

# Roundtable

Summer 2016/17 | Community Child Care Association



Community  
Child Care

**Pedagogical  
Documentation**

*What's News?*

*Spotlight on Bubup  
Wilam Aboriginal  
Child and Family  
Centre*

# Welcome to the Summer 2016/17 edition of *Roundtable*



In this edition of Roundtable you will find examples of practice to inspire you and new research to get you thinking!

We are happy to profile Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre and thank them for sharing their work with us all. It truly is an inspiring place. It seems crazy that a service with a working holistic model of integrated education and family support practice is struggling to remain viable by piecing together different funding streams. The sector has come to understand the importance of multidisciplinary collaborative practice and it is time that funding models matched this policy direction. CCC dares to dream of a time when all levels of government come together to develop a flexible ongoing funding model for integrated practice.

As you wind up your work with children and families for 2016 we wish you all the very best and hope you have a refreshing end of year break. Take a moment to look back over all the moments that your work has in some way touched the lives of a child or family. The social capital that our member services create in local communities and across the state is inspiring.

Thank you for your ongoing support of CCC, in 2017 we look forward to bringing you resources, information and professional development and to being a strong voice for the best interest of the child in the policy arena.

*Leanne Giardina*

Leanne Giardina  
Executive Director ~  
Community Child Care Association

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## CCC Staff Contributors

CCC would like to thank the following staff who contributed to this edition of Community Child Care Association's Roundtable:

Lynn Turner ~ Editor  
Cat Kimber  
Julie Price  
Leanne Giardina  
Pina Cannata  
Tarryn Holland

# Web-mapping – a new way of thinking about traditional play, popular-culture and digital media

PROFESSOR SUSAN EDWARDS – Learning Sciences Institute Australia, Australian Catholic University

The following article is based on a presentation given by Suzy at the Community Child Care Association AGM 24 October 2016. We thank her for her contribution to our AGM and to this edition of Roundtable.

Web-mapping is a new way of thinking about the relationship between traditional play and young children's engagement with popular-culture and digital media.

Research shows that young children increasingly access digital media in their daily lives (Plowman, et al, 2012; Rideout, et al, 2010). The consumption of digital media by young children promotes their interest in popular-culture. Many children use and enjoy a range of toys, artefacts and clothing items that feature characters from their favorite television programs or movies (Hedges, 2011). Digital media and popular-culture interests provide an important source of meaning making in young children's lives.

A problem for early childhood educators has been how to integrate the popular-culture and digital media interests of young children with the provision of traditional play activities in early childhood settings. This problem exists because the field of education has traditionally relied on older theories of play. These theories of play were developed in the time prior to the rapid increase and use of digital technologies in society more broadly. Educators today see children using digital

technologies and popular-culture in their play but do not have a theory or model to help them understand how to integrate children's contemporary interests with traditional ideas about play.

Research by Edwards (2013) suggests that children and families naturally integrate traditional play, popular-culture and digital media within the family home. For example, parents describe how their toddlers act out characters from their favorite television programs during role play. In the home, children also use digital technologies to participate in traditional types of activities, such as drawing on a tablet computer. Other families describe how their children use popular-culture toys and dolls for pretend play.

A web-map is a pictorial representation of the integrated relationship between traditional play and popular-culture and digital media. A web-map has traditional types of play as the inner rings. Digital media and popular-culture interests form the sectors of the web. The intersection between a traditional type of play and a digital media or popular-culture interest can be shaded by an educator. The shading 'maps' a child's range of interests in popular-culture, digital media and popular culture within the 'web.'

This web-mapping shows how traditional play, digital media and popular-culture are integrated for the child. An educator can then use the web-map to observe where additional integrated experiences may be planned for children in the early childhood setting.

