Reflecting on the ECA National Conference

Our Australian summer is now scorching the country—dry, hot days in the south and flooding rains in the north. Dorothea Mackellar’s poem, *I love a sunburnt country*, reminds us of the beauty and challenges of our home nation. At ECA’s National Conference last year, keynote speaker Claire Warden affirmed our relationship with the natural environment and encouraged us to explore the excitement and wonder of learning environments for children, bringing nature ‘inside’ and exploring ‘outside’, into nature and ‘beyond’.

Yet we are also compelled to understand the privilege for many of us to live in peace. At a time when millions of young children and their families across our world are fleeing their homes and seeking new places for ‘belonging’, it is incumbent on us to carefully consider both our privilege and our response.

Our work, policies, practices and attitudes must be underpinned by a commitment to the rights of every infant and young child, as expressed in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Two key ECA documents were launched at the National Conference—ECA’s revised *Code of Ethics* and ECA’s *Statement on the inclusion of every child in early childhood education and care*. Access, meaningful participation, positive learning and health and wellbeing outcomes are foundational rights of every young child, both internationally and here in Australia. How are we, as a nation and as individuals, ensuring the realisation of these rights?

This edition of *Every Child* brings you a range of articles from presentations at last year’s inspirational ECA National Conference. Carla Rinaldi, also a keynote speaker at the conference, writes about the citizenship of young children, calling on us to authentically consider the voice of children, with respect for their intelligence and agency.

A number of articles discuss the professional role of early childhood educators. Anne Stonehouse urges us to consider the ECA Code of Ethics as the cornerstone of our profession. She advocates for commitment, curiosity and professionalism rather than a reliance on ‘passion’ for our work with young children. The empowerment of early career educators is a focus of the ECA Queensland Branch; they discuss ways of engaging both pre-service and early career educators in leadership and advocacy. An article by Stephen Gallen reports on a project in outback north-western Queensland which aimed to support a context for ongoing learning and shared inquiry in remote services, finding that connections, conversations and acknowledgement were important factors. The importance of practitioner inquiry for improving teaching practice is highlighted by Maria Bennett, who explains that this also helps educators to articulate the benefits of their pedagogy and practice.

Marianne Fenech builds on this concept, reporting on ways in which educators may improve parents’ understanding of quality in early childhood education and care.

The theme for ECA’s National Conference was *This is childhood: Pedagogy and practice in the early years*. I trust that as we settle into another year, this edition of *Every Child* will support you to reflect on your work, enabling you to take a few moments to consider the purpose, challenge and wonder of working for the wellbeing and meaningful learning of all young children.

Jackie Brien
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