girls sang (p. 700). In a study of a two-year-old’s identity work through music making, Barrett (2011) documented a range of ways that the child engaged with music in the home, including extensive use of CDs and DVDs to listen to music, to move to music and as a stimulus to create/compose her own music. What these studies demonstrate is that young children do not use technology to engage with music in a passive way. Rather, they are actively engaged in using technology to be young musicians.

Research design

There were two phases to the research design. The first phase was the administering of a questionnaire to 185 teachers in preschools in one municipality of a metropolitan Australian city. Eighty-one questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 44 per cent). The questionnaire ended by asking the respondents if they would be willing to host the researcher at their preschool for a day so that the researcher could observe music learning experiences with children that focus on their use of technology. Nine teachers agreed to these observations, which concluded with a brief (15–20 minute) interview with the researcher to discuss what had been observed. This was the second phase of the research design. The questionnaire results were not only used to provide a picture of the broader use of technology to facilitate music learning experiences in one municipality of an Australian city, but also as discussion points for the interviews with the preschool teachers. The data from the questionnaire was tabulated. The observational and interview data underwent constant comparative analysis as it was collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), with key themes emerging. These themes were refined as additional observational and interview data was collected.

Questionnaire results

The preschool teachers were asked to nominate technologies that they used to facilitate music learning experiences (Table 1). These technologies were listed on the questionnaire and were drawn from technologies
identified in previous research as technologies used by children in the home environment for music activity. Results clearly demonstrate the dominance of CDs and the stereo systems used to play CDs, with all respondents indicating they used CDs. Next most used technologies—although used significantly less than CDs—were multimedia (i.e. not just auditory). At the lower end of use were digital-based technologies (digital music players, tablets, musical toys with digitised components).

**Table 1. Technologies used to facilitate music learning experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technologies used to facilitate music learning experiences</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDs</td>
<td>81 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereo system (i.e., CD player, dock with speakers for digital music player)</td>
<td>80 (99%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television (with or without DVD/video player)</td>
<td>41 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVDs/videos</td>
<td>28 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>25 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer games/software</td>
<td>22 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet websites (i.e. YouTube™)</td>
<td>12 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital music players/recorders (i.e. MP3 player, iPod™)</td>
<td>6 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablets (i.e. iPad™)</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical toys with digitised components</td>
<td>5 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karaoke machines (i.e. Singstar™)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were then asked to nominate which of the technologies listed in Table 1 were used to facilitate music learning experiences in five music activity areas: singing, playing musical instruments, moving/dancing to music, composing/creating music, and listening to music (Table 2). Technologies clearly support particular music activities, namely singing, moving/dancing to music, and listening to music. Interestingly, multimedia technologies play a role in musical activities which may not traditionally be thought of as having a visual component, namely singing and listening, which are activities supported by technologies with auditory and visual components such as television and DVDs/videos.

**Table 2. Technologies supporting music activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music activity</th>
<th>Technologies to support</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>CDs</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereo system</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DVDs/videos</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital music players/recorders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karaoke machines</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing musical instruments</td>
<td>CDs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereo system</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital music players/recorders</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving/dancing to music</td>
<td>CDs</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereo system</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DVDs/videos</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital music players/recorders</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karaoke machines</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composing/creating music</td>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer software</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereo system</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internet websites</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tablets</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td>CDs</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stereo system</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DVDs/videos</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internet websites</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital music players/recorders</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Musical toys</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karaoke machines</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire concluded by asking why or why not the respondents used any of the technologies listed in Table 1. Although an open-ended question, the responses were easily categorised around a range of core response areas (Table 3).
Table 3. Rationale for technology use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for using technologies</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides repertoire/material for music teaching</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher needs this to support their singing</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging for children</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a teaching aid for the child</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to use/access</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children access these technologies at home</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive learning for children</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for flexible use according to child’s interests</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for not using technologies</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher is unsure about how to use the technology</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not suitable for preschool-aged children</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there were a wide range of reasons for using technologies to facilitate music learning experiences, three areas dominated:

1. technology provided repertoire or musical material for music teaching, namely CDs, DVDs and videos that teachers used with children
2. technologies such as CDs played on stereo systems serving as tools to support their singing with children (many respondents indicated that singing along with CDs gave them the confidence to sing songs with children)
3. technology was seen as a way of engaging children with music-making activities.

The focus on technologies being used as a teaching aid for the child (14 respondents) referred to children using a range of technologies independent of the teacher to engage with music, such as listening to CDs on a portable stereo system during free play, playing with musical toys, and accessing music software and internet sites independent of teacher direction. Responses relating to using technologies because of ease of use/access referred to both ease of use/access for both the teacher and the child. Only nine respondents acknowledged that they used technologies because they recognised children used these technologies at home and therefore it ‘made sense’ (quote from one respondent) to draw on these in-home experiences at preschool. The six respondents who indicated they used technologies because they were interactive for children pointed to children’s use of digital music recorders to record each other’s singing, using a karaoke machine, and watching DVDs where children were invited to participate in moving to music and singing with the presenters on the DVDs. Of these six respondents, five also indicated that these technologies afforded flexibility for catering to children’s different musical interests (i.e. using musical ‘apps’ on the iPad™ in a variety of ways).

The most cited reason for not using technologies to facilitate music learning experiences was the cost of these technologies. Seven respondents who indicated the cost of technologies was an issue indicated that they were liable to require constant maintenance and replacement, thus adding to the initial cost of purchasing such technologies. Computers, iPads™ and portable stereo systems were highlighted as requiring this kind of ongoing maintenance. Cost was clearly the most dominant reason for not using technologies to facilitate music learning experiences. The next cited reason was teachers being unsure how to use these technologies for music teaching: 12 of the 26 teachers who highlighted this as an issue specifically pointed to the use of iPads™, computer software and music websites. The final reason identified by teachers for not using technologies at preschool was that they were not seen as being suitable for use in the preschool setting. Three of the respondents indicated that this was because they believed children were being exposed to excessive amounts of technology in the home environment.

**Observation and interview results**

Eight of the nine observations in preschool classrooms revealed similar practices in terms of the use of technology to facilitate music learning experiences for children. In these cases technology was largely restricted to the use of CDs and DVDs/videos, through stereo systems and TV with DVD/video player. In four of these eight classrooms, music websites were also accessed and used in class. These technologies were used to facilitate singing experiences and moving/dancing to music experiences, generally with an entire class of children. The ninth classroom observation revealed a much wider range of technologies being used to facilitate music learning experiences. This classroom afforded children the opportunity to engage in music listening via a listening station with headphones where children could select listening choices from a range of five CDs. Children were also able to play electronic musical instruments via an iPad™ app on the class iPad™ and
through music software on a computer. Children were also encouraged to create their own music and record this using portable digital sound-recording devices.

**Technology is used and valued by teachers to facilitate music learning experiences for young children**

All interviewed teachers expressed the view that technology was something that enhanced the music learning experiences for children in their classrooms. One teacher commented that ‘without CDs I wouldn’t be doing nearly as much singing [with my children] because I’m not musical, I didn’t know many songs before buying CDs with songs for children’. CDs were used in all classrooms for whole-class singing whereby the teacher and children sang along with the CD. In four of the classrooms DVDs or videos were used in a similar way, although children did not spend all their time singing along with characters in the DVD/videos because music was not the sole focus of these video recordings. For example, in one classroom the children and teacher were watching the animated movie *The Lion King*; the children joined in with some songs in the movie as they were sung by the characters on screen, but there were long stretches of dialogue and on-screen action without singing when the children simply watched the DVD. In two classrooms the website YouTube™ was used in a similar way where the teacher and children sang along with people performing a song on YouTube™.

**Technology is valued by teachers as a way to access music education resources**

Teachers viewed technology as a way to access music education resources for their music teaching. CDs and DVDs/videos provided teachers with a range of song repertoire. Those who used YouTube™ did so not just to learn a song, but as one teacher said, ‘to see the actions that children can do with songs’. One teacher indicated that she valued drawing on children’s home music experiences in her classroom, which was ‘why I have used the X Factor website [Yahoo17, 2013] … all the children know this [television] show [a music performance contest] so we will often have a look and listen … The song Big Yellow Taxi was one of the songs [on the program] which I thought was a really nice song for the children to learn’. This teacher played the clip on the website of one of the performers singing Big Yellow Taxi and then started to teach the song to her class. In another classroom children had access to an orchestra website, San Francisco Symphony Kids (San Francisco Symphony Education Department, 2013), where children could explore different musical instruments. The teacher said, ‘I found this mainly for me because I didn’t know much about [musical] instruments … now the children use it more than I do’.

**Technology being used is starting to focus on music within the context of multimedia**

With the exception of the use of CDs, the technology used to facilitate music experiences for children drew on multimedia. That is, children not only experienced the auditory, but the auditory with the visual. This was evidenced in the DVDs/videos used to teach new songs, websites accessed (as mentioned previously), and in the use of both iPad™ apps and music software where children got to see the music they were creating through visual representation on screen (i.e. simple music notation focusing on colours and shapes). When asked about this one teacher commented, ‘with technology music is not just about music, not just sound, but it works with what children are seeing and touching even … that’s the reality of music for this generation’.

**Technology is viewed as facilitating interactive music learning**

The term ‘interactive’ was used by five of the nine interviewed teachers in reference to technology and music. ‘It [technology] lets the children do more at their own pace and in a way that really interests them, it’s interactive because they respond to the music, they don’t just sit back and let it wash over them,’ one teacher said when referring to the way children were using the San Francisco Kids website. The teacher who drew on the greatest range of technologies (i.e. music listening station, iPad™ computer with music software, digital recording devices) stressed that the technologies allowed children not only to interact with the technology, but the technology facilitated greater interaction amongst children. To illustrate this she referred to the way children were encouraged to create their own music, record their music making on digital music recorders, and then share these recordings with friends: ‘The children not only play back their songs to me and other children, but we post some of their songs on our website so parents can hear what they have been doing. They love that’. This teacher had set up a music listening station in her classroom. During free play children were able to listen to music with headphones. ‘Even though it can be a solitary activity, the children still love to share what they are listening to … they make music with each other.’ I witnessed one child initially sitting alone with headphones on, humming along to a CD. She then started singing along with the CD, drawing three other children to her who then wanted to ‘have a go’ (one of the children’s words) at listening and singing along too. The four girls ended up taking the headphones out of the portable CD player and singing the song with the CD to a parent helper. In another classroom the teacher spoke of the children looking forward to their ‘karaoke afternoon’ scheduled for the following week, where ‘one of the parents brings one [a karaoke machine] in and the children get to choose the songs and perform … we do
Constraints in using technology to facilitate music learning experiences include cost, ongoing maintenance and lack of knowledge about using these technologies with young children

Despite valuing technology as a means for facilitating music-learning experiences, the nine teachers highlighted constraints to their potential use of technologies for music experiences with children. All nine pointed to the initial cost of hardware, ‘particularly the big ticket items like up-to-date computers, iPads™’. Ongoing maintenance of technology was also seen as a key constraint: ‘Technology invariably goes wrong, we know that, but put in the hands of preschoolers, some who don’t know any better, well you just know you’ll constantly be having stuff in for repairs’. This sentiment was mirrored by five of the teachers. However, the teacher who did provide a range of technology-based music learning experiences countered this attitude: ‘I think that very young children know and understand technology and respect technology to a point where they look after it, probably better than adults’. She mentioned this in passing as we observed two children playing an electronic keyboard on an iPad™ app; one child was reminding the other child that they shouldn’t tap ‘too hard’ on the screen or ‘it might break’. Seven of the nine teachers expressed fears about being unsure about using technologies—namely iPads™, software and some websites—for teaching music. One teacher said, ‘the technology is changing so rapidly, I just can’t keep up. You’ve got to teach yourself because there isn’t the time or money to do any formal PD [professional development] and I really struggle with this, being one of the older ones teaching today. So I tend to stick with teaching music the old fashioned way, just singing ourselves and playing percussion instruments’.

Discussion and implications

This study aimed to determine what technologies preschool teachers are currently using to facilitate music-learning experiences in their classrooms and why they choose or not choose to use the kinds of technologies that current research indicates children are using in the home environment to engage with music. The questionnaire revealed that preschool teachers in this study clearly favoured the use of CDs and stereo systems to play these CDs above all other technologies. CDs have become a readily available resource for early childhood music education in recent years (see for example Gillespie & Glider, 2010; Gudmundsdottir & Gudmundsdottir, 2010) so the prevalence of teachers using CDs was not surprising. The preschool teacher interviews and observations mirrored these findings. Used significantly less were technologies with a multimedia focus, namely television, DVDs/videos, computers and internet websites. However, with the exception of radio, more recent technological innovations such as digital music players, tablets, musical toys with digitised components and karaoke machines, were used by few practitioners for facilitating music education experiences.

The questionnaire, and in particular the interviews and observations, made it clear why teachers valued CDs, and to a lesser extent DVDs/videos and websites such as YouTube™. These technologies provided preschool teachers with a way to access music repertoire (i.e. songs) and support their own singing with children. The internet provided opportunities for teachers to access resources and musical knowledge (i.e. the example of the teacher using the X Factor website or the teacher using the San Francisco Symphony Kids website). This suggests that technology has the potential to provide preschool teachers with personalised professional development in music. Similarly in a study focusing on early childhood teachers’ views and involvement in music professional development, Yim & Ebbeck (2011) found participants identified viewing music-related TV programs not only as entertainment but as professional development. The nature of music professional development need not necessarily be part of a formalised course or seminar, but can be something that teachers access as they need it. What is crucial is that teachers are made aware of these kinds of professional development resources. Music education organisations like the Australian Society for Music Education (ASME) can play a key role in developing and disseminating information about such professional development, not only to music teachers but early childhood teachers.

Teachers in the questionnaire and interviews also indicated they used technology to facilitate music-learning experiences because it afforded interactive learning experiences in music that engaged children and provided flexibility according to children’s musical interests. Technology was not seen as making music a passive experience. Rather, as Lamont (2008) has indicated in reference to children’s television programming that features music, technology can elicit a response in children (i.e. singing and dancing). However, the examples observed of children’s interactive music making through technology also pointed to the importance of children making and sharing their music, not just individually working with a particular form of technology. For example, in the classroom where children chose to record songs they created on digital music recorders, these songs were subsequently shared with other children and adults. This example demonstrates what Iliari (2011, p. 206) suggests is crucial in the use of technology when creating music-making opportunities with young children, that is that they ‘should be more of a
means than an end ... technology can be best integrated into music classrooms (and into our daily lives) when it enhances music-making’.

While the teachers who were interviewed indicated that they valued technology to facilitate music-learning experiences for children, this valuing for most of the teachers was limited, with only one of the nine teachers genuinely embracing digital technologies in her classroom. Both the questionnaire and teacher interviews pointed to factors why technologies—and in the case of the teachers interviewed the digital technologies—are not being readily adopted in preschool classrooms. Cost of technologies (including ongoing maintenance) is clearly an issue, but so is the fact that teachers are unsure about how to use these technologies. There is clearly a need for professional development focusing on using digital technologies for music activities with young children. Current providers of music education technology professional development could potentially work with early childhood practitioners to develop professional development specific to the needs of the early childhood sector.

The use of multimedia-based technologies for music experiences was identified in the questionnaire and observed in the nine classrooms. This somewhat mirrors the nature of everyday interactions with music for young children, whether it be through the interplay of the visual and the sonic in children’s toys (Campbell, 1998) or from screen-based sources (Young, 2008). As Young (2008) writes, today ‘children’s audio music listening cannot be separated out neatly from other multimedia, nor from music listening patterns within the family as a whole’ (p. 41). Therefore drawing on multimedia for music-learning experiences mirrors the reality of children’s musical lives in the home and should be embraced by educators. Teachers should discuss with children and their parents what in fact occurs at home in terms of multimedia music experiences.

Interestingly, the questionnaire revealed a gap in the way that technology was being used to facilitate music learning experiences. That is, teachers reported technology was predominantly used for singing, moving/dancing to music and listening to music. In comparison, technology was used much less for playing musical instruments and composing/creating music activities. The lack of focus on composing/creating music in early childhood settings is not new. While self-initiated musical play on instruments is encouraged in many early childhood settings (Young, 2003), music practices in early childhood settings tend to be ensemble performances of songs and rhymes, with structured movement and playing instruments to keep the beat and rhythm where there is little ‘opportunity for music generation, for viewing music as a creative rather than a re-creative practice’ (Barrett, 2006, p. 218). In a study of music-teaching practices in American preschools, Nardo, Custodero, Persellin & Fox (2006) found that composition was the least afforded of music activities in preschools. Yet, as demonstrated by one of the nine teachers in this study technology—particularly digital technology—provides many ways that facilitate music composition for young children. This teacher indicated in interview that she had a particular interest in both technology and music, so had explored ways in which she could use technology to allow children to explore music composition. The other interviewed teachers were not aware of how they might use technology to have children playing instruments (although one teacher did point to sometimes bringing in an electronic keyboard for free play time) and composing/creating music. With the ever-increasing range of software, internet websites and apps available that allow children to create, compose and record their own music, this aspect of music making appears to be an area that teachers need to know more about. However, it should be noted that young children’s musical composition frequently is spontaneous and emerges from play (Barrett, 2006; Lau & Grieshaber, 2010; Young, 2009). The somewhat formalised nature of some music composition software and apps may not always be the best mechanisms to capture this spontaneous composing of music.

This study has provided a contemporary snapshot of the technology being used to facilitate music-learning experiences by preschool teachers in one municipality in an Australian capital city. The author concurs with Ilari (2011) that technology should not be a substitute for other musical activities. Rather, educators should expand on popular culture contexts that children experience through technologies into ‘live, playful, and interactive activities’ (p. 207). A quality music education for young children should include a wide repertoire of songs, thus allowing children to experience the elements of music in a variety of ways and become musically literate (Kenney, 2013). The age appropriateness of repertoire for the age group being taught is key, as is children’s exposure to a range of different musical genres. Technology can help with this, but the onus of a quality music education program for young children still lies with the musical interactions between children and teachers. Adding technology to a music program should not mean that the teacher ‘takes a back seat’. Children should not, for example, just be asked to sing along with a CD or DVD. Rather, the teacher should be singing with children and be acting as a musical model. As de Vries (2009) found in a study of the use of CDs and DVDs in the home, it is very easy for adults to drop out of the music making/sharing/creating act with children when CDs and DVDs are used as substitutes for music making between adults and children.

As the literature cited earlier in this article indicates, young children are entering preschool with a rich array of music experiences that have been mediated through and with technology. Educators need to understand how children use these technologies to engage with music and build upon these in-home experiences. Professional development will be paramount in ensuring that preschool educators understand how this can occur.
References


Young children’s emerging understandings of the measurement of mass

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THIS ARTICLE DESCRIBES INSIGHTS into young children’s emerging understandings of the measurement of mass. Findings from a teaching experiment that delivered lessons offering rich learning experiences regarding concepts of mass to children of six to eight years of age (Years 1 and 2) suggest that, while the basic idea of direct measurement may look simple, the learning of mass measurement can involve complex mental accomplishments for young children. The lessons are described briefly to communicate the opportunities for exploration that they provided. Examples of children’s actions and reasoning as they experimented, theorised, and challenged each other in their learning are also described. Complexities and accomplishments in these young children’s emerging understandings are highlighted and discussed.

Introduction

Young children possess knowledge of mathematics, often informal knowledge that is ‘surprisingly broad, complex, and sophisticated’ (Clements & Sarama, 2007, p. 462). Research elaborates early mathematical understandings for a range of concepts. However, it provides limited insights into young children’s understandings of the measurement of mass prior to or during the early years of schooling. We believe that the research reported here makes an important contribution to the education community’s insights into young children’s developing understandings in mathematics, and most specifically in mass measurement.

In this article, and usually when working with young children, we use the term mass rather than weight as it is the term used throughout the Australian Mathematics Curriculum (ACARA, 2012). While not all researchers and educators agree on the exact meaning of the terms mass and weight, to inform our work we drew on De Klerk (2007) who defined mass as ‘the amount of matter contained in an object’ (p. 77) and weight as ‘the pull of gravity on an object’ (p. 143). We acknowledge that for the measurement of mass, the English language adds a layer of complexity for young children. We have no verb for the noun and we ‘weigh’ objects to ascertain their mass. So the actions of young children are described as ‘weighing’ and in context both teachers and children blur the scientific boundaries and distinctions between mass and weight. In our reading of research we found both terms, mass and weight, used.

In this article we build on previous research (Cheeseman, McDonough & Clarke, 2011) in the Early Numeracy Research Project (ENRP). Within the ENRP, a framework of conceptual milestones or ‘growth points’ was developed for mass measurement (Clarke et al., 2002), matching the growth points developed for length measurement (McDonough & Sullivan, 2011). The first growth point concerned Awareness of the attribute of mass and its descriptive language, the second Comparing, ordering, and matching with the attribute of mass, the third Quantifying mass accurately, using units and attending to measurement principles, and the fourth Choosing and using standard units for estimating and measuring mass, with accuracy. The first two authors were members of the original research team who designed and used this framework to inform the clinical assessment tasks and lessons in the present study. The ENRP findings indicated that for young children, rich experiences involving measuring mass are needed (Cheeseman et al., 2011). In the present study we provided such experiences, listened to and observed the children, and gained insights into their understandings and thinking.
about the attribute of mass and what it is to compare, order, quantify and measure masses. The assessment data showed that the majority of the 119 Year 1 and 2 children had moved from using non-standard units to using standard units and instruments for measuring mass (Cheeseman, McDonough & Ferguson, 2012).

The learning of mass measurement

Measurement is considered important and a need for better learning and teaching has been identified (Clements & Sarama, 2009; Smith, van den Heuvel-Panhuizen & Teppo, 2011). However, not all areas of measurement have received equal research attention, and there appears to be limited research specifically on the teaching and learning of mass measurement.

Lee (2012) found that even for children as young as 12 months to three years there was evidence in unstructured outdoor play of experimentation with ideas of measurement, including children attempting to lift or move heavy objects, illustrating that children’s ‘skill and understanding were relative to their experiences’ (p. 34). Brainerd (1974) examined the transitive nature of young children’s ordinal ability, and found that, given feedback, five-year-olds could be trained to arrange three balls of clay according to their weight. Brown, Blondel, Simon and Black (1995) with an interest in progression in measuring, interviewed 48 Grade 2, 4, 6, and 8 children on their understandings of weight measurement. Their work focused on the underlying general concepts of units, number, scale and continuity. Results suggested that ‘some aspects of competence seemed to progress more smoothly by age than did others’ (p. 167) and showed variation in individual performances. More recently, Spinillo and Batista (2009) studied 40 six- and eight-year-old children on their understandings of measurement, and found that children of both ages had an understanding of the relationship between the size of a unit and the number of units needed to measure an object, including for measurement of mass. They found also that mass was not difficult for children to understand in terms of the relation between units of measure and objects being measured. The researchers posited that this outcome was linked to children’s experiences of weighing objects at home from an early age.

Key ideas in early learning of mass measurement

Young children encounter mathematical ideas from the time they are born and come to play with and use those ideas. They may make statements related to measurement such as ‘That shoe is big’, sometimes with unconventional use of language such as ‘We are going to the playground today tomorrow’. Complex mental accomplishments are involved in the learning of measurement (Stephan & Clements, 2003), although ‘the basic idea of direct measurement is quite simple’ (Wilson & Osborne, 1992, p. 91). Children develop understandings related to foundational or key ideas of measure such as comparison, unit iteration, number assignment, and proportionality (Lehrer, Jaslow & Curtis, 2003; Wilson & Osborne, 1992), some of which are integrated within the ENRP framework of growth points. Foundational ideas of measure, as relevant to the focus of this paper, are now considered.

Awareness of the attribute

Children’s learning about measurement continues from experiences prior to school through formal schooling, where they are taught about attributes of measure including length, mass, time, area, angle, and volume. Becoming aware of each particular attribute and the differences between them is important as, in order to make comparisons and to measure, children need to know what attribute is in focus. MacDonald (2010) found that children of four to six years old have an awareness of the attribute of mass, as revealed in drawings of measurement situations.

Comparison

Critical in the learning of measurement is an understanding of comparison, that is, that ‘like properties can be compared to see which is greater’ (Wilson & Osborne, 1992, p. 92). In considering masses we make comparisons by hand (hefting), and by using units and scales. Outcomes from non-unit comparison of mass are described with mathematical language such as ‘heavier’ and ‘lighter’. While comparison without units or numbers may be seen as non-measurement reasoning (Battista, 2006), the understanding of comparison underpins more sophisticated measuring that utilises numbers and units.

Two concepts related to comparison, that are generally considered by researchers (Stephan & Clements, 2003) including Piaget, Inhelder and Szeminska (1960) as necessary for complete understanding of measurement, are conservation and transitivity. Conservation is the understanding that an object retains its size (in this case mass) when moved or subdivided; transitive reasoning involves understanding the relationship between the measures of three items. There is debate about the ages (Stephan & Clements, 2003; Wilson & Rowland, 1993) and order (Carpenter, 1976; Stephan & Clements, 2003) at which the ability to compare, including conservation and transitivity, develops.

Unit

Another key measurement idea is unit (Lehrer et al., 2003; Wilson & Osborne, 1992). For mass, examples of non-standard units are counters or metal washers; standard units include the gram and kilogram. Balance or spring scales are used as appropriate.
For length measurement, the unit is placed end to end (iterating) alongside the object, that is, the object is subdivided (mentally and physically) by the unit. In this process the size of the unit remains the same, the units or subdivisions must be identical, the unit is seen as part of the whole, and the unit is translated successively resulting in a count. For mass measurement, while the size (mass) of the unit must remain the same, the unit is not laid directly in line with the object. For example, when using non-standard units a balance scale is required to make the measure. Measuring in standard units of mass may involve the use of balance scales with physical weights, or some type of spring or digital scale.

Keeping in mind that foundational ideas of mass include comparison, along with conservation and transitive reasoning, and unit, along with quantification and use of scale, this paper addresses the research question:

What are some of the complexities within the emerging understandings of mass measurement of children of six to eight years of age?

Methodology

The research discussed in this paper involved 119 Year 1 and 2 children (six- to eight-year-olds) in five mixed ability classes at one school. It is described as design research (Cobb, Confrey, DiSessa, Lehrer & Schauble, 2003) as it involved a classroom experiment in which the research team collaborated with a teacher who took responsibility for instruction and who was also a member of the research team. There were three phases in the study: the administration of individual one-to-one, task-based assessment interviews (see Cheeseman et al., 2011) to collect baseline data on children’s understandings of mass measurement; the teaching phase of five lessons (three weeks after the initial interviews); and another set of one-to-one interviews for further assessment of children’s learning (three weeks after the teaching). A detailed discussion of the data collection and results from the task-based assessment interviews can be found in Cheeseman et al. (2012).

In addition to these quantitative data, observational data were collected to gain further insights into young children’s thinking about mass. Notes, photographs and audiotapes were used to document elements of the lessons. It is largely upon observational data that this paper draws.

A sequence of lessons on the topic of mass measurement was developed by the authors for use with the 119 Year 1 and 2 children in five classes. Each of these composite Year 1/2 classes was taught five one-hour lessons over one week, with three of these taught by the third researcher who was also a practising primary school teacher, and two by the children’s classroom teacher (who in each case had observed the third researcher teach the lesson earlier that day).

The lessons in the present study were to replace the existing school planning for mass measurement for that year and were designed to follow typical growth of children’s concepts of measurement identified in the literature (Outhred & McPhail, 2000). Accordingly, the lessons began with comparing mass and moved toward quantifying mass using standard units of measure. However, the difference was that we included a more rapid move towards standard units, with both Year 1 and 2 children (six- to eight-year-olds) being given the opportunity to work with these. Essentially we gave opportunities beyond the expectations of the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2012) and followed our own advice, as identified above, that came from previous research (Cheeseman et al., 2011) and that advocated the use of rich and challenging tasks.

The lessons are described here as they give the context for the majority of the data discussed in this article.

The lessons

The five lessons were designed to engage the children in rich mathematics experiences including real-world applications, problem solving and play-based approaches (Baroody, 2009; Copley, 2006) and children were involved in hands-on measuring during each lesson, following the advice of Wilson and Osborne (1992, p. 119) that ‘children should measure often, preferably on real problem tasks … [that] encourage discussion to stimulate the refinement and testing of ideas and concepts through oral interactions’. Each lesson is described in turn, followed by a discussion of insights into children’s thinking.

Lesson 1: ‘Tricky’ party bags

Mathematical focus: Comparing and ordering by hefting and use of balance scales.

Materials: Objects in the room; opaque party bags; balance scales.

The lesson began with a discussion of heavy and light, with children identifying items in the classroom to demonstrate what they meant by these terms. They then worked in pairs, choosing and placing objects from the classroom in small opaque party bags to create three sealed bags of different masses to be ordered by hefting, that is, by holding a bag in each hand and comparing masses. The children were challenged to make their bags ‘tricky’, so they deliberately made them similar in mass which led to careful comparisons by other children. Once each pair had filled and sealed their three bags, another pair of children was challenged to order by hefting (without being able to see what was inside each bag, that is, without visual cues). Where agreement could not be reached, balance scales were available if children chose to use them for further comparison of mass.
This lesson, focused on the foundational ideas of measure of awareness of the attribute and comparison, presented challenges that required the children to reason mathematically. First, because of mass being the amount of matter in an object and being invisible, the lesson posed challenges beyond those of the appearance-based comparison that occurs, for example, when measuring lengths (Battista, 2006). When asked to heft and order three bags, children also needed to reason about the relationships between the masses of the bags in a transitive manner (e.g. if \( A < B \), and \( B < C \), then \( A < C \)).

**Lesson 2: The three bears**

Mathematical focus: Choosing and using non-standard units to quantify mass.

Materials: Plastic ‘three bear’ teddies of graduating sizes, balance scales, objects to weigh.

This lesson was the first within the five-lesson sequence in which there was a focus on measuring and quantifying mass. The children were asked to choose objects from within the classroom, and measure and record the mass of the objects. Choosing from three possible size bears as the unit, for each measure the children noted the type of bear and the number of these. A discussion followed regarding the mass of items they had weighed using different types of bears. They found, for example, that less papa bears were needed than baby bears to weigh the same object. Using a mix of bears to weigh the same object was also discussed.

As noted above, an understanding of unit is a foundational idea of measure. Following the traditional approach, our instruction sequence included non-standard units before standard units. In this lesson, children had opportunities to think deeply as they were required to select the size of the non-standard unit (teddy) as well as to choose the objects to be weighed. The lesson gave the children the opportunity to investigate non-standard units and to experiment to discover how balance scales worked.

**Lesson 3: Post office parcels**

Mathematical focus: Using standard units to measure mass in grams.

Materials: Balance scales, parcels, cubic centimetre blocks (‘Centicubes’) in singles and joined as sticks of 10, Post-it® notes.

This lesson brought in a real-world application of weighing items with children measuring the mass of various envelopes and packages in a ‘post office’. The teacher began by asking the children if anyone had heard the word gram and what they thought it meant. The teacher took the opportunity to listen to the children’s ideas without judgement. Following the discussion, the teacher held a centicube and said, ‘This is a centicube. It weighs one gram’. This centicube was passed around so that each child could hold it. Then the teacher showed the class a stick of 10 centicubes and established that it weighed 10 grams. The children were invited to measure the mass of various post office parcels using the balance scales and sticks of 10 centicubes and the loose centicubes. The recording of the mass in grams was modelled. The children worked in pairs to measure the mass of at least two parcels and record the result in grams. Once again the focus of this task was the foundational idea of unit, but with the standard unit of the gram being introduced, and the idea of a composite unit (10 grams) introduced.

**Lesson 4: Weighing stations**

Mathematical focus: Quantifying mass in non-standard and standard units.

Materials: Various materials including fruit and vegetables, packaged foods, balance scales, rice, pasta, non-standard units such as teddy bears and metal washers, standard mass weights (e.g. 5 g, 10 g, 20 g, 1 kg), analogue kitchen scales, bathroom scales, and digital scales.

In this lesson children were offered a selection of experiences with a range of objects to be weighed and a range of measuring equipment. The tasks, set up as different ‘work stations’ from which the children could choose, included: estimate and then measure to fill a plastic zip-lock bag with 100 g of rice (or another material as selected); choose five potatoes, order from heaviest to lightest and check using units (balance scales and non-standard units and standard mass pieces were available); investigate the masses of kitchen items weighing with kitchen scales; investigate the masses of various fruits and vegetables through estimating by hefting, ordering and checking with balance scales and either teddies as informal units or standard mass pieces. Children also had the opportunity to choose to revisit the post office parcels task.

The lesson had elements of a play-based approach to learning with the children able to freely explore tasks that interested them, persisting for as long as they chose and working in fluid groups, pairs or individually. There was sufficient equipment for six children to be working at each station. For the teacher, the lesson offered the opportunity to observe and assess the children as they worked and engage them in rich conversations.

**Lesson 5: Making a set of weights**

Mathematical focus: Creating a set of useful weights to develop benchmarks for common masses.

Materials: Playdough, balance scales, standard mass pieces (5 g, 10 g, 20 g), digital scales.

This task involved children moving from using commercially produced standard mass pieces to creating their own objects of a specific mass. The children used playdough and standard masses with balance scales to

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create their own set of playdough weights of 5 g, 10 g, 20 g, 50 g, and 100 g. For each particular mass in turn, the children hefted to compare formal masses and playdough, estimating how much playdough to remove or add to create a specific mass. They then checked using a balance scale. Digital scales were available for a final check. With a focus again on standard units, this task gave the children an opportunity to experience and build benchmarks for a range of common composite units. Concepts such as conservation of mass were explored as children had the opportunity to explore that the shape of a playdough piece does not determine its mass.

Results and discussion

The discussion of results begins with some findings from the first one-to-one assessment interview followed by a focus on results from lesson observations as it was in the latter that the complexity in children's emerging understandings became most apparent.

The assessment interview incorporated hands-on tasks beginning with children handling and describing a range of objects—a piece of foam, a rock, two plastic containers (short and fat; tall and thin), a ball of string, a 1 kg mass (labeled 1 kg), and a tin of tomatoes. They were then asked, 'Which things are heavy and which things are light?' Based on these tasks we found from the initial interviews that 98 per cent of the children in each year level had an awareness of the attribute of mass.

The children were then asked to estimate the relative masses of two plastic containers by hefting, to check with balance scales, and describe and justify the result. We found that 68 per cent of Year 1s and 83 per cent of Year 2s could compare two masses by hefting and with scales. These data suggest that, even before the classroom experiences, many of these six- to eight-year-olds knew about mass and could compare masses. However, data from the classroom observations reveal another perspective, that is, complexity, reasoning and theorising in young children's thinking. Themes that emerged from the lesson observational data are discussed below, with a selection of observation data included to illustrate each.

Judging by sight whether something is heavy or light

At the beginning of the first lesson, Tricky party bags, the teacher asked questions including 'What is something in the room that you think will be heavy?' Responses included 'The cupboards because they are strong and can hold lots of things' and 'The speaker [on the wall] may be heavy because it has metal in it'. The teacher later reflected: 'I was surprised at how many children chose things as heavy that they would not be able to lift.

I think that’s what they were using as their criteria'. The responses suggested also that children may have been paying attention to materials, or strength, such as for the cupboard and in reference to metal in the speaker (see quotes above) or for a chair: 'The chair ... when someone sits on it, it is pretty heavy. [It feels heavy because of] the materials it is made out of'. Also with a focus on materials as justification, when asked, 'What would be really light?' responses included, 'Your hat because it is made out of light material'.

The children appeared to have developed informal knowledge of mathematics and science from earlier experiences, perhaps from handling or weighing things at home (Spinillo & Batista, 2009) or during outdoor play activities prior to formal schooling (Lee, 2012). As we can see from their comments about the materials, children aged from six to eight years also have emerging concepts of matter. Authors in the cognitive sciences have researched weight and found that it is a concept that is tied to children's growing understanding of the nature of matter. Carey (1999) found that 'roughly half [of the children] had differentiated weight from density by the age of 9, before they encountered the topic in the school curriculum' (p. 484). However, MacDonald (2010) found that the explanations of heavy and light of some four- to six-year-olds in their first year of school were based on the property of density rather than mass, indicating a need for practical examples to help these children overcome their misconceptions.

In the present study, some of the children’s suggestions for heavy things focused on size including the Smartboard™ on the wall and the cupboard, described as heavy 'because they are “big”'. In giving such responses, children appeared to be using appearance-based reasoning (Battista, 2006). Although the children would not have been able to test their perceptions of the mass of all the objects by hefting or use of a set of scales, they did appear to use reasoning in making their generalisations and were confident in their responses. Perhaps they believed that things that were too big to hold would be heavy, just as did some four- to six-year-old children in MacDonald’s (2010) study.

Judging by feel whether something is heavy or light

In the initial discussion the teacher also asked three children to each choose and bring to the front of the class an object that they thought would be 'a bit heavy' (phrased so it would be heavy but something they could hold). She then challenged them to think about how she could know which object was heaviest and which was lightest.

One child judged an object as heaviest because of its impact on the child who held it: '[He] looks like he is struggling to hold it'. Others described knowing something is heavy because 'my arms are flat [that is,
what may appear arbitrary factor such as the colour of
in the scale, the materials in the items, or some other
factors such as the order in which objects are placed
understandings of the use of balance scales where
These data show that children have emerging
the child to reflect on her theory.

Another child added, ‘the other [hand] would kind of stay
in the same spot because it is light’.

These responses show some appreciation of the
attribute of mass and of the effect of the mass upon
the hand holding it. They suggest an understanding that
may inform the use of the balance scale for comparing
masses. These data suggest that an understanding of
the workings of a balance scale may be informed by
experiences, observations and generalisations children
make from everyday encounters with objects.

Judging whether heavier or lighter using a balance scale

While most of these six- to eight-year-old children had
an understanding of the workings of a set of balance
scales, as evident from the one-to-one interview data,
it became apparent that some children’s understandings
were still emerging.

One teacher was surprised that at the end of the lesson
when a child she described as ‘confident and pretty
cluey’ shared with the class that he believed that the first
bag put in the scale would always be the heavier bag.
This child was clearly observing that the bucket of the
to go down and, as a result, developing a
theory about the mass of the objects placed in buckets of
the scale. But another child offered an explanation: ‘no, it
was just because it went in first, it has to go down’. The
teacher intentionally held back from telling and the class
then discussed and tested the two children’s theories
with the help of their advocates.

In another class, two children used a set of balance
scales to check the relative masses of two bags and
correctly stated which bag was heavier. However, when
asked how they knew, one child referred to the number
of items in the bag and the metal in the items but did
not refer to the balance scale. The other child said the
particular bag was heavier because it was in the red
bucket (on one side of the scale). The teacher moved
the bag to the other (yellow) bucket, thus challenging
the child to reflect on her theory.

These data show that children have emerging
understandings of the use of balance scales where
factors such as the order in which objects are placed
in the scale, the materials in the items, or some other
what may appear arbitrary factor such as the colour of
the bucket, may be powerful forces in decision making.
Believing that it is important for the children to build
their understandings from rich experiences, the teachers
held back from telling and challenged the children to test
their theories.

Difficulties with comparing three items

When asked to heft and order three bags, children
needed to reason about the relationships between the
masses of the bags in a transitive manner (e.g. if A < B,
and B < C, then A < C). This was a more complex task
than the comparison task in the one-to-one assessment
interview where just two containers were compared.
The teachers commented that some children appeared
to have difficulty comparing the three bags methodically.
To illustrate, one child held two bags in one hand and one
in the other and unsuccessfully tried to order the three
bags. Another child suggested he should ‘find out which
one is lighter then hold the other one and see what that
is like with the first one’. Letting the children grapple with
this task allowed the difficulty with transitive reasoning
to become apparent and showed that children of six to
eight years will work together to solve such problems.

Choosing and using informal units of mass

In Lesson 2, The three bears, where plastic bears
were used as units of measure of mass, there was the
possibility that children’s findings would not be ‘neat’
and therefore that the activity might challenge them.
Although the teacher had asked the children to ‘measure
the weight of something in our room with the teddies’
and had not directed them to use teddies all of one
size or of mixed size, we observed that some children
discovered that use of the baby bears as units allowed
for a more accurate measure. Perhaps it was because
of a difficulty in having partial units of mass with the
plastic teddies that some children chose to record with
mixed units, for example, three papa bears and one baby
bear. It appeared that the children had reflected on their
 findings of measures of mass of objects in the room and
made conscious choices of unit to facilitate accuracy.

Developing awareness of formal units of mass

At the end of Lesson 3, Post office parcels, the teacher
asked if anyone had found any ‘surprises’ or made any
‘discoveries’ during the task. Many children spoke of
being surprised at how light one gram was. A boy who
during the initial phase of the lesson had said that he
weighed 30 grams now stated ‘I realised that I couldn’t,
maybe I’m 30 kilos’. Notably, the teacher had not
corrected the child initially but allowed him to develop
his understanding through experience.