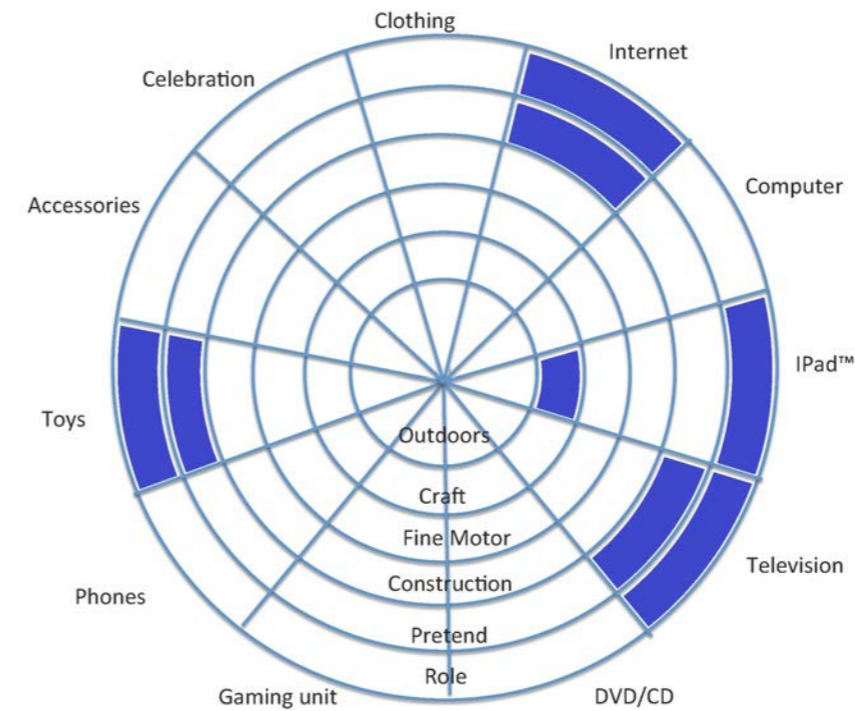
The benefit of web-mapping for educators is that it helps them to integrate popular-culture and digital media interests of young children with the provision of traditional play activities. Web-mapping is a new model for thinking about children's play in the 21st century where digital activities are a daily part of children's lives. Educators who have used web-mapping report that it helps them to pay attention to children's genuine interest in popular-culture and to integrate technologies more effectively with play-based approaches to learning (Edwards, 2016).

**To learn more about web-mapping visit: Learning Sciences Institute Australia**

[lsia.acu.edu.au/research/early-childhood/new-play-pedagogies-for-teaching-and-learning-in-the-early-years](http://lsia.acu.edu.au/research/early-childhood/new-play-pedagogies-for-teaching-and-learning-in-the-early-years)

<https://lsia.acu.edu.au/research/early-childhood/new-play-pedagogies-for-teaching-and-learning-in-the-early-years/>

Or Search for 'Early Childhood Futures' on Facebook



A web-map mapping a child's interests in integrated traditional and popular-culture and digital media interests (Edwards, 2013).

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## Spotlight on Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

Holistic integrated approaches to working with children and families are becoming increasingly recognised as best practice. We are delighted to profile the work of Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre who are leading the way in this area. It is a highly respected award winning Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation in Melbourne's North. Thank you to CEO Lisa Thorpe and Education and Training Manager Angie Zerella for sharing their work with us.

Everything that happens at Bubup Wilam is based on a deep understanding that culture matters. CEO Lisa Thorpe believes that supporting children, families and staff to be culturally strong is their most important work. This approach has created an inspiring learning community. It is a place that nurtures strong children, strong families and a strong staff team.

### Strong Children

Bubup Wilam means "Children's Place" in Woi Wurrung language. The principles underpinning centre programming and curriculum make this a reality. Communication and time to build relationships is a priority which supports each child to have a strong sense of belonging. The program is based on a flexible indoor/outdoor multi-age approach. This builds children's

agency and is respectful of connections within families and friendship groups between children of all ages.

Their culturally appropriate one on one enhanced learning model is based on children developing cultural knowledge, cultural pride and respecting and strengthening their connections to their Aboriginal identity, heritage and community. This is woven through all aspects of programming, which also includes some important regular experiences focused on Aboriginal culture, for example;

- A gathering area with a central space for a fire in the shared outside garden provides a setting for raising of the Aboriginal flag daily and regular acknowledgment of traditional owners and welcome to country smoking ceremonies. The fire



which often burns for large parts of the day is an integral part of the landscape

- Each child has an identity block which is used in many aspects of their play which has their photo, their name, an image of the Aboriginal flag and the name of the Aboriginal people that they belong to
- Each week the kindergarten group spend a day on country. A bus takes them to bush land in the City of Whittlesea, a place for the children to connect with and learn from the land and engage with nature through an Aboriginal lens. It is a time to foster cultural knowledge.

In collaboration with other organisations Bubup Wilam also provides a health and wellbeing program including an annual Child Health Check and an Education, Health and Wellbeing Plan for all children. Support for children with special needs, includes a visiting maternal and child health nurse and speech pathologist on site, and facilitated referral to specialist services. Delivery of these supports is fully integrated into the learning program, with specialists often spending time with children in the centre play spaces, alongside their familiar educators and teachers.

### Strong Families

There are currently 83 families accessing services at Bubup Wilam and building strong partnerships with them underpins all of Bubup Wilam's work with children. The cultural knowledge of families is respected and valued and is an important part of the evolving community at Bubup Wilam.

Empowering families to make good decisions and take control of their lives starts with a recognition that culture matters. Families participate in many aspects of the centre sharing their knowledge, learning from others and building connections. The strong relationships with staff provide a platform for many families to deal with the complex issues they face, as a result of our history of colonisation and ongoing structural disadvantage. The vast majority of families have experienced family violence and intergenerational trauma.

About 40 per cent of Bubup Wilam's children live in out-of-home care, with staff providing support to these children's family, kinship carer and the Department of Health and Human Services case workers. Their approach is to give families, as well as their children, a place to belong. A focus on culture and how families can engage in the program with their children no matter what else is going on in their lives has been transformative for many families. The centre also provides families with;

- Supported referrals to access a range of specialist services such as housing, health, and welfare
- Case management/care coordination for parents/carers with complex needs
- A transition to primary school program involving families, in partnership with the local primary schools.

### Strong Staff

Sixty per cent of staff at Bubup Wilam are Aboriginal. Supporting the team to be strong in culture and connected to all the resources they need to do their work well is also a high priority.

Bubup Wilam have developed an innovative and award winning training model with Certificate III and Diploma level Early Childhood Education and Care qualifications delivered on site. Educators who are studying have a full non-contact day each week when they participate in classes with others at the centre. There are currently 23 Aboriginal people enrolled at Bubup Wilam completing a qualification. The training delivered draws on two knowledge systems, looking at all aspects of education and care through an Aboriginal lens. All staff engage in cultural activities with the children and families and participate in ongoing professional development. This is true Aboriginal self-determination in action – a lifelong learning approach underpinned by Aboriginal knowledge.

Their outstanding practice in this area was recognised at the 2016 Victorian Training Awards in October where they received the 'Employer of the year Award' in the Medium Employer category. They were also one of the top three finalists in the Australian Medium Employer of the Year at the Australian Training Awards in November. ◀

# WHAT'S NEWS?

## SAVE THESE DATES

### Melbourne Play Symposiums 30 May, 31 May & 1 June 2017

CCC is delighted to be partnering with Play Australia to host three Play Symposiums next year with Dr. Wendy Russell and Dr. Stuart Lester from the University of Gloucestershire, United Kingdom.

Stuart and Wendy are both senior lecturers in play and playwork. Stuart has worked for many years on adventure playgrounds and local community-based play projects in England. His research interests include children's playful productions of time/space, and the relationship with adult understandings of play and policy interventions.

Wendy has undertaken several roles in the UK play sector over the past 35 years, initially as a playworker in adventure playgrounds in London, then mostly in training, education and research. Her research interests focus on the role of adults in supporting children's play across policy, planning and practice.

### CCC 2016 AGM

Thank you to all CCC members who attended our AGM in October. We also thank our two guest speakers, Minister Jenny Mikakos and Professor Suzy Edwards. Minister Mikakos expressed an ongoing commitment to lobby federal government for provision of professional development for the education and care sector, following the recent end to the

PSC. Professor Suzy Edwards provided a provocative presentation that explores the integration of digital technology and popular culture into play-based learning environments. In this edition of Roundtable, you can read more about Suzy's work, including her new concept of play known as 'web-mapping'.

### CCC keeping quality of RTOs in the spotlight

CCC continues to advocate for the provision of quality training for the education and care sector. Our recent activities include a submission to the SkillsIQ industry consultation on Improving Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care Training. Quality of RTOs, determined and consistent course duration, and adequate assessment practices are 3 key factors CCC believes are integral to a quality training system. CCC is also an invited member of the

recently formed, Community Services and Health Industry Advisory Group, facilitated by the Victorian Skills Commissioner, Neil Coulson. CCC's sector knowledge and advocacy at the meetings will help inform a new Industry Engagement Framework to ensure training aligns with Victoria's market requirements.