Conservation of mass

The relationship between the physical appearance
of the parcels and their mass provided ‘surprises’ for some children who noticed during Lesson 3, Post office parcels, that the taller cylinder was lighter than a shorter cylinder. This led to a discovery that how an object looks does not necessarily determine its mass.

Further to this, in Lesson 5, Making a set of weights, a number of children noticed that a particular amount of playdough such as 10 grams could be fashioned in a variety of ways but still weigh the same amount. This was an exciting surprise for some children. However, even with such relevant experiences, this is not necessarily an easy concept for all young children. On another occasion when these five lessons were taught, at the end of Lesson 5 a teacher of a Grade 1 class explicitly asked some of the six- to seven-year-old children to bring their 100 gram playdough masses to the front of the room to show the whole group. The masses were placed near to each other so all children could see them and the teacher (knowing that all the masses weighed the same) asked which piece was the heaviest. A debate ensued among the children showing that for some, but not all, the look of an object had greater influence on their reasoning about comparative masses than did the ‘knowledge’ that all the children had brought to the front of the room a mass weighing 100 grams. The emerging nature of children’s understandings and the need for plenty of hands-on experiences was apparent.

Emerging understandings of gross and net weight

During Lesson 4, Weighing stations, a number of children became engrossed in exploring the packaged foods when they discovered that the mass given on the packages did not match the mass they found when using the digital scales. While the teacher listened, a lively discussion ensued with children testing a range of packaged foods and making conclusions about the packaging and the contents. One group of children finally decided that the factory had weighed only the contents and not the packaging itself, which had led to the heavier mass that they had found for a number of the packaged foods. Another group, weighing a tin of beans, was observed to have found the opposite, that is the total mass was on the label and the fine print gave the mass of the beans inside the tin. This led to a debate about the ‘missing’ 25 grams. This experimentation stimulated a good deal of comparison and calculation of difference, with children building some understanding of gross and net weight.

Concluding thoughts

Being the amount of matter in an object, mass is not visible. It is not surprising then that learning about mass measurement may involve complex mental accomplishments for young children. However, we admired the development in understandings the six- to eight-year-olds in this teaching experiment achieved (see Cheeseman et al., 2012 for quantitative data analysis) from rich learning experiences that, over a one-week period, offered challenging mathematics within play-based, problem-solving environments. But we were also fascinated by the complexity and diversity in children’s ideas and theories that emerged during the five lessons, as illustrated in this article. We saw children reason, theorise, experiment, observe, and challenge each other in their learning. We wanted the lessons to include tasks which, as described by Piggott (2008, para 11):

... encourage children to think creatively, work logically, communicate ideas, synthesise their results, analyse different viewpoints, look for commonalities and evaluate findings.

Teacher actions such as holding back from telling, posing further questions, and encouraging children to articulate ideas, listen to others, and test theories appeared to facilitate these processes.

In thinking about mass measurement children seemed to draw on prior experiences and sometimes on visual cues, but with appearance-based comparison for mass not as likely a reliable strategy as it might be, say, for length. Our data suggest that six- to eight-year-old children are capable of thinking constructively about such intricacies of mass measurement if they are given suitable learning opportunities. Reflective of MacDonald’s (2010) findings, some of the children’s theories were accurate, some otherwise. But nonetheless the present research showed that children are capable of grappling with a number of foundational ideas of mass measurement and, working within ‘communities of enquiry and collaboration’ (Piggott, 2008, para 11), reflect on their theories as their understandings emerge. With limited prior research on young children’s learning of mass measurement, the present study has provided new insights into emergent understandings and complexities of children’s thinking about mass measurement.

References


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Introduction

Early childhood is defined as the ‘period of time from birth to eight years of age’ (UNESCO, 2013). It is during this time that the foundations for literacy are established. Success in literacy learning is important in terms of success at school and opportunities in life generally. Writing is a key element of literacy learning. Writing is also one of the important ways humans record ideas, discoveries and stories, and communicate with one another. Recent research shows that in Australia, as well as in other countries including the United Kingdom (Anning, 2002; Coates & Coates, 2006) and the United States of America (Bergen, 2006), a formalised approach to literacy instruction in early years classrooms dominates. This research suggests that the emphasis in many school classrooms is on letters and words, print conventions and accuracy, with limited time for self-expression or text construction through drawing. This may be a response to the ‘accountability movement’ (Genishi & Dyson, 2009, p. 59), a consequence of a ‘narrow understanding of literacy as reading and writing words’ (Ring, 2006, p. 195) or a view of drawing as a time-filler, art or ‘activity to encourage realistic representations of objects, people, places or events’ (Einarsdottir, Dockett & Perry, 2009, p. 5).

Our interest in children’s drawings is purely as they relate to text construction and early writing, not as a manifestation of children’s fantasy or artistic capabilities. In the early stages of learning how to write, children may not have sufficient control of print conventions to enable self-expression using text alone. Therefore, we assert that drawing, as a text construction method, should remain available to children throughout the conventional written language-learning journey. In this way, written text construction is added to visual text creation allowing text production to be fluid and flexible.

Drawing and writing: What does the research tell us?

Dyson (2001) suggests that the deliberate act of composing begins with directly representative media, including play and drawing. Mills (2011) also argues that young children ‘shift meanings across multiple modes long before they have mastered formal writing skills’ (p. 56). While drawing provides children with the potential for rich expression and complex learning (Oken-Wright, 1998), talk and drawing often interact as parallel and mutually transformative processes (Cox, 2005). Research from the 1980s and 1990s reports a strong relationship between early writing and drawing.
(Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Calkins, 1986; DuCharme, 1991; Dyson, 1988, 1990; Kress, 1997; Norris, Mokhtari & Carla, 1998; Oken-Wright, 1998). More recent research has come to similar conclusions (Dyson, 2001; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Jalongo, 2007; Kress & Bezemer, 2009; Mackenzie, 2011; Mayer, 2007; Mills, 2011; Ring, 2006; Shagoury, 2009). Drawing and writing involve the use of many of the same psychomotor skills and cognitive abilities (Jalongo, 2007), and are both systems of sign or mark making capable of carrying meaning. As drawing is a flexible, invented, personal symbol or sign system, it is unconstrained and does not require learned interpretation (Caldwell & Moore, 1991). In contrast, writing systems are closed systems determined by cultural context and constrained by rules.

Writing differs from oral language, because it leaves visible traces or marks (Tolchinsky, 2006). If writing is the representation of speech (Olson 2009; Vygotsky, 1997) in the ideal learning situation writing should develop at many levels spontaneously and simultaneously (Tolchinsky, 2006) with children building a ‘symbolic repertoire’ of which print would be one element (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). In this approach to writing, drawing is a form of self-expression in its own right and a means to add depth of meaning to early writing attempts (Clay, 1979; Dyson, 1986). When children are constructing visual texts (drawing), ‘teachable moments’ (Bailey, 2002) are created, enabling an adult, or ‘more knowledgeable other’ to assist them to learn another means of self-expression (written text).

There is also a strong relationship between children creating texts which incorporate both visual and written elements and their ongoing ability to create and interpret multimodal texts. While discussions of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Crafton, Silvers & Brennan, 2009; Hesterman, 2011; Makin, Diaz & McLachlan, 2007; Mills, 2009; New London Group, 1996, 2000) and multimodal texts are usually associated with Information Communication Technologies (ICT), we argue that multimodal text creation can start in the first year of school (or earlier).

**Theoretical underpinnings**

Cultural-historical theory (CHT) of the development of higher mental functions (Vygotsky, 1997) and the principles of Genetic Research Methodology (GRM) (Veresov, 2010) provide both theoretical and experimental tools for the study and the analysis of data. What is important for this research is that CHT considers the process of development, not just as simple growth or maturation demonstrated by a series of changes (stages) which replace each other in the course of time. Rather, development is a complex process of qualitative changes in human mental processes taking place within sociocultural contexts, environments and interactions. Vygostky (1997) identified an important developmental transition for children: they must discover that speech (like objects or things) can be ‘drawn’. However, ‘the generally accepted methods of teaching writing do not allow a thorough observation of the transition process’ (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 142).

GRM comes from CHT and converts its general ideas into a system of principles of design, organisation and experimental study. In this context, ‘genetic’ refers to the process of sociocultural development (genesis) of human mental functions. GRM creates an appropriate theoretical and experimental framework for the study because it provides useful tools and instruments for the analysis of the development of ‘written’ language in relation to the higher mental functions of a child. In other words, GRM allows us to study the process of transition from drawing to writing from a developmental perspective, as a genesis of writing which takes place in sociocultural contexts and conditions. Within GRM, the theory and the research method are ‘two sides of the one coin’; the researcher selects both the theoretical and experimental instruments which are the most efficient for resolving the research question and creates experimental settings according to this selection. GRM, in our study, makes it possible to analyse the process of social-cultural genesis of written language both theoretically and experimentally, with theoretical research tools and experimental research tools working together.

According to Vygotsky, the ‘development of higher mental functions’ encompasses two groups of phenomena, which represent two streams of development. First are the processes of mastering external materials of cultural development and thinking (language, writing, arithmetic, drawing) and second, the processes of development of special higher mental functions (1997, p. 14). Drawing, together with language, writing and arithmetic, is an external material of cultural development. It is a legitimate form of text construction in its own right as well as a mode of expression that can provide a scaffold to children as they learn the conventions of written speech.

**The study**

The task of the study was to investigate children’s drawings (with, for example, pencils and felt tip pens) as a form of *sign creation* (visual text construction) and as an important element of a child’s written language development or *sign use*. The research question asked: *how does ‘sign creation’ (visual text creation or drawing) support the learning of ‘sign use’ (written text construction)?*
Method

GRM is based on the experimental-genetical method, which ‘artificially elicits and creates a process of mental development ... in order to elicit a certain development’ (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 68). The advantage of this method is that it discloses ‘real connections that are hidden behind the external manifestation of any process’ (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 69). This method ‘asks about origination and disappearance, about reasons and conditions, and about all those real relations that are the basis of any phenomenon’ (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 69). For the purpose of our study, it was important that we were able to analyse not just the separate external forms (stories, drawings, texts), but the entire process of genesis of written language.

Sample

Our study focused on 60 randomly selected children who were in their first year of formal schooling and their 10 volunteer teachers. The children and their teachers came from six schools in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. In NSW, the first year of school is called Kindergarten. Twelve children were attending schools that had a Priority Schools classification to reflect the low socioeconomic status (SES) of the families. The children ranged in age from four years and seven months to six years and two months in the first week of school. Twenty-six (43.3 per cent) were girls and 34 (56.7 per cent) were boys. All children spoke English as their first language. Five of the schools were situated in a regional city with 100,000 people while the remaining school was situated in a small village 30 kilometres outside the regional centre. Seven teachers had Master’s or Bachelor’s degrees and three had a Diploma of Teaching. Two had Early Childhood qualifications and six were teachers with experience teaching in a literacy early intervention program (Reading Recovery). The teachers were all female; they ranged in total years of teaching experience from one year (average 17.2 years); and ranged in kindergarten teaching experience from one year to 10 years (average 5.9 years).

Experimental conditions

In our experimental settings, we created the necessary conditions to elicit the process of genesis of early forms of written language. These conditions were:

1. the maintenance of interaction of the ideal forms of writing during the entire experimental process
2. support of the transition from sign creation (drawing) to use of sign (writing)
3. the maintenance of persistent self-expression.

These three experimental conditions aligned with the ‘theoretical side of the GRM coin’ and therefore, as we see it, served as reliable analytical tools.

1. In the study classrooms teachers regularly demonstrated how written language was created and for what purposes. The children were immersed in written language (in books, charts, labels, interactive whiteboard and computers) as they continued to use their current forms of text construction (talking and drawing).

2. Teachers introduced conventional written language use as ‘another way’ of text construction, alongside talking and drawing. Explicit instruction in written language forms and use were provided to the whole class and small groups through an Interactive Writing approach. This approach involves children working collaboratively with the teacher to create shared texts. The teachers continued to follow the compulsory K–6 English Syllabus (Board of Studies, NSW, 2007) and the guidelines provided by ‘A continuum of critical aspects of early literacy development’ (Department of Education and Training, NSW, 2008).

3. Children were encouraged to ‘talk, draw and/or write’ in any chosen combination or order during independent ‘writing’ time. Independent ‘writing and drawing’ was usually completed in a ‘free drawing and writing book’ provided for this purpose. This allowed persistent self-expression or text construction to be maintained.

The teachers collected text samples from the children participating in the study twice each term (every five weeks). Samples varied from child to child, but included: drawings, ‘scribble writing’, drawings with labels, drawings intertwined with letter-like shapes and random letters, words created using invented spelling, and a combination of invented spellings and correctly written words. Teachers observed and recorded anecdotally the changes in children’s writing skills and understandings. On a number of occasions (two–five) throughout the year, teachers recorded children’s talking, writing and drawing events and their discussions with the children. They recorded anecdotally the order of activity (draw or write or both); collaboration between children; topics for writing/drawing; conversations which took place as children worked; resources used by children; time spent on tasks; strategies for spelling; pencil grip; letter formation; body language; behaviour and attitude. These data were shared with the researchers.

Cultural Historical Theory (CHT) and data analysis

Complex processes require complex instruments of analysis. CHT provides the analytical instruments that allow the researchers to expose and to restore the process of development, which is usually hidden behind the phenomena under study and, at the same time, is manifested in such phenomena. In other words, concepts of CHT are ‘lenses’ through which the researchers become able to refocus his/her eyes from
superficial observation to the process of development. For our study we selected three concepts of CHT as our ‘theoretical lenses’: 1) the interaction between the ideal and real forms; 2) the sign and mediating activity; and 3) word meaning as a unit of analysis of thinking and speech.

1. Interaction between the ideal and real forms

A child’s introduction to speech is a good example of this concept. From well before they are born, children hear speech, which is grammatically and syntactically correct, even though it is sometimes toned down for the child’s benefit. Vygotsky (1994) referred to the mature form of speech as the final or ideal form. The child’s early attempts at speech may be referred to as the real or primary form. Vygotsky (1994) suggested that for speech to develop, it was necessary for the ideal form to be present in the environment and to interact with the child’s real form. According to Vygotsky (1994), the ideal form ‘acts as a model for that which should be achieved at the end of the developmental period’ (p. 347). The ideal form is ‘final in the sense that it represents what the child is supposed to attain at the end of his development’ (Vygotsky, 1994, pp. 347–348). This concept aligns with study condition one.

2. Signification and text construction

Signification, the creation and use of signs, is a distinguishing feature of human behaviour (Vygotsky, 1997). However, there is a significant difference between the creation of sign and the use of sign. Children’s drawings are an example of sign creation. Conventional written language is an example of sign use. We focused our analysis on the developmental transition from sign creation (drawing) as a child’s only form of visible text creation to the use of sign (writing) as an additional or alternate form of text creation. This concept aligns with study condition two.

3. Word meaning as a unit of analysis

In Thinking and speech, Vygotsky (1987) introduced word meaning as a unit of analysis of the complex whole of speech and thinking. He suggested that ‘meaning is an inseparable part of the word; it belongs not only to the domain of thought but to the domain of speech … It is both at one and the same time; it is a unit of verbal thinking’ (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 47–48). As such, the concept of unit of analysis (with meaning as the unit) is important for our study because it helps to explain how the development may be interrupted not because the child has nothing to say, rather, their access to a sign system that works for them is removed and a new method is introduced. While they are mastering the new method, they may lose interest in text construction as a form of self-expression. This concept aligns with condition three.

Findings

The findings are provided in the format of children’s work samples. These samples are demonstrations of the kindergarten children’s text construction in a classroom context. Figures 1 and 2 are examples of students’ attempts at writing which came from an earlier collection of data that was not part of the experimental process. They are included here to provide a contrast to the samples from the experimental classrooms. They were collected in the middle of the kindergarten year and the children ranged in age from 5.4–6 years of age at the time of collection. Figures 1 and 2 came from classrooms that were not involved in any form of intervention. The samples represent those created by children in non-intervention classrooms collected in an earlier non-experimental study.

Figure 1.

On the holidays we played … (I can’t remember).

Figure 1 shows an attempt at written text use by Peter. He knows quite a bit about conventional forms of written language. Peter used a range of letters in a left to right line, which indicates an understanding of correct directional principles. The start of the sample, ‘On the holidays’, was copied from the board. Peter then wrote ‘we played’ but was unable to remember ‘what he played’. Figure 1 imitates written language but it is meaningless to Peter and the reader. Peter demonstrates limited control of conventional forms of written language for self-expression and does not include drawings to supplement his text construction. The tools he uses (attempts at written words) limit the process, and a contradiction between self-expression and available tools appears. Perhaps he was not encouraged to use existing tools (sign creation: drawing) to support his attempt at text construction.

Figure 2.

Today (X class) went to the library. Mrs (X) read Hairy Maclary.

Figure 2 shows an attempt at written text use by Peter. He knows quite a bit about conventional forms of written language. Peter used a range of letters in a left to right line, which indicates an understanding of correct directional principles. The start of the sample, ‘On the holidays’, was copied from the board. Peter then wrote ‘we played’ but was unable to remember ‘what he played’. Figure 1 imitates written language but it is meaningless to Peter and the reader. Peter demonstrates limited control of conventional forms of written language for self-expression and does not include drawings to supplement his text construction. The tools he uses (attempts at written words) limit the process, and a contradiction between self-expression and available tools appears. Perhaps he was not encouraged to use existing tools (sign creation: drawing) to support his attempt at text construction.
Jo was instructed to write about a topic determined by the teacher (see Figure 2). The teacher also provided words and parts of words representing and demonstrating the conventional form of language. However, this type of teacher–child interaction did not provide better possibilities, and the stories remain short and simple.

The remaining samples (3–8) came from classrooms which were part of the experimental process.

Figure 3.

The mermaid is under the water.

Figure 4.

I went to church on the bus.

Figure 5.

I went to church today on the bus.

Figure 3 is an example of spontaneous transitional text construction—drawing (sign creation) with some experimentation with letters (developing sign use). Sally has used two expressive modes to create a multimodal text. The transcript below suggests that the picture was an important part of the text.

Teacher: What do we have here? Can you read me your story?

Sally: (Pointing to the mermaid) This is my mermaid and here is the water (pointing to the water on top and below the mermaid). There is water all around. ... on top ... and down below ... she is under the water ... see... (pointing to the text) and this says... she is ... no ... (pointing back to the mermaid) ... the mermaid is under the water.

Figures 4 and 5 are further examples of transitional forms of text creation. The drawings provide messages which are quite complex in their nature. Written texts have become a little longer. The children assisted each other with the use of the tools of writing, while their drawings provided the points of difference and complexity in their messages. The drawing for Figure 4 shows the impact of the church’s architecture on Peta, with the shape of the building, crosses, stained glass windows, arched doorway, and crazy paving all featured. The people who greeted the children were also important to Peta. In Figure 5, it is clear that the bus ride was the most important element for Michael. The simple sign use (written language) is complemented by complex sign creation (drawing) to create multimodal texts in each instance. The children are able to express themselves using two modes of language working together.

Figure 6 provides an example of the use of words as signs (conventional written language). The arrows in Figure 6 are another form of sign used to indicate the objects drawn and to explain them. There appears to be a strong interdependence between the drawings (sign creation) and written text (sign use) in this figure. The drawings came first with the written text providing further meaning and explanation. Again a multimodal text using drawing and written text.
Figure 6.

I like to do craft with my mum. I like it a lot. I can do it all the time. This is my craft box 6. It is on a wooden table.

Figure 7.

This is my family. I’m having a party. My friend is having a sleepover. I love my friend. My friend name is Emily. Emily is pretty. I just love Emily. Emily is the best. I want to be her sister.

In Figure 7, the text is longer and expresses the meaning of the story (love to Emily). The drawing in this case is restricted to a group of people sitting around the table. Drawing as a tool of text construction appears less important in this figure. The transitional stage may be coming to a close for Marnie, although she may sometimes choose to use drawings to supplement her writing, just as an accomplished author will use a diagram or picture to illustrate a point. Not all children will continue to combine drawing and written text for the same length of time. All learners are different. At some point, conventional written language (sign use) becomes the dominant system of text construction and expression for most people. In an earlier discussion of the study explored in this paper, teachers reported the following trend:

By the end of the year most children were usually choosing to write first and their drawings had moved to a less central, more illustrative role. While children were actively encouraged to draw first at the start of the year teachers allowed children to make the shift to writing first in their own time. (Mackenzie, 2011, p. 335)

Figure 8.

Today Jayden’s tooth fell out. Yesterday Kade’s tooth fell out. When your tooth falls out the tooth fairy comes and gets your tooth and out of the tooth the tooth fairy makes a little home out of the teeth. Once in my life I had one falling out and it came out at night time and I got some money from the tooth fairy. I put the money in my money box because I am saving up for a two wheeler motorbike and so is my brother but not a two wheeler.

Figure 8 shows a sample of writing by a child who has moved away from drawing, in this instance anyway. Jed has provided his story using conventional forms of written language (sign use). He feels confident in his control of the written signs to the point where he has created a complex message using written language only. While for some this may be a reason for celebration, others suggest that complete reliance on written language is not necessarily a desired outcome in an era where multimodal texts are common (see, for example, Kress & Bezemer, 2009).

**Discussion**

In our study children’s drawings are a ‘primary or real form’ of written language whereas ‘written text created using letters and words’ is an ‘ideal, developed or conventional form’ of written language. As children become proficient in the ideal form of written language the primary form (drawings) may take on a more illustrative or supportive role. In some cases drawings may not be needed at all. For a while, the child may use both forms (drawing and written text) together in order to create messages that are more complex than those that they could create with either drawing or text alone. In our research, we see the changes from drawings alone, to drawings and writing combined, to conventional written text as social genetic transitions, because they are the result of interactions between the ideal and real forms of written speech. This theoretical concept therefore helps to explain changes in
children’s drawings and writing as a manifestation of a certain line of social genesis. While multimodal texts are important in contemporary times, the ability to express speech in its written form is a key linguistic skill children need to master.

At the beginning of the experimental series, children created their own signs (drawings) with stories ‘told’ in a form of pictures or graphical images. Gradually, they added letters, symbols and words to their drawings. At the latest stages of the experiment, written texts began to dominate for most children. For some children the drawings began to come after the written text while for others they disappeared from their writing altogether. What is important from the developmental point of view is not the system of signs the child uses, but the ability of children to continue to express their ideas during the process of transition from sign creation to use of signs. During the transitional process, the activity of the child remains meaningful.

We suggest that the difficulties, faced by some children when learning to write, may be the result of a forced disruption of the text construction process. If children are not encouraged to use drawings as a legitimate sign system, on its own or alongside early attempts at conventional written language, they may be unable to express their ideas or knowledge in a ‘written’ text format. If children have to wait until their writing skills reach a level of proficiency that allows them to express their ideas effectively and efficiently in the written form, the text construction process may be interrupted. Consequently learning how to write may become a meaningless activity. From a GRM perspective, if the child has no means of meaningful text construction we could say that the process of language development has been interrupted.

In our study, children’s ability and desire to draw ensured that at any time the children had access to tools to construct meaningful texts. During this process, text construction through drawing was gradually replaced by text construction using the conventional tools of writing.

**Conclusion**

In this article, we have discussed findings from the application of the principles of GRM, to data obtained during an ongoing research project focused on early writing. We acknowledge that the size of the sample (teachers: n = 10 and children: n = 60) was relatively small. However, the data were rich and provided a powerful platform for the application of GRM to the investigation of children’s drawings as a legitimate form of self-expression and text construction and an important stage in the genesis of written language. During the study, teachers used a variety of approaches to teaching literacy with one common element: an emphasis on drawing as an important part of children’s self-expression. GRM provided a rationale for the experimental nature of the study, a ‘new’ theoretical framework for the interrogation of the findings and consequently a ‘new’ way of discussing the findings.

To engage fully with literacy in contemporary times, children need to learn to create, comprehend and use written, visual, aural and multimodal texts. They usually begin school with some ability to create aural and visual texts, although our discussion here is limited to those texts which leave visible marks or signs. When they enter school most children have limited skills in written text construction. If children are taught to add written texts to visual texts, their self-expression skills become flexible and allow for the creation of texts, which may be more complex than those they can create with one or other mode of language. By encouraging the two modes of expression (drawing and writing) to work together, children learn to create multimodal texts. If however, visual text creation (drawing) is not valued once instruction in writing begins, self-expression is limited and children may lose confidence in their ability to share their ideas. An interruption to children’s self-expression ability may create an unnecessary gap in the process of language and thinking development.

Writing is one of the most important skills that schooling provides for children. However, due to the complexity of the process, many children face challenges when learning to write (Dockrell, 2009). We have argued that visual text creation skills allow for a continuation of self-expression while written text skills are learned. This specially created and designed stage bridges the gap in text construction and therefore eliminates interruptions to the text creation journey. Transition to written language becomes a step forward, supplied by the necessary developmental tools (sign systems) and psychological conditions. We also argue that by allowing the two language modes of drawing and writing to work together, children are able to create more complex texts from a younger age.

In this article, three important developmental conditions were discussed: 1) the maintenance of interaction of the ideal and real forms during the entire experimental process; 2) the support of the transition from visual text creation (drawing) to written text creation; and 3) the maintenance of persistent self-expression. The results indicate that the incorporation of drawing into the early writing curriculum provides children with a smooth transition to written language use. These conditions may also prevent potential writing problems in the classroom. The study findings provide a new way of understanding why drawing should be a valued and critical element in early writing curriculum.
References


Two scenarios

On a sunny afternoon in a regional Australian town, a mother listened silently through an MP player to her favourite songs, as she pushed a young toddler in a stroller along the footpath. The toddler, equally silent, sat passively watching the animated movie, Finding Nemo, on a portable DVD player. Both mother and child were oblivious to magpies warbling as they rested on the fence posts nearby, to a kookaburra laughing on a nearby branch, and to a horse that had trotted across the paddock to greet the pair as they walked by. A couple, watching this scene from their kitchen window, felt mournful at how western society’s reliance on technology undervalued the importance of quality interactions in family life. The couple gave a quiet sigh as they pondered the lost opportunity for interactions between mother and child that could signal active participation in learning about the world and relationships.

In another scenario, Jasper, an enthusiastic four-year-old, visited the local library with his father. A sign in the library doorway caught Jasper’s attention. The sign read: Play Mario Bros here. It had a picture of Mario pointing in the direction of the computers. Jasper could not read the words on the sign, but he recognised Mario and knew what the sign meant and how to play the game.

Introduction

Our conceptions of literacy have changed over time (Durrant & Green, 2000). What it means to be literate in society today is not what it was 20 years ago, yet many of the literacy teaching practices in educational institutions today have strong roots in traditional views of literacy (Snyder, 2008). This paper looks at some of the influences on contemporary educator practice and challenges associated with teaching literacy in the twenty-first century. It proposes that familiar models of literacy learning, in particular Cambourne’s Conditions of Learning (1995), may be used to inform educator practice with technology applied to the literacy context in early years (birth to eight years) settings.
Bruce (1998) proposes that our conceptions of literacy change as technology evolves, and this thinking has informed current views of literacy as social practice (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). The shift from manuscript scrolls to the printed book marks the period where literacy conceptualisations changed to embrace the printed book. Literacy conceptualisations will continue to change as technological advancements transform the way we communicate.

Between literacy and technology where technologies are learning within and across home and formal education issues and challenges in early years education. It is of this model is presented in order to address emerging useful in this process. The need for a reconceptualisation Conditions of Learning Cambourne’s (1995) integration of literacy and technology. It is further discussed and it is suggested that a model for use by early years educators is required to support seamless discourses on pedagogical practice (Carrington, 2001; Labbo, 2006; Marsh, 2003). Thus, in the early years of education, which is widely recognised as the period of birth to eight years (Bertram & Pascal, 2002; DEECD, 2009) including prior-to-school and school-based settings, tensions highlighted in the opening scenarios, around the application of technology to the literacy context have emerged.

Throughout this paper technology refers to tools, equipment or techniques used in processes. For example, a book was once considered technology for the reading process and today information and communications technology (ICT) can be viewed as technology for communications processes. It is ICT, in particular digital and media technologies, which are the focus of the discussion in this paper, as it is societal use of these technologies that has contributed to contemporary views of literacy. These contemporary views of literacy describe literacy as situated social practice (Gee 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Street, 1984) where multimodal systems for communication integrate written, oral and audiovisual modes of communication (Snyder, 2008) and incorporate local and global communication practices (Kress, 2006).

This paper discusses pedagogical approaches to literacy and technology and highlights issues associated with the application of technology to the literacy context in early years learning. The influences of prevailing literacy and technology discourses on pedagogical practice are discussed and it is suggested that a model for use by early years educators is required to support seamless integration of literacy and technology. It is further proposed that the relevance of a model that already exists, Cambourne’s (1995) Conditions of Learning, may be useful in this process. The need for a reconceptualisation of this model is presented in order to address emerging issues and challenges in early years education. It is argued that a reconceptualised model would support learning within and across home and formal education communities through a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology where technologies are seen as conductors for communication.

**Prevailing discourses and perspectives**

Three prevailing literacy discourses influence literacy pedagogy and how educators apply technology to the literacy context. These discourses are functional literacy, critical literacy and sociocultural literacy. Functional literacy contends that essential literacy skills, such as decoding the printed word, need to be mastered for employment and work and hence technologies serve a function in the development of these skills. Critical literacy contends that being literate involves understanding how knowledge and power is communicated through literacy practices (Luke, 1993) and thus, how power is communicated through use of technologies. It is sociocultural literacy however, that may contribute to our understanding of how technologies influence the way children learn in contemporary society. A sociocultural perspective of literacy acknowledges the literacy learning that occurs in homes and communities as a foundational point from which learning occurs (Healy, 2004). Contemporary views of literacy acknowledge both the local and global influences on social or communicative practices. An example of a local social practice is the use of storytelling in some Indigenous communities to communicate history, whereas global influences on social practices are evident through social media sites such as Twitter™ and Facebook™. Thus, sociocultural literacy discourses acknowledge that culture and community underpin literacy understanding (Bigum & Green, 1992; Lankshear & Snyder, 2000), and that technologies are deeply embedded in culture and communities and contribute to changing social practice (Marsh, 2010). It is through a sociocultural literacy lens that the complexity of early literacy learning in a rapidly changing technological world may be realised.

Through sociocultural theory and the work of Vygotsky (1978) in particular, an understanding of how educators influence children’s use of technology can be gained. Sociocultural approaches recognise the role that adults play in mediating children’s language acquisition through scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) and guided practice (Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu & Mosier, 1993). It would seem that while technologies can also contribute to children’s literacy acquisition (Plowman, Stephen & McPake, 2008), sociocultural theory also acknowledges the role of the educator in mediating children’s access to, and experiences with, technologies.

Technology discourses may also contribute to our understanding of how educators mediate children’s use of technology for literacy learning in the early years of education. Franklin (1992) describes two technology discourses: prescriptive technology and holistic technology. A prescriptive technology perspective describes learning with technology as being confined to a series of steps where the learner does not have control over the process. In contrast, holistic technology perspectives describe the learner as having control over the creative processes of learning with technology. Franklin (1992) suggests that a nexus of holistic technology perspectives and critical and sociocultural
literacy perspectives may provide a fusion between literacy and technology practice which, in turn, aligns with literacy practices in contemporary society.

One model that may be used to describe literacy and technology in the early years context is the 3D model of literacy-technology learning (Durrant & Green, 2000). The 3D model of literacy-technology learning (Durrant & Green, 2000) describes the operational, cultural and critical dimensions of literacy learning and practice, which are presented as integrated and occurring simultaneously in literate practice. In prior-to-school contexts where play pedagogies prevail this model could be used to provide insights into how the operational, cultural and critical dimensions of literacy and technology are acculturated in play. The following example of imaginative play shows how the constructs of literacy cut across print and digital technologies. This example is further elaborated on to show how the 3D model could be used to describe the learning that occurs through children’s play with technologies in an informal context:

A group of children were organising a restaurant in the home corner. The children discussed the menu and recorded some scribbles using paper and pens from the writing table. Two of the children then typed up the menu using a notebook computer and printed copies for the tables. As these children typed the menu they discussed font size, colours and layout of the menu. Another child joined the play as a photographer from the local paper. This child took photographs of the children in their restaurant using a digital camera. The child then shared the images with the children and they laughed and talked as they looked at the images through the viewing lens of the camera. Next, the children deleted some of the images and then organised themselves for further photographs. The play continued and the child with the digital camera went to the writing table to print the photographs and write a story for the newspaper.

This example shows the operational dimension of the 3D model (Durrant & Green, 2000) through the children’s use of the notebook computer to create menus and the use of the digital camera to take, view and use photographs in their play. The cultural dimensions were enacted in a way that reflected use of the digital camera and notebook computer in the wider community. The critical dimension was enacted as the children made decisions and provided justifications for their choice of images to keep or delete for the newspaper, and in their discussions about the menu. These dimensions were enacted simultaneously as the children incorporated the technologies into the informal literacy learning context. The example further highlights the seamless integration of print and digital technologies in the children’s play which is reflective of the lived experiences outside of formal education context and hence, as this paper will argue, needs to be identifiable in school and prior-to-school literacy education contexts.

A familiar model for literacy learning in the early years that may guide early years educators in practices for technology for literacy is Cambourne’s (1995) Conditions of Learning. This model is described as a holistic and process-orientated model for literacy learning (Cambourne & Turbill, 2007) and it may offer a way to think about technology applied to the literacy context. As a model for literacy learning the Conditions of Learning (Cambourne, 1995) embrace situated ‘authentic’ literacy learning tasks that are inherent in recontextualised views of literacy as social practice. Thus, the Conditions of Learning (Cambourne, 1995) reconceptualised for the twenty-first century, may offer support to educators coming to terms with a changing literacy landscape.

Cambourne’s Conditions of Learning (1988, 1995)

The Conditions of Learning (Cambourne, 1988) stem from progressive approaches to literacy education that view literacy learning as a complex process and acknowledge that learners are continually constructing meaning through the literacy learning process. These approaches are often described as child-centred, holistic and process-orientated because the emphasis is placed on the individual child’s growth and development as part of a learning process, as opposed to the product of learning that is sought through benchmarking assessment practices (Cambourne & Turbill, 2007). This model for thinking about literacy learning continues to influence progressive literacy pedagogies today, such as those with an emphasis on the explicit teaching of text types (Wing Jan, 2009) and play pedagogies (Beecher & Arthur, 2001). In his seminal work Cambourne (1988) theorised that through the conditions of immersion, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, approximation, use and response, engagement in literacy learning occurred. Figure 1 provides an overview of these Conditions of Learning as they were later represented in a model for literacy learning (Cambourne, 1995). The conditions have been criticised for not being culturally sensitive and for promoting middle-class practices. However, these claims have been refuted by Cambourne (1989) who argues that the Conditions of Learning can be implemented in culturally sensitive ways. As a process-orientated and holistic model for literacy learning, the Conditions of Learning (Cambourne, 1995) may provide support to early years educators searching for a way to embrace contemporary views of literacy in their work with young children.

Literacy, technology issues and challenges for contemporary society

Technological use in contemporary society has influenced societal literacy practices and young children’s experiences of technology prior to formal education.
Research in this area is highlighting a need for technology and literacy practices in formal education to take into consideration these practices in home communities. In order to embrace pedagogical approaches that reflect contemporary views of literacy and technology issues around access, equity and quality in literacy education need to be considered against the backdrop of current education reforms. Through an emphasis on traditional print literacy, these reforms present challenges for early years literacy education in contemporary society.

The two scenarios presented at the beginning of this paper highlight the pervasiveness of technologies in contemporary society. The scenarios highlight the influence of technologies in childhood and outside formal education. In the first scenario the couple, watching from the window, espouse a widely held view of technologies as having a negative impact by reducing opportunities for quality interactions important for literacy learning (Alliance for Childhood, 2012). In this scenario technology use appears to have created distance between mother and child, through engagement in distinctly separate activities which required minimal interactions between them. Further, it would seem that opportunities that were rife in the environment to foster the toddler’s active engagement in learning language were missed, as both mother and child passively engaged with technology and remained oblivious to life as it unfolded around them.

The second scenario draws attention to the child as a capable learner and to technology’s role in the positive encouragement of social interactions which are conducive to learning between father, child and family. In line with current literature, both scenarios highlight a number of factors which need to be addressed with the increasing reliance on technologies in formal education contexts (Marsh & Singleton, 2009), beginning in the early years.

In addressing issues surrounding the pervasiveness of technologies in contemporary society, Honan (2012) attests that it is in the early years of education that the application of technology to the literacy context is highly contested. Such is the situation illustrated by the two scenarios. As in the second scenario, Labbo and Place (2010) suggest that educators should draw on children’s technology knowledge to make curricular connections in the classroom. Additionally, Brooker (2008) alerts educators to the need to understand cultural influences, including technologies, on children’s lives. Further, as the two scenarios illustrate, children’s exposure to, and experience with, technologies outside of formal education varies considerably, with some practices being more conducive to literacy learning than others. Thus, it would seem that the integration of technologies into formal education should aim to strengthen connections between home learning and learning in formal education contexts (Brooker, 2008, 2010) and be informed by research.

Research supports the contention that children have access to, and use technologies prior to, and outside of, formal education. Rideout, Foehr and Roberts (2010) reveal significant increases in media use by young people in the United States. Their report highlights an increase in home internet access in recent years and raises concerns about possible links between high media access and disengagement in school learning. Their findings lend support to the call for ‘valuing and utilizing children’s out of school digital literacy practices’ (Marsh 2007, p. 268) in new pedagogical approaches for twenty-first literacy education. These perspectives are particularly relevant in the early years where there is a tendency to view technology as a tool for the development of print literacy skills (Labbo & Place, 2010) or as the antithesis of good practice in early years settings (Downes, Arthur & Beecher, 2001).

Although there appears to be a reluctance to embrace new pedagogical approaches in the early years, the research in this field suggests that the funds of knowledge children bring with them to learning include technological funds which should be used for literacy learning. In 1992, Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez drew attention to possible benefits of using knowledge that children bring with them to formal education. More recently, Freebody (2007) claimed that in the Australian context researchers and educators ignore linguistic diversity and resources to their peril. It is through research that has continued to explore reciprocity of knowledge children bring with them to the classroom that an awareness of children’s technological knowledge has also developed. This technological knowledge has been explored in early learning play environments. Mawson (2011) examined the collaborative play scenarios of three- and four-year-old children attending two New Zealand early childhood centres and found that during collaborative play children incorporated knowledge and understanding of technology that had been gained outside of the centres. In applying Cambourne’s (1995) Conditions of Learning to the children’s play in this study it would seem that the conditions of immersion in a rich literacy environment, and use of technological funds of knowledge may have contributed to learning. The study highlights the need for educators to be familiar with technologies and communicative practices in order to foster the development of children’s critical literacy skills and knowledge of the ‘wider ramifications of technology on their lives’ (Mawson, 2011, p. 34). Further, it reinforces that technology is strongly embedded in the lives of young children outside formal education, and suggests a relationship between literacy and social order that, as Marsh (2011) claims, has been transformed in the digital age.

A further reason why the children’s experiences with technologies outside of formal education may be important for literacy learning can be found in the literature about twenty-first century communicative practices. Reconceptualised views of literacy draw attention to
literacy as social practice (Street, 1984) and ways that technologies are used in communicative practices in daily lives (Kress, 2003). These views have given rise to the field of Literacy Studies in which print- and paper-based literacies are taken into account alongside a broader range of literacy practices (Auld, Snyder & Henderson, 2012). Through this broader literacy lens the activities and texts that children engage in outside formal education are largely multimodal and multimedia, and representative of the communicative practices in contemporary society. Hence, it is suggested that these activities and texts should be embraced and valued in formal education systems in meaningful ways that connect with social practice (Auld et al., 2012; Marsh, 2011). In her work, Brooker (2010) maintains that children need to experience continuity in their learning across the cultural contexts of home, school and community and argues for this to be reflected in play pedagogies. Similarly, in contemporary literacy pedagogies, attention has turned to creating connectedness within and across a range of communities including home, education and global communities (Labbo & Place, 2010). A further community for learning is described by Andrews (2004) as the ICT community and the influence of this community on literacy learning may also require consideration.

One study that shows that these communities may be important for early literacy learning is reported by Hill (2010). The study embraced a sociocultural view of 'children as active learners who invent their own literacy' (Hill, 2010, p. 317) through their participation in rich literacy learning environments. In this study educators planned to incorporate the technology knowledge children developed in prior-to-school settings in literacy learning at school. Hill (2010) reported that educators found that children's access to, and use of, technologies exceeded educator expectations. The findings resonate with theoretical perspectives that recognise literacy as culturally, historically and institutionally situated (Gee, 2000) and support arguments for technology to be incorporated in early years contexts in ways that recognise these benefits for children's literacy learning (Carrington, 2001; Marsh, 2003). When viewing the findings from this study through the lens of Cambourne’s (1988, 1995) Conditions of Learning it would seem that elements of the conditions of expectation, responsibility, use and immersion may have existed as the children pursued ‘authentic tasks’ (Hill, 2010, p. 321). In this study, once technological funds of knowledge were identified, it would seem that educators communicated expectations that the children would ‘question information, pose problems, make decisions and develop as critical and creative thinkers’ (Hill, 2010, p. 321). It is also possible that the condition of responsibility may have been realised through choice ‘about ways to communicate information and increasing choice about how to access information’ (Hill, 2010, p. 321), and that learning occurred through immersion in a multiliteracies learning environment and use of technological resources for literacy learning in ways that connect with learning in home communities.