- ▶ To read our SkillsIQ submission visit [www.cccinc.org.au](http://www.cccinc.org.au) > [advocacy](#) > [submissions and campaigns](#)

### Is our child care system broken beyond repair?

Did you catch Shadow Minister Kate Ellis' speech at the Press Club in October? The Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Development believes *'we have an early childhood education and care system that is broken beyond immediate repair. In its current form, it is incapable of meeting the needs of Australian parents, our economy, government, the workforce that keeps it going, or most importantly, the children for whom it exists.'*

- ▶ If you missed it, you can access the video and transcript at the website of Minister Kate Ellis [www.kateellis.com.au](http://www.kateellis.com.au) > [newsroom](#) > [speeches](#)

### WorkSafe Victoria – in the Early Years

Between December 2015 and June 2016, WorkSafe Victoria conducted over 271 health and safety inspector visits to 133 education and care services. WorkSafe will continue work in the early years space in 2017. It is a timely reminder to ensure all services have adequate OH&S practices in place.

- ▶ More information and resources, including a summary of the findings from WorkSafe Victoria's most recent visits, are available on WorkSafe Victoria's website [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au) > [Safety and Prevention](#) > [Your Industry](#) > [Early Learning](#)

### 2017 Conference Together We Grow – the child in focus

The 2017 Together We Grow Conference, hosted by ELAA and Gowrie Victoria will be held on Friday 26 and Saturday 27 May 2017 at Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne.

- ▶ For more information and conference updates, visit the conference website at [www.togetherwegrow.com.au](http://www.togetherwegrow.com.au)

### Respectful relationships in Early Childhood training

Early childhood educators are now invited to register their interest in undertaking the Respectful Relationships Professional Development training in 2017. Expressions of interest should be emailed to [respectful.relationships@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:respectful.relationships@edumail.vic.gov.au).

- ▶ More information can be found on the department website at [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au) > [About the Department](#) > [Programs and Initiatives](#) > [Health, Wellbeing and Safety](#) > [Respectful Relationships](#)

### Early Childhood Resource Hub

Established by Education Services Australia (ESA), the EC Resource Hub is a place to access a range of quality assured resources and support that align with the seven quality areas of the National Quality Standard.

- ▶ Resources from recently ceased Professional Support Coordinators across the Nation can be found at the hub, visit [www.ecrh.edu.au](http://www.ecrh.edu.au)

### Latest LSAC report now available online

The sixth volume of the Annual Statistical Report series for *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC) is now available. The report, produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, aims to provide valuable insights into family functioning and child development for researchers, policy-makers, and those who provide services and support, as well as the community at large.

- ▶ To access the report visit [www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au](http://www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au)

▶ continued on next page

## Jobs for Families Senate Inquiry

In October the Senate held an Inquiry into the Jobs for Families Child Care Package Bill 2016. Despite being open for only 5 working days the inquiry received 46 submissions.

Following our written submission to the inquiry, CCC was pleased to be one of the organisations invited to appear as a witness at the public hearings of the inquiry. Well done to Leanne (our ED) and Linda (Deputy Chairperson) for attending at very short notice and discussing our key concerns about the Jobs for Families Package:

- It should not be linked to Senate passing cuts to Family Tax Benefit - increased investment in early education and care should not come at the expense of cuts to low income families
- By treating child care only as a means to support and increase parents' workforce participation, it fails to recognise the right of all children to access high quality early education and care
- The proposed activity test will take away universal access to subsidised education and care – need to maintain existing 24 hours
- We disagree with proposed changes to Budget Base Funded Services. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are able to access integrated quality early learning and family support services. The Bill should include long term flexible funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services including existing Budget Base Funded Services.

As expected the Committee report reflects the Governments position and recommends passing the Bill but acknowledges concerns raised by CCC and others about these issues. It also includes dissenting reports from Labor, the Greens and additional comments from Nick Xenophon's Team – all of these highlight the need to address problems with the activity test.

Encouragingly, in response to a chorus of feedback and advocacy from across the sector, the Department of Education and Training reported to the Inquiry the definition of activity will be broadened to include a wider range of volunteering activities (including 'reading' in schools and centre based services). They have also renamed the subsidy which will replace Special Child Care Benefit, the Additional Child Care Subsidy (at Risk) to Additional Child Care Subsidy (Wellbeing) - unfortunately this appears only a change in name not a broadening of definition. CCC continues to advocate that we need all children in vulnerable circumstances to receive ongoing fully subsidised access of at least 24 hours.

## Trends in Community Children's Services Survey (TICCSS)

Great news! ACCS has received funding from the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council to undertake further waves of TICCSS research through to 2020 when the National Quality Reforms are completed. This means that ACCS can track in real time the ongoing implementation of the reforms and demonstrate how the community sector is embracing quality improvement. The next wave is planned for late February next year.



## New resource - 'Building Belonging' toolkit: supporting cultural diversity

The Australian Human Rights Commission has just released the 'Building Belonging' toolkit, a first of a series of resources to encourage respect for cultural diversity and addressing racial prejudice within early childhood settings. The tool kit contains an Educator Guide, eBook, songs, posters and more.

- ▶ To access the toolkit resources visit [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au) > Education > Early Childhood Education

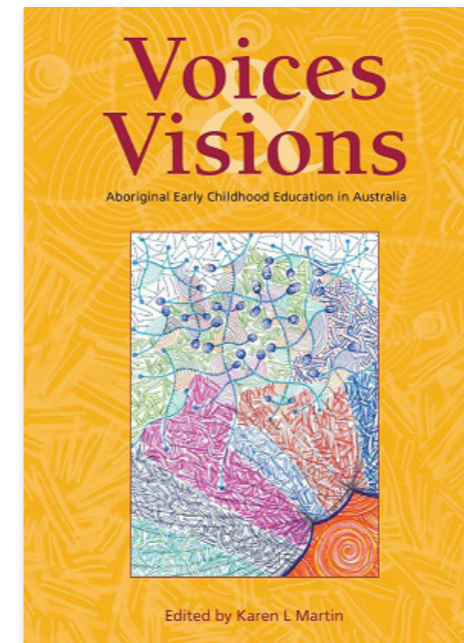
## Updated Kindergarten Funding Guide

The Kindergarten funding guide is designed to assist services that provide Kindergarten programs and currently receive or wish to apply for funding from the Department.

- ▶ The October 2016 updated guide can be accessed from the State Department of Education and Training website [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au) > Early Childhood > For Service Providers > Funding and Grants

## New 2016 Book releases to look out for!

### Voices and Visions: Aboriginal Early Childhood Education in Australia edited by Karen Martin

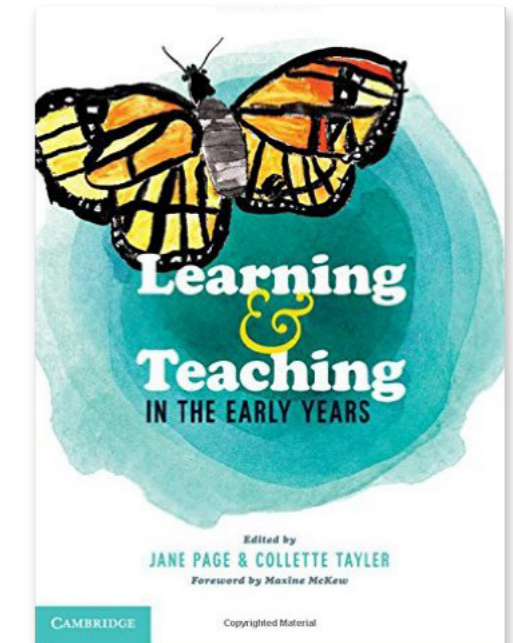


Launched in October 2016, this book is not only a reflection of stories from practitioners in Aboriginal early childhood education in Australia, but a text for how Aboriginal worldviews and frameworks are incorporated in what they do.

A review of the book by Professor Maggie Walter, Pro-Vice Chancellor Aboriginal Research and Leadership, University of Tasmania, gives insight that the book, written by Aboriginal Educators, will not only draw you in with its collection of insightful stories and experiences of practitioners, but provides a deeper understanding of what it means to be a good Aboriginal Educator.

- ▶ For more information visit [www.pademelonpress.com.au/voices-visions.html](http://www.pademelonpress.com.au/voices-visions.html)

### Learning and Teaching in the Early Years edited by Jane Page and Collette Tayler



Published in September 2016, this early years text is edited by two of University of Melbourne's Early Years experts, Jane Page – Senior Lecturer in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education and Collette Tayler – Chair in Early Childhood Education and Care. *Learning and Teaching in the Early Years* is not only a comprehensive and contemporary insight into early childhood education teaching in Australia, it presents the intersections of research, policy and practice. The text aligns firmly with the Early Years Learning Framework, covering learning and development, as well as professional practice in teaching children from birth to eight years.