Another study involving children’s immersion in a multiliteracies learning environment aimed to make connections with home communities through use of technologies in the nursery. Marsh (2006) theorised that new pedagogies for the application of technology to the literacy context must take into consideration the support required for young children to create and engage with multimodal and digital texts. Marsh (2006) reported on three- and four-year-old children’s use of animation software to create short films. It was reported in this study that children were provided with a variety of props and resources including paper-based storyboarding materials, and access to hardware and software for creating animations in ways similar to those described by Cambourne (1995) in relation to print literacy in the condition of immersion. Further, Marsh (2006) reported that modelling or demonstrations were provided with the expectation that the children would take responsibility throughout the process to learn through exploration or approximation to create their own animations. Thus, it would seem that elements of the conditions of use, responsibility, immersion, demonstration, expectations and approximation may have existed in this study where children’s technological funds of knowledge acquired in homes and communities were used to develop digital literacy (Marsh, 2006). This contention suggests the Conditions of Learning (Cambourne, 1995) may have some relevance when working with children’s existing technological knowledge to connect literacy learning within and across these cultural contexts (Turner & Turbill, 2007). The study further highlights a need to push the boundaries of traditional curriculum (Marsh, 2006) to understand how communicative practices associated with multimodal and digital texts may be considered essential literacy (Carrington, 2009).

It is argued that education systems must come to terms with multiple literacies and digital literacies that are part of everyday life (Kalantzis, Cope & Harvey, 2003; New London Group, 1996). Researchers turn to examples from literacy learning in the home community to highlight how new ways of teaching and learning need to acknowledge that ‘literacy does not happen separately from other aspects of our lives’ (Jewett, 2011 p. 342). Using the example of geocaching (an online game of hide and seek) Jewett (2011) shows how print literacies are embedded in digital literacies and theorises that holistic approaches to literacy and technology are needed for educators to effectively teach with an entwinement of literacies. Further evidence can be found in Marsh’s (2007) work and her description of productive literacy pedagogies. Marsh (2007) describes examples of literacies based on digital technologies, such as blogs, which at times, place print in a subsidiary role and at other times perform in a primary role. Seemingly, this indicates that there
may be benefits in pursuing holistic, process-orientated approaches to technology for literacy which allow for fluid shifts in emphasis on learning. This is why a model such as Cambourne’s (1995) Conditions of Learning may have some relevance through an emphasis on process in literacy learning. However, while holistic approaches may have the potential to transform early years educator practice, innovative practice with technology in the literacy context may also have been hindered through arguments relating to access and equity in early years education.

**Access, equity and quality in early years education contexts**

The scenarios presented at the beginning of this paper illustrate variations in children’s access to, and practices with, technologies in prior-to-school settings. Children can enter formal education having anywhere between minimal experiences to a broad range of experiences with technologies and the quality of these experiences may vary, with some more beneficial for literacy learning than others. This situation provides a challenge for educators working towards common literacy learning outcomes. In particular, the way that technology is applied to the literacy context, however well-intentioned, may not necessarily reflect contemporary social and cultural use of technologies outside of formal education. This problem is linked to differential access to technologies in families and communities (Plowman et al., 2008). In some families, children may have minimal access to technology in the prior-to-school setting and rich exposure to literature through books. In other families, children may have spent many hours in front of screens, engaged in passive literacy learning, with minimal exposure to literature. Alternately children may have experienced a range of multimodal texts with, and without, digital technologies and engaged in this process in social or solitary ways. The problem is further compounded because children enter formal education with differing literacy and technology orientations despite their experiences outside of formal education (Edgar & Edgar, 2008; McLean, 2009).

Researchers suggest that inequities resulting from living in ‘information-rich’ or ‘information-poor’ communities must be addressed through education, as an individual’s ability to be literate in society depends upon having access to quality educational experiences with technologies (McLean, 2009; Plowman et al., 2008). Auld et al. (2012) draw attention to further complexity as they point to a ‘growing body of work which suggests that digital resources are not directly transferable from well-resourced to poorly resourced communities’ (p. 282) due to a mismatch between expectations and use. Auld et al. (2012) report on a study describing the use of ‘mobile phones as placed resources in a remote Indigenous community’ (p. 282). The findings from the study showed how mobile phones became multimedia resources shared among community members. This study reported on the interactions between a mother and child as the mother shared her mobile phone with her son and explained how to download multimedia. It would seem that throughout these interactions the mother gave responses to the child that enabled the child to be ‘rewarded for his literacy practices’ (p. 290) in ways similar to those described by Cambourne (1995) through the condition of response. The findings from this study drew attention to the need for the education community to understand the ‘kinds of social practices that are reinforced and valued’ (Auld et al., 2012, p. 292) in different communities as these may not be consistent with what is considered ‘standard use in schools’ (Auld et al., 2012, p. 292). Perhaps a reconceptualisation of the Conditions of Learning (Cambourne, 1995) model may offer insights into how connections between literacy practices in the home community and formal education can strengthen access, equity and quality in education.

In the current educational climate quality literacy education seems to be described in different ways. For many researchers, quality in early years literacy education requires children to be exposed to the best literacy education opportunities that are available (Comber, 2001). Comber (2001) warns against simplistic and reductive approaches to literacy when there is a focus solely on print. Similar views are described by Marsh (2006) who calls for the education system to ‘acknowledge the centrality of digital literacy practices from birth’ (2006, p. 495); however, these views are not well represented in quality agendas and standards-based reforms.

The quality agenda has given rise to policy and curriculum reforms in Australia (i.e. the Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] and The Australian Curriculum) and internationally (Logan, Press & Sumson, 2012). These reforms have influenced the professional work of educators through an emphasis on measurable standards of quality. In Australia, traditional views of literacy can be found embedded in policy processes such as national literacy and numeracy testing (e.g. NAPLAN) where an emphasis on reporting measurable print- and paper-based literacy standards and skills is the priority (Auld et al., 2012). The pressure for schools to demonstrate achievement of these literacy standards is further reinforced through national reporting of school-based data (e.g. My School website) in the public domain. This influence can further be found in prior-to-school settings in formal play activities designed to ‘introduce and practise skills’ (Yelland, 2011, p. 3), and through documentation of observable skills (Yelland, 2011). It would seem that traditional literacy views embedded in standard-based reform policy have led to an institutional focus on educator accountability for achieving high-quality outcomes (Stamopoulos, 2012). This influence can be found in the early years of education where the foundations for achievement of these standards are laid. It is particularly evident in many reported innovative
technology practices where technology is described as a tool for print-based literacy skills (Dreher, 2012), thus reflecting a downwards push into prior-to-school settings (Yelland, 2011).

Play and ethical practices in prior-to-school settings

In turning to children’s play to inform an understanding of children’s language and literacy development, the implications of a changing play landscape cannot be ignored. Digital technologies in particular, have contributed to the evolution of new meaning-making practices (Gee, 2010) and the need for reconceptualising play (Yelland, 2011). It is suggested that play leads development (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003) and, as a leading activity and context for language and literacy learning, play contributes to knowledge through building connections to the lived experiences of the children (Yelland, 2011). Yelland (2011) suggests that play can be viewed as ‘playful learning’ (Yelland, 2011, p. 6) in which playful explorations with new technologies that are part of the children’s lives are incorporated and scaffolded in the meaning-making process. When viewed in this way technologies in digital play become mediating tools or conductors of culture, through offering connections between the literacy practices in home and formal education contexts (Auld et al., 2012). It would seem that, in the current educational climate where high stakes testing has emerged as a priority in the western world and shaped curriculum to focus on skills across, the communities of learning children engage in. The influence of marketing strategies targeting children as consumers has influenced children’s play in technologically constructed childhoods (Marsh, 2003; Fleer, 2011) and raises ethical concerns for educators. Edgar and Edgar (2008) describe the influence of consumerism and technology in children’s play as requiring intervention from the education community to foster informed use of technologies and media beginning in the early years. One way that this may be achieved is through an emphasis on critical literacy practices which extends to media and technology use and begins in the early years of education. To assist educators to foster children’s ethical practice with technologies it would seem that critical literacy instructional approaches should extend beyond printed texts to a focus on marketing techniques used for electronic games, interactive software, media packages, websites and interactive toys. This further highlights a need for all children in the early years to not only have access to technologies but to learn to use these technologies in ways that lead to ethical communicative practices. In order to understand how educators can be supported in their efforts to assist children to be discerning and to develop ethical practices with technologies, the transformative potential of a relationship between literacy and technology must be considered.

The potential of a transformative relationship between literacy and technology

A relationship between literacy and technology can be identified in contemporary literacy and play perspectives. Vygotsky’s work (1978) in particular, describes children’s use of cultural tools as conductors. Viewing digital technologies as conductors may provide a way to think about a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology, and draws on contemporary literacy and play perspectives to inform pedagogy. While barriers exist to realising this relationship in practice, the Conditions of Learning (Cambourne, 1995) may offer much-needed support to educators to better understand this relationship and foster literacy learning with technologies within and across home and formal education communities.

Andrews (2004) first described a symbiotic relationship between literacy and technology. This relationship was described as a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology that needed to be better understood. Since this suggestion was made researchers have continued to theorise the relationship in ways that highlight the social dimension and communities of learning that ICT generates. Marsh (2010) and others (Brooker, 2010; Labbo & Place, 2010) continue to emphasise the urgent need for educators to be more familiar with the range of literacy practices in which children engage outside formal education, in order to transform literacy curriculum and pedagogical practice. Although literacy and technology research has moved along a number of tangents since 2004, it seems that this theorisation remains at the core. If this is so, then educators need support to embrace this relationship in practice and to bring about transformational literacy learning (McLean, 2007). In order to achieve this it would seem that new ways of teaching and learning in the early years must build on children’s experiences with technologies in ways that enable connections within, and across, the communities of learning children engage in.

Some theorists raise the concern that a transformational relationship between literacy and technology cannot be realised as long as educators continue to assimilate technology into existing pedagogies. Pedagogical consideration must include ‘the differences between literacy practices inside and outside school’ (Burnett, 2009, p. 33) and analysis of the ways in which technologies are used for communicative practice (Burnett, 2009). Such approaches would require a mindset shift for researchers and practitioners. Reinking (2010) refers
to communication technologies in literacy education as 'one of the defining developments in history' (p. 328) where the literacy landscape is constantly shifting. This shift, Reinking (2010) argues, calls for a change of focus from today’s technologies to models and indicators which preserve and extend literacy values regardless of the context. Perhaps through examining the relevance of familiar models such as the *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995) it may be possible to shift this focus back to literacy values.

**Literacy, technology and play in the early years**

Contemporary play perspectives may provide insights into models for identifying and extending literacy values. In prior-to-school settings play-based pedagogies prevail and with recent interest, nationally and internationally, in the relationship between play in early childhood and lifelong learning (Wood & Attfield, 2005), play pedagogies are finding their way into primary classrooms. Through play it is widely accepted that children develop social skills and capacity for literacy. In particular, children learn to use language and regulate their activities through their use of language in imaginative play and play in the physical world (Hedges, 2010; Whitebread, Colman, Jameson & Lander, 2009). Further, contemporary play perspectives draw attention to the influence of culture, peer, social interactions and adult interactions on children's literacy learning which may, in turn, inform educator practice with technologies in the literacy context.

Contemporary theorists, influenced by Vygotsky (1978), see children's play as culturally determined and shaped by the experiences, identities and abilities of the participants (Wood, 2010). Further, these theorists acknowledge that children learn through social interactions with their peers and adults. They describe play as contributing to the acquisition of cultural tools and acknowledge the influence of social interactions, adult interactions and culture on learning (Bodrova, 2007). Contemporary approaches to play aim to support or scaffold children’s learning as educators identify and plan for learning within the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978), or distance between what a child can do independently and with the assistance of a more able other. Similar aims can be identified in contemporary approaches to literacy education where *scaffolding* is described as essential for effective pedagogy (Louden et al., 2005). This suggests a connection between contemporary literacy and play perspectives that may inform pedagogy for the effective application of technologies to the literacy context in the early years.

**Connecting literacy and play perspectives to inform technology pedagogies in the early years**

Viewing digital technologies as conductors for communication, in similar ways to the cultural tools described in play, may provide a way to realise a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology in practice. Theorists recognise the potential of adult-mediated interactions in supporting children's learning (Bodrova, 2007; Hedges, 2000) and of adults mediating interactions to support literacy learning (Clay, 1993; Bodrova, 1998). Bodrova (1998) discusses scaffolding applied to emergent writing. The role adults can play in mediating interactions can be further extended to children’s experiences with technologies. These mediating interactions would be important for new pedagogical approaches embracing literacy as communication (Gee 2003; Street, 1984). These views acknowledge the ongoing influence that technologies have on the multiplicity of communication and meaning-making modes and extend well beyond traditional definitions focusing on reading, writing and interpreting paper-based texts, to broader definitions describing engagement with text. In connecting literacy and play in a contemporary learning context, it could be said that Vygotsky (1978) referred to cultural tools as *conductors* and noted the significant communicative role that these cultural tools have in children's play. Thus the notion of conductors offers a way of thinking about the relationship between literacy and technology practice, as digital technologies can be viewed as *conductors* for communication. Characterising literacy and technology practice in this way brings us closer to a conceptualisation of literacy as design for social futures (Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996) through situating literacy within the ‘multimodal ensembles’ (Jewitt & Kress, 2010).

**Barriers to realising a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology in practice**

A number of barriers exist to realising the potential of a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology in literacy as design for social futures (Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996). While arguments for recontextualisation of literacy are not new, reframing literacy in a way that takes into consideration the push and pull of *old* basics, or paper-based literacies, and *new* basics such as digital literacies and multiliteracies, continues to present challenges, particularly for early years educators (Labbo, 2006; Labbo & Place 2010). One reason this may be the case is highlighted by Burnett (2009) who found that existing models of print literacy were reinforced through research and practice. Numerous other studies point to a lack of educator understanding of the transformative nature of a relationship between literacy and technology for children’s learning (Edwards, 2005; Turbill & Murray, 2006, Turner & Turbill, 2007; Wohlen, 2009) and some studies further highlight a tendency for educators to see the use of technology as a reward for completed paper-based literacy tasks, or as a tool for developing paper-based literacies (Labbo, 2006; Turbill & Murray, 2006).

It would seem that the integration of technologies
continues to be based on traditional forms of text (Carroll, 2011) and is reinforced in the current educational context where academia has given a relative value to literacy practices associated with new technologies (Honan, 2012). Further, despite the salient influence of technology on communication practices educators continue to be strongly influenced by media and national reporting regimes and priorities (Honan, 2012) which emphasise print-based communication practices. Evidence can be found in reported innovations of the application of technology to the literacy context which fall short of informing literacy pedagogy due to a narrow focus on technology aspects, to the detriment of literacy (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008). These barriers would suggest while digital technologies as conductors for communication may have the potential to transform literacy and technology practices in rhetoric, a framework is needed to support educators to embrace digital technologies as conductors of communication in the current education climate.

Building on the work of Luke and Freebody’s (1999) Four Resources Model, Hill (2010) describes a multiliteracies map which, when used as a framework, has potential to support educators to include new forms of literacy in their planning. However, further research is required to assist educators to move beyond what Snyder (2008) describes as assimilating into existing repertoires only the parts of theory that resonate with familiar models or existing educator beliefs about literacy learning. In viewing digital technologies as conductors for communication, holistic, process-orientated approaches for literacy and technology practice may enable innovative practice where educators can work with the known and the new in sustainable ways.

**Turning to a familiar model to inform educator practice**

For educators to realise the potential of a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology approaches to literacy, teaching and learning must reflect contemporary perspectives and discourses about learning. Progressive approaches to literacy education view literacy learning as a complex process and acknowledge that learners are continually constructing meaning through literacy learning. These approaches are often described as child-centred, holistic and process-orientated because the emphasis is placed on the individual child’s growth and development as part of a learning process, as opposed to the product of learning that is sought through benchmarking assessment practices (Cambourne & Turbill, 2007).

It may be timely to consider the relevance of the *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995) as a model for promoting a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology in early years education. Elements of the *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995) appeared in the studies reported in this paper. These studies described learning with technologies within and across home and formal education communities. Thus, it would seem that a reconceptualised model of the *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995) may offer some support to educators to embrace innovative practice with technologies in the literacy context.

**A way forward**

For Cambourne’s (1995) *Conditions of Learning* to influence the application of technologies to the literacy context, the relevance of the model needs interrogating in the twenty-first century literacy context using a sociocultural-critical literacy lens. Reconceptualised views of literacy embrace new basics and old basics and contend with a changing literacy landscape. What would seem to be needed in the current literacy landscape is the interrogation of models, such as *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995), in ways that may inform future directions through placing an emphasis on literacy values rather than on technology as a tool for print literacy. Also necessary is consideration of how developments in our understanding of children’s early literacy learning may enhance pre-existing models such as the *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995). For example, from the work of Vygotsky (1978), the role adults play in mediating children’s language acquisition is understood and requires consideration in the twenty-first century context. This is because technologies are deeply embedded in communication practice; however, it is educators who mediate children’s access to technologies, and the way in which children use digital technologies as cultural tools. There is a mounting body of research which suggests that collaborative uses of technologies can foster learning (Freeman & Somerindyke, 2001; Brooker & Siraj-Blatchford, 2002) and should be encouraged. This would seem to point to a need to explore the relevance of the *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995) alongside contemporary understandings of the role of the educator in supporting children’s literacy learning through guided instructional approaches.

For educators to embrace a mutually beneficial relationship between literacy and technology in their practice, issues raised in this paper must be examined alongside the two opening scenarios. These two scenarios highlight the connection between technology and literacy and ways for educators to understand this connection. The contrasting scenarios suggest some urgency for the educational establishment to come to terms with twenty-first century literacy practices.

A way forward may be to consider the fusion of digital technologies as conductors of culture with our existing contemporary understandings of literacy education. In
their privileged positions as mediators of young children’s literacy learning experiences, educators require an understanding of the mediating role that technologies play in our lives. Perhaps turning to a familiar model for literacy learning, Cambourne’s *Conditions of Learning* (1995), may provide a lens to understand how technologies as conductors for communication influence literacy practices. Insights gained could then be used to inform a reconceptualised model that encapsulates learning within and across home and formal education communities through a mutually beneficial or symbiotic relationship between literacy and technology. This may be one way to shift the research focus away from reacting to the latest technological advancement, toward what is ‘most valued in literate environments’ (Reinking, 2010, p. 338) regardless of the technology, and in the long term contribute to sustainable practice.

**References**


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**Figure 1. The Conditions of Learning**

A model of learning as it applies to literacy

Cambourne’s *Conditions of Learning* (Cambourne, 1995, p. 187)


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Introduction

Influential early childhood programs such as the Reggio Emilia approach (Malaguzzi, 1998), Nature Schools in Scotland (Warden, 2012), Te Whāriki in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the many contemporary contexts within Nordic educational systems such as the Swedish National Curriculum (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011) demonstrate how various countries have responded to local historical, social, environmental, cultural and political conditions. Within these programs is a global recognition that children are viewed as competent beings, thus shifting a deficit discourse to one of empowerment. Furthermore, the programs cited above have a strong social justice framework, reminding us of the rights of young children. Finally there is a contemporary focus on the sociocultural contexts in which young children operate, echoing the need to see young children as individuals who already have complex worldviews.

In Australia, the EYLF with its signature of Belonging, Being and Becoming is no different (DEEWR, 2009). It is the first early childhood national curriculum, which is uniquely identifiable as a national approach in Australia. Integral to the EYLF is intentional teaching, a new emphasis for the approach of Australian early childhood educators. However, there are debates and tensions with this re-emphasis on intentional teaching. This paper sets out to closely examine intentionality and an extension of this concept to encompass the learner as well as the teacher. To further inform the debate, early childhood educators in three Australian centres will outline their understandings of intentional teaching as it relates to their own practice. In conclusion, the paper will argue that a much broader understanding of intentionality is required in its application within an intentional teaching framework.

Intentionality

The EYLF presents a definition for intentional teaching based on strategies for teaching developed by Ann Epstein (2007), later adopted by the High Scope approach to early education and care in America. It has a history in developmentally appropriate practice within the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States of America. According to Epstein (2007) intentional teaching means that teachers act with specific outcomes or goals in mind for children, requiring wide-ranging knowledge about...
how children develop and learn. Epstein identifies this process through the combination of child-guided and adult-guided educational experiences and how teachers interact with children. However, the EYLF has eschewed discourses located in developmentally appropriate practices where adults were the primary decision makers of events, in favour of more contemporary approaches drawn from an emergent curriculum philosophy, most notably Reggio Emilia. The EYLF therefore signals the maintenance of a curriculum that has children’s interests at its centre, while at the same time introducing outcomes to frame teaching practice. In other words the EYLF is drawing together different ways of operating under one curriculum model, thus creating debates and possible tensions around the roles of the early childhood educator in relation to the child as learner.

The nature of intentionality is at the centre of this debate together with its connection to relationships of power. In the EYLF intentional teaching is defined as ‘educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have always been done that way’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15). What is lacking in the EYLF documents is a focus on a broader definition for intentionality that explores both the intended teaching acts of educators and the intentional learning of children. Intentional teaching has turned the lens upon the role of educators as they frame outcomes, but it is also necessary for children to be acknowledged for their own agency and motivation for independent goal attainment. While it is clear the EYLF retains a play-based model within its framework, and thus acknowledges children’s agency, the introduction of intentional teaching, without the commensurate discussion about intentional learning, leaves the implementation of the EYLF open to emphasising one aspect of the teaching/learning nexus to the detriment of another. A close examination of the precise nature of intentionality is the first step in developing a broader understanding of the role educators are to undertake as part of their professional practice.

Intentionality is a uniquely human characteristic (Goswami, 2004; S. Strauss, Ziv & Stein, 2002) where we have the goal to purposefully teach our young. William Stern’s (1924) theory of language development discussed this unique human ability in terms of three roots of speech: the expressive, the social and the intentional. The first two are rudiments of speech in animals as well as humans, while the third is specifically human. Stern defines intentionality as acts of thought toward content or meaning (Stern, 1924; Vygotsky, 1962). The intention to learn about the world is an innate drive that matures within social contexts. These intuitions involve the role of intentions, plans and mental efforts in learning (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989). The role of the early childhood educator, therefore, is not just to look at the observed behaviours of young children, but to act upon the internal drives that develop characteristics of a lifelong learner.

The role of the educator

Until recently theoretical discourses on what constitutes the role of educators in children’s learning have provided broad definitions ranging from carer, guide (Rogoff, 1990), facilitator, scaffold, co-constructor (Vygotsky, 1962, 1986) and role-model (Lumpkin, 2008). According to McArdle and McWilliam (2005) such terminologies inadvertently have silenced the term teaching, suggesting that it is not the role of educators to teach (Grieshaber, 2008). Given intentionality is a newly introduced term within the EYLF, it suggests a stronger positioning of the role of the educator. This newly adopted term strengthens the professional identity of educators, empowering their role and capacity to teach young children, reinscribing the previously absent emphasis on educator as teacher. As teachers we can employ strategies such as guiding, facilitating, scaffolding, supporting and co-constructing in order to direct children toward outcomes for learning. Being intentional with what, how and why we teach requires careful consideration on how content for learning is shaped between adult-guided and child-initiated learning experiences.

Much of the tension between teacher control and child control over the process of learning raises serious debates around the philosophical idea of a child-centred curriculum. Much of the discourse of child-centredness has developed out of different theoretical bases (Backer, 1998; Chung & Walsh, 2000; Meade, 2000; Tzuo, 2007). Piaget and Vygotsky presented opposing beliefs influencing the practice of educators. On the one hand, Piaget believed that children have the freedom to explore and construct knowledge through their own participation in their learning; and on the other hand, Vygotsky believed that adult guidance and support was necessary in assisting children to reach higher conceptual understanding (Piaget, 1971; Tzuo, 2007; Vygotsky, 1962). Dewey (1990/1902) advocated that children’s freedom should be nurtured with teacher guidance within a democratic learning environment (Tzuo, 2007). For Dewey (1963/1938) teacher insight is an important attribute in organising the conditions of the experiences of the immature. Thoughtful decisions regarding children’s learning involves the educator having deep understanding of content, knowledge of children as learners, and the disposition to apply these insights in ways that determine how best to initiate and sustain interaction with students. Contemporary research avoids the false dichotomy of child-centred or teacher-directed approaches to one that explores the nature of the dynamic relationship between children, teachers and content (Broadhead, 2004; S. Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011; Grieshaber, 2008). According to Strauss (2003), natural cognition is represented where successful teaching is the counterpart of successful learning.
The role of the learner

Intentional learning is referred to by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1989, p. 363) as strategic thinking ‘processes that have learning as a goal rather than an incidental outcome’. Intentional learning involves three aspects: the decision to engage, commit and persist with learning; the ability to apply and manage strategic cognitive efforts in achieving goals; and the extent to which the learner takes responsibility for developing as an autonomous learner (AAC&U, 2002). All experiences for children can involve incidental learning opportunities, however intentional learning is likely to occur when situational and intrinsic factors create learning goals and opportunities for the child. Ormrod (2006, p. 19) explains that ‘as children grow, they increasingly engage in intentional, explicit learning: they actively think about, interpret, and reconfigure what they see and hear in their environment’. Hiemstra (1994) suggests that taking personal responsibility and control in education refers to individual children assuming ownership for their own thoughts and actions.

An intentional learning environment is one where the educator’s role is to mentor, coach and guide and the learner’s role is to question, connect, reflect and apply knowledge to create, act and achieve (AAC&U, 2002). Goal-orientated learning is intentionally supported through educators who are aware of the child’s intrinsic need to acquire and take control of their own learning. Thomas, Warren and de Vries (2011) suggest that the ways teachers interact and think about children’s learning can identify particular constructions of what it is to be an early childhood educator. The question then is, ‘does the development of a set of outcomes, as is the case in the EYLF, diminish opportunities for the child to create their own goals, to determine the nature of their own learning?’ Clearly the relationship between the child as agent and the teacher as pedagogical driver is a very delicate one.

Teacher/learner nexus

Careful considerations about the role of the educator and reflections on how teachers think and respond to children are often found in the documentation of Reggio Emilia. Rinaldi (2006) discusses the relationship between teaching and learning as complementary, where through the act of listening children’s curiosity, theories and research are legitimised. The teacher responds through ethical research by hypothesising, observing, documenting and interpreting. Rinaldi (2006) urges us to reconsider the child as we recognise (re-know, re-understand) childhood not just as social subjects but in recognising children’s rights as new rights for everyone. In terms of education, we are to respect the subjectivity of the learner, not only from a pedagogical viewpoint, but also in terms of values, social policy and culture (Rinaldi, 2006). With respect for children’s individual construction of knowledge, Rinaldi presents the role of the educator as a co-creator, rather than transmitter of knowledge who is powerful in her vulnerability. Accepting doubts and mistakes as well as surprise and curiosity are all facets from which true acts of knowledge are created. Children are equally powerful, who along with teachers are the primary researchers, who possess their own theories and questions for building knowledge (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Gandini, 1993; Rinaldi, 2006, 2008). Malaguzzi (1998) also challenged educators to develop new eyes to really see the intelligence of children (Rankin, 2004). The role educators play with children in developing skills, knowledge and dispositions towards inquiry and learning involves the sharing and negotiation of power.

How knowledge is constructed can be a productive process through the analysis of power (Foucault, 1994). For Foucault, power relations are complex constructions, not restricted to the powerful and the powerless, but involving the multiplicity of force relations within micro-relations and micro-practices in every sphere of every society (Fenech & Sumson, 2007; Foucault, 1994; Mills, 2003). Power is fluid and multi-directional, affecting all stakeholders in the chain of relations within the early childhood setting. However, within the teaching/learning nexus it is clear unequal relations of power are manifest, so how teachers view their role to think and speak with intentionality will challenge the successful implementation of intentional teaching practices within the EYLF. Acknowledging young children as holders of rights in contributing to their own education as well as expressing their views about matters which affect them are outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Nutbrown (1996) suggests that as educators we adopt the view of respectful educators who are open to children’s developing knowledge, actively participating in the learning and listening process.

Deciding what knowledge children require, as well as ways in which that knowledge may be acquired, needs to be at the forefront of teaching and learning relationships. Situations where adults help children learn something that the adult considers valuable or important for the child to know or learn creates a direction that is vertical and hierarchical with the one who knows and the one who doesn’t know (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). Dewey argues that it is the teacher’s role to use professional knowledge, judgement and skill to identify environments and activities that ‘will interact with the existing capacities and needs of those taught to create a worthwhile experience’(1963/1938, p. 45). Intentional teaching requires educators to make informed, thoughtful decisions regarding learning opportunities for children.

Who decides on the content to be taught is a contentious issue raising important considerations between learning outcomes, or goals teachers hold for children, while
maintaining the child's agency and rights to determine
his or her own learning trajectory. The outcomes in the
EYLF remain relatively broad, deliberately so, in order to
genegotiate varied pathways for learning. However, making
responsible, respectful decisions for what children learn
involves educators having deep content knowledge, as
well as knowledge of the children as intentional learners
in order to determine the best way to initiate and sustain
interactions between the child and the curriculum.

An intentional curriculum

There is surprisingly little in the literature specifically about
an intentional curriculum. This may be a taken-for-granted
concept, however in the new imaginings of intentionality
in early childhood education it is worthwhile examining
further. An **intentional curriculum** involves a co-constructed
curriculum that supports teacher–child interactions. Connecting with children and building relationships form
the basis for instruction and learning. Curriculum in the
early childhood setting refers to all the ‘interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned
and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed
to foster children’s learning and development’ (DEEWR,
2009, p. 9). The EYLF claims to provide a good foundation
for building an environment that is supportive of children’s
intentional learning, while allowing opportunities for
educator engagement through intentional teaching.
For example, the EYLF states that ‘both indoor and
outdoor environments support all aspects of children’s
learning and invite conversations between children, early
centrality, families and the broader community. They provide opportunities for sustained shared thinking
and collaboration’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16). However, for
practitioners in the field, enacting the EYLF is proving
challenging. It is not explicit how intentional learning in
the EYLF relates to intentional teaching, because the term
intentional learning is missing from the EYLF curriculum
documents. The next section describes some of the
dilemmas facing practitioners, grappling with implementing
the new national early childhood curriculum framework.

Recent Australian research on intentional teaching

A recent study conducted by the authors, involving
three Australian early childhood centres, focused
upon intentional teaching strategies of early childhood
educators. The aim of the study was to provide an in-
depth investigation of the intentional teaching methods
of early childhood educators providing provocations for
creative thinking in four- to six-year-old children. This
research generated new theory and understandings
around the phenomena of intentional teaching strategies
demonstrated through practice by educators, as well as
the creative thinking processes of young children.

Method

Participants

Following ethics approval from the University ethics
committee, three early childhood centres in NSW
volunteered for this research. Five women and one
male early childhood educator across three rooms and
approximately 60 children aged four to six years agreed
to participate in the study. Educators and parents/guardians
of children consented to audio-recording of interactions
between educators and children. The assent of children’s
involvement was also sought prior to the study as well
as during it, respecting children who may not wish to be
recorded or observed. A primary consideration for this
study was that the researcher and participants made
decisions and acted in ways that promoted and protected
the rights of children, who are generally considered to
be voiceless in contemporary society (Nuttbrown, 1996;
Rodd, 1994; Spriggs & Gillam, 2008).

Data collection

As the educators are considered the experts in their
field (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) and have established
trusting relationships with the children, they continued
to plan and implement learning experiences connected
to the children’s current interests. Thus children were
encouraged to respond to learning activities under the
guidance of an educator and engage with the materials in
a normal way. Children were not coerced into becoming
involved in any of the activities.
Various collection tools were used to compile rich data
and this was framed as a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2001).
Case studies using naturalistic inquiry aimed to generate
new knowledge and improve practice among participants.
Observations (Boudah, 2011), digital recordings of
interactions between educators and children, field notes
(Yin, 2011) and researcher memos (Charmaz, 2006;
Lempert, 2007) were gathered during weekly visits
to the three centres over a six-month period. At the
same time, monthly focus group interviews (Charmaz,
2006; Morgan, 1993) were conducted with the six early
childhood educators, with emerging themes forming the
basis for ongoing discussion (Charmaz, 2006; Morgan,
1993). The educators involved reflected on their own
practices by keeping journals and diaries that they could
draw upon at each of the focus group sessions (McNiff
& Whitehead, 2006; Schön, 1983). This provided the
opportunity for the early childhood educators to improve
their understanding of intentional teaching practices. The
idea that educators should be **reflective practitioners**
or should engage in **reflective practice** was promoted
by Schön (1983) who viewed that practitioners should
engage in the study of their own practice and develop
theories derived from their own practice.
Data analysis

This qualitative research draws on grounded theory within context-dependent case study analysis as a methodology to elicit rich data (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used to store data and analyse transcriptions. Key phrases and words were coded and concepts arising from the data were categorised. Focusing on sections of text in order, naming concepts, and repeating the process, is what Strauss and Corbin (1998) call open coding and Charmaz (2000) calls initial coding. This initial coding supported focus group interviews by naming emerging themes and framing discussions about intentional teaching and intentional teaching strategies. Researcher memos, field notes and observations supported educators’ own experiences, but sometimes challenged and disrupted taken-for-granted practices that allowed for deeper conversations to take place during focus groups. ‘Memo writing’, says Charmaz, is the ‘intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis’ (2000, p. 517).

Early findings

Early findings from the research indicate there are significant understandings of intentional teaching, with evidence of many strategies involved in an educator’s everyday practice. However, participants in this study struggled to articulate their role as educators. Furthermore, intentional teaching was routinely discussed only in the context of whole group sessions where knowledge acquisition was the primary aim. In other words intentionality is being regarded in a traditional unequal power relation of the knower and those who need to know.

In this section participants will first describe their understandings of intentionality and intentional teaching. This is followed by some examples of how intentional teaching plays out in their practice. Finally, a discussion emerged regarding significant differences in the way outdoor and indoor environments are used as spaces for intentional teaching moments.

Educators found it a challenge to articulate intentionality, so it was necessary to probe for information about their practice. In this way, ideas of intentional teaching could emerge from the focus group discussions. For example, Carl explained:

*It depends if you are using it to spark an interest within the rooms. So you might, for instance, see something on the TV or news and you might go, ‘Look I found this in the newspaper’, and share it with the children … to start building ideas and ask questions and then, from that, using their questions to work out some more of what to bring in, to relate to other things and [then] to extend it further.*

Joan’s idea was similar:

*I think extending on the children’s ideas [Others: yeah, yeah I agree] the scaffolding.*

To some extent though, these unproblematic definitions masked the complexities of applying intentional teaching in practice. One important element of intentional teaching is the ability to negotiate and manage the learning environment in order to maintain consistency and momentum in children’s learning and engagement with educators. Educators in this study commented on the amount of constant interruptions and how this impacted upon their ability to create sustained intentional teaching moments. For example, Rita commented:

*Something I’ve noticed is how often a moment I’m really enjoying with a child is interrupted by another staff member, a phone call, something else happening, and you lose that moment.*

As a room leader, Rita also noted that she didn’t realise how often she would get called out of the room or have to take a phone call before she was required to track her activities in a detailed way for the purpose of the study.

Another educator, Joan, observed:

*Some people feel as though they have to be everything to every child all the time and that’s when you start jumping from one thing to another.*

Carl also contributed to the discussion mentioning that:

*It takes time as well for consistency in your room [to be established], which is really hard with every little interruption.*

Relationships between educators and children, where sustained interactions become pivotal to the intentional teaching/learning nexus are central considerations for the role of the educator in negotiating within the environment. Educators may revert to whole group sessions as one easier way to fulfil the requirements of intentional teaching.

The need for educators to develop negotiation strategies is an important aspect of intentional teaching, where maintaining control and managing time between interactions and responses to children is necessary in maintaining momentum with children. Trusting relationships develop within children the ability to self-regulate, knowing that the educator will come to them eventually. Planning and management are characteristics of good intentional teaching where educators manage both individual behaviour and group dynamics (Epstein, 2007). The spontaneous reactive responses of day-to-day operations and routine requirements seem to be determined by a teacher belief of being all things to all people. Ironically, this seems to be to the detriment of high-quality interactions that are demanded by intentional teaching. This resonates with what a quality teacher is:
someone who plans ahead; negotiates time and allows opportunities for engaging in deep understanding with children, rather than tail-chasing behaviours.

The outdoor environment and intentional teaching

The participants in this study made mention of the different approaches between the indoor and outdoor environments. Implementing intentional teaching was a much greater challenge during outdoor play. In this section, the shifting role from educator to supervisor, the idea that the outdoor sessions provide opportunities to relax and the type of activities on offer all seem to be factors inhibiting intentional teaching, at least as conceived by the research participants.

The educators expressed concern about their role because in the outdoor environment more vigilant supervision of the whole area was necessary. This left much less time for meaningful interactions that could be constituted as intentional teaching moments. This runs counter to the EYLF which suggests that intentional teaching should occur frequently throughout the entire day.

Rita mentioned that the outdoor environment was something they were constantly struggling with. When outdoors, most centres found it necessary to combine the children for mixed-aged play from all rooms at the same time; this was due to sun policies placing restrictions on outdoor play time. Teachable moments outdoors were often missed or overlooked due to the need to supervise a large group of children. Also educators found that older children could not engage in sustained play due to interruptions from younger children. When speaking with Joan, the need to supervise outdoors became more important than trying to engage in children’s learning:

I find sharing the outdoors with another room difficult, the whole dynamics of play changes completely, so those moments of intentionality are not there so much when there are 40 children in the yard.

There are three points to be made regarding this quote. First, this quote suggests a misreading of intentionality, second, the quality of relationships shift dramatically within a large group when children are not the direct responsibility of a staff member in terms of programming and planning, and third, intentionality is closely related to documentation and it is less likely that educators will create teachable moments with children they do not have direct responsibility for. In contrast to practice, the EYLF advocates for a strong relationship with a child so meaningful teaching moments can occur. This is creating tensions between curricula requirements and apparent practices.

Outdoor as relaxation

Perceptions of the outdoor environment were more often associated with free play because of the amount of time spent outside. Historically, the outdoors was a place for children to run free in the wild unhindered (Gianoutsos, 2006). Most educators would agree that the outdoors produces a sense of freedom to explore without the invasion of educators asking questions or getting in their way.

From the educator’s position Rita observes:

I know we were talking here once about aimless playing … is outdoor, is that something to encourage? We quite like using our bottom yard as that. Free running …

For some educators in this study they saw time outside more as an opportunity for children to run free and therefore the emphasis on intentional teaching was diminished. There was some acknowledgement from the educators that continual teaching is an exhausting process and there does need to be relaxation times where both children and educators can just ‘be’.

Carl resists this idea:

I feel like you have to make the most of every opportunity with the kids through playing … There’d still be intentional teaching moments in that play. Like if a child finds a bug you build around that, same with the gumnuts and all that sort of stuff. You can direct that. I guess as educators, that’s what our role is, to know how to … support that.

There appears to be mixed views on the purpose of play in the outdoor environment. Joan commented:

I’m just thinking when the children are outside, not aimless play, being connected, I don’t like aimless play outside, they should actually be doing something, not just wandering around.

Rita also commented on the difference between indoor and outdoor learning environments:

I think it’s embedded into their practice. I know at our centre they know outside, it’s lots of running and climbing and investigating all the nature that’s fallen into the yard, whereas inside it is calmer and you have a lot more small groups.

Not only is the quality of interaction and its relationship to intentionality something participants commented upon, the types of activity—the curriculum content—also created debate and this was coupled with independent observations by the researcher.

Types of activities

According to observations made during this research as well as educators’ comments, there was a marked difference in the number of activities offered outside
compared to inside. On average, 12 learning activities were presented indoors, whereas an average of only five to seven activities were provided outdoors, even though the amount of children in mixed-aged play routines increased.

The types of activities outside were cause for comment. For example, Joan stated:

*I have a belief too that the outdoors should [only] have things in the outdoor area available to [children] that you would normally do in the outdoor area.*

Carl agreed noting:

*I don’t know why they put the books outside, in the sun, there are no kids there, they are ripped apart ... I think the kids aren’t going to use them properly.*

Contemporary perspectives are now challenging the role of educators within outdoor play environments. The definition of play provided under the EYLF echoes both traditional and contemporary views, stating that play is defined as providing ‘opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 5). Careful planning and management of the outdoor environment as well as the indoors is an essential component of intentional teaching (Epstein, 2007). However, when we consider that children can be in early childhood settings for up to eight hours, a child’s right to uninterrupted play deserves respect. Although the EYLF promotes intentional teaching during social contexts indoors and outdoors, there appears to be a marked difference in how these environments impact the role of the educator. In particular, more formal teaching opportunities became available with children during indoor group time.