- ▶ For more information visit <http://admin.cambridge.org/ki/academic/subjects/education/education-history-theory/learning-and-teaching-early-years?format=PB>

# When to notify the Regulatory Authority

Dealing with a serious incident or complaint can be a stressful time for an education and care service. However services need to remember that the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (National Law) and the Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (National Regulations) have very clear requirements around reporting incidents and complaints that need to be followed during these times.

## Serious Incident

A serious incident is defined as follows:

- The death of a child; whilst at the service or following an incident that occurred at the service
- Injury or trauma to a child at the service that requires medical attention from a registered medical practitioner or admission to hospital
- A child is missing or cannot be accounted for
- A child has been taken or removed from the service in a manner that contravenes regulations
- A child is mistakenly locked in or out of any part of the service
- Any incident where an emergency service has had to attend the service.

If any of these occur it is required that the regulatory authority is notified as soon as practically possible within **24 hours** of the incident occurring. The regulatory authority in Victoria is the State Government Department of Education and Training (DET). They must be notified in writing using form SI01 Notification of a serious incident, which is provided by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

**i** This form can be found here [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au) > *Educators and Providers > Applications and notifications > Notification forms > SI01 Notification of a serious incident.*

This form needs to be submitted online via the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au) > *NQA ITS.*

It is also recommended that if a serious incident occurs, an authorised officer from your regional office of DET is notified as soon as possible in order for you and your team to receive the advice and support you need.

## Complaints

DET must also be notified within **24 hours** if your service receives a complaint alleging:

- The safety, health or wellbeing of a child was compromised during their time at your service
- That National Law has been breached at your service.

To notify DET about a complaint they must be informed in writing using form NL01 Notification of complaints, non-serious incidents and additional children in an emergency, which is provided by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). This form can be found here [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au) > *Educators and Providers > Applications and notifications > Notification forms > NL01 Notification of complaints, non-serious incidents and additional children in an emergency.*

**i** This form must also be submitted online via the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS) [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au) > *NQA ITS.*

## Incidents

DET must also be notified within **seven days** if any of the following occurs:

- An occurrence of inappropriate sexualised behaviour between children
- Children are being (or are at risk of being) subjected to physical, emotional or sexual abuse
- An occurrence of inappropriate discipline
- The service premise is in disrepair or there has been a natural disaster which has damaged the premises in a way that poses a risk to children.

To notify DET of any of these circumstances you will need to use the same form and follow the same procedure that is used for notifying DET about a complaint.

**i** If you would like further information on notifying DET about incidents and complaints you can access their factsheet here [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au) > *Early Childhood > For Service providers > Regulation and Quality Assessment > National Quality Framework > Fact Sheets and Resources > All Service Types > Incidents and Complaints.*

## REFERENCES

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Education and Care Services National Law Act (No. 69 of 2010): Section 174.

Education and Care Services National Regulations (No. 653, 2011): Regulations 175, 176.

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# Pedagogical Documentation as a Tool for Collaborative Reflection

JULIE PRICE – *Community Child Care Association*

This article highlights new research presented at the European Early Childhood Research Association Conference, held in Dublin in September 2016, about the use of pedagogical documentation as a tool to support educator's reflective practice. It draws on papers written and presented by academics and practitioners from Finland, Belgium, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and Norway. Abstracts from the conference are available at [www.eecera.org/conference/2016/](http://www.eecera.org/conference/2016/)

Rintakorpi, from Finland, suggested that "Although the idea of documenting appears fine in theory, and international experiences of constructing child-centred pedagogy through documents are promoted in the literature, accomplishing this task successfully is challenging in practice." Many speakers at the conference discussed how collaboratively reflecting on documentation can grow educator's understanding and knowledge of their pedagogy and the children with whom they are working. Hence making the job of pedagogical documentation easier, as they understood how to do it and use it to improve their practice.

## What is pedagogical documentation?

Kashin (2015) cites Carlina Rinaldi as speaking of documentation "as a way of listening to children that helps us to learn about children during the course of their experiences and to make the learning visible to others for interpretation".

In one presentation, Rintakorpi, proposed that pedagogical documentation contains the content of the observation and then the analysis of that fact. She posited that the analysis is an important part of pedagogical documentation, as without analysis it is simply documentation and no pedagogy is added.