**Indoor environments**

In contrast to discussions about outdoor environments, a different set of issues emerged about indoor play. Educators discussed how intentional teaching becomes restricted to indoor group times. For the participants, it somehow seemed easier to fulfil the requirements of the EYLF and the need to document outcomes when children were inside. However, the participants presented different approaches to indoor group experiences and the relationship to intentional teaching. For example, Rita seems to have a dilemma about how to fulfil outcomes and how to balance this against activities driven by the children’s interest.

Rita describes her approach this way:

*We obviously go into a moment of teaching with our idea of what we want that outcome to be, especially with our project work, we are so focused on getting that answer, instead of seeing what they do with the information.*

She continues:

*It’s more about teaching with a purpose and that higher level of thinking and I don’t know whether an outcome is the right answer, but having an idea of what I want them to learn and then looking at, okay, how can I scaffold them ... [I do this by] asking questions and doing the research, using technology and not being afraid of saying I’m not sure of the answer to that, let’s find out together.*

Rita is grappling with the fine balance between teacher-directed and child-guided learning experiences. Her discourse echoes past positioning of the educator as provider of knowledge, but she is also conceding the children have a role to play. At the centre of this dilemma is the relationship of power between the educator and child to create spaces for learning that acknowledge the rights of the child and fulfil new requirements for documentation which include pre-determined outcomes. Another educator discussed a project driven by children’s interests and the way it evolved. Nellie explains:

*Lots of boys were interested in a space suit they were wearing so, umm, the helmet and what they carry on their back; the oxygen. They need to breathe. That’s how we got into the gases and the air, so it’s, yeah, it all just came out of discussions. Their brains are just amazing! They are powerful really!*

Nellie’s discourse has shifted to embrace more contemporary understandings of the competent child. She shows surprise at the ability of the children, but recognises the value of children co-constructing their own learning. This reinforces the child’s active participation in their own education, thus affirming the principles underlying the EYLF.

**Conclusion**

From the evidence provided in this paper, much more consideration is required in understanding intentionality for both the educator and the child. Nested within the EYLF that promotes the curriculum as all the interactions and experiences for children, educators now need to pay careful attention to how, and by whom, content for curriculum is decided. Difficulties arise when interpretations of intentionality are misguided. Historical notions of the role of the educator, with direct links from intentional teaching through developmentally appropriate practice to more postmodern conceptualisations, have created tensions in curriculum tied to pre-determined outcomes. Curriculum developed by educators has the potential to inhibit powerful contributions children can make towards their own education. Contemporary theorising of the educator now acknowledges the child’s right for active participation. What needs to be understood is that while an intentional
teacher looks for opportunities to teach, an intentional learner looks for opportunities to learn throughout the day. The goal of an intentional teacher is to seek strategies that develop intentional learning skills within children. This view on the role of the educator changes from the provider of knowledge to one that promotes the innate drives for independent learning.

An intentional curriculum involves co-participation where both the teacher and child are valued as equal partners within the teacher–learning nexus. Identifying the child as an intentional learner provides agency for children in setting their own goals with educators. Equitable outcomes for learning pathways can only be truly achieved when intentionality represents this relationship. This paper argues that recognition of the child as an intentional learner may go some way to resolving misunderstandings about intentionality.

References


A trinity of saviours—parent, teacher and child:
Human Capital Theory and early childhood education in New Zealand

Margaret Stuart
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THERE IS A CONTEMPORARY trinity, of mother, child and teacher, who together ‘grow’ both the present and future workers of the national economy. Economic truths assert that mothers can best meet their young child’s needs by being in the workplace, while entrusting her child to a skilled educator. Human Capital Theory discourse has penetrated the lives of our youngest citizens. Human Capital theorists maintain that state investments in early childhood education will be cost effective; will pay long-term economic dividends.

A shift has occurred in western society over the past 50 years, from a societal perception of the maternal home as a ‘natural’ place for the child, to the contemporary view that children should be cared for by ‘qualified’ teachers. Mothers are now viewed by many as ‘dangerous’, unable to grow their child’s cognitive and social potential (e.g. Heckman, 2011, Heckman & Masterov, 2007). Their ‘natural’ place is now considered to be in the workplace supporting the growth of their nation’s economy. In this article I suggest there is a contemporary trinity, of mother, child and teacher, who together ‘grow’ the present and future workers of the national economy.

I use New Zealand as a case study of a neoliberal economic theory, Human Capital Theory (HCT), and the growing alliance with early childhood education (ECE). I argue that the child and ECE are sites of increasing economic interest. The use of the term ‘choice’ assumes market-ready entrepreneurs can effectively order (and evaluate by cost and benefit) all education purchases; parents as seeking cost-benefit investments for their money. Governments, too, seek the most effective and efficient state investment (e.g. Carneiro & Heckman, 2003; Heckman, 1999, 2011; Heckman & Klenow, 1997; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; NZ Taskforce, 2011).

Drawing on a genealogical review of the economic arrangements, practices and forms of knowledge that have guided ECE in this country, I will set out some analyses of future possibilities. I argue that the recent adoption of HCT by government and supra-national agencies like the World Bank is a form of knowledge with associated practices and arrangements which will continue to influence ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ). I further suggest that these forms of knowledge have begun to construct some mothers, specifically, so-called ‘dysfunctional mothers’ as risky, and the child’s teacher as the preferred surrogate caregiver. Robert Doherty (2008) suggests that researchers can plot the genealogy of policy in a backwards direction; however, policy can also be analysed in a forward direction. Such analyses may involve ‘search[es] of the technical forms, organisational arrangements, practices and forms of knowledge that are mobilised in making political reason operational and material’ (p. 199).

The genealogy

The story of the shift in neoclassical economics that occurred in the nineteenth century, notably the work, in the 1870s, of W.S Jevron, Leon Walras, and Carl Menger has been told by others (Fitzsimmons & Peters, 1994; Olssen, Codd & O’Neill, 2004; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Suffice to say that the concept of ‘marginal utility’, of valuing things according to their scarcity,
gave the underpinning of price theory its power. Other concepts (e.g. Karl Popper’s theory of falsifiability; and Vilfredo Pareto’s theory of efficiency) were accepted by the science of economics in the twentieth century, which supported the discipline’s claim as an objective and universal science. The publications of the Mont Pelerine Society post World War Two, allowed neoliberal economists to disseminate their views, and assisted the overthrow of Keynesian economic assumptions about an equitable society. In the 1980s a number of western liberal governments adopted Austrian neo-liberal theory as understood by the Chicago School of Economics. One such was the Fourth Labour Government (1984–90) in New Zealand where Finance Minister Roger Douglas introduced wide-ranging reforms, including a massive education reform.

The educational reforms effected managerial and organisational change across the sector. Early childhood documents _Education to be more_ (Meade, 1988) and _Before five_ (Lange, 1988) had the effect of devolving decisions about daily management to each independent ECE entity. These were changes in the technical forms and organisational arrangements. A significant change in _Education to be more_ was the plurality of curriculum delivery to meet the needs of different geographic or ethnic communities. In particular the _Education Act 1989_ allowed for the funding support of Ngā Kōhanga Reo (Māori language nests) and Pasifika centres. A central focus of the reform was the perceived need for increased efficiency with a slimmed bureaucracy overseeing funding and policy through the delivery of service (Meade, 1988). Centres signed a charter which set out regulatory and compliance expectations in return for bulk-funding from the Ministry of Education. The education as market commodity continued under the National government (1990–99), which supported the growth of privately owned early childhood centres.

Michel Foucault’s (2008) concept of biopower assumes that the state needs to know, manage, identify, and then minimise ever-present threats within the body-politic. The ‘central core’ of the problem of our times, neoliberal economics, was ‘what is called population’: governmental reason; a question of truth (p. 21). Traditionally early childhood centres in New Zealand had been established by bourgeoisie interests, keen to effect disciplinary change on the children of the poorer classes. There was a close biopolitical interest between the philanthropic beginnings of the Plunket Society and the first Kindergartens at the turn of the twentieth century in New Zealand (Stuart, 2011). The interest in the welfare of the child supported increased societal intrusion into the bodies of both mother and child. While the initial interest was that of hygiene, of ‘helping the mothers to save the babies’ (King, 1913), increasingly the focus of society and the state was on the child-as-future adult. Mothers now worked for both self-fulfillment and material purposes, moreover, their children needed to be ‘groomed’ and disciplined as future docile employees. This change in perceptions coincided with the educational managerial reforms of the 1980s. The number of centres that offered full-day enrolments in education and care increased, releasing working mothers from the onus of care of their children. Traditional part-day services such as kindergarten and play centres diminished. This shift was paralleled by a number of initiatives based on home interventions, for example, Parents as First Teachers. The state’s normative expectations were to increasingly penetrate the private domain, offering the rationale of improved parenting in the ‘child’s best interests’. These new foci I argue coincided with the societal and political acceptance of the Chicago School’s theory of HCT in New Zealand.

The effect of HCT was of state interest in the minds and bodies of the very young, and of intrusions into areas previously considered private. I suggest that HCT imperialistic discourse with its normative expectations has significantly changed the savior—deep-level power discourse—of early childhood education. I set out a genealogical exploration of societal constructs, particularly the governmental policies of the Fifth Labour Government (1999–2008).

### The rupture: Education as commodity

New Zealand Treasury, in its advice to the incoming government, _Government Management_ (1987), had offered ideological rather than impartial advice (Grace, 1989). Much of this advice became the basis of the _Education Act 1989_, which, with its amendments, remains in effect today. This document contained, often unacknowledged, the views of Chicago School economists. These views constructed human beings, their skills and vocational training, as human capital, able to be traded by individuals acting as entrepreneurs of themselves, in the employment market. One’s skills were a private good, rather than a public one, the argument went, so enterprising traders could maximise their value, seeking the best options. Children were also constructed in this discourse, as requiring ‘good beginnings’, as the foundation of the economy. David Lange, as Minister of Education in the Fourth Labour Government, adopted the investment lexicon ‘improvements in this sector are an investment in the future. Our children are our future. They need a good start’ (Lange, 1988, p. iii, cited in Te One, 2003, p. 30). Later governments, both liberal and conservative, proved to be enamoured of neo-liberal economics.

It was an econometric interest that underpinned much of the Fifth Labour Government’s education policy: _Pathways to the Future: Ngā huarahi arataki. A Ten Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education: 2002–2012_ (SPECE). The terms of reference for the Working Group were to support ‘government policy goals ... [of]
education, labour market, health, welfare and Closing the Gaps’ (Ministry of Education, 2000). New Zealand Treasury published a series of working papers on HCT in the early years of this government. These publications supported the government’s ‘third way’ focus of robust economic policies with a social face (Maharey, 2000a; 2001; Clark 2000). A Research Report to NZ Treasury by David and Lopez (2000) titled Knowledge, capabilities and human capabilities formation in economic growth was published in 2001, together with a number of papers with titles such as Framework for closing the gaps (NZ Treasury, 2000), and Human Capital and the inclusive economy, a Treasury report (NZ Treasury, 2001). David and Lopez noted that parental education and income are determinants of children’s physical, social and cognitive skills (p. 6). Education, these authors noted, continuing the foundational metaphor, is a ‘sequence of educational choices’ which suggests ‘the importance of corrective intervention in early stages of the lifecycle’ (p. 8). A NZ Treasury 2005 (Le, Gibson & Oxley, 2005) literature review summarises a version of HC theory:

The family is like a firm, in which time and market goods are combined to produce services that confer utility to the members of the family (Becker, 1991). These outputs include self esteem, health, leisure, companionship and children … The most significant marital-specific assets are children. Children are long term investments: their costs and benefits span a lifetime (p. 45).

The authors suggest that the HCT measures in use failed to ‘quantify the flow of future benefits’ to the country’ (p. 26), to account for complexities and diversity.

At about the same time James Heckman, Nobel Prize winner, was suggesting that as populations are heterogeneous, economists should take account of diversity. Heckman is important to this work in that his ideas emerged as a new ‘truth’, accepted as facts by supra-national agencies and, for the purposes of this paper, the NZ Treasury. ECE, in Heckman’s view, is a good investment for states seeking efficient ways of growing national wealth. Childhood is not, Heckman argues, one simple stage of life; rather children go through different stages (Cunha & Heckman, 2007). The early childhood stage in his estimate is a critical one. Heckman had examined data from the longitudinal Perry Ypsilanti study in America.

Evidence indicates that those enrolled in the program are higher earners and have lower levels of criminal behavior in their late 20s than do comparable children who did not participate in the program, Heckman said. ‘Reported cost-benefit ratios for the programs are substantial,’ he said. The program is expected to yield $8.70 for each dollar invested over the lifetime of the participants (Harms, 2004).

The empirical data-collection from control and research groups, Heckman argued, supports early intervention as a cost-effective state investment. Moreover, he continued, socialisation skills are more important than cognitive; especially those skills required of workers in the twenty-first century. Compliant, punctual workers are more important than those with a high IQ, and can be fostered early, he concluded. Such skills are needed to grow the national future in a competitive world.

Figure 1. Heckman’s graph showing best education investments period over life trajectory.

Source: www.greatstartshere.org.
Heckman’s ideas on *Policies to foster Human Capital* (1999) began to appear in NZ Treasury papers early in the twenty-first century, to be given added credence by their later adoption by agencies such as the World Bank (2005; 2006; n.d. a,b,c.), *Babies and Bosses* (OECD, 2004), *Starting Strong 11* (OECD, 2006) and *Starting Strong 111* (OECD, 2012) used his work, including that graphing a concave parabolic curve of efficient investment over a life-time trajectory. There is an almost universal acceptance that investing early in children’s skills is good economic policy.

A neurological argument emerged in Heckman’s writings, which focused on the mother as the agent responsible for growing the young child’s brain by offering language and cognitive enrichment. Early investments, Heckman and others argue, raise the benefits of later investments because of input at the critical moment of the life trajectory when the young brain is especially malleable (Almeida & Pedro, 2008; Heckman, 2011; Heckman & Klenow, 1997).

Neuro-developmental theorists such as Jack Shonkoff (Shonkoff & Philips, 2000) of *Neurons to neighbourhoods* fame, co-published with Heckman and others (Knudsen et al., 2006). Micro-econometricians claim that both families and education institutions support children’s social and cognitive skill-formation (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003). This has policy implications for state funding: an efficient cost-benefit consideration would be to target the very young children, they posit. It has also allied the twentieth century science of Human Development unquestioningly to that of economics in the twenty-first century, at a time others are questioning its universality.

**Normative measures—who has the child’s best interests at heart?**

If not the mother; ‘then whom?’ early intervention advocates asked. ‘The children of better educated women have major advantages over the rest of the population, because the poor face the possibility of “diverging destinies”’ (McLanahan 2004, cited in Heckman, 2010, p. 5). A divide, argues Heckman, ‘is opening up in American society’ (Heckman, 2010a, p. 4). There has been, he suggests, an increase in single-parent families, especially among the African-American population. There is a gap between children of more educated women, and those of poorly educated mothers; the former have families later and have a steady income; moreover their partners are more involved with their children. Resources are scarce, and cost-benefits uncertain in some HCT studies, so states seek certainty about investment decisions from their policy advisors.

To maximise efficient state investment, and prevent over-estimating the externalities of schooling, funding should be targeted to the risky populations. Heckman’s message has left the shores of America, and can be found in numerous policy and economic tracts across the world.

The state is particularly interested in eliminating the gaps between discrete groupings of the population, to bring the ‘risky’ groups up to the unmarked norm. The debate, Heckman himself says, is reminiscent of the eugenics debate of the early twentieth century (2010a, p. 5). He does acknowledge that imposing middle-class social norms may be problematic, because ‘programs change the values and motivation of the child. Some of these changes may run counter to the values of parents’ (Heckman, in Bracey, 2008, p. 255). Carneiro and Heckman (2003) suggest that, for certain families, state intervention may be appropriate for major sources of ‘social problems’. They claim, however, that ‘[p]aternalistic interventions into the family life may be warranted on efficiency grounds’ (2003, pp. 45–6). Should, the authors posit, the sanctity of the family be paramount in decisions about the children of dysfunctional groups? Heckman (2008) and other HC theorists offer apparent solutions to reducing the skill gaps between groups.

Although there are increasing numbers of children growing up in an adverse environment, Heckman says, the good news is that ECE environments can be enhanced, to ensure the ‘somatosensory bath of early childhood’ (2008, p. 19) is maximised through interventions (see too, Almeida & Pedro 2008; Heckman 2011; Heckman & Klenow,1997). While later remediation is possible, it is more costly and less effective. Recent research has demonstrated that the effects of bad families can be ameliorated as high-quality early childhood interventions have lasting effects on skills and motivation, if enriched programs are targeted to reduce spill-over effects. Teachers, acting as social buffers, can support the state to manage the danger of poor parenting by the lower, unemployed classes.

The image of the teacher, in a recent HCT oeuvre is ‘ghostly’; both essentially linked, but a bulkhead in the Trinity with mother and child. She is both valued and dismissed. Her role is to provide enrichment. In New Zealand at the Fourth Early Childhood Convention in 1987, visiting US psychologist David Weikart told the audience that international agencies such as the World Bank, were advocating for early intervention. The Mayor of Minneapolis, Weikart continued, had said we must ‘use’ ‘early childhood education to reduce adult unemployment’ (1987, p. 19). Do you know, Weikart asked conference attendees, ‘that the person sitting the other side of you is more effective as a crime fighter than anyone else in the country? If you could peek under the collar of her shirt you would see a red T-shirt … it would say “crime fighter” and “superwoman”’ (1987, p. 15, emphases added). Education Minister Russell Marshall, at the same conference agreed, suggesting that childhood education could best be provided by ‘caring, well-trained adults’ who complement the work of the family (1987, p. 7). Within two decades, the understanding that teachers with credentials can support
the children of the disadvantaged was accepted. The data has been uncritically universalised. In SPECE (2002), the government was keen to both increase the numbers of qualified staff, and increase participation in ECE, of the hard-to-reach groups (such as Māori and Pasifika). Much of the theory that supported their views came from economic data suggesting early intervention can support governments to grow their future competitive wealth.

Economists do not see teachers as agentic agents; rather schools are viewed as another version of the firm, with inputs into students, notably those who are ‘disadvantaged’, ensuring good outcomes (Almeira & Carneiro, 2008, Heckman & Klenow, 1997; Heckman, 2008). Early interventions impact on social externalities: ‘[f]irms, schools and families are all important producers of human capital’ (Heckman & Klenow, p. 10). When visualised as firms, education becomes conceptualised as inputs and outcomes; however, to achieve good outcomes they need careful management to prevent unconsidered or hidden costs outside the influence of the market pricing mechanisms. To prevent state investment cost-overruns, Carneiro and Heckman (2003) reject suggestions of lowering the teacher to child ratio. Such conservative economic thinking sees the teacher as having a vested interest, seeking to ‘capture’ education for their own ends. They instead put emphasis on ‘parental sovereignty’ (p. 43) and behaviours of ‘choice, competition and local incentives’ (p. 75), and private provision of education. Competition between schools will ensure that poor teachers within poor schools do not survive. Local principals can discipline poor teachers and reward good teaching (p. 46). ‘Teachers matter’, Carneiro and Heckman conclude (p. 66), but need firm management. While the teacher as agent is barely visible in economic writings, the entity of the school or early childhood centre, with its ‘enriched environment’ is a central entity. A strange trinity (mother, child, teacher) indeed. New Zealand government policy, 1999–2008 (such as SPECE) aimed to increase the numbers and quality of ECE teachers. The policy further sought to enhance initial teacher education to include sensitivity to diverse families. Credentialism of teachers by regulatory means served to allay parental fears about poor care. Responsibility for good care thus lay with centre management, supported by the theory of parental choice.

**A peep into the future—Faith in the trinity?**

The positivity of the HCT discourse continues to grow, to gather momentum, propelled by economic and developmental ‘truths’ that ‘skills beget skills’ (Heckman, 2010b, p. 3). Heckman’s work is quoted in publications as diverse as the Starting Strong 11 (OECD, 2006, pp. 35 ff), the New Zealand National Government’s Early Childhood Taskforce (2011); and the World Bank (e.g. 2011). Lately with the alliance of economics with neurobiology, the belief in child development and enriched environments has grown. It has become a scientific ‘truth’ that is almost unchallengeable. The technical forms, organisational arrangements, practices and forms of knowledge that are mobilised in making political reason operational and

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Source: www.greatstartshere.org.

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material remain unchanged at present. They form a material net of ponderous power, which continues to represent, present and advise of solutions to perceived economic problems. However, the technical forms remain those of neoliberal economics—representing the atomistic individual as the sum of her skills; education as a commodity in the market economy driven by price theory; and endogenous growth as a foundational truth.

In a world that is concerned about risk, that urges all to seek wealth, the apparent simple truth of early education as a cost-benefit foundation of endogenous growth is attractive. It is gaining adherents to its faith at the same time that many other economic solutions to world problems come under question. The discourse of HCT constructs mothers as workers, teachers as trainers of children’s cognitive skills and dispositions, where children are viewed as a pool of future workers: savours of our national economies. Such a trinity narrows our human potential to purely material purposes.

References


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Equity and quality: Challenges in providing early childhood educational opportunity in China

Yu Qian
East China Normal University

THIS ARTICLE IS INTENDED to provide a timely outline of early childhood education (ECE) provision and policy in China. It gives a commentary on ECE policy in China and argues for new policy directions. Since 2010, the Chinese government has launched a comprehensive set of education policies designed to promote equitable access to ECE and improvements in the quality. These policies arose as a political response to a national complaint about the difficulties to enrolling children in qualified kindergartens and the growing gaps between education in the cities and rural areas. This study analyses the difficulties for the Chinese government and scholars to reach a balance between the equity and quality of ECE in different areas, especially in rural areas and for migrant children. It concludes that local government will, as well as central government, play an important role in determining whether formulated policies are translated into action on the ground. It is critical to increase the public funding of ECE in China and to conceive specific allocations of the budget.

Introduction

In the past three decades, economic development and rapid social change across China have transformed Chinese traditional family and child-rearing patterns. Parents have recognised that the development of all young children benefits society by providing a solid foundation for a brighter future. Improving the quality of ECE is a crucial way to reduce educational, economic and health disparities (Bradbury, 2011; Engle, Fernald & Alderman, et al., 2011; Nores & Barnett, 2010). Based on these ideas, China has entered a decade of education reform with an extensive focus on how well our society can prepare every child to succeed in the future. As seen in Table 1, during the last 10 years, the numbers of kindergartens and enrolment in them has been increasing rapidly in China.

Table 1. ECE expansion in China, 2001–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Kindergartens</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Number of teachers and staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>111 700</td>
<td>20 218 400</td>
<td>630 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>117 900</td>
<td>20 894 000</td>
<td>759 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>130 500</td>
<td>22 638 500</td>
<td>898 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>133 700</td>
<td>24 750 000</td>
<td>1 032 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>138 209</td>
<td>26 578 141</td>
<td>1 127 798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>150 400</td>
<td>29 766 700</td>
<td>1 305 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>166 800</td>
<td>34 244 500</td>
<td>1 496 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>181 300</td>
<td>36 857 600</td>
<td>1 677 500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- “Kindergarten” in China is a generic term for ‘ECE or preschool institution’ for children from 3–6 years old. There are usually three grades in each Chinese kindergarten: Grade Junior for 3–4 years; Grade Middle for 4–5 years; and Grade Senior for 5–6 years. Some kindergartens have Toddler Classes for 2–3 years.
Nowadays, equity must be another important term in Chinese ECE policy. According to the 6th National Census in 2010, the population of China is 1,370,536,875, 5.84 per cent higher than the population count taken in the 5th National Census in 2000 (National Bureau of Statistic of China, 2012). There are currently 34.2 million children attending these early educational institutions. The national rate of enrolment in 2010 was 56.6 per cent, which increased by 5.7 per cent when compared to that in 2009 (National Bureau of Statistic of China, 2012). Today, nearly half of Chinese young children do not have opportunities to access any early childhood programs. In a global context, a large body of data from economics, psychology and biology shows that educational equity is more than a social justice imperative (Heckman, 2011). The equity of early education used to be discussed as a moral issue, but is now becoming a national political and economic issue, especially for Chinese from minority backgrounds, children living in rural areas and the families of migrant workers in China.

**Equity and quality in Chinese early childhood education**

Inequality in early childhood experiences produces inequality in ability, achievement, health, and adult success. Early education can be one of the most effective approaches to preventing poverty in the next generation (Barnett, 2007; Cunha & Heckman, 2006; Engle et al., 2011; Yoshikawa, 1994). Equity includes the fair distribution of resources in society and improvements in access to ECE among disadvantaged groups.

At birth, each Chinese child inherits different capabilities and different resources to capitalise on them. More than half of Chinese citizens live in country and rural areas. Obviously the resources are unequal for children in West and East China. For example, in the eastern areas like Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai Provision, enrolments in ECE are over 95 per cent. In the middle areas such as Hebei and Hubei, enrolments are around 45–70 per cent.

In the west, areas such as Gansu, Nixia and Guizhou, enrolments in 2009 were lower than 45 per cent (Zhou et al., 2012). Even though the numbers of early educational institutions in China have grown more rapidly over the past two decades, children from minority and rural families and children from other disadvantaged family groups are still not accessing ECE in the same proportions as children from the majority Chinese culture (see Table 2).

### Table 2. Numbers of kindergartens for different nationalities, China 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergartens</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>In which: Minorities</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>26,578,141</td>
<td>1,894,185</td>
<td>7.1 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergartens</td>
<td>138,209</td>
<td>1,601</td>
<td>1.1 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In urban areas, more and more parents complain about the difficulty of accessing high-quality kindergartens while it is particularly hard for migrants’ children to access the qualified ECE services (Qian, 2013, p. 45). The number of domestic migrants in China has increased astronomically from 2000 to 2010 from 144.3 million to 261.3 million, an increase of 81.3 per cent over 10 years (Xinhua Net, 2011). 88 per cent of migrants are migrant workers. It was estimated that in 2010, the number of migrant workers has increased to 230 million (Xinhua Net, 2011). Most migrant workers move to cities to pursue a challenging life and higher salary. However, they will be at a big disadvantage when their children are attending ECE services in urban areas.

The most recent statistics indicate the population of Shanghai has reached 23.02 million, of which 2.5 million are migrant workers (the 6th National Census of Shanghai, 2010). In Pudong, the biggest district of Shanghai, there are nearly one million migrant workers. In 2012, there were only 56,236 migrant workers’ children living with their parents in Pudong, of whom 36,000 attended the unofficial day care centres (Pudong Educational Bureau, 2013). Because of the difficulties in attending city kindergartens, most migrant workers have to send the children back to rural areas to be raised by grandparents. The left behind children are left behind not only by parents but also by the early education systems. Only 35 per cent of them attend a three-year ECE program in their hometown (Qian, 2013, p.54).

Meanwhile, in the context of difficult admission to kindergarten and the high cost of early programs and services in the city, a lot of cottage nurseries have emerged in the urban and rural regions. Most cottage nurseries are run by private organisers and not registered. These preschool institutions mainly recruit children of migrant workers who are usually socially and economically disadvantaged. In Beijing, there are

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1. Migrants here refer to domestic people moving from one place to another inside China. In this article, migrant workers also mean Chinese workers moving from rural areas to the city in search of work. The three typical characteristics of migrant workers are: born in rural area, with poor education background, and doing manual labour in city, noted by author.

2. The Chinese average annual income was 19,109 Yuan (RMB) in the city and 5,919 RMB in the country in 2010. Data from National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011.
currently 1,298 cottage nurseries. In comparison there are fewer registered kindergartens in Beijing (1,266). The administration fee for each child in the cottage nurseries is USD 26 to USD 100 per month, much cheaper than in registered ones which is USD 70 to USD 850 (Survey by National Committee Members, 2009). The quality of these private institutions becomes another great concern of ECE scholars. None of the staff in cottage nurseries have ECE teacher certificates and the settings and programs are seldom qualified (Yu, 2013).

A review of recent policy and finance

Traditionally, equity and quality are viewed as competing goals in China (Qian, 2013). In the past two years, more and more attention has been paid to issues of diversity and the access of children from poor areas. The Chinese government has been trying to bring equal educational opportunities to disadvantaged populations across a wide range of children with different backgrounds, abilities, and family resources (Yu, 2013).

It is said that 2010 was a policy year for ECE in China (Qian, 2013). Given the highlighted importance of ECE, the Chinese Premier Wen JiaBao hosted the executive meetings of the Chinese State Council focusing on the policy of early childhood development in November 2010. Premier Wen (2010) said, ‘we must increase the investment in ECE and put the ECE into local government’s budget. … We need to support the children in risks, in poor family and the disabled. The central government will start certain special funds to support the Midwest regions and the minority areas to development early childhood education and early bi-lingual education’.

In 2010, China issued many important ECE policies. The most important one was the National Medium to Long Term Planning Outline for Educational Reform and Development (2010–2020) (Chinese State Council, 2010a), which identified two major challenges that would face China in the next decade: equity and quality.

In the Outline, it was said that the policy objectives of Chinese education are to promote equity and to improve quality in the educational field. The Outline also has a full chapter, Chapter 3, which describes the national plan of ECE as shown in Figure 1.

According to the Outline, equity will be a national basic educational policy. The Outline says, ‘Educational equity is an important foundation for social justice’, ‘The key is to provide a fair opportunity’ and ‘the fundamental measure is the rational allocation of educational resources to rural areas, remote and poor areas and ethnic areas’ (Outline, Chapter 1, p. 1). The Outline also focuses on the quality of education. It said that the core task of educational reform and development in China is improvement in educational quality. The government will create a national standard for education, including ECE, establish the system of educational quality assurance, and strengthen teachers’ training. In Chapter 3, titled as ECE, it is said that until 2020, there

Figure 1. Main objectives of ECE in China 2009–2020

will be 40 million children in different kindergartens. Nearly 95 per cent of children in China will have at least a one-year program in 2020. The government also encourages the education and care for birth–three-year-olds. Local government must set their three-year-planning of ECE according to the national Outline. For example, on 7 Nov 2011, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region has published the regional three-year-planning of ECE. In the coming three years, 213 public kindergartens will be established in Ningxia. Ningxia will ensure that every county could have a public kindergarten for 500 children and every town will have one for 300 children in 2014 (People’s Daily, 2011).

On 21 November 2010, the Chinese State Council also issued the Documents of Early Education Development (National Document No. 41) (Chinese State Council, 2010b) called the National Ten Principles (NTP) by scholars which addressed ten principles to develop ECE. The NTP requires public interest and universality. The idea of universality could be influenced by the Beveridge Report (1942) of UK. The ten principles of NTP are as following:

a. Give more importance to ECE and resolve the difficulties of admission in most areas.
b. Improve the resources of ECE with diverse ways, encouraging private kindergartens.
c. Strengthen the teacher’s professional development and issue a standard for early childhood educators in 2010.
d. Increase the investment of ECE by different channels and give financial support to the disadvantaged.
e. Improve the administration of kindergartens.
f. Improve the security of kindergartens.
g. Regulate the management of kindergarten fees.
h. Improve the quality of ECE and issue the Guide of Children’s Learning and Development.
i. Improve the working mechanism, strengthen the organisational leadership.
j. Plan the three years action of ECE at city and town levels.

During the past two years, finance has also become a hot topic for ECE and continues to be an area engaging the attention of ECE professionals and researchers (Zhou, 2012). Direct investment in children is one possible and important way for intervening in the lives of disadvantaged children. The government has realised that every dollar invested in high-quality ECE might produce a 7 to 10 percent per annum return on investment (Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev & Yavitz, 2010). Investment in early education for disadvantaged children from birth to age six helps reduce the achievement gap, increase the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lower the crime rate, and reduce overall social costs (Miller & Smith, 2011).

In the steadily progressing economic transformation, and against the background of setting up a harmonious society and striving for a balanced educational

Figure 2. ECE funding of education budget in some Asian countries and area 2009

![Percentage of ECE funding of Education Budget (%)](image)

development, a reform of the financing system for China’s ECE is inevitable (Cai, 2008). However, since 1993 to 2009, only about 0.012 per cent of GDP and 1.3 per cent of public educational expenditure was provided for ECE. In Beijing, the funding for public kindergartens decreased from 2.05 per cent of education budget in 2000 to 1.92 per cent in 2007. The expenditure per each child is only USD 47 (Zhang and Zhang, 2011).

In 2011, the Chinese government launched a series of documents about educational finance, which will increase the national education budgets. On 29 June 2011, Chinese State Council published the Document about Increasing Education Finance (National Document 2011.22). It said that the funding of the education budget will amount to 4 per cent of GDP in 2012. From 2001–2010, public investment increased from USD39 billion to USD208 billion. Now the educational budget has increased from 14.3 per cent to 15.8 per cent of public social expenditure, which makes education the largest item in Chinese social expenditure. On 5 September 2011, the Chinese Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education published the Document about Increasing Early Childhood Education Finance (Ministry of Finance and Education Document 2011.405) (Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Education, 2011) together. It is a pity that, as seen in Figures 2 and 3, ECE funding in China is still lower than that in most Asian countries (Zhou, 2012, pp. 20–32).

**Discussion and conclusion: How can we make this a reality?**

In reviewing the main points in early education policy conducted over the past two years, it is abundantly clear that the Chinese government and scholars have realised the importance of equity and quality of ECE. Children can make impressive educational gains when the best educational research, policy, and practice are aligned (Peterkin, Jewell-Sherman, Kelley & Boozer, 2011). The challenges of equity and quality work as a reform driver for China (Riley & Coleman, 2011). The tough question is: Will the rapid expansion of ECE and the issued new policies in China give all children a real opportunity?

To achieve this end, first we need to create a new system of Early Childhood Education Acts, which will guarantee funding and monitor the quality and equity of ECE. So far, there is no any act or law which focuses on ECE in China. Increasingly countries in Asia and western society have issued a series of ECE Acts. For example, Korea has issued the Early Childhood Education Promotion Act (2001), Child Care Act (2001) and the Early Childhood Education Act (2004). Mexico has launched the Law of Obligatory Pre-schooling in 2002. China also initiates some projects to include education for five–six-year-old children in the compulsory education system (Liu, 2009). Free education for five–six-year-old children has been initiated in Shanxi Province in China since 2012.
In this process, local governments such as Shanghai will, alongside central government, play an important role in determining whether formulated policies are translated into action on the ground. The gaps between the east and the west, and between cities and rural areas, leave us a big challenge to provide a real opportunity to reach all children. With a deep understanding of their own place, local government can positively influence the quality of ECE, centralising coordination, planning activities, implementing need-based financial aid programs and resolving the difficulties of accessing local licensed kindergartens. It’s obvious that central policy and law will not be implemented effectively without changes at the local levels which determine what actually happens.

Second, it is critical to increase the public funding of ECE and conceive a specific plan addressing how to use the money in different places. Between 2010 and 2012, the Chinese government has invested RMB 5560 million to initiate the ECE Promoted Project of The Middle West Country, constructing 3149 kindergartens in the central and western areas. ECE funding was 3.23 per cent of educational budget in 2012 (Qian, 2013, p. 98). However, in local interviews, Yu found that in each school the big challenge is the lack of qualified teachers (Yu, 2013, p.18). The quality of ECE in these brand new schools becomes another big issue for the government.

In November 2008, the Hong Kong government officially started the three-year Child Development Fund (CDF) initiative. According to Hong Kong’s Secretary for Labor and Welfare, Mr. Cheung Kin-chung, the goal of CDF was to ‘capitalise on the strengths of various sectors in the community to help our disadvantaged children and to provide the participating children with more personal development opportunities’ (Sherraden & Zou, 2009, p.1). Many successful ECE programs also work with families to improve parenting skills. The two inputs—direct investment in the child’s cognition and personality, and investment in the family environment—complement each other (Heckman, 2011). It is worthwhile to reduce inequality by investing in ECE. However, we need to consider the detailed plans to create more productive human capital with limited resources. It is necessary for China to not only increase public funding, but also ensure reasonable allocations of this funding, focusing on the admission to qualified early institutions of children left behind by their migrant parents, the migrant children in urban areas and other children at risk.

Last, it is necessary to create certain national standards and quality rating systems to improve educational quality nationwide. Australia has a good example for this. In 1994, a national quality system, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (COAG, 2009), was introduced in Australia in which government funding for long day centres was made contingent on the centre’s achievement of an acceptable level of quality (Wangmann, 1995; Ishimine, Taylor & Thorpe, 2009). It has recently been updated by a more complete system, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education & Care (DEEWR, 2012), which commenced on 1 January 2012 for most early childhood education and care services. China needs a system of national standards to improve the quality nationwide, too.

In the past two years, more attention has been paid to diversity in China. We need to ensure that every child has highly qualified teachers, as well as enough kindergartens, to find a balance between equity and quality. All the Chinese kindergartens, especially the ones in rural areas, must be supported to develop fiscally sound programs for making a positive difference in every child’s educational experience. Equity and quality—these challenges will confront Chinese early childhood educators and policy-makers in the coming decade. We still have a long way to go to help millions of Chinese children who do not reach their developmental potential due to poverty, health or environmental risks.

Note on contributor:

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Introduction

In the United States (US), formal schooling typically begins with grade school at age five with what is termed kindergarten. However, the majority of US children now first attend preschool in the years prior to kindergarten (i.e. from age three to five years). This provides a window of opportunity to address problem behaviours before the beginning of formal schooling, which may be easier to do before the more rigorous demands of grade school.

Study rationale

Teacher perspectives are commonly used in determining who might need extra early intervention; their experience with many children may make them ideally situated to evaluate children’s behaviours (Achenbach, 2011). Indeed, evidence suggests that, in some cases at least, teacher reports are uniquely predictive of later functioning (e.g. Dirks, Boyle & Georgiades, 2011). Central to such early identification, and to research on early development, are teacher behaviour rating scales in which a teacher indicates the frequency of specific child behaviours. These scales are widely used in applied settings to make referral decisions, and in research as an assessment tool. They bring a number of potential advantages. Rating scales are efficient, and they do not require specialised training, which is particularly useful for preschool teachers who often have little specialised training in this area. Normative data are available, and the scales are internationally relevant (Rescorla et al., 2012). For example, Achenbach’s ratings forms have normative data available from an effort that included 44 countries (Achenbach, 2011). On the other hand, the utility of rating scales is, of course, dependent on their reliability and validity. Given their widespread use and potential advantages, it is important to understand the characteristics of teacher ratings on these scales. One area in which more information is needed is inter-teacher agreement in ratings. The present study aims to add to knowledge about the agreement of preschool teachers on behaviour rating scales with a sample of children at risk because of low socioeconomic status (SES).

First, more information is needed to evaluate the extent to which teachers agree with each other. Given the common reliance on individual teachers’ ratings, the extent to which such ratings agree with others’ ratings speaks to their reliability and utility. There is a body of research on the extent to which different raters (e.g. teachers, parents, and children) agree on these scales. Achenbach, McConaughy and Howell (1987) conducted the seminal meta-analysis of 119 studies reporting correlations between different rating scale informants. This study has been cited over 2000 times, pointing to the importance of this topic (Achenbach, 2011).
Correlations for rating scales completed by informants with similar roles (e.g. two parents or two teachers) averaged 0.60. For informants in dissimilar roles (e.g. parents and teachers), the mean correlation was 0.28. However, only 13 of these studies reported inter-teacher agreement, with an average correlation of 0.64, and all of these were with grade-school children. It has been difficult to separate the extent to which disagreement reflects context-specific behaviour versus error in the ratings (Dumenci, Achenbach & Windle, 2011). Better knowledge about the agreement of teachers could help to disentangle these possibilities. Preschool is particularly ideal for this in the US, because it typically provides two teachers in the exact same classroom. It has been shown that agreement levels differ in children aged six–11 compared to children 12–19 (Achenbach, 2011). It is plausible that agreement would also be different for even younger children, but we know of only two studies of preschoolers examining teacher agreement on rating scales. One found agreement on the Sutter-Eyberg Student Behavior Inventory-Revised ranged from correlations of $r = 0.43$ to 0.86 across four pairs of teachers (Querido & Eyberg, 2003). The other (Bulotsky-Shearer & Fantuzzo, 2004) found that teacher agreement on the Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention was higher for overactive (average $r = 0.73$) than underactive behaviours (average $r = 0.55$). This result is consistent with other findings that agreement tends to be higher for externalising than internalising behaviours (Achenbach et al., 1987; Rescorla et al., 2012). In sum, too few studies have examined whether preschool teachers agree in their ratings of behaviour problems.

Second, the few existing studies of teacher agreement have focused on relative agreement rather than absolute agreement, despite absolute agreement being critical for some purposes. Good relative agreement, captured by correlations, indicates that raters agree on which children exhibit more or less of a behaviour compared to the other children they rate (Achenbach, 2011). For certain uses, relative agreement may be sufficient. However, absolute agreement—how similar the scores of two raters are in absolute terms—is critical for other uses. For example, absolute agreement is required for national norms to be reliable indicators of clinical significance. Consider two teachers who perfectly agree on the relative standing of their students. Despite the perfect correlation of their ratings, one teacher might have rated all of the children in the normal range, whereas the other teacher could have many or all of the children’s behaviours rated as problematic. Some data suggest that relative agreement is stronger than absolute agreement between parents and teachers (Cai, Kaiser & Hancock, 2004), which might limit the usefulness of normative data. Despite its importance, to our knowledge no study has presented information on absolute agreement among preschool teachers.