Hostyn, Tast, Makitalo and Vandenbussche, researchers from Finland and Belgium, suggested there are a wide variety of documentation formats that educators reported using. These included documenting

children's experiences using photographs, audio recordings, video, children's creations and products and their own observations and notes. They described three key functions of pedagogical documentation as understood by educators as:

- 1 Demonstrating the child's development - facts and growth, strengths and talent; to show that they have seen the child,
- 2 Provoking further thinking of staff, parents and children, and
- 3 Facilitating interaction between one another; facilitating conversation between educators to enhance their professional reflection and give children a sense of identity.

## Why use documentation as a reflective tool?

Hostyn et al, however, found that very few educators utilised pedagogical documentation as a tool to facilitate interaction and suggested that when utilised, educators reported that these interactions had built their pedagogy. Educators reported their view and understanding of how children grew and their intentional teaching also expanded when reflecting on their documentation collaboratively with others. Downs, from the United Kingdom, also reported that in her research, educators described how collaboratively examining and reflecting on their work, and learning with others improved their practice and changed the way they worked. Whittington, Sisson & Scales, from Australia, found educators reported an increase in professional identity and a better understanding and

engagement with emergent inquiry based pedagogy. These educators who engaged in collaborative reflection of their documentation also reported reduced feelings of isolation and an improved sense of their own agency.

## Examples of how educators use documentation to support their reflective practice.

Walker, also from the UK, reported that one tool educators found useful was using time together to look at each other's documentation and ask open ended, sensitive questions. Each group ensured that they began by establishing how they would work respectfully together. They then collectively examined their practice and shared their values and knowledge. They asked questions such as:

- What did you learn about this child from this documented experience? What do others see in this documentation?
- What does that tell you? What of my beliefs and theories underpin my interpretation? What does this tell others?
- How could we build on this learning and interest for this child?

This collaborative reflective questioning in action built the educators confidence in knowledge and understanding of pedagogical documentation and the children with whom they were working.

Norwegians, Gotvassli, Vannebo and Moe described some Reflection Groups that they facilitated to support collaborative thoughtful practice amongst educators.

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## Downs, from the United Kingdom, also reported that in her research, educators described how collaboratively examining and reflecting on their work, and learning with others improved their practice and changed the way they worked.

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Six to eight educators would look at film of their practice and examine each practitioner's practice. Like Walker, Gotvassli et al stressed the importance of trust in the group. To begin the group they had a discussion about the process of collaborative reflection and how to best ask questions to ensure people felt safe. The process was guided by a first round of questions focused on "What do you see?" with a second round of questions focused on – "How can we improve practice here?" As the process continued colleagues would ask each other deeper questions. These groups would also all read a piece of research and discuss what it meant for their practice. Gotvassli et al proposed that the leadership of the service needed to value this approach and ensure time is set aside for this work.

Downs reported on different approaches and strategies used by services as a whole to reflect collaboratively. She found some services that had two educators doing peer observations of the one situation. They would then read each other's notes and discuss the similarities and differences of what they had seen, what this meant about their understanding and how they could provide further learning opportunities to build on the child/ren's knowledge, skills and abilities. Other services Downs observed used reflective logs where a number of educators contributed with observations and analysis of those observations and built on each other's views and understanding. Room meetings were used by some services to collaboratively discuss their documentation, and plan what other opportunities could extend the children's learning.

Whittington, Sisson & Scales reported on some successful local hubs and networks of educators in Australia, that they had facilitated to support collaborative reflective practice. Educators were supported to carry out a piece of action research in their service, which took them through the collaborative process of planning, action, observation and reflection about a topic of their choice. In this project, educators were provided with phone support, funding for relief staff, on-site mentoring and on-line lectures through Vimeo and support on Facebook. Another form of collaborative reflection occurred in lecture meetings where educators could discuss a lecture they had heard together and what it meant for their practice.

It is interesting to consider how this international research can inform educators practice in Australia. Hopefully some of these ideas might spark your thinking about how to build on collaborative reflective practice at your service! ◀

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## Spotlight on Gender – Can a boy be pretty?

ALISTAIR GIBBS

Alistair Gibbs works as an early childhood educator and has been exploring gender identity in his work with young children. CCC thanks him for sharing the following thoughts and learnings with us.

**A girl walks into the environment wearing a long flowing dress. She has a headband keeping her hair in place and shoes on that sparkle when the light hits them just right.**

When we think about gender stereotypes her appearance, colour associations and play behaviours fit into a stereotypical list for a girl. However, subsequent conversations with her family reveal that at home her appearance and interests can fall more in line with a more masculine stereotype of construction, rough play and superheroes.