Third, beyond the average level of agreement across teacher pairs, the extent to which agreement varies across teacher pairs is important, but has not been sufficiently studied. That is, some teacher pairs may agree better than others. The average agreement across teachers may represent a fairly uniform agreement level, or it may mask important variation in agreement. For example, an average correlation between teacher pairs of $r = 0.50$ has typically been interpreted as demonstrating moderate teacher agreement. It might be that all teachers moderately agree, but it could also be that some agree very highly and others not at all. If the latter were the case, it would suggest that some teacher reports are more valid than others. To our knowledge, no study has examined variability in preschool teachers’ agreement.

Fourth, the idea that agreement may vary across teacher pairs raises the question of what factors are associated with better or worse agreement. While few studies have addressed variation in agreement, still fewer have investigated predictors of agreement. Understanding the causes of disagreement could further theory, and have important implications for interpreting or improving rating scale data. While we know of no empirical studies of this, theory and indirect evidence suggest that SES and gender might be relevant to teacher agreement. Low SES is associated with worse child–teacher ratios and less teacher education and training, which might interfere with teacher agreement. Gender might also be relevant to agreement; one study found that parent teacher agreement was higher when rating kindergarten boys’ externalising problems than girls’ (Gagnon, Vitaro & Tremblay, 1992).

In sum, apart from findings of better agreement about externalising than internalising behaviours, very little is known about why and how inter-teacher agreement varies. This research gap is especially evident with respect to preschool teachers’ reports, and preschool classrooms are very different settings than classrooms for older children. The present study takes a step towards addressing this gap by examining four aspects of preschool teachers’ agreement. First, to what extent do preschool teachers agree with one another, in terms of relative agreement? We hypothesised that relative agreement would be moderate, similar to agreement described in previous studies. Second, does this agreement look different if absolute agreement is considered? We predicted that absolute agreement would be poorer. Third, do different pairs of teachers vary substantially in their agreement? We expected agreement to vary significantly. Fourth, does the SES of centres or the gender of children predict their agreement? These analyses were exploratory, but we hypothesised that agreement would be stronger for high-SES centres and, at least for externalising behaviours, stronger for boys than girls.
Method

Participants
One hundred and thirty-two children (63 girls and 69 boys) and 26 preschool teachers participated as part of a larger project. Participants were recruited from 13 preschool classrooms at six childcare centres, in urban areas of New England in the US. Four of these centres primarily serve economically disadvantaged families from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and two serve predominately Caucasian children of higher SES. The ethnic makeup of the children is approximately 37 per cent Puerto Rican, 29 per cent African American, 26 per cent Caucasian, 5 per cent multiracial, and 2 per cent unknown. The children ranged in age from 41 to 64 months ($M = 54$, $SD = 5.5$). All teachers were female. Eleven teachers were Caucasian, eight were African American, and seven were Puerto Rican. All lead teachers were required to have a high school diploma and at least four additional courses relevant to early child care. All of the high-SES teachers had college degrees, while none of the teachers from the other centres had completed college.

Procedure
Parents were introduced to the study through a letter sent home with their children. They enrolled their children in the study by signing consent forms, in accordance with the study protocol approved by the university’s institutional review board. Teachers completed a behaviour rating scale for each participating child in their classroom: each child was therefore rated by both teachers in his/her classroom. These ratings were provided in late autumn to allow them sufficient time to get to know the children. Teachers were told that they were completing the scales as part of a study on the development of preschoolers. Otherwise teachers were not given any special instructions regarding the rating scales, but rather followed the scale instructions as usual, which is consistent with the standard use of these scales.

Measure
The Teacher Report Form (TRF) of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991) is the most widely used teacher rating scale, with strong reliability and extensive validity data (Achenbach, 1991). Teachers rate each child on 113 items, and the resulting externalising, internalising, and total problem scores were used for this study. All analyses were conducted using $T$-scores because these are most relevant to clinical applications. Scores in our sample were consistent with national norms; the mean for the externalising subscale was 53.9 ($SD = 8.99$), for internalising was 47.8 ($SD = 8.01$), and for total problems was 50.7 ($SD = 8.96$).

Results

Relative agreement
Relative teacher agreement was measured with average classroom correlations across the 13 teacher pairs. The average classroom correlations were 0.82 for externalising behaviours, 0.47 for internalising behaviours, and 0.80 for total problem scores. The SDs for these classroom correlations were 0.14, 0.42, and 0.16, respectively, suggesting substantial variability in agreement across classrooms for internalising and total scores, and very large differences in agreement for externalising symptoms.

Table 1. Relative and absolute inter-teacher agreement by socioeconomic level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Higher SES Mean</th>
<th>Lower SES Mean</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$d$</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative agreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalising</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.010</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.36</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total problems</td>
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<td>0.75</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute agreement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalising</td>
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<td>5.71</td>
<td>−3.69</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalising</td>
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<td>7.78</td>
<td>−2.01</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>−1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total problems</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>−2.45</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>−1.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Relative agreement refers to Pearson correlations. Absolute agreement refers to the average of the absolute values of difference scores. There are three higher-SES classrooms and ten lower-SES classrooms. Equal variances are not assumed. $t = t$-statistic for comparing independent means; $p =$ probability that sample mean differences of this size would occur if there were no population mean differences; $d =$ Cohen’s effect size measure.
Absolute agreement

Absolute agreement across teacher pairs was measured as the average absolute value of the difference between the two teachers’ scores across the children in each classroom. Teachers differed by an average of 4.62, 6.61 and 6.00 T-score points on the externalising, internalising, and total score scales. Variability in absolute agreement was large; the SDs of classroom differences were 2.23, 3.70 and 4.23 respectively. All of these standard deviations are greater than would be expected by chance, suggesting that some teacher pairs are in significantly closer agreement than others (all ps < 0.01 with a resampling procedure, see Goldstein, Arnold, Rosenberg, Stowe & Ortiz, 2001).

Disagreement in absolute scores was not accounted for only by teachers with lower relative agreement. As a striking example, one classroom’s teachers’ total problem scores correlated 0.86, yet they differed by an average of 16.43 T-score points. More generally, correlations between absolute and relative agreement, scaled to be in the same direction, were only 0.22, 0.39, and 0.40 for externalising, internalising, and total scores (all ps non-significant).

Predictors of teacher agreement

SES

Three classrooms participating in this portion of the study were located at higher-SES centres; the remaining ten classrooms were at lower-SES centres. Although these small numbers clearly represent a major limitation, exploratory t-tests were performed to determine if relative and absolute agreement levels differed when classrooms were grouped by SES (see Table 1). That is, the ten correlations from lower-SES classrooms were compared with the three correlations from the higher-SES centres. Similarly, classrooms’ absolute agreement scores were compared for the three higher- versus the ten lower-SES classes. Even despite the low power, both relative and absolute agreement for externalising and total scores were significantly stronger in the higher-SES classrooms, with large effect sizes (all ds > 1.0).

Gender Agreement as a function of child gender was investigated using paired sample t-tests. For relative agreement, each classroom provided one correlation coefficient for boys and one for girls. For absolute agreement, each classroom provided one average discrepancy score for boys and one for girls. There were no significant differences between teacher agreement in rating girls’ versus boys’ behaviour for either relative or absolute agreement, all ps > 0.05. With respect to relative agreement, boys’ versus girls’ average classroom correlations for externalising scores were 0.82 versus 0.71; for internalising were 0.63 versus 0.39, and for total scores were 0.74 versus 0.76. With respect to absolute agreement, teachers’ agreement for boys versus girls was 4.8 versus 4.7 for externalising, 7.1 versus 6.3 for internalising, and 6.7 versus 5.3 for total scores.

Discussion

Teachers agreed with each other moderately well in terms of correlation coefficients, that is, about which children show higher levels of behaviour relative to other children in their class. This agreement was, as expected, substantially better for externalising than internalising behaviours. These findings are consistent with previous research on other rating scales and children of other ages. However, with respect to the absolute differences in teacher ratings, we found fairly large discrepancies. This suggests that caution may be needed in interpreting one teacher’s score relative to national norms, at least in isolation. The extent to which this issue may influence interpretation is practically important—for example, one pair of classroom teachers showed an average discrepancy of over 16 T-score points even while agreeing closely on relative rankings of children. This discrepancy represents one teacher describing a child as having average problems with respect to norms, with the other indicating clinically significant issues. So perhaps the most important take-home message of this study is to be cautious in interpreting any one teacher’s ratings with respect to national norms. Beyond this point, the study raises several other issues that are not conclusively answered, but point to important future research questions.

The superior agreement for relative compared to absolute agreement suggests that relative behaviour ratings might in some cases provide better information than absolute ratings. For example, clinicians might ask teachers to rate children’s behaviour relative to other children in their class, perhaps in addition to using standard scores. However, more research is needed before it can be determined if, how, or when relative ratings might be preferable.

Many previous studies considered only average measures of teacher agreement, potentially leaving readers to assume that inter-teacher agreement is consistently moderate. This study, however, found that some teachers agree very closely, whereas others show little agreement. This finding reinforces the take-home conclusion that any one rating should be interpreted with caution. What is less clear is what explains such pronounced differences? This paper can only begin to explore that question, as there are many possible factors that were not measured, and power was too limited to do justice to this issue. Future work should examine variables on several levels that could plausibly influence teacher agreement. Centre characteristics could be at play. Given their additional resources, higher-SES
centres tend to have lower student-teacher ratios, better-trained teachers with more social capital, less teacher turnover, and a less chaotic environment than lower-SES centres. All of these factors could give teachers better opportunity to observe students’ behaviour and produce better agreement. Indeed, we found better agreement at higher- than lower-SES centres, but future studies should directly measure centre-level variables presumed to account for this effect. Teacher-level variables may also affect agreement, but this study did not provide sufficient power to examine these. Finally, child variables may also play a role. The present study did not find differences as a function of child gender, but this result should be interpreted with caution given the low power.

Limitations of this study include the exploratory nature of our agreement predictor analyses, given our relatively small sample size. The study used a now out-of-date version of the rating scale. The updated version of the TRF is, however, very similar to that used in this study. We can think of no particular reason why patterns of results would change with the newer version, and this data provides a first step given the lack of research in this area. Despite these limitations, our results highlight the complexities of using teacher-report data in research and practice, and point to the need for additional empirical work in this area. Determining the causes of the variation in agreement will be particularly important towards ultimately improving the reliability and validity of these ratings for early childhood research and practice.

References


Documenting the transition experiences of children, families and staff through the relocation and integration of two Australian early childhood services

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Sydnye Allen
Charles Sturt University

THIS EXPLORATORY STUDY EXAMINES the transition experiences of children, families, and staff at two early childhood services in regional Australia, as they merge into an integrated early childhood service. A qualitative methodology was used and data were collected from open-ended surveys distributed to early childhood staff (5) and families (13) three months after the transition. Families indicated that early preparation, via social stories and orientation activities, helped facilitate smooth transitions for their children and themselves. Early childhood staff indicated challenges with a new location and a lack of infrastructure to support integration. Directors expressed positive attitudes about the integration process, but indicated that the lack of leadership and policy to guide the integration process was an impediment. Results point to the need for stronger support of early childhood staff during transition, and the importance of strong leadership, infrastructure and policy to facilitate integration of early childhood services.

Introduction

Children’s transition experiences have been examined extensively in previous research, with much emphasis on the transition from prior-to-school settings to school (Dockett & Perry, 2004, 2010; Pianta & Rimm-Kaufman, 2006). However, less is known about the transition experiences for children, families and early childhood staff when they move within and across prior-to-school early childhood settings. Although there is some research on transition experiences within early childhood settings (Cryer et al., 2005; Garpelin, Kallberg, Ekstrom & Sandberg, 2010) and between different prior-to-school settings, such as long day care to preschool (Barblett, Barratt-Pugh, Kilagon & Maloney, 2011), there is little research documenting the transition to an integrated early childhood service. However, there is now a strong trend in Australia, and around the world, towards integrating early childhood services (Press, Sumsion & Wong, 2010). Considering that such transitions involve changes in location, routines, environment, and often early childhood staff, it is important to develop and implement strategies that will support children, families and staff through these changes.

The purpose of this research was to document the transition experiences of children, families and early childhood staff as two early childhood services (a long day care centre and an early intervention service) relocated to a new site, and merged into one integrated children’s service. The aim was to identify strategies to support other children, families and staff experiencing similar transition situations, and identify areas where additional support was needed.

Background

This research documents the transition and integration of two separate children’s services in a regional area of Australia, one of which is a university-based long day care centre and the other an early childhood intervention service for children with disabilities and developmental delays, and their families. These services were previously located separately and were not affiliated in any way with each other. Both services are now co-located on a university campus, and have begun the integration process. Transition planning has occurred over the course of several years, and the physical occupation of the new building took place while the children enrolled in these services were on a six-week break from mid-December to late January. This research commenced when the new integrated service had been open and services available for families and children for three months.
Transition in childhood

A useful way to examine transition experiences is with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model, which emphasises the various contexts that influence and are influenced by the child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The experiences of young children who undergo transitions between early childhood settings will likely be affected by the ways in which their family and the early childhood staff experience the transition and support them. Additionally, the ways in which families and staff experience transition may be impacted by the child’s experience. In order to develop support strategies for children, families and staff, it is important that all stakeholders work collaboratively and understand the perspectives and experiences of all involved in the transition process (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

For children, families and early childhood staff, the relocation to a new building could involve significant disruptions in routine, as well as losses in some cases. Fostering continuity is important and can be accomplished in a number of ways, such as visiting the new location, keeping staff and routines as similar as possible in the new location, and regular communication between staff and families (Early Head Start National Resource Center, 2004).

While adult transition and change are not at the centre of this study, the impacts of change and transitions of adults impact the experiences of the both the children and adults in any changing early childhood environment. Adult transition experiences with change impact upon identity in public spheres of development. Schlossberg’s (2011) important study of adult development identified the unique experiences of adults in changing environments and transitional stages. This work provides a fuller conceptualisation of how the child nested in the ecological context and the adult developmental change trajectory interplay in this study. The adult staff and family stakeholders are deeply impacted by changes in work roles, environment, and culture (Schlossberg, 2011). Some change creates profoundly difficult loss experiences for adults that require ongoing support (Silin, 2011). These theoretical implications should be considered and explored in future studies targeting the adult experiences and outcomes in transitional early childhood work environments.

Although a transition to a new and improved physical setting may be exciting, transition plans and support strategies need to be put in place before the transition begins (Merrill & Britt, 2008). Young children learn best when they have secure attachments to the important adults in their lives, such as parents and caregivers (Bowlby, 1982). During transitions, parents and caregivers can minimise children’s distress by responding sensitively. Supportive and respectful relationships are key elements in supporting young children through transitions (Perry et al., 2006).

Planning ahead is also important in easing transitions for young children (Adams & Parlakian, 2010). There are many ways in which early childhood staff can assist children and families in the transition to a new classroom and centre location. For example, visiting the new centre and classroom, and, if possible, meeting any new staff, can help families and children become more comfortable with changes (Cryer, Hurwitz & Wolery, 2001). Also, obtaining feedback from families, either written or verbal can assist staff in identifying areas of concern for children and families. Additionally, talking with children about transitions, highlighting the positive aspects, is helpful in preparing children for changes. Even children who are not yet verbal can observe adults’ body language, facial expression, and tone of voice. Talking to children about upcoming changes can help children feel more comfortable (Adams & Parlakian, 2010).

Children who have delayed or impaired development, and families with complex support needs require more strategic preparation for transitions to new learning environments (see Dockett et al., 2011). A system of continuous planning and evaluation cycles in conjunction with a predictable routine and open communication best supports the unique needs of children with exceptional learning requirements (Brandes, Ormsbee & Haring, 2007). Early childhood educators need to be afforded professional development opportunities in order to understand the most effective strategies for supporting these diverse young learners. Collaboration is the key to designing and implementing effective transitions for young children from early intervention to early education settings. All stakeholders—parents, educators, and children—need to be included in the development of the transition planning (Branson & Bingham, 2009; Brandes et al., 2007).

Much attention has been given to the experiences of children and families in the transition research; however, early childhood staff also need to be supported in their own experiences of the transition. There has been little empirical attention given to staff transitions in early childhood settings. Children, families, and staff require adequate resources to successfully plan and carry out transitions to new learning environments (NECTI, 2008). Services should allow for careful strategic planning in order to design, implement, and evaluate the scheduled plans. In particular, resource provision should be made available for time, formal training, and informal preparation involving frequent opportunities for children to engage with educators and families (NECTI, 2008).

Transition to integrated early childhood services

The integration of early childhood services is becoming increasingly common and desirable in Australia and around the world (Dockett et al., 2011). According
to Press et al. (2010) the Australian Government has recently advocated for the provision of ‘integrated early childhood education and care’ (DEEWR, 2010). Although defined in numerous ways, integrated services are generally thought of as ‘services that are connected in ways that create a comprehensive and cohesive system of support’ (Dockett et al., 2011, p. 7). Research has found numerous benefits of integrated services to families and children (Moore, 2007).

Press et al. (2010) discuss several key characteristics of effective integrated early childhood services. First, services must have an effective and committed governance. Second, they must have strong leadership effective in managing change. A strong organisational culture and ethos is also important, including shared visions, a sense of collective ownership, and trust. Finally, ‘frontline’ interdisciplinary professional practice in team building is an essential feature of an effective integrated children’s service.

In 2011, a cohort of Australian early childhood practitioners brought together years of their work on early childhood service integration. The Bestchance organisation led by Tytler (2011) yielded a comprehensive report delineating the phases of development required to design infrastructure, to develop staff, and implement routine program evaluation strategies. Tytler and colleagues developed an integrated service framework for early childhood services over several years as the cohort continually refined their service delivery strategies to accommodate new data, which supported innovations in organisational structure and service operations. Although policies about service integration exist, more research is needed to document the transition to integrated early childhood services, as these services become more widespread.

**Summary**

Previous research suggests that support through transitions is important for young children and families, particularly those with diverse support needs. There is a lack of research focused on transition across prior-to-school settings, and on the experiences of transitions within early childhood settings. Additionally, the extant literature fails to adequately illuminate the shortcomings of integration transitions as they relate to the need for continued collaboration between senior organisational leaders and the practitioners who work with the families and children who are set to benefit from the enhanced services. The present study identifies how active involvement of all stakeholders during the visionary planning phase and commitment to the iterative process during implementation are related to more favourable outcomes. In addition, this study offers the unique opportunity to document the merging of two children’s services into one integrated service.

The aims of this exploratory study were:

- to document the transition experiences of children, families and staff as two early childhood centres relocated and merged into one integrated service
- to identify strategies to support children, families and staff as they experience similar transitions
- to identify areas where further support was needed.

**Method**

To address the aims of the research, an interpretive approach was used (Denzin, 1992). The focus was on gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of those involved in the transition. All questions posed to participants were open ended and responses were analysed qualitatively. This research was approved by the institution ethics committee. Surveys from family and staff members were anonymous and consent was obtained.

**Participants**

Staff and families were located in a regional city in New South Wales, Australia, which has a population of approximately 88,000 people. Forty-five parents (mothers and fathers) and five early childhood staff from the long day care centre were approached (a total of 23 families). Twenty-five parents and nine staff members from the Early Childhood Intervention Service were approached to participate in the study. Overall, 13 families and five staff members across both of the services consented to participate in this study.

**Data gathering**

Surveys were distributed three months after the transition to the new location occurred. Hard copies of the parent surveys and information sheets were distributed through the children’s information pockets. Parents were instructed to return their surveys in a return box in the lobby of the building. Staff surveys were distributed via staff mailboxes and staff were instructed to return completed surveys in a return box in the staffroom.

Survey questions for families asked about how families prepared themselves and their children for the transition, what worked well and what did not, the main successes and challenges, and how they and their children coped with the transition. Survey questions for staff focused on describing their experiences of the transition, how the children coped, what strategies they used to prepare themselves, children and families, and any successes or challenges they met. To gather more information about the process of combining two children’s services into one integrated service, the Directors of both services...
shared their experiences by completing an open-ended written survey. Questions focused on describing their experiences with and preparation for the integration process, goals of integration, successes and challenges.

Data from the staff and families related to the general process of this unique transition were analysed based on the idea of phenomenology, which states that knowledge can be gained through understanding the experiences of others (McMillan & Wergin, 2006). Analytic induction, which is the ‘systematic examination of similarities between cases to develop concepts or ideas’, was used to develop the themes that emerged from the open-ended survey responses from staff and families (Punch 2005, p. 196). The survey responses were coded using the principles of the Constant Comparative Method (see Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1999).

Coding was done by two of the lead researchers. A process of ‘open coding’ was used, which is ‘the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data’ (Strauss & Corbin 1999, p. 61). First, each researcher separately read the survey responses and took notes about themes that commonly emerged, both for the families and the staff. The two researchers then met to discuss their initial notes and look for commonalities in these themes.

Results

Data analysis

The researchers identified four categories of data: ‘successful support strategies initiated by staff’, ‘successful support strategies initiated by families’, ‘challenges faced by families’, and ‘challenges faced by staff’.

Successful support strategies initiated by staff

In their survey responses, staff and families identified the support strategies they viewed as helping to ease the transition process. These strategies included social stories, orientation events, photo books, and communication. A social story is designed to share accurate social information with someone in a reassuring and patient way, and aims to help a person more clearly understand potentially confusing situations (Gray, 2000). Social stories were originally designed to be used with people who have Autism Spectrum Disorder, but have more recently been used successfully for people (both adults and children) with other communication differences, and people without such differences. Clear visuals, such as the use of photos, are helpful in creating successful social stories. Staff at the early intervention centre used several social stories to help prepare children and families for the transition. Although the research on the effectiveness of social stories is mixed (Sansosti, Powell-Smith & Kincaid, 2004), it is clear from many of the parent responses that these were seen to be useful.

I read through the learning story the staff at [the early intervention service] … had sent us with my child so he knew that we would be at a different location this year. I believe it helped that he could recognise the new building from the photos when we first came (Parent 1).

Orientation visit/site visits were also seen by some families to be a successful transition support strategy. There was a ‘turning of the sod’ event that took place on the new building site prior to construction. Families, children, staff, and members of the community were invited to this event. Additionally, open days and classroom visits were scheduled immediately prior to the new service opening.

Allowing a site inspection prior for families was a positive. It was like an intro before moving in which allowed our son to digest after talking about it so much (Parent 7).

Photo books of the new site under construction were regularly shown to and discussed with children and families in the months leading up to the integration of services. The photos were regularly updated by staff as the construction progressed. This allowed the children and families to see the ‘process’ of their new centre being built.

We regularly took photos of the building and displayed them for families to see. We had a sod-turning ceremony and orientation visits … Talking to the children and having photo books of the old centre as well as the one about the new centre (Early childhood educator (ECE) 3).

Continuity and support of staff were also identified as being important in easing the transition. Although the move to a larger physical space required the hiring of some new staff, many of the staff at the previous sites continued to the new site.

… the teachers in the room helped as immediately he saw familiar faces (Parent 7).

One parent indicated that a support strategy that worked well was:

Having a key staff member from the old centre in charge of the new room where our child now goes (Parent 6).

Communication was repeatedly discussed by many of the families and staff as being a key strategy used to prepare for the transition.

Communication is the key. Keep everyone informed through a variety of means, conversations, photos, newsletters, etc. (ECE 3).
Successful support strategies used by families

Several strategies were used by families to prepare their children for the transition. Driving by the new site while it was under construction was a common practice.

We drove out with our eldest child to have a look at the building one day as it was being built (Parent 5).

Also, verbal communication with children was seen to be important in supporting children through the transition. Some parents said that when they talked to their children about the upcoming move, they made sure to model their own excitement.

We talked to our child about moving to a new building/home and they got really excited to come and play and meet new friends (Parent 9).

Some families stated that they used strategies that included reference to the previous setting. This may help to show respect for the child’s attachment to their previous early childhood centre, and to maintain some consistency. One parent indicated that when they still refer to the new centre by the name of the previous centre. Another parent stated that talking about the ‘old’ centre (school) was a continued practice.

We still drive by his ‘old school’ and look at it and talk about it, as this was part of our routine when we went into town (Parent 4).

All staff and families indicated that they felt children were well prepared for the transition, and the experience was positive.

The children have transitioned much easier than I thought. They have been excited to be in our new space and enjoyed exploring it and getting to know the staff and children (ECE 3).

One parent stated, don’t just turn up expecting children to accept ‘change’—like adults we need info in order to understand and accept a change in an environment we have become accustomed to (Parent 7).

Challenges faced by families

All of the families who responded expressed that they felt well supported and indicated that the transition was smooth. There were few identified challenges. Issues related to changes in the physical building and location were the most common challenges discussed by families. The new building was larger, rooms were more dispersed, and the new site was some distance outside of the centre of town, resulting in longer driving time for some families. Additionally, the interior doors had automatic locking features that were not always accessible to families. The new physical environment, thus, made changes in routine necessary.

This probably sounds very minor, but the new collecting routine took some getting used to. It was hard to find hats, shoes, bottles, lunchboxes among card-swipe doors (Parent 6).

I missed the homely feel of the old centre and seeing all the staff. Now they are all in their separate rooms (Parent 8).

Although continuity of staff was seen as an effective support strategy, in a few cases, staff and children at the previous centre did not remain continuous. Discontinuity of children and staff attending the new centre was an issue for a minority of families. Not all of the families chose to make the move to the new site, for a variety of reasons. This resulted in a disruption in children’s familiar peer groups. Staff also had to be shifted to different classrooms on some occasions.

… having children from the old centre not go to the new one, either because they go elsewhere or began school (Parent 6).

My son did prefer one particular staff member who he asked for a lot in the first month. She is in a different room (Parent 8).

Challenges faced by staff

There were several identified challenges for early childhood staff. As was the case for families, changes in the physical building were most commonly identified by staff as being problematic.

Some aspects of the building were incomplete to safety standards (gates/doors) as they were not on schedule for starting date. This became evident once children attended and they needed to be fixed (ECE 1).

The building was not adequately inspected or prepared (ECE 2).

I think the major challenge has been getting used to a much larger facility, remembering where things are stored, etc. (ECE 3).

Also, several staff discussed the short time frame for physical re-location as being a challenge. The physical re-location to the new building felt too rushed, and more time was needed to better prepare the physical space prior to the children, families, and staff arriving, as well as transition into the new space. Additionally, a longer transition time would have allowed more of a focus on preparing new staff, and recruiting new families.

We needed to allow more time to develop the staff as a team. Allow more time to have children visit. Allow more open days to have community members visit and get new families in (ECE 2).

The focus was on old staff and families almost exclusively with no emphasis on new staff and families (ECE 2).
Finally, two early childhood staff expressed difficulties with emotional attachment to the previous sites.

On an emotional level I was more affected by the transition than I expected. I knew the change would be difficult/different but I do miss the old centre more than I thought I would (ECE 3).

I didn’t realise I had such an attachment to the previous centre … I did not transition easily. I found it very difficult (ECE 4).

**Perspectives on transitioning into one integrated service**

The Directors of the long day care centre and the Early Childhood Intervention Service offered insight into the process of merging to become an integrated service for children and families. First, they indicated their goals for the integrated service, including:

- high-quality education, therapy and care
- increasing the experience of staff through increased training and awareness of child development
- better learning opportunities for children and families
- more empowered, well-prepared professional education teams
- happier families
- children who feel safe and engaged
- streamlined entry to education services
- a community that understands the benefits of integrated services.

Although both Directors shared similar goals, there were challenges in reaching these goals through the integration of services. Prior to the integration process, the grand vision was to facilitate a seamless integration. However, the Directors indicated that prior to the integration, and three months afterwards, policies had not been put in place to support the integration process.

The policies are not yet devised, but we plan to do so. At the moment I feel there is a lack of support from both sides’ governing organisations in assisting us with these policies (Director 1).

No such policies exist, and this is the primary roadblock to us making progress as two organisations working toward mutual outcomes (Director 2).

Both Directors indicated that they communicate regularly with each other to discuss common goals, a shared vision, and strategies to achieve an effective integration. The Directors work under the structure of two unique organisations; one of which operates within an allied health framework and the other operates as a commercial enterprise. Senior leaders from each organisation are responsible for approval of resources needed to make significant changes to policies and procedures. An integration committee, including senior leaders and the directors or managers charged with carrying out the on-the-ground operations, should be founded and have ongoing action plan review meetings from start to conclusion of the integration transition. Some of the visionary planning goals generated during the development stages did not evolve into soundly implemented processes. Time and monetary resources were needed to support continued collaboration between services. Service integration processes are ongoing. An iterative operational framework is suggested to enhance productivity and best fit during the development and implementation. However, without a strong infrastructure and the support of key stakeholders who hold the power to make changes, the integration process has stagnated.

I wish we had more structure in place that aligned organisational charts, mutual outcomes, and a five year plan before we moved into the building. We are two different organisations that live in the same building. We are incredibly supportive of each other’s work. However, without the support of senior leaders at the university, we are limited in what change we can bring about without their support and resources. They must share our vision and support us in the journey (Director 2).

The actual integration of the two services however has been much harder than I originally thought. I think the crucial factor is the loss of several key players during the transition. This has meant that some really important information that was gathered during the planning stage was lost or changed when new people arrived (Director 1).

The comment of Director 1 (above) refers to the loss of two key early childhood leaders who played major roles in planning the integration. These two leaders represented ‘collaborative champions’, who had a great deal of influence on key stakeholders and who were enthusiastic in keeping up momentum to move the project along (Press et al., 2010). However, just a few months before the physical relocation of both services, these two ‘champions’ were called away from the project due to other commitments. Thus, the two services were left without strong leadership to guide them through the last phases of the integration, which called into question the sustainability of the integration.

In the best case scenario, Directors expect to have ongoing support and involvement from senior leaders to develop and review transition processes and to unfold the integration in stages according to the size and capacity of the service over a period of time. Despite the challenges, both Directors remained positive about the experience and have hopes for becoming an effective and quality integrated service.
I am hopeful that the powerful stakeholders will understand there are so many families looking for support for their young children, and we can help them. We need the tools to develop a good service model, and in five years’ time this will be a model integrated early childhood service (Director 2).

It’s been a really positive experience, for all the hard work it [is] still definitely worth it. In terms of staff and families, I think it’s been a great experience (Director 1).

**Discussion and conclusion**

The aims of this research were to document the transition experiences of children, families, and early childhood staff after the relocation and merging of two children’s services into one integrated service, to identify support strategies, and to identify areas of further support. Findings indicated that families expressed that they felt well supported and felt their children did well with the transition. Numerous support strategies were used by families and early childhood staff and these were viewed by families and staff as successful. Continuity of people, staff, children and families, as well as preparing children for the upcoming transition by talking to them and various orientation activities, were highlighted as being key factors in the success of the transition. These findings correspond to those of previous research indicating that relationships, which involve continuity and regular communication about changes, are important (Perry et al., 2006). Also, the use of social stories was viewed as a useful strategy to assist children to prepare for the transition. This method of support could be used for children without diverse learning needs as well (Sansosti al., 2004).

Challenges identified by families were largely focused on the physical aspects of the new building. Different features and processes in the physical building, such as the use of card swipe doors, seemed to be most disruptive. Although there will be ‘teething problems’ involved in any transition, this finding highlights the need to adequately prepare the new physical space and to inform staff and families of new procedures ahead of time. Accessibility and inclusive design are important for all children, families, and staff. Design and security features should be sufficient for the space, but equally important are values of belonging and inclusion. Features like electronic locking doors, door release buttons, and accessible toilets should be thoughtfully placed to allow for safe and convenient operations. Families want their children to be safe, but also require open, convenient access which demonstrates a sense of belonging.

Although families and children generally had positive experiences of the transition, some staff felt the transition was emotionally challenging. In this case, more preparation was needed in supporting staff through such changes. There is a need for future research about early childhood staff experiences during transitions in their work setting, as there is little empirical research on this topic. Although there are transition guidelines in place that can be used and adjusted for those experiencing different transitions (Perry et al., 2006), more emphasis should be placed on supporting early childhood staff though workplace transitions. Previous research has identified that adequate resources are essential for having a prepared staff ready to lead children and families into new learning environments (NCETI, 2008; Press et al., 2010). Although it is important to allow opportunities to mourn the loss of old familiar places and practices, it is equally important to focus on the benefits afforded by new environments. Although the transition process may be challenging and highlight loss experiences, over time staff may be able to develop new attachments, gain new knowledge and skills which accommodate the needs of children and families (Silin, 2011).

In relation to the Directors’ experiences of the process of integrating services, there was an overall positive and hopeful attitude about the process and about the benefits that such an integrated service could bring to children, families and staff. However, a lack of strong senior leadership in the months prior to the transition, policy, and support from powerful stakeholders were identified as barriers. These findings support previous research showing that proactive planning and preparation for the integration of services helps to make the transition more successful (Press et al., 2010; Prichard, Purdon & Chaplyn, 2010; Tytler, 2011). Also, there is a need for strong leadership in order for the integration to be sustainable (Press at al., 2010; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Special focus must be targeted to the entire organisational structure of the transitioning organisation. The present research highlights the importance of actively engaging key stakeholders involved in the policy development and applied practical levels within the organisation or collaborating organisations. Successful implementation of integrated early childhood education services calls for policies to be guided by values, which can be adopted and implemented by day-to-day practitioners. Such dynamic changes in operations, philosophy, and vision call for improved infrastructure and resources to support staff in developing protocols with routine evaluations also a fundamental requirement (Press et al., 2010; Prichard et al., 2010; Tytler, 2011). High-level leadership and measurable support throughout the transition process is needed. More research is also needed as the trend toward community-focused, integrated early childhood services continues. Services planning to expand operations from previously independent organisations to integrated services should take special consideration to provide opportunities for families and staff from each organisation to network...
and build relationships before moving to new facilities and making significant changes to practices. Healthy working relationships are critical to successful service integration, and this should be reflected throughout the planning stages.

There are several limitations of this study. The qualitative nature of the study, and the fact that a small subsample of potential participants was used, does not allow for generalising to other settings, and may not reflect the views of all potential participants. However, this study does identify some areas for future research, and some considerations for other early childhood services going through similar transitions. Also, the present study examines the transition process retrospectively and fairly early on in the transition process. Longitudinal studies of the integration process are needed to gain a fuller understanding. Additionally, the children’s experiences of the transition were reported through the parents’ eyes. It is not known if parental perceptions accurately captured how children were actually feeling about the changes. However, due to the fact that many of the children were non-verbal, it was felt that parent perspectives would provide more information about the particular support strategies that were and were not effective. However, it must be acknowledged that even very young children are capable of sharing their experiences of transition (Einarsdottir, 2011) and future research should include their perspectives. Play has been identified as an important transitional mechanism for helping children engage in the process and to express their thoughts and feelings regarding the developmental impacts of transition during the early education period (Brostrom, 2005). In future efforts, play-based experiences can be built in by educators to encourage children’s contribution to evolving environments. Finally, we present a descriptive study about the experience of transitioning to an integrated service. Future studies should apply a more theoretical and analytical approach to examining the transition of early childhood organisational settings. Despite these limitations, this research highlights the need for more attention to be focused on the support of early childhood staff in workplace transitions. The findings also indicate that, during the process of early childhood service integration, careful planning, development of policy and the support and leadership of powerful stakeholders are needed in order to facilitate implementation. As the trend towards early childhood service integration continues in Australia and internationally, it will be essential to develop strategies to best support staff, children and families through this process.

References


The development of ECEC in Australia since the introduction of Child Care Act (1972)

The year 2012 marked the 40th Anniversary of the introduction of the Child Care Act (1972) (the Act), a watershed in the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Australia. Reflecting on this history is important for understanding and acknowledging ECEC’s historical lineage, and contributes to our understandings about the current context—why things are the way they are. It also enables us to appreciate that things could be otherwise, and to recognise that those situations we perceive as unjust can be changed.

Papers in this Themed edition of AJEC Online take the introduction of the Act as a major point in history and reflect on the development of ECEC in Australia since its introduction. Each paper is historically grounded, contemporary focused and forward thinking.

Three of the five papers in the themed edition focus on policy. From a Foucauldian history of the present approach (Foucault, 1977), Logan, Sumision and Press analyse the Act using Bacchi’s (2009) ‘What’s the problem presented to be?’ approach. They contend that the introduction of the Act represents a ‘critical juncture’ (Gal & Bargal, 2002) in the development of ECEC in Australia that bought quality to the fore as a key policy consideration. Beginning with a review of literature and commentary concerned with the introduction of the Act as a background for their analysis, Logan et al. go on to discuss the discursive effects of the Act for the development of the ECEC sector, for teachers, and for children. Through their analysis of the Act, Logan et al. demonstrate how discourses operate to construct quality both in the past and today.

Continuing the theme of quality—Fenech’s historical analysis renders visible the lack of parent involvement in the development of the early childhood sector since the introduction of the Act, and problematises this lack as detrimental to the provision of quality for all children. Fenech argues that dominant neo-liberal discourses—that privilege marketisation and construe parents as consumers rather than citizens—and discourses of maternalism—that place the responsibility for child care on mothers—have shaped the provision of ECEC as parents’ private concern, primarily related to their child, rather than as a public concern for all children. The effect of these discourses is the inequitable ECEC service system we have today. To strengthen and support advocacy for universal provision of quality ECEC, Fenech suggests that ECEC advocates forge alliances and work collaboratively with parents ‘to enhance parent’s capacity to drive demand-led quality improvements’.

Similarly concerned with the increasing marketisation of ECEC, Irvine and Farrell discuss the policy shifts that have occurred since the introduction of the Act. As these authors note, the Act marked the beginning of the Commonwealth Government’s involvement in the provision of ECEC. Irvine and Farrell argue that 20 years on from the introduction of the Act (1990s)—during a period of high policy activity and rapid expansion of ECEC services and the rise of New Public Management (Dempster, Freakley & Parry, 2001)—in western societies—another significant shift occurred in which ECEC policy moved to a market-driven approach. Irvine and Farrell examine five ‘transformational policy events’ taken during this period that led to the quasi-market, mixed service system we have today, and urge further critical examination of the influence of these policy and market contexts for the provision of ECEC.

Shifting away from policy, the final two papers in the themed edition provide personal accounts from oral history and biography to illustrate continuities and differences between past and contemporary constructs of ECEC. Against a backdrop of an historical overview of policies, theories and changing views of children in Australia, Theobald, Irvine and Cobb-Moore report on an analysis of oral history interviews from past staff and parents of Queensland’s Lady Gowrie Centre—one of several such services to be in established in Australia by the Commonwealth Government in the 1930s and 1940s. Snippets from the oral history interviews provide intimate, first-hand accounts of what it was like to work and attend this service from the 1970s onwards. Theobald et al.’s analysis of these interviews identifies similarities between the past and present that appear at first glance to transcend time—such as the view of the child as active participant, the centrality of play as pedagogy, the importance of relationships and connections with community—but the authors tease out important differences in how these concepts have changed over time. Theobald et al. challenge us to reflect on these varied meanings to consider what constitutes effective teaching and learning today.

Delving even more deeply into personalised accounts, the final paper in the themed edition is Whitehead and Kreig’s ‘Herstories’ which focuses in particular on the ways early childhood teachers are prepared to educate ‘other people’s children’ and their role in bringing about social reform and educational change. Juxtaposing first-and second-hand accounts of Majorie Hubbe’s time as an early childhood student teacher at the Adelaide Kindergarten Training College, in the early twentieth century, with an interview with ‘Joanne’ a recent early childhood university graduate, Whitehead and Krieg highlight differences and similarities.
between the two periods. In particular, they note the shifts from homogenous populations in early childhood teacher education programs (white, middle-class, exclusively female) to more heterogenous contemporary student populations that, they argue, were pre-empted by the reforms of the 1970s and the introduction of the Act. Whitehead and Kreig also draw our attention to the continuance of dominant ideas in ECEC (such as the focus on individualism) that tend to uphold inequities. They argue the need for teacher educators to work closely with student teachers to support them engage in critical inquiry, contest existing knowledge and interrogate and challenge issues of social inequality.

Brought together, these five papers in the Themed edition provide a rich historical account of the development of ECEC in Australia in the forty years since the introduction of the Act in 1972. Reflecting on this history, they illustrate connections and shifts between past and contemporary ECEC demonstrating that ‘everything that exists in the present has come out of the past, and no matter how new and unique it seems to be, it carries some of the past with it’ (Benjamin (2001, p. 2). These five historical papers make a valuable contribution to deepening our understanding of where Australian ECEC ‘came from’ and how it ‘got here’ and to helping us consider where it might go in the future.

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**References**


Introduction

This article illuminates the significance of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) in the development of Australian ECEC policy in two ways. First, we argue that it created a critical juncture in the development of Australian ECEC policy and second, that it established quality as a key policy consideration in ways that still resonate in contemporary policy. By critical juncture, we mean a particular period in which key factors coalesce to create a turning point in policy. Gal and Bargal (2002, p. 432) explain that critical junctures are periods ‘during which decisions taken not only reflect major digressions from previous policies but also have a lasting impact upon subsequent decisions and structures’. Informed by Foucault’s use of a history of the present, we present findings from an analysis of the Child Care Act 1972 that highlight dominant discourses and path-dependent processes as both enabling and constraining for quality in child care and the development of a national ECEC sector.

We commence with a brief explanation of the Child Care Act 1972 and the political context surrounding its introduction. Then, we review research and commentary about the Act before explaining the methodology and methods of data analysis used in our study. Drawing from a doctoral study that is investigating constructions of quality in Australian ECEC policy between 1972 and 2009, we then explain why we believe the period surrounding the Child Care Act 1972 constituted a critical juncture in ECEC policy. We conclude by highlighting dominant discourses and elements of path dependency that signify the Child Care Act as an important historical moment in establishing quality as a key policy consideration for Australian ECEC.

The Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth)

The Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) (the Act) was introduced by the McMahon Liberal-Country Party government at a time of political instability and social change. Shortly after the Act was enacted, the Liberal-Country Party government lost the Commonwealth election after 23 years in office. The incoming Whitlam Labor Party government (1972–1975) swept to power with promises of radical social and educational policy reform and undertook responsibility for the Act’s implementation.

The Act contained legislation for ‘the beginning of the Commonwealth government’s large-scale involvement’ in funding Australian child care (Brennan & Adamson, 2012, p. 257). Although the Act was introduced primarily to facilitate women’s workforce participation, its content reflected an understanding that government intervention was necessary to address the quality of child care. Since the legislation of the Act, child care has become an intrinsic...
part of the Australian social policy landscape, supporting women’s workforce participation and changing parents’ expectations regarding the availability of children’s care and education services. In the following section we review literature and commentary about the Act.

A review of research literature and commentary about the Act

A small corpus of literature has emerged in the 40 or so years since the Act came into operation. In reviewing that literature, we focus primarily on two interrelated lines of discussion: the significance of the Act, and tensions in discourses surrounding the Act.

Significance

As research literature and broader commentary about the Act identifies, it was significant in at least three key ways. First, it provided a legislative basis for Commonwealth intervention in child care (Wangmann, 1995). In doing so, it enabled the government to develop a national childcare system which provided access to government-subsidised child care for children from families of all income groups. The legislation moved the issue of child care from a private concern to a public concern and established a premise for publicly funded child care in Australia.

Second, the Act acknowledged that substantial Commonwealth Government intervention was required for the provision of high-quality child care (Brennan, 1998; Wangmann, 1995). Prior to the introduction of the Act in 1972, high-quality child care had either been unavailable or unaffordable for many Australian families (Brennan, 1998). The Act explicitly promoted factors contributing to quality, such as funding for the development of approved childcare facilities and encouraging the employment of staff with qualifications related to early childhood education and/ or health. While not without its limitations, the Act was progressive at a time when research about the factors contributing to, and the effects of, high-quality early childhood programs was only beginning to emerge.

Third, the Act provided an impetus for the growth of the early childhood profession through a rapid increase in the demand for qualified teachers and the provision of grants for ongoing research into child care. Historically, many kindergarten and nursery teachers had been educated at independent philanthropic colleges. From the mid-1970s onwards, early childhood teacher education programs moved from independent colleges to government-sponsored teacher education programs (Brennan, 1998); in other words, from the periphery of independent tertiary education colleges to mainstream teacher education programs. This move expanded the range of early childhood tertiary courses available and made it possible to study early childhood education from certificate to postgraduate level.

Although the Act was widely recognised as highly significant, its implementation was not without criticism, even by those who were broadly supportive of its intent. The implementation of the Act highlighted philosophical differences among childcare interest groups. Furthermore, critiques pointed to inadequate features of the Act.

Tensions and critiques

Although Commonwealth funds for child care were welcomed by early childhood professionals and feminist groups, much of the literature reviewed highlights the philosophical differences among professional organisations, feminist groups and community groups that were accentuated during the early roll-out of the Act. For example, feminist critics questioned the appropriateness of requiring preschool teacher qualifications, as specified in the Act, for childcare staff. In the late 1960s many preschool teachers, strongly influenced by the work of John Bowlby, opposed young children attending child care (Brennan, 1998). Not surprisingly, these views were considered unacceptable by feminist groups who regarded child care as appropriate for young children and necessary for women’s rights to undertake paid employment (Brennan, 1998). Feminist groups focused on lobbying government to increase the supply of childcare places while professional organisations, such as the Australian Pre-School Association (APA), emphasised the importance of the employment of qualified staff and advocated for funding to be directed to preschool education (Australian Pre-School Association, 1970). Competing emphases on the supply, quality and type of service provision, and contention concerning the relative merits of child care or preschool education, complicated the development of a national childcare system.

Critical commentators also argued the Act had several inadequacies. For example, a number of critics considered the Act contained features that did not encourage women’s workforce participation. Rigg (1972) explained that the income threshold for access to government-subsidised fees was so low it excluded many low-income families. These families were forced to pay either full childcare costs at government-subsidised centres or use costly commercial centres. Consequently, for many low-income families above the threshold, childcare costs led to a disincentive for women to work. Similarly, Spearitt (1979, p. 29) argued the Act did not support working parents with middle incomes because the stringent means test ‘virtually excluded those with both parents working’. Furthermore, critics commented on the limited capacity of the Act to provide a range of childcare options. For example, while the Act was considered a positive step towards providing publicly funded child care, it did not provide for other flexible childcare options because it restricted funding to non-profit, centre-based long day care (Brennan & Adamson, 2012).
Both the Act and the Whitlam era (1972–1975) have been identified as a ‘turning point’ in childcare politics (Brennan & Wales, 1982; Brennan & Adamson, 2012) which we assert can be described as a critical juncture that also encompasses an important historical moment in the emergence of quality in early childhood policy development. However, before we take up these assertions, we explain the methodological understandings that shaped the first author’s analysis of the Child Care Act 1972. We highlight some challenges presented by this type of study. In particular, we discuss the dangers of presentism and ways we sought to guard against them.

Theoretical framework

Government policy documents are constituted by dominant discourses and heterogeneous path-dependent processes (Ball, 2008). This study is informed by Foucauldian notions of genealogy and a history of the present (Foucault, 1977). A genealogy presents a view of history that traces how discourses work in ways to produce conditions for the development of common understandings. The analysis of the Child Care Act reported here highlights the relationships that operate in converging discourses to shape constructions of quality in Australian ECEC in particular ways. In using the term discourse, we adopt MacLure’s explanation of discourse as ‘practices for producing meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions at particular historical times’ (2003, p. 175). We also draw on concepts of path dependency to suggest influences that reinforce the development of policies along specific policy paths (Myles & Pierson, 2001). Rather than delving into the complexities of path-dependent theory, we draw on Ball’s (2007, p. 6) explanation that policy ideas and events involve ‘a set of trends … which are critically mediated through new discourses and which are specific and path-dependent within particular political, cultural and accumulation histories.’ This explanation is relevant for discourse analyses as discourses have constitutive power that constrain decisions in policy-making processes and thus influence policy paths taken (Ball, 2007).

Historical analyses can provide new insights into present-day concerns but we caution against an inclination to judge the past on present-day knowledge. This inclination represents a dangerous projection that is commonly referred to as presentism (Castel, 1994). In order to guard against this danger, we adhered to three approaches. First, reading widely from policy documents and other historical accounts from the period prior to and after 1972 was crucial, as focusing on a single event can limit understandings of what preceded the event and what came after. Second, focusing closely on questions posed in our data analysis deepened our understandings about the role of policy and the contexts in which policy documents were written. For example, questions such as: ‘Why was there a focus on quality in terms of physical arrangements and qualified staff at the time [1972]?’ and ‘In what ways does policy enactment for the provision of quality reinforce some constructions of quality while other constructions are seemingly marginalised?’. Third, processes of researcher reflexivity encouraged repeated engagement with the data. As Brew (1998, p. 32) suggests these processes involve going ‘round the experiential research cycle progressively deepening our understanding’. By adhering to these principles we endeavoured to guard against bringing present-day concerns and assumptions to bear on the past.

In approaching the study as a history of the present, we have drawn on similar material to other historical accounts of Australian ECEC policy (see for example, Brennan, 1998; Ailwood, 2002; Wong, 2006) but focused our attention specifically on constructs of quality in child care. The study presents an account that is respectful of, and consistent with, existing accounts but uses different methodological tools than most previous accounts. In doing so, we do not imply that the concept of quality ECEC did not exist prior to 1972 but rather, that policies provide us with a medium to observe shifts in constructions of quality. We have looked back to understand how past ‘truths’ of quality in ECEC came to be represented in particular ways. This kind of study maps the conditions of power that shaped constructions of quality at particular times and the inconsistencies and disparities that exist within these multiple constructions.

Methods

‘Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended’ Ball (1994, p. 10). To understand the text of policy as well as its intent and enactment we drew upon key government documents and transcripts from selected in-depth interviews with policy elites for our analysis. The key documents referred to in this article are the House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech (Cwlth) and the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth); and transcripts from individual elite interviews undertaken as part of the doctoral study (Logan, in progress). These documents were selected from a broader corpus of policy documents examined for the study. The analysis reported here also draws on excerpts from transcripts of interviews with policy elites undertaken as part of the study. The policy elites were selected on the basis of their active involvement in policy-making circles and/or peak early childhood bodies from the time the Act was enacted. They include senior bureaucrats, academics and key professionals with specialised knowledge of policy-making processes (for further details, see Logan, Sumson & Press, in press). Pseudonyms are used throughout when referring to commentary from policy elites.
As we have argued elsewhere, ‘the complexity of policy histories calls for a range of methodologies and methods to enhance understandings of policy making processes’ (Logan, Sumison & Press, in press). Data analysis involved two methods. First, a thematic approach was used to identify common themes which represented ‘something important about the data in relation to the research question, and some level of patterned response or meaning within [the] data set’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Initially, sections of the text, that is, the House of Representatives Child Care Bill 1972 Second Reading Speech (Cwlth), (the Bill), and the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth), that mentioned the term ‘quality’, as well as concepts that had implicit connections to quality, were identified. These sections, whether sentences, phrases, or paragraphs, were read repeatedly to identify patterns related to quality. In the early phases, data analysis involved moving backwards and forwards across the data to generate a series of questions, considerations and preliminary codes. Multiple codes were clustered into common themes to represent repeated ideas. The ‘keyness’ of a theme was not reliant on quantifiable measures but determined according to its relationship to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis identified five main themes related to quality: Benefits for society, ideology, the early childhood profession, children, and the economy.

The second method involved applying a ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach (Bacchi, 2009). Central to Bacchi’s approach is the idea that policy problems are constructed through dominant discourses. The way policy problems are represented in discourses shapes particular understandings of quality in ECEC. By focusing on the underlying assumptions of how quality was represented within multiple texts, such as key government documents and transcripts of elite interviews, problem representations of quality in child care were examined. Bacchi’s approach, as taken up here, facilitates making connections between, across and within multiple texts where particular problem representations of quality in discourses can be mapped across and into policy texts.

Findings and discussion

In the following sections we argue that the Act was a path-breaking development, a critical juncture. The concept of critical junctures has been widely applied by scholars to examine turning points, often represented as crises, in institutional and policy change. Drawing loosely on the concept of critical junctures (see for example, Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Gal & Bargal, 2002; Hogan & Doyle, 2007; Scheiwe & Willekens, 2009), we identify three key ways in which the Act constituted a critical juncture.

The Act as a critical juncture

The Act can be considered a critical juncture in policy through the presence of three key elements. First, it was born in an intense period of political uncertainty in the lead-up to an electoral defeat; second, it was a ‘major digression’ from previous policy; and third, it had ‘lasting impact on subsequent decisions and structures’ (Gal & Bargal, 2002, p. 432) for Australian child care.

Critical junctures are characterised by ‘brief periods of momentous political, social or economic upheaval’ (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 349). In this instance, the Act was enacted during a short-lived period of rapid political, social and educational change in Australia’s history. Many factors contributed to this tumultuous period including an electoral defeat, a swing away from conservative values and the changing roles of women in society.

In addition, the Act represented a major digression from previous social policies. It established a precedent for extensive Commonwealth involvement in child care and changed the focus on child care from an individual responsibility to a community responsibility. Brennan (2002, p. 95) explains that between 1972 and 1975 [and subsequently 1983–96]:

Australia developed a world-class child care system more in keeping with the generous, public provision of social democracies such as Denmark, Sweden and France than with the virtual absence of national support exemplified by other liberal regimes such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

The Commonwealth’s intervention in childcare policy supported the principle that childcare services were best provided through direct government funding. This intervention reflected an understanding of child care as a societal obligation rather than a private responsibility and as such was a path-breaking policy turn. In steering this new policy path, the focus was on a national childcare system, supplanting the previous reliance on state-based policies related to welfare or education.

The Act had a lasting impact on decisions and structures for Australian child care by establishing a premise for the employment of qualified staff in child care and widespread publicly owned childcare infrastructure as a benefit for society. Brennan (2002, p. 96) highlighted the lasting impact of the Act when referring to the 1980s and 1990s that ‘Australia’s child care system is characterised by extensive coverage, high-quality care, and relatively generous subsidies’ even though the strength of this system has deteriorated in recent times. A focus on the provision of public child care set in place the principle of community-based infrastructure for almost two decades between the 1970s and 1990s, while the employment of qualified staff in child care remains an underpinning principle in contemporary times.

Next, we highlight how quality, as represented in the Act, became a key consideration for Australian ECEC policy. In doing so, we identify discursive effects of dominant discourses and point to path-dependent processes
that have been and continue to be both enabling and constraining for the provision of quality in Australian ECEC policy.

The role of the Act in establishing quality as a key policy consideration

Government policies frame changes by shaping policy problems in particular ways (Bacchi, 2009). The Bill for the Act represented the limited number of childcare services at the time as lacking both the quantity and the quality required to support children’s development and women’s workforce participation. When introducing the Bill, Minister Lynch explained:

... the purpose of the scheme is to meet this existing problem—to help the children of working and other parents insofar as they are deprived of proper child care either because good quality facilities are not available or the cost is presently too high (p. 2289).

The problem of quality (or lack of) was to be resolved through attention to the physical environment (such as the building of new centres and the refurbishment of existing centres) and the employment of qualified staff:

Included in the concept good quality are both the physical arrangements and the professional staffing ... (p. 2288).

The Bill’s emphasis on the physical environment and professional staffing as important contributing factors to quality continues to resonate in contemporary ECEC policy. For example, the National Quality Framework (NQF), introduced as part of the Rudd and subsequently Gillard Government (2007–13) reforms, introduced nationally consistent approaches for Australian ECEC. The NQF includes a National Quality Standard (NQS) that is comprised of seven quality areas. Of these seven areas, two maintain an enduring similarity with the Act: the physical environment and staffing arrangements (DEEWR, 2012).

Discursive effects

In framing the problem of quality through the provision of physical arrangements and professional staffing, policies were shaped in particular ways through discourses. As we have previously noted, discourses are systems for producing meaning. Discourses convey language, values, practices and means for thinking about the world that shape policies through problem representations (MacLure, 2003). In turn, the way problems are represented in policy gives rise to discursive effects. Discursive effects are evident in policy when problem representations open up possibilities for some groups but close off options for others, leading to less favourable consequences for some groups or individuals (Bacchi, 2009). Consequently, discursive effects can narrow the possibilities for thinking differently about policy problems. We discuss three ways in which discursive effects of problem representations of quality are manifested in discourses of care and education: for the early childhood sector, teachers and children. We conclude our discussion by pointing to path-dependent processes evident within these discourses.

Discursive effects for the early childhood sector

Discourses of care and education are shaped by a heterogeneous array of factors, including problem representations and slippages between policy intent and enactment (Ball, 2008). The early roll-out of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) led to a polarising effect within the early childhood sector as discourses of care and education and policy slippages worked in ways that privileged the development of some early childhood services while simultaneously constraining others.

In the years shortly after the legislation of the Act, responsibility for its implementation moved from the Department of Labour and National Services to the Education portfolio (Pincus & Shipley, 1976). While education officials had responsibility for the implementation of the Act, many officials had little knowledge of child care or the differences between preschool and childcare services (Brennan, 1998). Lack of knowledge possibly explains why funds intended to develop childcare facilities were used initially to bolster state-based preschool systems.

Former prime minister Fraser (1975–83) explained that during the first three years after the commencement of the Act, ‘75 per cent of Commonwealth expenditure on children’s services went to preschools in the States’ (Coleman, 1978, p. 15). The redirection of Commonwealth funding to support state preschool systems in the early roll-out of the Act was highlighted by Kerry, a former senior state education official. Kerry explained:

In Queensland the State Government picked it up [Commonwealth funding for child care] but on the condition that they could pump much of it into the State preschool system. It was interesting ... so Queensland became a bit of a back runner in terms of the expansion of community based child care during this period because it used much of the early flow of Commonwealth funding to bolster its State preschool system. Well ... it was a State Government initiative and it had been an election promise by the [State] Coalition Government ... this was in the Joh1 era as well. It was a case of, ‘Yes we’ll take Commonwealth money and yes we’ll use it the way we want to use it’ ... and preschool education is more important than child care to Queenslanders.

Discursive effects for teachers

Discourses of care and education reinforced a divide for teachers within the early childhood profession by positioning some teachers as primarily providing care and others as primarily providing education. Over time, lower numbers of qualified staff in childcare centres and poorer working conditions than that of teachers working in preschool have led to low professional status for teachers employed in child care (Purcal & Fisher, 2007). While funding to support the employment of qualified staff was a welcome policy move, proportionately fewer qualified teachers were employed in childcare centres than preschools and schools at the time of the Act’s introduction (Brennan, 2005).

Emma, an interview informant with extensive involvement in policy development for Australian child care, reflected on discourses of care and education that continue to position teachers employed in child care as having lower professional status compared to their preschool and school counterparts. As Emma noted:

... there’s still this huge thing that well, child care is really just child care and I just get more and more despondent about the bias that exists among young kindergarten teachers ... that child care is just child care ... I mean they wouldn’t say it in so many words but that’s really what they mean and I think in all the bureaucrats [bureaucratic circles] and the government there is all the rhetoric and policies about the importance of early childhood but it is like that’s over here [gestures to the left] and over here [gestures to the right] is an often not articulated notion that well, really it is just child care.

An intent of the Act was the provision of quality through the employment of qualified teachers. Yet, discourses of care and education that work in ways to devalue the work of teachers in child care have been attributed to low professional status and ongoing staff shortages (Sumison, 2005). Challenges associated with low professional status and the retention of qualified teachers in child care remain a constraint for the provision of quality and the development of a qualified early childhood workforce in the contemporary context (DEEWR, 2013).

Discursive effects for children

The Act emphasised the employment of qualified teachers primarily for children older than three years of age and nurses primarily for children younger than three years of age. When introducing the Bill for the Act, Minister Lynch explained:

Broadly speaking, these recurrent grants will be determined on the following basis. They will be based on a prescribed proportion of the salaries payable to qualified preschool teachers and nurses employed in centres—the two categories of professionally qualified staff regarded as necessary in centres providing good quality care ... Younger children under three years of age have other and more demanding needs. The basis of the recurrent grant in respect of staff is therefore different. The grant will be available for a qualified nurse employed in a centre for every ten such children or part thereof for which the centre has enrolments (p. 2290).

Discourses of care and education that group children’s needs according to their chronological age encourage thinking about children from a child development approach. Laura, a former senior academic and policy advisor, highlighted limitations for the provision of quality that focused primarily on child development with little reference to their family and community contexts. Laura pointed out:

... quality is very much contextually based ... and you can’t look at quality unless you actually put in the context of the family and the community ... and the early definitions of quality were only child centred. They looked at everything that was related to the development of children ... which ... was focussed on what actually happened in the child care centre.

A focus primarily on child development narrows ways in which it is possible for teachers to work with children (Cannella, 2002) and tends to overlook the fundamental role of family, culture and local contexts for children’s learning.

A distinction between the types of qualified staff available to children enabled some children to access qualified teachers but not others, namely children younger than three years. Emma highlighted how discourses of care and education constrain possibilities for the provision of quality for these children. She explained:

... I think that is a huge impediment to quality that you do not believe that you would provide the very best education from birth on ... that sort of belief that when it comes to under three year olds it just doesn’t matter as much [pause] keep them safe and healthy and think a bit about attachment but as far as education [it’s] not an issue.

Programs provided by qualified nurses were considered beneficial for children younger than three years. Yet, restricting access to qualified teachers to children over three years of age limited possibilities for thinking about specialised teaching programs for younger children. This limitation privileged children older than three years and overlooked the educational needs of children younger than three years.
The issue of limited access to qualified teachers for all children points to a legacy from the past that is played out in the present, as we elaborate below. We conceptualise this legacy as pointing to the presence of path-dependent processes where the past is not repeated in the present but is represented in related ways.

Path-dependent processes represented in discourses

As we have previously pointed out, discourses have constitutive power that shape policy paths in particular ways. A tendency for policy decisions to follow well-worn policy paths is influenced by previous political discourses (Scheiwe & Willekens, 2009). Path-dependent processes are evident in discourses of care and education.

To illustrate this point, we elaborate on the interconnectedness between discourses, policy slippages and path dependency. For example, limited access to qualified teachers for children younger than three years has been evident in Australian early childhood services for over a hundred years (Brennan, 1998). In the contemporary context, despite the substantial investment in ECEC by the Rudd and subsequently Gillard Labor Government (2007–2013), children younger than three years of age remain less likely than older children to access qualified teacher-led programs under the NQF (Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012). Furthermore, while the NQS claims to set a new ‘national benchmark’ for the quality of Australian ECEC (DEEWR, 2012), critical commentators point out the staffing arrangements ‘only modestly reflect research that led programs under the NQF (Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012). Furthermore, while the NQS claims to set a new ‘national benchmark’ for the quality of Australian ECEC (DEEWR, 2012), critical commentators point out the staffing arrangements ‘only modestly reflect research that clearly demonstrates the value added benefit of teacher qualifications to the provision of quality early childhood education and optimal developmental outcomes for children younger than three years has been evident in Australian early childhood services for over a hundred years (Brennan, 1998). In the contemporary context, despite the substantial investment in ECEC by the Rudd and subsequently Gillard Labor Government (2007–2013), children younger than three years of age remain less likely than older children to access qualified teacher-led programs under the NQF (Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012). Furthermore, while the NQS claims to set a new ‘national benchmark’ for the quality of Australian ECEC (DEEWR, 2012), critical commentators point out the staffing arrangements ‘only modestly reflect research that clearly demonstrates the value added benefit of teacher qualifications to the provision of quality early childhood education and optimal developmental outcomes for children younger than three years of age’ (Fenech et al., 2012, p. 7). Under the NQS, to be fully implemented in 2014, many children are likely to have only partial access to a qualified teacher during their attendance at ECEC services.

A tendency for policy actors to rely on existing institutional paths rather than create new paths in the early roll-out of the Act was highlighted by Joyce, a former senior Commonwealth bureaucrat who was active at the time of the Act’s commencement. Joyce stated:

Because of the speed with which [it] was necessary to spend money [from the Act] it was very much easier to pour the money, which the women’s groups had hoped would be for child care, out into the existing preschool system [pause] none [emphasis] of the state governments wanted to spend money on child care ... they’d bought the idea of expanding their preschool systems.

Kerry further highlighted policy slippage between senior Commonwealth education officials’ [mis]understandings of the Act’s intent and the tendency to direct funds to existing state-based preschool systems in Queensland. Kerry stated:

In the early to mid-70s the Commonwealth wasn’t differentiating that much between child care and preschool education or they weren’t going to stand on their digs anyway. So they were happy and the money flowed. Towards the 1980s the Commonwealth was starting to insist that more of its money go into child care but that was OK from the State Government’s point of view too because it had broken the back of its free State preschool system by then ... it had facilities in just about every school in the State. So it was happy enough to see Commonwealth funds going into child care at that stage ... There was a little bit of a community child care sector but provision was mainly private and a reason for that was the decision to direct much of the 1970s Commonwealth funding into the State preschool system.

Considered through Bacchi’s (2009) analytical lens, the dispersal of government funds was represented as a problem requiring an expedient and rapid solution. Decisions to direct Commonwealth funds to an existing system rather than create a new one points, in part, to a tendency toward incremental change and the presence of path-dependent processes. The effect of these decisions is exemplified here by the Queensland experience because centre-based child care has remained primarily provided by the private sector in Queensland (Productivity Commission, 2009).

In this section we have highlighted how discourses of care and education, evident through problem representations and path-dependent processes, constructed understandings of quality as identified by the Act, in discursive ways. The Act was extremely important as it acknowledged that quality in child care was a key policy consideration, best supported through direct government intervention. Furthermore, the Act supported the employment of qualified staff and the development of national, public childcare infrastructure.

Conclusion

Improving the quality of Australian ECEC has been a high priority of the Rudd and subsequently Gillard governments (2007–13). Our analysis of the Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth) contributes to understandings of how discourses operate to construct quality; not as a judgement but rather as a means to consider how constructions of quality from the past may influence and contribute to understandings of quality in the present. Moreover, our analysis highlights the complexity of policy development by pointing to the presence of path-dependent processes and how a series of events coalesced to create a critical juncture in Australian ECEC policy. We suggest that pivotal points in policy development for the construction of quality in Australian ECEC policy potentially represent other key historical moments worthy of further examination.
Legislation

Child Care Act 1972 (Cwlth).


References


Introduction

One of the most significant decisions faced by an increasing number of parents across Australia (DEEWR, 2012) is whether, where and when to enrol their children into formal child care. Parents who can demand, discern, and enrol their child in quality early childhood education (ECE) settings are in a powerful position to access significant benefits for themselves and their children. Research unequivocally shows that quality ECE stimulates brain development, improves children’s life outcomes, and enhances national productivity through increased workforce participation and social inclusion (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). These child, family, community and national benefits, however, are predicated on parents having access to and enrolling their child in ECE settings that are of high quality.

The purpose of this article is to stimulate discussion and debate on the potential for parents to drive demand for an equitable system of high-quality ECE in Australia. A review of ECE policy since the passing of the Child Care Act in 1972 (Brennan, 1998; Wong, 2006) shows that parents’ role in the development of the sector has been limited. This trend has continued since the 1970s, with parents seemingly contributing to the development and quality of individual centres more so than to the development of a quality system of ECE in Australia. In the absence of parent-driven demand for such a system, significant and longstanding barriers to the universal provision of high-quality ECE prevail. This paper suggests that three intersecting influences have collectively induced parents to think about ECE as a personal rather than a public concern. These influences are ECE policy as an ‘art of government’ (Foucault 1991[1978], p. 92); maternalist discourses that naturalise motherhood; and educators’ limited engagement with and enacting of systems advocacy. The paper discusses possibilities for educators to subvert these influences and develop activist collaborations with the goal of achieving universal provision of high-quality education for all children in Australia.

The increasing role of government in the development of the sector, yet sustained inequity

The provision of quality ECE first became a policy focus of an Australian government in 1972 through the passing of the Child Care Act. Through this Act the Australian Policy.
government made capital and recurrent funds available to not-for-profit long day care settings (Brennan, 1998). Significantly, the Act acknowledged teacher qualifications as a key contributor to the provision of quality ECE through its payment of early childhood teachers’ salaries (Cox, 2006). By funding teacher salaries the Child Care Act 1972 also represented, for the first time, an Australian government contributing directly to the quality of ECE settings.

Over the next two decades however, subsequent federal government policies reflected a shift in priority from quality to supply. These policies included the removal of operational subsidies to not-for-profit centres, the abolition of capital funding, the extension of fee relief to for-profit centres, and the introduction of parent subsidies (Brennan, 1998). These policies clearly positioned ECE as child care; a strategy to support women’s increased workforce participation. Renewed focus on ensuring quality in ‘child care’ came 20 years after the passing of the Child Care Act through a national quality improvement and accreditation system (NCAC, 1993). This system was introduced in response to concerns from community groups and peak bodies about quality standards in an increasing number of for-profit services (Brennan, 1998). The introduction of this system signified the beginning of what has become an entrenched policy approach where successive federal governments have sought to ensure quality ECE indirectly through regulation. This approach culminated in the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF) (ACECQA, 2011a) in 2012.

The NQF represents a national approach from all governments in Australia to raise quality in the sector through robust, nationally consistent regulations and standards. Through a new assessment and rating system—which entails the publishing of centres’ quality ratings against seven Quality Areas—the NQF is also designed to enable parents to make informed childcare decisions. Notions of consumer choice through ‘transparency and accountability’ (ACECQA, no date, para 9) are indicative of the neo-liberal, marketised approach Australian governments have adopted over the past three decades (Sumison, 2006). In this model of provisioning consumer choice is intended to drive quality, through demand. Regulatory frameworks such as the NQF are intended to guide and support consumers’ rational decision making.

Despite increased federal government involvement Australia still lacks an equitable system of quality ECE. Inequitable access to preschool education emerged as an issue in the 1960s (Brennan, 1998) and is still an issue today. In New South Wales, for example, children of middle-upper-class families are more likely to attend preschool than children from lower-class families, children with a disability, children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and children with limited English (Brennan, 2012). Inequities are also embedded in the NQF, with children’s access to an early childhood teacher being dependent on the state or territory in which they live and the number of places the centre they attend is licensed for (Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012). Affordability and availability of a place in any ECE setting, irrespective of the level of quality it is providing, continue to be significant barriers to equitable access (Brennan & Fenech, in press). While parents can access government subsidies, these are not available to parents whose children attend preschool/ kindergarten (Brennan & Fenech). It also remains to be seen whether centres rated as a Centre of Excellence or Exceeding the National Quality Standard are significantly more expensive than centres operating at the baseline standards, and thus less accessible to low-income families.

The role of parents in the development of the sector: Private interests over public concerns

The issues outlined in the previous section have emerged in spite of lobbying from political and community groups, but notably not parents. Brennan (1998) and Wong’s (2007) accounts of the development of ECE in Australia suggest that the role parents have played in the development of the sector—as current or potential ECEC users—has not been significant. Philanthropists, feminists (mostly childless), unions, ECE providers and peak bodies, educators, business, and even ‘political radicals’ have been highlighted for their contributions to the development of the sector (Brennan, 1998) but parents have not.

Indeed, since the implementation of the Child Care Act 1972, parent involvement appears to have been largely confined to the development of individual ECE centres rather than to the development of the ECE sector. Such parent involvement has been demonstrated in three ways. First is parents’ governance of community-based centres. As the not-for-profit community-based sector grew in the 1900s parents became involved in the managing of these centres. The need for parental governance, however, has declined since the late 1990s with the expansion of private, for-profit services. Recent figures show that approximately 26 per cent of long day care centres and 48 per cent of preschools today are community-based (Productivity Commission, 2011). Moreover, perceived onerous regulatory responsibilities for voluntary management committee members are leading to calls for cluster models of governance2 that will relieve parents of this responsibility (Brennan, 2012).

More commonly, parent involvement lies with the development of partnerships with educators to enhance the quality of education and care their child is receiving. Under the NQF (ACECQA, 2011b) educators are required to develop collaborative relationships with families. In quality settings therefore, parents are given meaningful opportunities to participate and contribute to the ECE setting in which their child is enrolled, and to provide information to educators about their child and family that can be used for curriculum development. In these ways, the parent-partnership is very much service, not sector, specific.

2 This model is already in operation in Victoria (Brennan, 2012).
Notably, the NQF does not require parents to rate the quality of the setting they are using. Providing formal ratings in the national system of accreditation that preceded the NQF (NCAC, 2005) was a third avenue of parental involvement. Under this quality assurance system centres were required to complete a self-study that included formal parent evaluations. This requirement was enforced from 2005 but ceased in 2009. According to the National Childcare Accreditation Council, the decision to disband parent surveys was made, in part, because parents tended to overestimate centre quality, thus rendering the surveys to be of limited value (Horin, 2009).

As noted earlier, these parental contributions have been largely confined to the development of individual ECE settings, rather than to the development of a system of high-quality ECE. In other words, parents appear to have had opportunities to ensure that the ECE for their child is of high quality. In contrast, parent involvement in ensuring that ECE is of high quality for all children appears limited. Given that ECE in Australia has been and continues to be hampered by longstanding inequities, I propose that parents’ prevailing focus on individual rather than public interests is problematic. This assertion is not intended to denigrate parents’ concerns for their own child’s early education, but comes from the view that, in the absence of universal high-quality ECE in Australia, current and potential parent users of ECE settings present as a relatively untapped lobby group. As a way forward, I propose that educators are well placed to build activist partnerships with parents that focus on developing a system of high-quality ECE in Australia.

To frame possibilities for how such partnerships might be developed I first outline three interconnected spheres of influence from social policy, from society, and from the sector that can be seen to have narrowed parents’ perspectives to private rather than public concerns pertaining to ECE. Accordingly, parents’ engagement with the provision of quality ECE has been largely confined to a focus on individual service quality rather than a system of high-quality ECE for all children. The first influence is ECE policy functioning as an ‘art of government’ (Foucault, 1991 [1978], p. 92) that manoeuvres parents into operating as consumers with private interests rather than citizens with public concerns. Second is the maternalist discourse that positions mothers as a young child’s best caregiver. Third is educators’ desire and capacity to practise as advocates and activists for an equitable system of quality ECE, and to partner with parents in this work.

1. **ECE policy as an ‘art of government’**

   Foucault conceptualised governmentality as ‘the art of government’ (Foucault, 1991 [1978], p. 92). The ‘art’ is a government’s construction of parameters within which its constituents can act. The constructed parameters are economically viable and serve to meet a government’s interests. Through these parameters, governments employ ‘multiform tactics’ (Foucault 1991 [1978], p. 95) to shape and align the interests of their constituents to their own. These tactics are subtle rather than explicitly coercive (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). A ‘manifestation of truth’ (Foucault, cited in Gordon, 1991, p. 8) becomes a central tactic, with governments propagating truth discourses to systematise and rationalise the exercising of political power for specific ends. Foucault’s (1980, p. 93) entwining of power/knowledge, encapsulated in the following quote, is key here:

   > In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse … We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.

   Successive Australian governments since the instituting of the Child Care Act 1972 have implemented ECE policies that have effectively established governmentalist parameters and discourses. On their own and melded together, these parameters and discourses have served to keep parents focused on ECE for their own child, rather than for all children. Additionally, and as will be seen in the examples below, the concern for ‘quality’ has been mitigated in some of the ways ECE has been constructed in policy.

   Parameters take the form of the ‘institutional architecture’ (Ben-Porath, 2010) established through government policy that defines and confines ECE options for parents (Marshall, 1996), and in turn shapes how parents think about ECE. That there is no and never has been universal entitlement to quality ECE in Australia—a stark contrast to the provision of primary education—is a significant frame that positions ECE as a private concern rather than a public good. Parents’ options are further influenced by architecture that has established long day care and preschool as two mediums through which ECE is to be provided. Within this frame, parents working full time and wanting to enrol their child in a formal ECE setting can explore long day care but not preschool options. Similarly, given that fee relief is only available for approved and registered ECE settings, that is, long day care but not preschool, the choices of parents on low incomes are mostly likely confined to long day care and not preschool.

   Both of these architectural designs reflect the longstanding construction of long day care as a means to enhance the country’s productivity through women’s increased workforce participation (Wong, 2007). Such a construction powerfully shifts understandings about ECE from early learning to ‘child care’. While ‘child care’ is a high-profile policy issue, public debate appears subsumed by affordability and accessibility issues. Australian research (Dalton & Wilson, 2009), for example, has shown that newspaper articles pertaining to child care overwhelmingly focus on market and cost issues, with little attention paid to quality.
Parents’ perceived need to advocate for a system of high-quality ECE is further diminished by policy that aims to ensure quality through regulation. Since the establishment of the national system of accreditation in 1993 (NCAC, 1993) to the recent introduction of the NQF (ACECQA, 2011a), parents have been assured that regulatory standards will ensure and improve the provision of quality ECE. In the new NQF assessment and rating system, parents will be able to check the quality rating their centre has received on a publicly available national register. The assumption here, however, is that all parents will have access to centres that are rated as operating to at least the National Quality Standard, and that this Standard is a robust reflection of quality contributors identified in research. A recent analysis of the NQF suggests that both assumptions are problematic (Fenech et al., 2012). Indeed, of the 1620 services that had been rated up to 31 March, 2013, nearly half (44 per cent) had been rated as Working Towards the National Quality Standard. It remains to be seen whether parents will seek ratings information from ACECQA and if so, whether there will be an ensuing demand to place their child in one of the centres rated as Exceeding the National Quality Standard, or a more collective demand for universal high-quality ECE.

The latter scenario seems unlikely given another policy influence that can be considered to have confined parents’ interest in ECE to a personal rather than public consideration: the marketisation of ECE (Sumsion, 2006). Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) argue that ‘the education market (like all markets) is intended to be driven by self-interest … the self-interest of parents, as consumers, choosing schools that will provide maximum advantage to their children’ (p. 2). This proposition assumes that parents can and do operate as responsible, autonomous, free, proactive, rational consumers of child care, that is, as economic rationalist policy purports consumers will act (King & Meagher, 2009). While this portrayal may apply to some parents (most likely with the capital required to source quality options) Cox’s observation that the marketisation of child care has diminished ‘demands for collective solutions to problems such as child care’ (Cox, 2006, p. 273) stems from the self-interest of a different kind of consumer. Cox contends that the burden of responsibility to find quality child care has desensitised parents’ desire to ‘form an angry lobby about childcare issues … [instead, they] accept the problems as personal albeit often devastating’ (p. 274). While the onus of choice is in the context of limited available, affordable, and high-quality options the current policy positioning of parents as informed consumers of child care has not generated and is unlikely to generate a powerful parent lobby that demands a quality system of ECE.

The maternalist and sectoral influences discussed in the following two sections further explain why this is the case.

2. Maternalism

Resistance to the growth of ECE (or ‘child care’) has prevailed since the origins of the sector in the late 1800s (Brennan, 1998). Much of this resistance has been grounded in a discourse of maternalism, notably, that it is in young children’s best interests to be at home with their mother, rather than in ‘child care’ (Allwood, 2008; Brennan, 1998; Wong, 2006). In maternalist discourses a mother is considered to be biologically wired to be the natural and best caregiver of her children (Allwood; Wong). Accordingly, societal expectations have been and arguably still are that mothers should fulfil their carer responsibilities, not their career aspirations. The influence of these societal expectations is evident in the feelings of anxiety and guilt mothers express when talking about their experiences of ‘leaving’ their child in formal child care. Drawing on Foucault’s theorising of discourse noted earlier in this paper it seems feasible to suggest that any ambivalence about using ‘child care’ would exacerbate a parent’s (mother’s) private agenda of securing quality child care while also perhaps mitigating a concern about a quality ECE system for all children.

It is important to note that this discourse of maternalism is fuelled by the ECE policies discussed in the previous section. The entrenched education (preschool/kindergarten)–care (long day care) dichotomy is of particular significance to working mothers who may view long day care as inferior to preschool but who have no option, due to the hours they work, to enrol their children in what they may perceive to be ‘child care’ and not a setting where learning and teaching takes place. Conversely, ECE policies are developed in part, from politicians’ ownership of these maternalist ideas (Bown, 2009). Challenging maternalism, therefore, may also serve to shift the values and agendas that underpin current ECE policy in ways that entice a more ‘public good’ view of ECE.

3. Educators’ perceptions about advocacy and the positioning of parents in this work

The role of educators as advocates for a universal system of high-quality ECE is a third influence on parents’ limited direct involvement in the development of the sector. Undertaking advocacy at a systems level (Waniganayake, Cheesesman, Fenech, Hadley & Shepherd, 2012) can be challenging for early childhood educators for a number of personal and contextual reasons, including: lack of time, lack of perceived experience, ambivalence about the exercise of power, sector fragmentation, and feelings of powerlessness and marginalisation (Macfarlane & Lewis, 2012; Mevawalla, 2009; Mevawalla & Hadley, 2012; Sumsion, 2006). When educators with whom parent users of ECE settings have relationships are reticent about advocacy, then it seems likely that the primary concern of these parents will be the level of quality those educators are providing their child, and not what is happening more broadly in the sector.

3 The quality ratings of long day care centres, preschools, and family day care were published. Data pertaining to the proportion of each service type included was not available.
Further, when educators do engage in advocacy work this is positioned in the literature as something that is to be done for parents, rather than with them. Early Childhood Australia’s Code of Ethics (2006), for example, states that ‘early childhood professionals have a strong history of advocating on behalf of (my emphasis) children and their families’ (p. 1). Educators are encouraged in the Code to continue advocating on issues that affect children and their families. Similarly, Sumson (2006) envisions that activist educators ‘would yield benefits … for (my emphasis) the families and children with whom they work’ (p. 4) and parents are not included as a possible group with whom educator-activists could forge alliances. The following and final section of this paper considers how such an alliance might be developed.