She has a persona for kindergarten and a persona for home and will not allow either to mix. She has learnt at the age of five that in an environment that is populated by more girls than boys, she has to survive by being a different person; a person that contradicts how she may actually want to act or behave. She compromises her identity to fit in.

Where did she learn that to survive she had to change? When and how did she learn about gender? Have I unintentionally been supporting this belief? Confronted by this I decided to explore existing research and work with the children to gain a deeper understanding of gender identity.

### What is gender and how do we learn it?

Self-concept and how children develop their image is profound and an important aspect of their wellbeing. Children are like gender detectives. It is one of the first social categories they become aware of and they are constantly absorbing new information from their surroundings whether it be language, mannerisms or images (Halim and Lindner, 2013). **It can be quite confronting when striving to promote a neutral gender, children still act in gender stereotypical ways.**

There are many theories that support how gender is learnt, with a common link suggesting the constant internal and external struggle that we go through. (Aina and Cameron, 2011)

- **Social Learning Theory** discusses where we learn through process of rewards and punishments where sex type behaviour moulds gender ideals. When a child is hurt a girl may be comforted and given affection where as a boy could be told to toughen up
- **Kohlberg's Cognitive Development Theory** discusses three stages of gender development. Basic gender identity where we are forming the ideas of what each gender is. Gender stability where we recognise where we fit within these identities. Finally gender consistency where we have formed our gender beliefs and live within that authentic identity

- **Sandra Bern's Gender Schema Theory** tries to find a balance between the internal and external struggle we can find in gender identity. Here schema is defined as a cognitive structure that helps to organise an individual's perception of the world. This lets us categorise and sort behaviours into masculine and feminine with socialisation occurring when we connect our identity to a gender schema.

Whilst trying to let all of the theory sink in and process, I was then confronted by another musing from the children. Becoming immersed in their play I asked a simple question 'Can you make me pretty?' The response I received stated that pretty was a term that could be used for girls whereas for boys the word was handsome.

**Even in the simplest of play experiences and discussions there is gender division.**

I found myself asking if we as educators contribute to gender stereotyping? Do we encourage a neutral gender? In producing high quality programs, we discuss promoting developmentally appropriate environments but how do we ensure these environments are inclusive, promoting multicultural and anti-bias views? (Tansey, 2009).

Picture books define standards for masculine and feminine behaviours and children are exposed to them from birth. Do we look past the engaging cover and deeper into the characters to see what role the male or female characters may have? Non- sexist books can produce positive changes in identity, attitude and behaviours but it is up to us to provide them as such to children (Narahara, 1998).

Through discussing this topic with other educators I found that some shared the same opinion as the children. This came from a number of different reasons but ultimately highlighted to me that it is up to us as educators to embrace the professional partnerships we create and educate each other in a non-judgmental way.

Families are the strong link to understanding children and giving behaviour reason. However, in creating a more accepting and neutral atmosphere where we are constantly walking a tight rope so as not to verbally or mentally put a label on a child, we can come into conflict with families. It is crucial to give families the opportunity to have their voice heard gaining an understanding and respect for their beliefs and values, including culture. This may provoke anger or other emotions within us as educators. **Do we have the right to say they are wrong?**

A common fear that is presented is that in encouraging a neutral gender in the environment there is a potential for confusing children in their gender identity. Gender exists on a non-binary continuum of male and female dimensions therefore gender confusion is having an awareness of gender but an unsureness of where to fit within the spectrum. This means identity development is open to individualised paths with it being achieved via authentic self-actualisation but we cannot influence and change gender (Pardo, 2008).

Studies have shown that transgender children can be aware within the 3 to 5 age bracket supporting theories that suggest gender realisation happens in the early stages of childhood (Kennedy, 2012).

For transgender children there is a realisation of gender but an even bigger confrontation of knowing that the gender does not fit the external image.

What we should strive to provide is an environment that supports exploring the boundaries of gender to find individualised identity.

The alternative is the potential for children to go through the internalisation of self-hatred with them feeling alone with no choice but to suppress and conceal. It is our responsibility to make sure that the internal views that children create are healthy representations of what it means to be a person.

**Through empowering the children to look beyond gender and giving them the skills to critically think about stereotypes we can have an impact on their view of themselves. These children will be less likely to conform to stereotypes and find their full potential. Through this they will be better-prepared and willing to stand up against prejudice.**

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