Transforming the parent–educator partnership paradigm to an activist collaboration

In light of early childhood advocates’ limited success in achieving universal, high-quality ECE, Sumson (2006) proposed that ‘we should consider shifting our priorities from advocacy to activism and from policy to politics’ (p. 3). A focus on activism and politics requires challenging established discourses and modes of operation, and working within new frames of reference to secure a more equitable distribution of power. This section considers what such a shift in priorities might entail for educators if parents are to emerge as a powerful lobby group for a quality system of ECE in Australia.

I suggest that fundamentally a new frame of reference necessitates a shift from the dominant discourse of parent educator partnerships discussed earlier in this paper, to an activist parent–educator collaboration driven by a vision for high-quality ECE for all children in Australia. Such a shift requires activist leadership not just from peak bodies and unions, but from educators in ECE settings, particularly those employed in leadership positions. Significantly, while a professional and ethical responsibility, advocacy and activism are not required elements of practice in the National Quality Standards’ Quality Area seven, which focuses on leadership and management (ACECQA, 2011b). This is a notable omission, with advocacy recognised by sector leaders as a hallmark of high quality ECE settings (Community Child Care Co-operative NSW, 2012). There remains an onus of responsibility on early childhood leaders to be intentional about working for a quality system of ECE (Waniganayake et al., 2012).

Findings from a recent small-scale Australian study (Fenech, Harrison & Sumson, 2011) suggest that leaders’ and educators’ advocacy and activism can powerfully impact parents’ understanding of the contributors to quality ECE and their involvement in advocacy and activism for a universal system of high-quality ECE. This study investigated the knowledge parents using high-quality settings had of contributors to quality ECE. Practising from a philosophy committed to children’s rights and social justice, staff at one case study centre became heavily involved in a state-wide 1:4 Make it Law campaign aimed at improving ratios for children under two years from 1:5 to 1:4 (for more details on this campaign see Bown, in press). This involvement entailed parent education about the importance of more robust ratios for young children, asking parents to sign petitions that were sent to relevant members of parliament, and inviting parents to an awareness-raising day and a public rally. Not only did parents participate in the campaign, but their exposure to the issue meant that, out of all six case study centres, parents from this centre demonstrated the strongest knowledge about staff: child ratios as a critical structural contributor to quality ECE. This finding highlights the value of forging activist collaborations that enable parents to broaden their focus from the ECE their own child receives to the ECE all children might receive. While just one example, it behoves the potential for early childhood leaders and educators to enhance parents’ capacity to drive demand-led quality improvements.

More broadly, the findings from this case study attest to the value of educators intentionally challenging the policy and societal parameters and discourses discussed earlier in this paper with current and potential parent-users. Wong (2007) has argued that ‘proponents of universal ECEC in Australia have to constantly struggle to construct ECEC in ways that engender public and government support’ (p. 144). This argument can be extended to parents who research shows, generally have limited understanding of the importance of the early years, the value of a quality ECE, and the contributors to a quality ECE setting (Atkinson, 2011; Cryer, Tietze & Wessels, 2002; Fenech et al., 2011; Mocan, 2007).

Finally, another strategy educators could utilise is to engage with and subvert maternalist discourses that leave parents—mothers in particular—reticent about leaving their child in ‘child care’. When developing relationships with parents, educators could give parents (mothers) opportunities to air feelings of guilt about not being a full-time stay-at-home mum, and address these feelings through promoting research that highlights the benefits of quality ECE for young children and which also articulates the value that a community approach to raising children has for families.

Conclusion

Prior and subsequent to the passing of the Child Care Act 1972 parents in Australia have never operated as a strong political force lobbying for a universal system of high-quality ECE. Political, social and sectoral influences have collectively diminished both the capacity of parents to agitate for an equitable system of high-quality ECE and perhaps more importantly, a parent consciousness that such agitation is needed. To redress the positioning of parents as consumers focused on securing high-quality ECE for their own child but much less so for all children, educators are well placed to intentionally cultivate activist collaborations with parent-users.
References


The rise of government in early childhood education and care following the Child Care Act 1972: The lasting legacy of the 1990s in setting the reform agenda for ECEC in Australia

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Introduction
Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a national and international priority (COAG, 2009; Irvine & Farrell, 2013; OECD, 2006). Its rise to prominence in Australia, since the inception of the Child Care Act 1972, bears the hallmarks of a global phenomenon. Its global profile is evident in the productivity and human capital agenda of ‘starting strong’ and the parallel agenda of investing in ECEC for the short-term and long-term benefits for children and society. At the brink of the twenty-first century, almost 30 years following the Act, educationist Colin Power (2000) flagged major shifts in education provision worldwide and cited globalisation as a significant phenomenon shaping government awareness of, responsibility for and involvement in education. This has been no less so than, in the ensuing years, in the field of ECEC. Australia, along with numerous developed countries, is now known for its adherence to managerialism and marketisation, an educational phenomenon described by Allan Luke (2005) as ‘an internationally rampant vision … based solely on systematic efficacy at the measurable technical production of human capital’ (p. 12). The current state-of-play in Australian ECEC invites historical reflection on the features of ECEC within its global and national contexts and the policy precursors that have impacted the field of ECEC. To commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Child Care Act, this paper provides an overview of the key contributions of the 1990s in setting the course for the reform agenda that was to ensue in ECEC.

The role of government in ECEC in Australia
Forty years on from the passage of the Child Care Act 1972, government continues to play a key role in determining the nature and level of provision of ECEC services in Australia. Despite moves towards a national approach to ECEC, and related streamlining of roles and responsibilities, both federal and state/territory governments continue to contribute funding, provide information and advice to parents and service providers and help to plan, set and maintain operating standards (SCRGSP, 2013). That is, both levels of government remain active players in setting, implementing, monitoring and enforcing ECEC public policy.

Against the current backcloth stands the decade 1990 to 2000, a decade of (at least) five transformational policy events: (a) the extension of parent fee subsidies to private for-profit childcare services; (b) a strengthened focus on quality standards; (c) the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG) proposal for a national framework for children’s services; (d) the Economic Planning Advisory Commission (EPAC) report on future childcare provision in Australia; and (e) the abolition of operational subsidy for community-based, not-for-profit childcare centres. It can
be argued that each of these events served to strengthen the ECEC quasi-market in Australia and that together they have had a significant and lasting impact on the funding and delivery of ECEC services to the present day.

While there were some earlier forays, including federal funding for the Lady Gowrie ‘demonstration’ child centres in 1939, commencement of the Child Care Act 1972 marked the beginning of a formal role for the Australian Government in planning, financing and setting operating standards for ECEC in Australia (cf. Brennan, 1998). The primary purpose of the new legislation was to provide a basis for funding the establishment and operation of childcare centres for working parents, given the increasing participation of women in the paid workforce. It was:

An Act to provide for assistance by the Commonwealth in respect of places where children all or the majority of whom are under school age may be cared for, in respect of the development of such places and in respect of research in connection with the care of children, and for related purposes (Child Care Act 1972, Notes).

Within this context, the Act set out eligibility criteria, funding processes (for capital grants, one-off equipment grants and recurrent funding based on child utilisation) and gave the minister of the time power to fund ‘research in child care and related purposes’ and to establish a ‘Child Care Standards Committee’ (Child Care Act 1972, s13–s14).

A distinguishing feature of the new legislative framework was the containment of funding for community-based ‘not-for-profit’ organisations (Brennan, 2007; Cox, 2007). At this time, eligible childcare centres included charitable organisations, local government authorities and a body corporate ‘not carried on for the purpose of profit or gain’ (Child Care Act 1972, s48). Two decades later, responding to increasing demand for work-related child care, the then Federal Labor Government amended the Act to allow access to some public funding for private for-profit childcare services. The face of ECEC in Australia had changed forever.

During the 1990s, the provision of accessible, affordable, quality child care emerged as a policy priority (Brennan, 1998), evidenced by the huge number of policy documents released during this period. With a clear focus on growing the national economy, and supporting labour force participation, the government of the day turned to market theory to expand childcare provision. Advocates argued that support for private services, and the creation of a mixed childcare market would lead to economic efficiencies, lower costs for government and families and increased competition which would, in turn, enhance parent (consumer) choice. However, many now question the longer-term impact of these policies, and the ensuing growth of the ECEC quasi-market (Cox, 2007; Press & Woodrow, 2005). In a recent reflection, Brennan (2013, cited in Maddison & Denniss, 2013) concludes that ‘the market model in child care has served Australian parents very poorly. Instead of greater diversity, lower costs and higher quality promised by market enthusiasts, families face escalating child care fees, greater uniformity, lower quality and less choice’ (p. 38).

This paper examines ECEC policy over this period of major change, with a particular focus on formal ‘child care’ services (i.e. childcare centres, family day care and outside school hours care). These were the services in receipt of government funding to support parent workforce participation and came to dominate the policy context. In keeping with the language at this time, the term ‘child care’1 is used from herein to refer to these services. Acknowledging ambiguity and inconsistency in use of the term policy, the term is used in this paper to refer to: ‘the actions and positions taken by the state … that share essential characteristics of authority and collectivity’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 4). Within this context, policy is deemed to be any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values and the allocation of resources. The focus here is public policy, in this case, policy which is made on behalf of the state to ‘steer the conduct’ (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 2), and, in some circumstances, to control (Ball, 2008) the activities of those involved in child care in Australia (e.g. children, parents, staff, sponsors, operators and related government agencies).

In this paper, we examine the emergence of the reform agenda and the language of reform that pervades the majority of Australian childcare public policy documents released from 1990 to 2000. Understanding policy to be more than text (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), this section reviews the broader policy context and examines a selection of Australian ECEC policy documents released over this period to reveal emergent and sustained policy themes. Particular attention is directed to the tactical use of language to frame policy and, thereby, to serve a political purpose (Ball, 2008). The paper concludes by reflecting on the longer-term impact of this period on ECEC in Australia.

New Public Management (NPM) and the rise of the ECEC market

From 1990 to 2000, the Australian childcare system changed dramatically. To meet expanding need precipitated by women’s increasing workforce participation, there was an unprecedented increase in work-related childcare places, significant expansion in private for-profit service provision, and greater emphasis on competition within a market context. Table 1 provides a snapshot of key Australian Government policies released over this period.

1 The term child care (or childcare) was used in Australian public policy from the commencement of the Child Care Act 1972 to the beginning of the new millennium to refer to regulated work-related child care (excluding funded preschool services). While still part of the policy text, there has been an increasing tendency to use the term ‘early childhood education and care (ECEC)’ promoted by the OECD (2006) to better reflect the integrated nature of care and education services prior to school entry.
### Table 1. Key Australian Government policies released 1990–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Australian (National*) Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Interim National Accreditation Council – recommendations for accreditation system, including linking of accreditation to receipt of parent fee subsidies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>National Childcare Accreditation Council established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>National Standards for Centre-based Long Day Care – minimum quality standards to be incorporated in state regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIaS) for long day care centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>National Standards for Family Day Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>National Standards for Outside School Hours Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Federal Budget 1996–97. Reforms to childcare funding, including end of operational subsidy for community-based centres, and new limits on hours for both work- &amp; non-work-related care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>National Childcare Access Hotline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>National Child Care Curriculum accredited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Commonwealth Childcare Advisory Council (CCCAC) established to advise Minister on priorities for reform and research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>National Policy Framework for Children’s Services in Australia failed to achieve national agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Review of the QIaS for long day care centres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Community Services and Health Training Package (including Children’s Services) accredited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Review of QIaS completed – recommendations for change endorsed by Minister. CCCAC to develop implementation plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Draft Quality Assurance System for FDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Introduction of Child Care Benefit – combined previous subsidies into one payment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Review of Funding and Charging Practices (CCCAC project) – no change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Review of child care regulatory system (CCCAC project)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Many of the identified Australian Government policies were national initiatives, jointly developed and/or implemented by federal, state and territory governments (e.g., Functional Review of Child Care, National New Growth Strategy, National Standards, COAG Working Group, National Policy Framework for Children’s Services in Australia).*
As can be seen, this was a period of high policy activity and related growth in the supply of child care. The first authoritative government report on government-funded ECEC services (SCRGSP, 1997) reported 306,600 childcare places (i.e. long day care, preschool, family day care, outside school hours care) at a cost of $980 million in 1995–96. By the end of the decade this had risen to 443,400 places at a cost of $1.35 billion (Department of Family and Community Services Annual Report, 2000–2001), and, more recently to 711,394 places and $6 billion in combined Commonwealth, state and territory funding (SCRGSP, 2013). However, these policies were also to have a lasting impact on the composition of the sector, signifying the beginning of our current mixed market, the rise of corporate child care, and, what many view as reduced choice for families (Brennan, 2013; Cox, 2007; Press & Woodrow, 2005).

Without doubt, one of the strongest and most influential forces during this period was the prevailing ideology of economic rationalism. In public administration, the application of this ideology was evidenced in the emergence of ‘new public management’ (NPDM) (Ball, 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), a phenomenon evident at this time internationally. Recognising differences across countries, Dempster, Freakley and Parry (2001) characterised the impact of NPDM on public sector activity as:

- a reduction in government’s role in public service provision
- the imposition of the strongest feasible framework of competition and accountability on public sector activity (and an increase in consumer control over service provision)
- explicit standards and measures of performance and clear definition of goals, targets or indicators of success, preferably in quantitative form
- a greater emphasis on output controls
- a reduction in the self-regulating powers of the professions (p. 2).

Changes such as these reflect a market theory of public service provision (Ball, 2008), based on the belief that the creation of a more competitive market place will provide particular benefits:

_Increased competition is meant to improve responsiveness, flexibility and rates of innovation; to increase the diversity of what is produced and can be market chosen; to enhance productive and/or allocative efficiency; to improve the volume and quality of production; and to strengthen accountability_ (Marginson, 1997, p. 5).

In the following section, we trace the influence of market theory discourse and the emergence of the childcare quasi-market during the 1990s in Australia, with a particular focus on centre-based child care where the impact of market theory was seen to be greatest (Press & Woodrow, 2005).

The term ‘quasi-market’ is borrowed from Marginson (1997), who distinguished between a ‘quasi-market’ and a ‘fully developed economic market’ (p. 6) on the basis of continuing government influence on matters of supply and demand (e.g. through policy, legislation and funding). Applying this distinction, we contend that public policy decisions taken during the 1990s led to the rise of the child care (now ECEC) quasi-market, and, ultimately, our current mixed-service system today.

We focus now on the five transformational policy events introduced earlier: (a) the extension of parent fee subsidies to private for-profit childcare services (1991); (b) a strengthened focus on quality standards (1991–94); (c) the Council of Australian Government’s (COAG) proposal for a national framework for children’s services (1995); (d) the Economic Planning Advisory Commission (EPAC) report on future childcare provision in Australia (1996); and (e) the abolition of operational subsidy for community-based, not-for-profit childcare centres (1996–97).

**The extension of fee relief to private for-profit childcare services**

The 1990s commenced with a clear focus on expansion in child care. Linking child care to economic policy, the then Australian Labor Government implemented the first National Child Care Strategy (1988–92), negotiating individual agreements with states and territories to establish new childcare places in identified areas of need. Funding comprised capital grants for construction and equipment, ongoing operational subsidies and access to parent fee subsidies. As per established policy, funding was available only to not-for-profit sponsors. It is, therefore, not surprising that, at this time, the majority of childcare services were provided by the community-based sector. Press (1999) suggested that community-based services were initially favoured by government because they offered parents a voice in how their children were educated and opportunity to be involved in service management. Moreover, as not-for-profit services, they were considered unlikely to be exploitative of children and families.

However, change was in the air. In 1990, fulfilling an election promise to make work-related child care more accessible and affordable, the Australian Government announced a fundamental shift in policy. This was in the form of the extension of parent fee subsidies to for-profit childcare services. During the second reading of the Community Services and Health Legislation Amendment Bill 1990, Peter Staples, then Minister for Aged, Family and Health Services, reflected on the Government’s primary objectives for child care—affordable care, equity of access and quality care—and offered the following explanation for this far-reaching policy change:

_The main challenges inevitably facing the Government in the 1990s in childcare are … to increase the supply of quality childcare places and to make sure that_
ordinary Australian families are able to afford care. The proposed amendments promote these objectives, and enable the introduction of fee relief arrangements that are equitable across the non-profit community based sector and commercial sector of the childcare industry (Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, 1990, p. 2342).

While presented as an equity measure, some commentators perceived links to broader economic reforms. Press (1999) argued this initiative was more about reducing public expenditure and direct government involvement in child care over the longer term. The follow-up national New Growth Strategy (1992–96), targeting child care in rural areas unlikely to attract private business investment, supported this interpretation. Cox (2007) also noted the impact of neoliberal strategies to support increased supply while reducing cost to government. This was to be achieved through a shift from supply-side funding (i.e. investment in new services) toward demand-side funding by providing fee assistance to families to enable them to choose the best service for their child. Whatever the original motivation(s), with strong encouragement for private sector investment, and no planning controls, the outcome was massive, unprecedented growth in for-profit child care. Leading growth in private for-profit child care at this time, the State of Queensland reported a two-fold increase in supply over the period 1990 to 1995, “with the number of places growing at approximately 20 per cent per year …[with] about 80 per cent of long day care centres … privately owned” (SCRGSP, 2007, p. 483). It is evident, therefore, that the move to fee-relief was a major innovation that, in combination with others such as national quality standards and quality assurance, was to change the landscape of ECEC in Australia.

A focus on accountability through increased quality standards and national quality assurance

As noted, the ideology of NPM and application of market theory to the provision of public services contributed to a strengthened government focus on quality and accountability. Reflecting on the tension between government and private roles and responsibilities in this new order, Ball (2008) put forward the idea of ‘controlled decontrol’ (p. 48), arguing that NPM was preoccupied with quality and accountability. Demonstrating this connection, the extension of public funds to private childcare businesses and related growth in private ‘for-profit’ service provision stimulated a renewed policy focus on setting and monitoring quality standards. Until this time, state and territory licensing regimes had set the quality floor for service provision, and government worked with community-based sponsors to support the provision of quality services for children and families. With the extension of public funding to private service providers, anticipated growth in service provision, and a growing body of research attesting to the importance of quality in child care (Wangmann, 1995), governments committed to a strengthened quality assurance framework. Regulatory reviews were undertaken by some states and territories, resulting in enhanced minimum quality standards. For example, in 1991, Queensland introduced a new separate Child Care Act and related regulations covering childcare centres and family day care, including new qualification requirements for staff, improved adult to child ratios, the requirement for a planned (educational) program and improved health and safety standards. Recognising variability in minimum quality standards across states and territories, ministers also committed to the development of National Child Care Standards, arguing that children should be entitled to the same level of quality in child care regardless of their family circumstances or where they lived in Australia. Following a lengthy and complex process of consultation and negotiation, national standards were endorsed for centre-based long day care services (1993), family day care (1996) and outside-school-hours care (1996). However, notwithstanding an earlier commitment to progress these through state and territory regulations, and introduction of a national quality assurance system that would build from these standards, the full implementation of national standards for child care remained unrealised.

Shifting the focus from minimum to higher quality standards, the federal government also announced the establishment of Australia’s first national quality-assurance framework for child care. In essence, this was a two-tiered framework. To operate, childcare services needed to meet regulatory requirements and be licensed. To gain access to parent fee subsidies, childcare centres also needed to participate in a new national Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). In 1993, the Australian Government established the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) as a statutory body, to oversee the development of higher quality standards and a national system of accreditation of childcare services. While clearly related to the rise of the childcare quasi-market, in particular, the need to safeguard the interests of children in child care and to strengthen accountability measures for services in receipt of public funding, quality assurance was also widely recognised to be an important mechanism for raising the quality of service provision (Wangmann, 1995). Setting Australia apart from other western nations who had ECEC quality assurance systems (e.g. the United States of America), the QIAS was fully funded by government and linked to the receipt of childcare fee subsidy (i.e. all funded services were required to participate).

The COAG review and a national framework for children’s services

As the number of services and related public expenditure on child care continued to increase, government, at national and state levels, initiated a series of reviews and inquiries into child care. The language of these policy documents provides further evidence of the growing influence of economic rationalism and NPM in Australian
social policy. Key words and phrases clearly signal the strengthening market agenda for child care, with sustained use of terminology such as [child care] ‘industry’, ‘level playing field’, ‘efficient and effective service provision’, ‘flexibility’, ‘responsiveness’ and ‘consumer choice’. The early activity of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) provides a prime example.

Established in 1992, COAG remains the primary intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Australian Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. In 1994, COAG commenced a review of government roles and responsibilities across a number of portfolios, including child care. Perceiving unnecessary overlaps and duplication in government, the task was to examine the potential allocation or reallocation of responsibilities to ‘produce more efficient and effective arrangements for the delivery of services’ (COAG Child Care Working Group, 1995, p. 7). In 1995, COAG released a Discussion paper on a proposed national framework for children’s services in Australia. The aim of the exercise was ‘to clarify roles and responsibilities with the overriding objective to improve outcomes for families and value for money for taxpayers and users of children’s services’ (COAG Child Care Working Group, 1995, p. 11).

Presenting children’s services as a ‘billion dollar industry’ (COAG, 1995, p. 11), COAG argued the need for systemic reform to meet the changing needs of families and to ensure ‘efficient and effective program delivery’ (p. 11). The notion of efficient and effective program delivery pervades the paper, and while not clearly defined, the proposed children’s services ‘program outcomes’ (p. 15) provided some indication of meaning. These included: ‘responsive service provision; consistent quality standards; effective targeting of places; convenient and equitable access for families; effective preschool programs; appropriate services provided efficiently at reasonable cost to users and governments; and effective administration of the system at the lowest possible cost’ (COAG Child Care Working Group, 1995, pp. 15–16). Despite intergovernmental beginnings, COAG’s vision was not to be realised, due to mid-stream governmental changes, at national and state levels, and, ultimately, the inability of states and territories to agree to reform components at this time.

The EPAC Report

In the wake of COAG, and clearly worried by spiralling expenditure in child care (approximately $1.2 billion in 1995–96), the newly elected Australian Liberal-National Government initiated yet another inquiry into child care. In June 1996, the Government asked the Economic Planning Advisory Commission (EPAC) to establish a Task Force to ‘investigate and report on the prospective demand for child care, best practice in the provision of child care and the links between the provision of child care and other children’s and family services’ (EPAC, 1996, p. 13). The decision to work through EPAC, and to rely on a Task Force whose membership reflected bureaucratic and business backgrounds and no early childhood ‘content expertise’, marked a first in Australian child care and received considerable criticism from within the sector.

The Task Force presented a lengthy list of recommendations for systemic reform, including the adoption of national objectives for child care and the redirection of funding from services to parents, via the introduction of ‘smart card’ technology. Key themes included a focus on family needs (as opposed to child needs), availability and affordability of services, equitable access to services, flexible service provision, quality and cost effectiveness.

Significantly, in spite of a change in government, many of the earlier COAG themes prevailed in the EPAC report. As in the COAG paper, the word ‘industry’ was used to describe child care, and the descriptors ‘efficient’ and ‘effective’ appeared throughout the final report. There was also growing emphasis on the role of ‘parent as consumer’ and the benefits of choice. Once again, observers perceived market theory at work (Cox, 2007; Press & Woodrow, 2005).

Put simply, direct funding to services would be replaced by direct funding to parents. Parents as consumers of child care would find their increased buying power gave them choice and markets would thus be provided with an incentive to respond to child care needs (Press, 1999, p. 22).

While firmly grounded in the philosophy of micro-economic reform, the EPAC report conceded the need for some continuing government involvement in child care (i.e. quasi-marketisation), albeit on the basis of promoting equitable and efficient outcomes.

End of operational subsidy for community-based childcare centres

The recommendations of the EPAC report were minimally implemented: the proposed objectives and principles were not endorsed and direct funding to parents did not proceed at that time. Nevertheless, within the context of a ‘responsible economic strategy’, prior to the release of the final EPAC report, the Coalition Government used the 1996–97 Budget to announce another major shift in childcare policy: the abolition of operational subsidy for community-based childcare centres. Policy rhetoric at this time spoke of the benefits of increased competition, the need for a ‘level playing field’ and parental choice:

2 The COAG paper used the broader term ‘children’s services’ to refer to childcare services plus linkages with state and territory preschool systems.
The promotion of reliance on the market place for the provision of services is accompanied by a belief that competition produces better quality services, therefore government subsidies should not provide one sector... with an unfair advantage over another ... Thus removal of such subsidies is required in order to create a level playing field (Press, 1999, p. 22).

Given the impact of economic rationalism, NPM and market theory on Australian child care over this period, it is impossible to dismiss the power of the policy discourse. Examining the effects of market discourse in education, a number of researchers argue that the use and acceptance of marketing language has been instrumental in bringing into effect a new and different era in education in Australia (Dempster et al., 2001; Marginson, 1997; Rizvi & Lingard, 2008).

Conclusion

Today, ensuring access to quality inclusive services for young children remains high on the national policy agenda. Since the 1990s, there has been a change in nomenclature, with a general shift in policy rhetoric, towards the use of the collective term ‘early childhood education and care (ECEC)’ (OECD, 2006) in place of child care. Use of this term is intended to promote and strengthen the educational context of these services and support moves towards a more integrated sector. This has been accompanied by a shift away from the use of some explicit market terminology in Australian ECEC policy, for example, the words ‘industry’ and ‘consumer’ do not appear in the National Early Childhood Development Strategy (COAG, 2009). However, reflecting on the past, it is argued that neo-liberal changes in ideological directions during the 1990s have left their mark on our current service system (Brennan, 2007; Cox, 2007). Australia, along with numerous developed countries, is now known for its adherence to corporatisation, competition and marketisation (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003). In this concluding section, we reflect on the legacy of the 1990s, exploring the impact of some of the identified policy events in shaping and defining our current system of ECEC services in Australia.

Faced with increasing demand for ECEC services to support family workforce participation, Australian governments of various persuasions embraced NPM principles in the 1990s and put into place a series of policies that were to change the composition of ECEC in Australia. The broadening of access to public funds for private, for-profit ECEC and later moves to strengthen competition and choice within the ECEC quasi-market achieved the policy objective of increasing the number of services available, primarily through growth in private, centre-based child care.

In line with market principles, a key policy objective at this time was to reduce the role of government in ECEC. Cox (2007) argued that the move from supply- to demand-side funding, (i.e. direct funding of community-based childcare centres to direct funding for parents using community-based or private childcare centres) ended the direct relationship between government and centres. However, while this is true within a funding context, it is contestable in terms of other government roles and responsibilities, in particular regulation and quality assurance. Having extended the availability of public funds to private businesses, the government needed to ensure the provision of safe, suitable child care and funding accountability. Reflecting NPM practices (Dempster et al., 2001), the change to funding eligibility was accompanied by a range of policy initiatives designed to better monitor and control quality inputs and outputs. While seeking to strengthen quality service provision and to promote a culture of continuous quality improvement, funding of the national Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) was also designed to address the problem of market failure in ECEC, in particular, the difficulty that parents may experience identifying and monitoring the quality of their ECEC service (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003). The application of a consumer rating system is testimony to this intent, a feature that has been retained in the National Quality Framework which superseded the QIAS.

Finally, the application of market theory to ECEC in the 1990s represented what Brennan (1997) described as a ‘fundamental transformation in the philosophy underlying the provision of children’s (ECEC) services in Australia’ (p. 205). More than simply expanding the provision of funding to a new group of stakeholders, the move from supply- to demand-side funding reflects a shift from collective to individual interest. That is, rather than fund the provision of quality services directly, government determined it to be more efficient to provide funding to parents as ‘consumers’ of child care and to let them be the arbiters of quality service provision. Supply-side funding remains the dominant approach to financing childcare provision, however, demand-side approaches are more likely to be used to finance preschool provision which continues to be largely provided by the state and/or for-profit community-based organisations. While this may be attributed to historical patterns of organisation (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2003), as Australia seeks to move toward a more integrated ECEC service system, such differences call for further examination of the policy and market contexts that predispose the sector to achieving optimal benefits for children, families and communities.

References


A snapshot of 40 years in early childhood education and care through oral histories

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THE YEAR 2012 MARKED 40 years since the introduction of the Child Care Act 1972 and the federal government introduced financial support for the provision of childcare services in Australia. Significant changes have occurred in social, political and theoretical contexts of early childhood education and care (ECEC) during this time. Bringing these to life, this paper investigates archival data of key changes in ECEC in association with oral histories of staff, parents and children associated with The Gowrie Qld during the years 1972–2012. With narrative analysis considered alongside historical information, two dominant issues emerge as integral to ECEC in the past, now and the future. These are: 1) what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the educational program; and 2) professional expectations in ECEC. Building an historical picture, this paper provides for critical reflection on the past to inform current and future practices.

Introduction

An increased commitment to the early years within social, political and educational reforms has occurred during the past 40 years. This paper investigates key changes in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in association with oral histories of staff, parents and children associated with The Gowrie Qld during this time. Oral history is the assemblage and study of stories of people’s reported experiences (Candida Smith, 2002). The stories are typically collected from interviews and conversations that are transcribed and analysed. This paper reports on a study in which Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) preservice teachers held informal interviews with past staff, parents and children as they attended a 70-year reunion celebration at The Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Brisbane. In line with oral history approaches, this paper draws on the recalled narratives of those who worked in or attended the early childhood programs during this time along with factual information of the social, political and theoretical contexts. Marrying oral histories with key factual information allows for first-hand understandings and rich description of dominant influences. Building an historical picture from recalled narratives and a review of archival data during the years 1972–2012, this paper provides for critical reflection on the past to inform current and future practices.

The context of the study

For over 70 years The Gowrie Qld has provided a range of early childhood services (e.g. child care, kindergarten, family day care), parenting education and child and family support. Over the period 1939–40, the Australian Government funded the establishment of a Lady Gowrie Child Centre in all state capitals to demonstrate excellent practice in the care and education of young children (Roberts, 1990). The Lady Gowrie centres mark the federal government’s first financial investment in ECEC in Australia. Building on the vision of Lady Zara Gowrie, wife of a former Australian governor-general, the centres represent an early model of integrated service provision (Irvine, 2008) and were designed to improve outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The centres maintained a strong focus on promoting children’s health, learning and wellbeing, but also worked to support parents in their parenting role to achieve and sustain the best outcomes for children. The Gowrie Qld, a not-for-profit community-based organisation, embraced this leadership role and soon became a main site for early education, parenting information and education and training early childhood teachers.

In order to investigate changes in ECEC over the past 40 years, this paper provides the historical background of ECEC within the period in question. First, international
and national social, political and theoretical reforms of the past 40 years are reviewed, making explicit the historical context for the recalled narratives. Second, oral histories of past staff, parents and children who worked at or attended the early childhood programs of The Gowrie Qld during the past 40 years are explored. Analysis of oral histories along with the review of literature identified four themes. These themes are: 1) changing ideas and challenges for educators; 2) image of children as confident and active in the educational program; 3) the sense of freedom to explore and play as key elements of the educational program; and 4) the importance of relationships and community. The last section of the paper draws on this historical information to consider current and emerging challenges for the field for ECEC in Australia. Thinking about these themes in relation to the context of ECEC today and the future, two main issues were identified, relating to 1) what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the educational program, and 2) professional expectations in ECEC.

Oral histories on their own provide the recalled views of participants. Recollections involve thoughts and feelings that may be seen as subjective and lacking rigor in historical research (McCullough & Richardson, 2000). Oral histories have more credibility, however, when linked to historical events based on fact. When oral histories are used alongside information regarding the social and educational time frame, a deep understanding of past events and experiences is gained (Gahan, 2005; Candida Smith, 2002). The next section presents a review of events influencing ECEC in Australia over the past 40 years in order to understand the historical context for the collected narratives of staff, parents and children.

Social, political and theoretical contexts of ECEC in the past 40 years

Significant changes have occurred in social, political and theoretical contexts of ECEC within the years in focus. The year 2012 marked 40 years since the federal government introduced financial support for the provision of childcare services in Australia. The new Child Care Act 1972 (Commonwealth of Australia, 1972) was introduced to provide a basis to fund the expansion of childcare centres in Australia. The policy intent was to support the increasing participation of women in the workforce, and to address social disadvantage through investment in not-for-profit community-based quality child care. Until this time, the provision of ECEC services had remained a philanthropic endeavour, with the single exception of the federally funded Lady Gowrie demonstration centres. Furthermore, community interest in preschool education had resulted in some state governments becoming involved in the provision of part-day preschool services. As Press and Hayes (2000) noted, however, these sessional programs largely failed to meet the needs of the growing number of working mothers. The Act responded to social change within Australian society, and the provision of child care was linked to women's rights, industry needs and improved national productivity. Seeking some balance in terms of needs and benefits, the new Act also emphasised the importance of providing good quality care to meet children's developmental needs and initially supported the employment of qualified teachers in these centres (Press & Hayes, 2000). However, over the next couple of decades, the focus on parent as primary consumer and child care to support workforce participation resulted in changes to childcare policy and funding. As demand for work-related child care grew, various federal governments sought to manage the spiraling cost of providing child care. A range of policy measures, most notably the introduction of parent fee subsidies for private childcare centres in the early nineties, led to significant growth in the provision of private for-profit child care and the beginning of Australia's mixed childcare market. Seeking to ensure the provision of safe and suitable child care, and accountability for public funding, this period also marked an increase in government regulation and quality assurance in ECEC.

An historical milestone and catalyst for the expansion of ECEC services in Australia, the Act, by its title and scope, served also to strengthen distinctions between care and education; distinctions that continued to be reinforced by separate policy, funding, quality assurance and administrative arrangements for child care and preschool education within government.

While the link between child care, workforce participation and economic productivity remains strong to this day, international interest in children's rights and a growing body of evidence promoting the importance of early life experiences and learning have also shaped ECEC in Australia. Internationally, interest in the early years and children's rights have been at play since the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989). Suggesting that the early years are a ‘critical period for realizing children’s rights’ (UN, 2005, p. 3), the United Nation’s General Comment No 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood called for early years organisations and programs to become more active in acknowledging and addressing children’s issues in policy making (Burr, 2004; Sidoti, 2005). Giving strength to this argument is longitudinal research promoting the immediate and ongoing positive effects of access to high-quality ECEC on children's health, learning, development and wellbeing (Heckman, 2013; Schweinhart, Barnes & Weikart, 1993) The promotion of quality education and care, prevention of risk factors and early intervention are increasingly emphasised within early years research (Boivin & Hertzman, 2012; Heckman, 2013).

Responding to this evidence, and prompted by comparative reports in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Thematic Review
of ECEC policy (OECD, 2001, 2006) that identified poor output and expenditure in ECEC by Australia, the Australian Government’s investment in the years before compulsory schooling has increased dramatically over the past decade. Situated within a human productivity agenda, the current National Early Childhood Reform Agenda is based on a dual discourse of starting strong and investing in the early years (Irvine & Farrell, 2013). This investment strategy is clearly articulated in the Council of Australian Governments’ Investing in the early years – a national early childhood development strategy (2009a). Key reforms include the achievement of universal preschool provision by 2013 and implementation of an integrated National Quality Framework (NQF) (COAG, 2009b) for ECEC and school-aged care that combines minimum legal standards (i.e. regulations) and higher quality standards to support continuous quality improvement.

The NQF introduces higher qualification requirements for some educators, improved adult to child ratios and has a strengthened focus on the educational program. Defining features of the NQF include coverage of all ECEC services (i.e. child care and preschool education) and the introduction of performance-based standards that support professional judgment and enable different ways of working in different community contexts. Seeking to strengthen early learning and to support successful transition to school, the NQF includes a learning framework for ECEC and a second framework for school age care. Principles, practices and outcomes supporting the education of young children are articulated in Australia’s first national early years curriculum: Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009). Implementation is now widespread, with ECEC services aligning their programs to outcomes that support the importance of relationships; emphasise children’s active engagement with learning; and recognise the influence of early experiences on children’s future participation in society (DEEWR, 2009). These social policy reforms have a focus on delivering quality ECEC, driven by comparative reports of the OECD (2001, 2006) and informed by shifting theoretical ideas in ECEC.

Changes are also evident in the theoretical ideas informing ECEC over the past 40 years. Throughout the 1970s a constructivist regime reigned in Australian ECEC with teaching beliefs adopting a child-centred approach. This approach maintained that education should be directed towards children’s interests, needs and developmental growth, as well as informed by an understanding of child development (Burman, 1994). The resulting pedagogy and curriculum was one from a developmental framework, in which appropriate developmental practice was given priority. As awareness of the influence of social factors on a child’s learning grew, a social-constructivist approach that drew on sociocultural theory came into play.

In the 1980s, early childhood education embraced understandings that took into account the social context for learning with the key idea being that learning is co-constructed. Most significantly, the work of Vygotsky (1978) has been taken up to construct pedagogic principles that accounted for sociocultural perspectives. With social interactions found to be such an influencing factor, other aspects that might affect children’s learning, such as the role of culture and the participation of members, were considered.

Major shifts in thinking about children have also taken place outside of education since the late 1980s and early 1990s as post-modern and sociological paradigms emerged. In these understandings, perspectives from reconceptualising early childhood education, post-structuralism and the sociology of childhood were proposed as new lenses through which to view ECEC. Key ideas in post-modern frameworks tease out nuances of identity regarding power, culture and gender (MacNaughton, 2004). The sociology of childhood perspectives focus on the view of childhood, not as a predetermined stage in life in which children develop according to a set life trajectory, but rather a view of childhood as a social construction (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998).

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education has had widespread attention in Australian ECEC. This approach fosters pedagogy of negotiated learning with components ‘design, documentation and discourse’ (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). It also involves recognition of the physical environment and its ability to support social relationships (Rinaldi, 2006). While these perspectives are not yet considered as major informants to ECEC pedagogy and curriculum in Australia, increasing shifts and widening of theoretical underpinnings have led to a review of children’s social status. Collectively, a focus on interrogating taken-for-granted understandings of power, gender, culture, class and disability has surfaced in ECEC. Today, attention to diversity and inclusive practice is key to political, theoretical and pedagogical positions in ECEC.

National educational reforms in this time frame have occurred within a backdrop of a global financial crisis and increasing demand on educators for the children and families in their care. This section has provided an historical context for the collection of oral histories regarding the past four decades.

The study

Preservice teachers were invited to collect oral histories of past staff, parents and children attending The Gowrie’s 70th Reunion Celebration. This opportunity provided practical links of academic learning with ‘real world’ experiences for those preservice teachers enrolled in a foundational historical unit at QUT.
The project required preservice teachers, as novice researchers, to conduct a brief interview with reunion participants to elicit memories of their time spent at The Gowrie. The interviews were conducted informally during the event and captured by audio-recording. The preservice teachers’ and reunion attendees’ participation in the project was voluntary and not related to assessment requirements at QUT and ethical approval was gained. In preparation for the interviewing process, the preservice teachers were provided with an introduction to interviewing techniques and a series of prompts to guide the interview process. These included: Tell me about your experiences at The Gowrie. When and why did you first come to The Gowrie? What are your fondest memories of being at The Gowrie? Any lessons we can learn from our past?

The reunion event took place at the original Lady Gowrie Love Street Child Centre, Brisbane. The study participants included nine Gowrie staff members, three parents, and three past children, who were interviewed by nine preservice teachers. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed. Information and consent forms informed the participants that the aural records gathered would be used in a publication.

The oral histories were produced in a favourable context, as the participants reminisced about their time at The Gowrie with friends and colleagues. Reunion attendees understood the interviewers as ‘novices’, not only to interviewing but also, as first year preservice teachers, new to The Gowrie and early childhood education in general. A sample of the oral histories that related specifically to the past 40 years are analysed in this paper and the analytic process is now outlined.

Analysis

Narrative analysis supports the ‘historical interpretation’ of oral histories (Candida Smith, 2002). While narratives collected from oral histories are not factual reports, they can provide information and events otherwise not available (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Our analysis focused on the ‘what’ of the oral histories. In other words, the ‘told’ aspect was our focus, ‘rather than “how”, “to whom” or “for what purpose”‘ (Riessman, 2008, p. 54). We selected ‘brief, bounded segments’ (Riessman, 2008, p. 61) from oral histories and examined these in conjunction with historical and theoretical contexts. In other words, our prior knowledge of the social, political and theoretical aspects of the time frame complemented the themes that emerged from analysis.

Analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage of analysis examined the accounts of the past staff members, made up of teachers and some ancillary staff, which comprised the largest participant group. The first reading of the oral histories showed changing ideas and challenges for teachers emerge as the main focus theme.

In the second stage of analysis, the oral histories of the collective group of participants were examined and key themes identified. Three key themes emerged from this analysis: 1) the image of children as confident and active in the education program; 2) the sense of freedom to explore and play as key elements of the educational program; and 3) the importance of relationships and community. Subsequent readings in each stage of analysis searched the accounts chronologically within these themes and according to the decade in which the participants worked. At times, a changing focus and reflection dependent on the decade in context was apparent, while other themes transcended decades and participant type.

Stage 1: Analysis

Changing ideas and challenges for teachers were the focus of the accounts of the staff participants with two of the four decades in focus:

1970s

Account 1: We would write observations, we had something like a sociogram to capture the social interactions … we were asked to do running records, event sampling … and time sampling. We were really taught to respect the confidentiality of the records we made. The professionalism of the teachers and their sense of purpose and having a really clear identity about their work as teachers (preservice teacher 1, circa 1972).

This account suggests that the field as a whole held high the professionalism and integrity of early childhood staff at this time. This teacher associated with The Gowrie when the Child Care Act 1972 was introduced, commented on the professionalism of the teachers at The Gowrie. It was clear that the requirement for a teacher to keep records of children’s learning and development was a high priority.

This account was situated within the era named the ‘expansionary era’ in 1965–75 (Byrne, 1986). In 1971 training colleges for teacher education were included in the tertiary education field, continuing a strong focus on child study and development. This was significant as it enabled graduates of institutions such as the Brisbane Kindergarten Teachers College to gain credit toward a degree.

1980s

Accounts from the staff who worked in the 1980s hinted at longstanding tensions that have existed in ECEC literature regarding the role of the teacher—as educator or carer:

Account 2: We’re not just caring for children. We’re educating children (staff 4, circa 1985).

Account 3: Definitely back in the 80s your emergent curriculum and things wasn’t around yet. We were still planning in boxes (staff 1, circa 1972–1980s).
Two participants described an increasing focus on professionalism, reflective practice and the theoretical aspects of the curriculum (accounts 2 and 3). At this time, there was growing attention to the role of qualified teachers in promoting early learning, in part due to the influence of Vygotsky’s theories. In sociocultural approaches, teachers were seen as significant others, important in helping children to bridge the gap between what they knew and what they accomplish with assistance (Robbins, 2005).

Account 4: There wasn’t the focus on reflective practice – more about nice ladies looking after children than quality service provision ... focus on looking at what children were doing rather than the whole environment and adults interactions with children as having an impact (staff 4, circa 1985).

Nevertheless, as evidenced in this account, there remained differences in community views about the purpose and nature of ECEC, with some continuing to perceive early childhood teachers as just ‘nice ladies who loved children’ (Stonehouse, 1989, p. 61). In addition, as the staff member in account 4 suggested, the professionalism of teachers and commitment to reflective practice and ongoing learning has continued to increase with higher expectations of teacher to deliver quality programs.

Stage 2: Analysis

Analysis in Stage 2 was conducted across all participant groups. Three key themes: 1) the image of children as confident and active in the educational program; 2) the sense of freedom to explore and play as key elements of the educational program; and 3) the sense of community in The Gowrie centres were revealed.

Theme 1: Image of children as confident and active in the educational program

The first theme that emerged in the collective analysis was the image of children as confident and active in the educational program. Accounts discussed the practices and experiences that supported children as confident and active learners. A slightly different emphasis is evident according to each decade. When situated within the historical context of the time, these accounts provide historical understanding of the key ideas of that decade.

1980s

Account 5: We believed very much in the autonomy of the individual child. Children had access to puzzles and books and collage materials and without being told what to do, they used their own initiatives (staff 2, 1985).

Account 6: Everyone was an individual and they all have different needs that need to be addressed (parent 2, circa 1983).

Staff members were encouraged to help children to become increasingly responsible for their own learning as accounts 5 and 6 indicated. Such ideas resonate with contemporary early years curricula (DEEWR, 2009) that promote children as active investigators and problem solvers in their world. These views of staff member and parent provided an understanding of the time in the late 1980s where ideas regarding the competence of children were taking the fore. The recognition that each child was unique, with differing needs, was reflective of core practice during this time. Later, a dominant early years curriculum document Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) similarly endorsed recognition of children’s unique abilities and rights as integral to the development of a quality early childhood service.

1990s

The importance of providing children with opportunities to explore and actively engage with their learning environment continued to be a theme in quality ECEC, evidenced in the following comment from a past parent from the 90s:

Account 7: They were to explore, they were to create, and they were to work out their own strengths, limitations. Each child had their own unique abilities: they were allowed to develop them. We used to be able to borrow books from here ... massive numbers at a time ... it was an encouraging, supportive, let the child grow at the child's pace environment (parent 1, circa 1992).

This account demonstrated the continuing emphasis on children’s autonomy and right to learn at their own pace. Children’s independence and agency for their learning was also fostered. Theoretical influences emerging at the time were reflective of the understanding that children have influence over their social settings (James et al., 1998).

This account is evidence of alignments between past practices and philosophies and those endorsed within the current national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009), in particular the desire for children to have a strong sense of personal identity. Based on the reflections of past staff members and parents, it seems this was also a strong practice at The Gowrie during the 1990s. The emphasis here was on interacting with others in ways that display care and respect. As account 7 suggested, however, a shift is apparent as children are considered as part of a broader community of learners.

2000s

Account 8: The core focus of children first (staff 8, circa 2001).

There were few accounts collected from those who worked or attended the centre during the decade of the 2000s. The account presented here suggested a ‘child first’ approach. In the 1990s children’s interests and needs were central to all aspects of the program. This might suggest a fundamental shift in how adults are expected
to engage with children, possibly influenced by a ‘child rights’ discourse from the introduction of the rights of the child in 1989 (Burr, 2004; Sidoti, 2005).

Account 9 reflected on technological advancements within the last decade and a shift toward incorporating information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the classroom:

Account 9: Children are very aware of technology and often teach me new things (staff 8, circa 2001).

Over recent years, the educational program has been the subject of change with more focus on intentional teaching and also spontaneous moments. Today, the educational program is in the spotlight and a key area in the measure of quality in the early years (COAG, 2009b). Current curriculum frameworks for the early years encourage educators to provide children with a range of resources and different media, so that children begin to explore texts, numerals, symbols, including different technologies (DEEWR, 2009).

Theme 2: The sense of freedom to explore and play in the educational program

The second theme to emerge from stage 2 analysis was the sense of freedom to explore and play in the educational program. The oral histories provided an understanding of the sense of freedom to explore and play in the educational program at The Gowrie. This theme was emphasised regardless of the decade in which the participant attended The Gowrie.

Account 10: The openness of the room and the way that children could move from the indoor and the outdoor area outside under the trees (staff 1, circa 1972).

Account 11: You could play in the bamboo. You would hide in it. It was their little hidey spot, their little zone, their place to go and be themselves. Like you have these days in book corner and in their little quiet places. They had it out there. (staff 7, circa 1991).

The accounts remark upon the openness and freedom of the physical learning environment. The Gowrie in Love Street was described as a ‘paradise for children’ with the playground seen as ‘an extension of the playrooms where young children would spend most of their playtime out-of-doors’ (Roberts, 1990).

The staff interviewed indicated the importance placed on affording children opportunities to interact with different people, groups, resources and settings as well as finding places to ‘be themselves’ and ponder the world. The accounts provide a picture of the free-flowing and relaxed nature of the childcare setting, with a value placed on caring for others and enjoying the outdoors.

The next accounts highlighted the importance placed on children having risky experiences and meeting challenges:

Account 12: The outdoor experience, the freedom they had on the equipment – they didn’t have to be too careful, they didn’t have to be too neat. They were encouraged to be children, to explore all that that entailed, it was wonderful. Let the children be children ... let them play ... don’t mollycoddle them ... If they get a scratch in the day... then that’s childhood for heaven’s sake. Don’t wrap them up in cotton wool (parent 1, circa 1992).

Account 13: A big sand pit and it had – we used to make volcanoes out of milk cartons and put something in there and then you put colouring in it and it would explode (child 2, circa 1995).

Account 14: Children wanted to play, children learned through play and it was fun ... they played without even realising what they were learning (staff 6, 1996).

The importance of play as a vehicle for learning was recognised in these accounts by staff, parent and child. Each account suggested the provision of a range of activities, with particular emphasis on allowing children to investigate and experiment with different concepts. The focus here on play and active involvement also resonates with current learning frameworks that continue to suggest that educators provide experiences to foster children’s curiosity, confidence and persistence. The children were given opportunities to explore their abilities, meet challenges and to develop a sense of resilience.

These participant accounts reflected the historical context of the 1990s. At this time, play was viewed unquestionably as the main vehicle for children learning in the years before compulsory schooling and observed as a fundamental right of childhood (UN, 1989). Play was endorsed as ‘a primary vehicle for and indicator of mental growth’ in children and ‘an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice’ (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 3). Play, as a means for learning, has been increasingly under scrutiny, particularly in the early years of compulsory schooling.

Accounts from a staff member and parent from the late 1980s and 1990s, however, suggested that children in the past may have had certain freedoms that are now more restricted:

Account 15: You got to interact with the children. I think they were given more opportunities to come into the kitchen and speak, where nowadays you’re just sort of separate. (staff 5, circa 1996).

Account 16: They could climb as high as they liked. Then restrictions started to be put on how far they could climb (parent 1, 1992).

Changes in the playground due to safety regulations were noted in accounts 15 and 16. One staff member reflected on how in the past children were allowed greater freedom to move around the centre, and often visited the kitchen. Such comments draw our attention to the realisation that interactions, available to children in the past, may not be so readily available due to health and safety restrictions in ECEC today.
Theme 3: The importance of relationships and community

The third theme to emerge was the importance of relationships and community fostered by the The Gowrie. Comments evident in this theme highlighted the practices and approaches that helped children and parents to report on a sense of community. This theme was evident regardless of whether it was a staff, parent or child and crossed all decades.

Account 17: The staff were wonderful from the office right through to those in the kitchen ... it’s that – getting to know the families, getting to know the people that the staff are supporting and the little idiosyncratic bits of everybody ... everybody was just really great together. Parents were involved – we organised lots of bazaars ... we participated in these and everybody was a big family. My kids still know kids from when they were three. (parent 2, circa 1983).

Account 18: Expected rules of behaviour were – you will look out for other people, you will look after other people. You took care, you considered their feelings ... you shared, you picked up your own things, you helped to move things away (parent 1, circa 1992).

Account 19: Staff know what the children liked and didn't like and it seemed to be one big family. We need to respect children for them to begin to respect us (staff 6, circa 1996).

Account 20: We all kind of became close family and friends (child 2, circa 1995).

These participants all placed importance on positive learning experiences that fostered positive interactions. Relationships between children, parents and staff were considered paramount to building a sense of community and ultimately the quality of the early childhood program. This sense of community was one that continued as children grew and left The Gowrie. Such ideas continue to be valued today as learning frameworks informing ECEC emphasise a sense of belonging to different groups and communities (DEEWR, 2009).

This study aimed to explore changes in ECEC over the past 40 years and use this information to consider the challenges for the field in the years ahead. Narrative analysis of oral histories of past staff, parents and children provided a snapshot of the past 40 years in ECEC.

The first stage of analysis showed that the largest participant group, the teaching staff, focused on the changing role of teachers and teaching. The key themes from the second stage of analysis were 1) the image of children as confident and active in the educational program; 2) the sense of freedom to explore and play as key elements of the educational program; and 3) the importance of relationships and community. Although this study only collected a small sample of views of this time, analysis of the oral histories provided ‘connections ... among past, present, and future’ (Riessman, 2002, p. 702) and highlighted prevalent ideas and pivotal points where change has occurred in social, political and theoretical contexts in ECEC.

Discussion

The analysis presented above attended to ‘the broader contexts that shape the personal accounts’ (Riessman, 2008, p. 58). When the themes of analysis are considered alongside historical information, two dominant issues emerge as integral to ECEC in the past, now and the future. These are: 1) what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the educational program; and 2) professional expectations in ECEC.

The first issue, what constitutes effective teaching and learning in the educational program, continues to be a topic that attracts a range of views. In ECEC programs play remains a dominant medium for teaching and learning. Reflecting many of the values evident in the historical accounts of The Gowrie, the EYLF defines play-based learning as ‘a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 6). However, over the past 40 years, a subtle shift is evident, away from free play to play-based learning supported by the active engagement and intentional teaching of a qualified educator. Examining the role of educators in play-based learning is critical for play-based learning to continue to be valued and accepted in ECEC. Studies advocate that play is relevant for learning but requires high-quality teaching for it to have most benefit. For example, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study found that ‘rich talk’, i.e. talk that occurs through joint expression of ideas by educators and children leads to ‘sustained shared thinking’ (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2008, p. 5). When focused teaching is applied to scaffolded activities, children are more likely to engage in advanced play, self-regulation and higher order thinking (Basler, Winske & Reifel, 2011; Miller & Almon, 2009). These studies suggest that active engagement by educators and intentional teaching support play-based learning. However, the notions of intentional teaching and play do not always sit comfortably together for educators (Theobald & Kultti, 2012; Thomas, Warren & deVries, 2011).

The second issue identified for ECEC today relates to professional expectations. Analysis of the oral histories from The Gowrie study highlighted a focus on professional practice throughout this period, which was underpinned by a view of children as active and competent learners and the importance of building positive relationships with children and their families. It is interesting to note that these perspectives remain prevalent in contemporary quality standards and curricula. The NQF (COAG, 2009b) increases quality expectations in relation to the provision of ECEC.
and the professional practice of educators. Reflecting contemporary research, key quality determinants include a focus on children as active and competent learners as the basis for the educational program, the need to build trusting and respectful relationships with children and the importance of collaborative partnerships with families and communities. Scrutiny of professional practice in recent times means educators are expected to engage in critically reflective practice and ongoing learning and to develop a strong evidence base on which to make pedagogical decisions (Busch & Theobald, 2013). Critical reflection is viewed as a professional responsibility in which educators develop and employ ‘reflective practices that focus on implications for equity and social justice’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 45) and support quality educational programs that are inclusive of all children and families. The aspect of quality practice that seems to have most changed over this time is the opportunity to allow children freedom to explore and play, a trend that may be explained by an increased focus on risk management in the early years and related regulatory requirements.

Change and educational investment within the past 40 years have not occurred in a vacuum. As the analysis of oral histories and review of the key influences presented in this paper showed, ECEC is a result of the social, political and theoretical contexts in which it exists. Oral histories examined in this paper have provided critical reflection on the past to inform current and future practices in ECEC.

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References


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1 In this paper, the term ECEC is used to refer collectively to all formal education and care services for children birth to five years prior to entry to school (e.g. childcare centres, family day care). The term child care is used in its historical sense to refer to a subset of ECEC services, offering extended hours education and care to support parental workforce participation.


AS RECENTLY AS 2006, Lisa Delpit (2006 p. 28) argued that American education is grounded in ‘liberal middle class values and aspirations’, thereby maintaining the status quo and marginalising black, poor and minority group children, that is ‘other people’s children’. A similar situation occurs in Australia and from early childhood settings through to schools, white middle-class educators grapple with the dynamics of inequality in their work with other people’s children (Krieg, 2010; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). Likewise, teacher educators are implicated in these struggles as they prepare a future generation of early childhood professionals to work for social and educational change.

Thinking historically, the kindergarten movement was one sector that focused specifically on other people’s children, along with crèches and day nurseries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Beginning in New South Wales, the kindergarten movement spread across Australia with the formation of Kindergarten Unions (Brennan, 1994). Whereas crèches and day nurseries were usually staffed by nurses (Swain, 2004), Kindergarten Training Colleges were established to prepare young white middle-class women to educate other people’s children in kindergartens (Whitehead, 2008). This situation continued until the 1970s when a slew of social and education policies, not the least of which was the Child Care Act of 1972, laid the groundwork for the expansion and integration of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in early childhood settings and in teacher education.

As suggested by the title, historical analysis involves a consideration of both personal and institutional histories. In this paper, the authors’ historical method involved accessing and analysing primary sources including archived letters, meeting notes, newspapers and curriculum documents in relation to Marjorie Hubbe’s life and teaching. Looking back and then forward, we explore the preparation of early childhood educators to work with ‘other people’s children’ (Delpit, 2006) both historically and in contemporary times. We describe Marjorie Hubbe’s studies at the Adelaide Kindergarten Training College from 1911–13 before exploring the raft of policy decisions in the 1970s which have led to the current integration of early childhood education and care in Australia. The impact of these changes is highlighted in our discussion of ‘Joanne’s’ preparation to teach other people’s children in the twenty-first century.
‘The child and his interests are the important things’

The late nineteenth century fields of child care and education were thoroughly fragmented in South Australia. The vast majority of young children were cared for within the family unit. The first crèche opened in Adelaide in 1887 but there was little further institutional provision to support working class mothers in paid employment (Swain, 2004). Compulsory schooling was introduced for seven- to 13-year-olds in 1875, along with the first teachers’ college. From 1892 children under five were excluded from the fledgling state school system but five- to seven-year-olds were encouraged to attend (Miller, 1986). Although a few kindergartens had been established for middle-class children in young ladies’ schools in the 1880s, the kindergarten movement dates from the formation of the Kindergarten Union of South Australia (KUSA) and the first free kindergarten in 1906. Lillian de Lissa was recruited from New South Wales to open the Franklin St Free Kindergarten and one year later she established the Adelaide Kindergarten Training College (Whitehead, 2008, 2010). ECEC and teacher education would remain divided along these lines for most of the twentieth century, and certainly during Marjorie Hubbe’s childhood and youth.

Marjorie was born in Adelaide in April 1893 to Edith and Samuel Hubbe. The Hubbes were an Anglo/German middle-class family. Samuel was killed in the Boer War in South Africa in 1900 (Miller & Butler, 2007). Edith had a well-established reputation as an educator, having been the second headmistress of the Advanced School of Girls in the early 1880s, and then opened a private girls’ school, Knightsbridge, in 1886. She was close friends with KUSA Secretary and feminist social reformer, Lucy Morice, as well as de Lissa, and served on the KTC Education Committee from 1910 (Miller & Butler, 2007; Trethewey, 2008). Marjorie’s childhood and youth were thus spent in a milieu of social and educational reform. Along with her older sisters, Marjorie was educated at Knightsbridge and qualified for admission to Adelaide University. With Morice and Edith’s encouragement, however, she chose the KTC (Miller & Butler, 2007).

When she enrolled in February 1911, Marjorie entered a deeply divided field of teacher education. The KTC had just secured its independence after protracted attempts to amalgamate it with the government teachers’ college (Whitehead, 2010). In the absence of government funding, well-to-do women were the only people who could afford the KTC’s tuition fees and like Marjorie, most had been educated in private schools, well away from other people’s children. Under de Lissa’s leadership and with Morice teaching history of education and urging them to ‘stay abreast of social and political developments affecting the welfare of women and children’ (Trethewey, 2008, p. 24), the KTC’s two-year program focused on the transformative potential of education for both young women and other people’s children. To say the least, Marjorie’s engagement with her studies was inconsistent and she was ambivalent about other people’s children (Series 47–1).

Under de Lissa’s leadership, the KTC program was underpinned by progressive liberal values. De Lissa aimed for the ‘all-round development’ (KUSA Annual Report, 1910–11, p. 10. hereafter Annual Report) of students, that is ‘an educated and reasoning mind, an understanding heart, with wisdom, not instinct alone and a hand that can do’ (Annual Report, 1906–07, p. 12). In the same way, Froebel focused on the mental, spiritual and physical development of children (Dowd, 1983). KTC students were offered a broad intellectual program; the liberal arts and professional studies were integrated, so that studies of English literature were combined with children’s literature and the skills of storytelling, for example (de Lissa, 1912, p. 125). Education studies included the philosophies of Froebel and Dewey, along with history, sociology and psychology of education, child study and program making (de Lissa, 1912, p. 125). De Lissa maintained that ‘theory is not divorced from action but runs along hand in hand with it’ (Annual Report, 1909–10, p. 9). Thus KTC students spent each morning in the free kindergartens ‘learning from the child himself. Individually she studies each child, and when she has gathered up some facts, the psychology classes are arranged to throw light upon the many problems’ (Annual Report, 1909–10, p. 9). The intimate relationship between the KTC and kindergartens enabled de Lissa to proclaim ‘there is nothing so ideal as the practical, and nothing so practical as the ideal’ (Annual Report, 1909–10, p. 10). Ultimately, the KTC students’ intellectual, social and practical experiences were intended to be transformative for de Lissa insisted that ‘teachers are not merely leaders of children but makers of society’ (Annual Report, 1908–09, p. 13).

There is no doubt that Marjorie engaged with and enjoyed many aspects of the KTC program. Perhaps the most telling evidence that she valued her teacher education program is the fact that she kept some of her exam papers (Series 47–9), planning sheets from Grey Ward Free Kindergarten (Series 47–8) and annual reports (Series 47–1; Series 47–8), and these were donated to Adelaide University after her death in 1993. Morice’s history of education was intellectually stimulating; Marjorie excelled in Art and struggled with ‘Peer Gynt’ which she read with de Lissa (Dowd, 1983). Aligning with Froebel, she declared that she was ‘not in favour of teaching a child to read and write at an early age, first because he ought to be exercising and gathering his own sense impressions instead of reading about other people’s, second, because the process of teaching him would conflict with his stage of development by making him passive and receptive instead of active and executive’ (Series 47–9). Returning to the KTC for a third year in 1913, Marjorie was introduced to Montessori’s philosophy to which she applied her well-honed capacity for critical analysis: ‘I think that the
child’s individuality should not be developed to the extent that it ignores all social obligations, and one of the weak places in Madame’s theory of education is that it does not sufficiently emphasise the social life of children’ (Series 47–9). Alas, Marjorie was not an overly conscientious student. In 1912, her annual report concluded with ‘Theory 80 per cent (this would have been much higher if there were no spaces against your name for work not handed in’) (Series 47–8).

Like most free kindergartens, Grey Ward operated three-hour sessions each morning in the poverty-stricken heart of Adelaide (Dowd, 1983). About 80 other people’s children were being educated by two KTC-trained teachers, Annie Burgess and Rachel Luxmore, along with Marjorie and other KTC students. Marjorie’s weekly plans (Series 47–8) show that each day commenced with morning talks and circle time, and then two periods separated by ‘lunch’. Learning was organised thematically across weeks, and included ‘Fathers work in the home and environment’ and ‘The life of Australian natives’. Froebelian gifts and occupations were emphasised, and gardening was integral to the children’s activities. Dewey’s influence was registered in the frequent excursions to cultural and industrial sites such as the Museum, Art Gallery, wood yard and baker’s. There were many follow-up activities which engaged the children’s interests and Marjorie soon learnt that ‘the children are all much more interested in making definite articles than just doing gift plays’. However, her pedagogical work was problematic. As far as ‘table work’ and ‘circle work’ were concerned, de Lissa noted that Marjorie tended to ‘give the children too many ideas and so confuse them, and you are apt to sail along on your own thought leaving them far behind’ (Series 47–8). Indeed she chastised Marjorie about her interactions with children on several occasions, but focused on Marjorie’s failure to accommodate children’s individualism rather than her liberal middle-class values. For example de Lissa wrote, ‘From an adult standpoint maybe a grocer is a prosaic plebian! But when you see him with the imagination of a child he becomes the most romantic and artistic individual ... the child and his interests are the important things’ (Series 47–1).

Marjorie’s weekly plans also include her reflections on the Grey Ward Free Kindergarten children. Of the whole group, she wrote, ‘the children are all most interesting, and seem much more brighter than the Bowden [Free Kindergarten] ones, but I am probably partial. They are much nicer looking than the Bowden ones, for which I am glad’ (Series 47–8). As far as individuals were concerned, Marjorie had great difficulty reconciling her experiences of other people’s children with her middle-class expectations of ‘normalcy’ (Delpit, 2006, p. 25). With no regard for their economic and social circumstances, she frequently named individuals as ‘irritable’, ‘preoccupied’, and often ‘nervous’ and ‘greedy’ rather than hungry. In an implied criticism of Charlie’s family she claimed that he had returned to kindergarten ‘a little spoilt since his illness’. Marjorie valued obedient children who had learnt their social obligations. Thus she commented, ‘Maisie seems much brighter and obeys me quicker than she did, and says “please” for some lunch’. Duncan and Herbie ‘helped very well’ and Laurie was ‘full of sterling virtues’. Marjorie also valued the active and inquiring child but struggled to enact her beliefs about children’s learning.

Henry Sykes has not helped much with his lips but I think that with George, Noel and Henry their talkativeness comes from their interest and excitement in the work. I have to go rather carefully in stopping them talking as that may diminish their interest and then they might become like Gladys Meadows. Gladys Meadows and Thelma are both very quiet and, so far, uninteresting children (Series 47–8).

After observing Marjorie on several occasions de Lissa concluded, ‘I think your application of theory is still poor. I think your child study must be superficial because you don’t seem to be able to determine what to give them from your store of knowledge which you would be able to do if you studied him more carefully and deeply’ (Series 47–8). In 1912 Marjorie’s annual mark for ‘Practice’ was 69 per cent (ibid).

It was not only that Marjorie did not come to terms with other people’s children but her relationships and work with other KTC students and teachers also concerned de Lissa. KTC students were incorporated into the KUSA community socially and politically as well as educationally, and encouraged to become active citizens, that is makers of society (Miller & Butler, 2007). From the outset, Marjorie was intimately connected to the movement by virtue of her mother’s position on the KTC Education Committee and the family’s friendship with de Lissa and Morice. According to de Lissa, Marjorie had high ideals, expansive interests and a generous nature, but ‘sometimes your impulsiveness spoils other people’s opportunities and has the effect of putting yourself over the other girls’ (Series 47–1). Furthermore, Marjorie repeated confidential information, thereby ‘causing many complications’ (ibid). De Lissa urged her ‘to develop a more sympathetic understanding for others’ and to work collaboratively ‘towards your greatest good’ (ibid). In the early twentieth century, there were limits to this collaboration in the field of early childhood education: There was no institutional cooperation between KUSA and the Education Department, the KTC and government teachers’ college, or between teachers in infant departments and free kindergartens. These divisions were evident in Marjorie and de Lissa’s personal and professional networks.

Notwithstanding the positional differences and disagreements during Marjorie’s three years at the KTC, she and de Lissa (and Edith and Morice) formed a lifelong friendship that transcended their contrasting life paths. De Lissa left Australia permanently in 1917 to become
the foundation Principal of Gipsy Hill Training College for nursery school teachers in London (Whitehead, 2008). Eschewing other people’s children, Marjorie conducted a private Montessori kindergarten in the family home from 1915–22, when she married Alfred Caw and moved to a farming community in Western Australia (Miller & Butler, 2007). Both were makers of society: De Lissa was a leader in the British nursery school movement and Marjorie led several women’s organisations in her local community into the 1960s, by which time the still-separate fields of early education and child care were on the cusp of significant change.

**Early childhood education as the key to a democratic society**

Writing to a South Australian friend in 1962, de Lissa reflected ‘I do remember my enthusiasm for education and my unquenchable confidence in the possibility inherent in it in bringing about a new social order of really mature men and women … I still believe that the education of the whole man is the only sound way of making for social wellbeing—slow as it inevitably is!’ (de Lissa to Finness, 1962). Her comment is prescient as, by the 1970s, economic, social and political factors conspired to produce a widespread commitment to education as the key to a more democratic society. These included the post-war economic boom, spectacular growth in birth rates and immigration, and the rejuvenation of labour and feminist movements, among others (Connell, 1993). In this context, the South Australian Labor Government commissioned the Vice-Chancellor of Flinders University, Peter Karmel, to examine ‘the whole education system of the State’, as well as teacher education (Karmel, 1971, p. viii). Acknowledging the ‘upsurge of interest in early education’, Karmel devoted a chapter to ‘Pre-School Education’, and included the KTC. He found enormous gaps in the provision of early education. Most children had no access to preschool. There were 129 kindergartens affiliated with KUSA and about 100 private kindergartens charging high fees and thus only open to wealthy families. He also noted that kindergartens were of limited assistance to working mothers with young children. Convinced of the value of preschool education, Karmel recommended a substantial increase in government funding, targeted especially towards new free kindergartens for other people’s children, namely working-class, migrant and Indigenous children. He also investigated teacher education. He found that the KTC offered a limited range of academic subjects and that KTC students came predominantly from well-to-do families, rather than reflecting the heterogeneous population of the state. He recommended that the KTC remain autonomous but cooperate more closely with the government teachers’ college. He also stated that the latter should cease to be the responsibility of the Education Department. In essence, Karmel set the scene for the expansion and reconfiguration of early childhood education and teacher education (Connell 1993; Miller, 1986).

Karmel’s brief did not include child care but he advocated the provision of pre-school programs in ‘full day child-minding centres used by working mothers’ (Karmel, 1971, p. 368). In so doing, he supported the intent of feminist and other groups that were lobbying for the extension of child care in South Australia and federally, and foreshadowed the integration of ECEC. Their lobbying provided the impetus federally for the 1972 *Child Care Act*, passed in the final days of the Liberal government (Brennan, 1994). The new Labor government led by Gough Whitlam implemented the legislation, thereby expanding the provision of childcare centres. Promoting ‘education as the key to the improvement of society’ (Connell, 1993, p. 259), Whitlam also commissioned Karmel to identify areas of greatest educational need (Miller, 1986). Karmel’s report largely replicated his South Australian findings and recommendations (Connell, 1993; Miller, 1986).

Under complex regimes of federal and state government provision, funding and regulation, early education and child care have gradually intertwined. Today, South Australia’s field of ECEC is much the same as other states and includes child care, preschool and the early years of school. Many changes in the ways these dimensions of early childhood education are staffed and regulated relate to the federal Labor Government’s reform agenda, instigated at their election in 2007. These reforms focus on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and child care. A *National Quality Framework* (NQF) now provides expectations at a national level across seven quality areas including the implementation of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009). Alongside the *Early Years Learning Framework*, educators working with children aged five to eight are mandated to use the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2009).

Concomitant changes are evident in teacher education. Teachers’ colleges were separated from state education departments and brought under federal control as Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) from 1973. The Adelaide KTC also became Kingston CAE in 1974; and with increased government funding began to diversify its curriculum and student population. In 1982 the CAEs in South Australia were drawn into a single organisation known as South Australian College of Advanced Education (Connell, 1993; Elliott, 2006). Then in 1991 three of the CAE campuses and the South Australian Institute of Technology amalgamated to form the University of South Australia. This means that the KTC is currently incorporated into the University of South Australia. Recognising the inseparability of early childhood education and care, several contemporary universities across Australia have developed dedicated early childhood degree programs to prepare teachers to work with children from birth to eight years, and in the full range of settings (Elliott, 2006, p. 37). Marjorie Hubbe’s equivalent, Joanne, graduated from one of the most recently established early childhood teacher education programs in South Australia.
Co-constructing knowledge in teacher education

In 2007, a second South Australian University established an early childhood teacher education program, namely the BA/BEd (Early Childhood). This double degree encompasses the birth–eight-year period and focuses on the transformative potential of education for student teachers such as Joanne and young children. From the outset, the intention was to develop a program that addressed the inequitable outcomes that exist in early childhood education, especially for other people’s children. This focus on social justice required a repositioning of young children in the learning process as active social participants. In order to achieve this outcome, student teachers needed to experience a reconceptualised university curriculum that positioned them as able to contribute to and contest knowledge rather than simply ‘receive’ it. This intent has points of connection with de Lissa’s positioning of KTC graduates as makers of society but there are also some significant differences between the historical and contemporary programs.

The 2007 degree contrasts with the KTC program in that it is framed within a social-constructionist paradigm that views knowledge as an evolving co-construct. Not as something ‘out there’ waiting to be transmitted to students. From this perspective, knowledge is inseparable from social practices which include speaking, reading, writing and interacting. Mason’s (2000) conception of the teacher as ‘mediator’ of knowledge encapsulates teacher educators’ work in the double-degree program. Mason argues that in a Vygotskian (1978) framework, teachers actively participate in the learning process as ‘intentional mediators’, leading learners to increasing complexity (p. 347). Teaching is intellectually and emotionally demanding work for it requires that teacher educators develop authentic, respectful relationships with the diverse students who are enrolled in the double-degree program. Thus another point of difference relates to the students.

Whereas Marjorie and all KTC students were middle-class white women from private schools, each cohort in the double degree reflects Karmel’s aim to diversify the ECEC workforce. The double-degree students continue to be predominantly white middle-class women and Joanne was among this group. Taking one cohort of 50 students as an example, however, 32 students had attended public schools while 10 attended private schools. About half of the cohort was the first in their family to attend a university; three were international students and there were a handful of men. This demographic profile aligns more closely to Australian society and bodes well for the education and care of other people’s children.

Alongside a more heterogeneous student population, the BA/BEd (Early Childhood) also provides opportunities for broad intellectual pursuits. Whereas the two-year KTC program integrated liberal and professional studies, current students select from a wide range of BA topics. For example, Joanne studied a major in English and a minor in Health Education. The latter strand includes a second-year topic ‘Crime, Deviance and Social Control: Introduction to Sociological Ideas’. Her colleagues are studying majors such as Philosophy, Women’s Studies, Australian Studies and Drama. Students’ liberal studies in the BA ensure that they encounter and engage deeply with multiple bodies of knowledge, thereby informing their work as makers of society.

In the BEd component of the double degree, Joanne played an active role in testing, contesting and generating new knowledge rather than ‘applying’ knowledge generated by others. Similarly to most teacher education programs, the BEd comprises Education Studies, Curriculum Studies and Professional Experience. Topics are framed within an inquiry-based paradigm drawing from Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999) metaphor of ‘inquiry-as-a-stance’ for reconceptualising the relationship between student teachers, teacher educators, practising early childhood teachers and educational knowledge (p. 288). From this stance, theory is used as a basis for testing and exploring classroom practice. In the ongoing process of learning about teaching from a ‘teacher as inquirer’ perspective, the potential to reduce some of the dilemmas in contemporary teacher education is realised. For example, both teacher educators and student teachers become contributors to new knowledge and change agents rather than replicators of the status quo in early childhood education. Approaching the task of ‘learning to teach’ from an inquiry perspective situates early childhood sites and universities, teachers, teacher educators and student teachers as players in Gibbons and colleagues’ (1994) Mode 2 knowledge production teams. Such teams are characterised by heterogeneity and they are generating knowledge that has immediate application to practices identified by a broad range of stakeholders.

Like Marjorie, Joanne engaged more deeply with some topics than others and this is reflected in her results. In the topic ‘Play, learning and development’, Joanne almost achieved distinction. This first-year is designed to challenge the dominance of developmental psychology. The descriptor states that the topic:...

... uses reflective processes to engage and extend students’ thinking about the relationship between learning and development. Through the inquiry based teaching and learning processes of the topic, students will be drawing from their experiences as learners in order to critically analyse current research and theoretical perspectives regarding the relationship between learning and development in the early childhood years. The topic enables students to develop the knowledge base necessary for engaging infants and young children in significant and challenging learning.
Joanne’s reflective comments demonstrate the extent to which the topic achieved its stated intent:

*As future educators it would be in the children’s best interest to take into account a broad spectrum of ideas. If for instance we were to only accept Piaget’s developmental stages, we are in danger of pigeon-holing, as Helen described in the tutorial a few weeks ago. Vygotsky was a lot more concerned with a child’s cognitive development growing through their interactions with adults and peers and the influence of culture, which I do think is more influential than Piaget realised.*

Whereas Marjorie drew on Montessori and Froebel, Joanne accessed more recent theorists, namely Piaget and Vygotsky, to frame her critical analysis of learning and development. However, both young women value the active and inquiring child and both are also concerned that children learn their social obligations. Joanne stated that:

*Interacting with peers is very beneficial for children because they can help each other form new understandings and can learn important tools for later in life such as sharing, compromising and so on. I would like to mention a really poignant statement from our second reading in Lally that ‘we are a child’s travelling companion in their search for meaning’ (Lally, Mangione & Greenwood, 2006). I think this statement beautifully describes the role that an adult should play in a child’s life. As teachers, parents, grandparents and so on, we have the opportunity to go on a journey with children scaffolding their learning where needed, taking a step back at times for a child to discover for themselves and to maintain a child’s enthusiasm to be inquisitive. By being their travelling companion, I believe we are able to watch a child grow through trial and error and guiding them in the right direction, while at the same time maybe learning a thing or two ourselves.*

De Lissa’s comments indicate that Marjorie experienced difficulty in scaffolding children’s learning in the hurly-burly of Grey Ward Free Kindergarten. Joanne’s reflections indicate that she developed a strong knowledge base with which to scaffold children’s learning during her professional experience.

A significant thread of continuity between Marjorie’s and Joanne’s teacher education experience is the concept of integrating theory and practice. This is enacted first through work integrated learning embedded within university topics in Joanne’s degree. Many of the topics rely on student participation in early childhood sites. This is somewhat similar to Marjorie’s situation at Grey Ward but Marjorie’s work was also essential to maintaining low staff student ratios and thus the success of the free kindergartens. Contemporary work-integrated learning does not use students as cheap labour but it relies on each student having a work ‘place’. Therefore, it demands new approaches to students’ university learning and high-level skill and negotiation with all stakeholders. An important aspect of establishing and developing the new degree involved working with a course reference group (the contemporary equivalent to the KTC Education Committee) to develop a partnership with the field that was underpinned by principles of inquiry and professional learning. The course reference group is indicative of the breadth and integration of contemporary ECEC. Stakeholders include representatives from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Catholic Education, childcare and preschool directors, and school principals with responsibility for the early years of school. Liaison with this group has not only fostered work-integrated learning but also facilitated the dedicated Professional Experience in each year of the degree. The contemporary practicum is far more complex organisationally than in Majorie’s era. The diversity of the contemporary early childhood field, together with state and national accreditation requirements, means that student teachers now require placements in child care, integrated children’s centres, preschools and the early years of school classrooms. Joanne’s professional experience reflected this complexity.

Joanne’s first placement was in a public school situated in an impoverished working-class suburb. The school incorporated a special Disability Unit and an early childhood program called ‘Learning Together’ which is also a learning program for adults with young children. In 2011 75 per cent of children at this school came from low-income families and about one-third were Aboriginal. As a white middle-class woman, Joanne was working with a much more diverse group of other people’s children than Marjorie. For all student teachers’ placements in Joanne’s degree, schools and centres nominate inquiry projects in which student teachers can participate: this means that they are seen as contributing to children’s learning rather than as a drain on staff time. Joanne’s first placement was focused on supporting children who were transitioning between the Disability Unit and the mainstream early childhood classrooms.

Similar to Marjorie’s situation, Joanne’s second placement was in a kindergarten with an enrolment of 50 preschool children, plus about 40 enrolments in an occasional care program. The DEECD website describes occasional care as ‘short term child care for babies, toddlers and children under school age’. The service is intended for other people’s children. It is explicitly stated that ‘Priority access to sessions of Occasional care is given to children not enrolled in another early childhood service, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children, children from low income families, with additional needs or at risk, and children of parents with a disability’. This preschool has a staff team of 12 that includes teachers, early childhood workers and preschool support workers who work with children with additional needs. Joanne worked with eight Aboriginal children and 23 children with English as a second language.
A small Catholic parish school was the site for Joanne’s final integration of theory and practice. Yet again Joanne became a ‘travelling companion’ for a variety of other people’s children. This school had an increasing enrolment of English as second language learners, some of whom were categorised as New Arrivals. Joanne spent a total of 35 days in a Year 1 class with six-year-old children and two mentors (classroom teachers), thereby completing all requirements for registration as an early childhood teacher and qualified to work across the birth–eight age range in child care, preschool and the early years of school.

Together, Joanne’s professional experiences exemplify the heterogeneity of contemporary Australian society. They also reflect the long-term outcomes of the Child Care Act 1972 and the Karmel reports. The latter highlighted the inequalities in Australian education and identified Indigenous, migrant, working class and children with disabilities as disadvantaged. Karmel proposed that these groups of other people’s children be provided with extra resources to facilitate their success in education and to bring about a more democratic society. Joanne’s professional experiences are indicative of the complex field which she has now entered as a graduate of the double-degree program and maker of society, and the ongoing challenges of social and educational change.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we have used an historical lens to juxtapose two student experiences, that of Marjorie in the early twentieth century with Joanne’s contemporary early childhood teacher education degree. In this process, many continuities have been evident alongside significant differences. Underpinning our comparison has been the concern for ‘other people’s children’ (Delpit, 2006). Our historical analysis leads us to conclude that the KTC’s liberal-progressive principles and focus on children as individuals did not necessarily challenge Marjorie to interrogate social difference and the dynamics of inequality. Likewise, one of the most profound implications for contemporary early childhood educators working within a normative, age-based and individualist developmental framework is the way this positions the early childhood educator in relation to educational reform. This positioning can be seen at the level of the day-to-day work of teaching, where other people’s children who do not ‘fit’ conceptions of ‘normality’ as described in child development discourses are seen to be deficit, labelled and ‘treated’ accordingly, thus aggregating the inequalities produced by race, class, and gender difference.

In summary, the imperative for reform is urgent. We share Ryan and Grieshaber’s (2005, p. 45) position that ‘we are no closer to achieving equity for all children than we were thirty years ago’, and that this situation demands a better understanding of the limits of the traditional early childhood knowledge base. Contemporary Australian early childhood teacher education demands approaches which support student teachers to understand how they are being positioned within the contemporary knowledge environment. This requires teacher educators to work alongside student teachers as mediators, mediating between the known and unknown in ways that use the analytic tools offered by postmodern perspectives to support inquiry and contestation of knowledge, rather than simply ‘applying’ the knowledge that has been developed by others. Analytic tools that will support the examination of the practices in early childhood from different perspectives and that ‘open up’ spaces for considering what could be different are of critical importance if Joanne is going to be able to effectively educate other people’s children in their earliest years.

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