

Editorial

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Document Version:

Author accepted manuscript (postprint)

Citation for published version:

Mcardle, Felicity A, Black, Alison L (2006) Editorial. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp.i-ii.

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Editorial for AJEC
Felicity McArdle and Ali Black

In our shared conversations about young children and all that impacts on their lives, we are adept at holding together ideas and concepts which others might consider opposites. For instance, we are comfortable with the notion of Education and Care, work and play, children and their families. We do not feel the need to choose one over the other, allocate one more importance than the other, nor place in a hierarchical order. This is not even a matter of finding a balance - we know that both are necessary and true (McArdle & McWilliam, 2005). Early Childhood professionals are better at living with contradictions than we know, a lot of the time. We live with ideas which do not always sit well with each other, but remain in tension. But maybe we are not so good at articulating these ways of thinking in our dealings with others.

We are all constantly on our quests to find the proper way to teach and care for young children, and this means all children...not the mythical 'universal child' of the norms and standards and averages (Grant & Gillette, 2006). This is a big quest, and we are never going to find that one true way to do it. In fact, it is important that we are suspicious of any universalising claims about what makes a good teacher, or the proper way to do Early Childhood Care and Education. But this should not stop us from our questioning, confronting, contesting and challenging our own and others' taken for granted ideas about "what's best for young children". And it should also not stop us from speaking out for young children, all young children, and obtaining the ear of governments, policy makers, funding bodies, corporations, communities, families, and other educators, and including them in our conversations, and enlisting their support and understanding. We should use all means possible to speak up for young children, at every opportunity.

One of the best ways to convince people of what we know is to be able to support our ideas with research and evidence. In this edition of AJEC, you will find the results of a number of people's efforts to generate and gather data, and use this as evidence to give weight to their claims for improving the ways we work with young children. There is no one end to our quests, and many ideas remain in tension, competing and colliding with each other. But this issue provides us with a 'mosaic' – different ways that research can be designed, conducted and disseminated, to support us all in building our knowledge, and helping us to reconsider and re-think our ways of working with young children and their families. The papers in this collection highlight the challenge and scope of the field and provide an excellent starting point for provoking reflection, and critiquing our own taken for granted ways of seeing and knowing .

Firstly, there are two papers which touch on current issues of globalisation, and some of the stresses and challenges that many very young children are facing daily. Dianne Jackson uses case study design in her research, to highlight the work of supporting young refugee children and their families. At the Playgroup she studied, she shows us how education and care, play and relationships, and children and their families can be considered together. Her point about trauma forming an integral part of these young children's development makes a powerful point. Karen Guo's article turns an inquiring eye on the children of Chinese immigrant families, and the blending of

traditional Confucian philosophy alongside the ideologies of the new culture. Through studying another culture, we learn to ask new questions about our own beliefs, customs, practices. This research is carried out through a study of the literature. The highest purpose of living, according to Confucian thought, is self-perfection, and this entails a certain understanding of family and interdependence. Juxtapose this with modern Western cultures' insistence on glorifying the individual and our continuous path of progress. How these two sets of values can exist side by side is something that the children of Chinese immigrants must work out, and Guo's work alerts us to the need for teacher understanding about children's home experiences.

Some research is about measuring, and there are two articles which are concerned with the how and why of measures, and what they tell us. Yuriko Kishida and Coral Kemp, in their concerns about current calls for quality in ECEC, prompt us to think about ways in which this might be determined. Child engagement is frequently referred to as an indicator of quality, outcomes, and a guide for programming but, they ask, how does one ascertain engagement? Does anyone actually examine children's experiences? Their questions establish the need to develop a new measure for ascertaining engagement, particularly for those children with additional learning needs. And, speaking of developing new measures, Denise Williamson, Joy Cullen and Chris Lepper present their research on a learning story approach for supporting inclusive programs that cater for children with special needs. Their work draws our attention to how the Te Whāriki principles acknowledge children's learning in specific social and cultural contexts and embrace holistic views of learning that involve reciprocal relationships between children, parents, teachers and other 'experts', and the learning environment.

The article by Claire McLachlan, Lucila Carvalho, Nicky de Latour and Koshila Kumar, through its inquiry into literacy in early childhood settings in New Zealand, provides quantitative data to support the notion that teachers position themselves in the space between competing and conflicting discourses, and manage to 'teach without teaching' (McArdle, 2001). The teachers in this study describe their work variously as supporting, scaffolding, guiding. The authors reflect on this eclectic approach to literacy instruction, which embraces immersion and notions of readiness, and the reluctance for either acknowledging or engaging in direct instruction - even in the face of curriculum documents which include this as a strategy for effective teaching. Lambert's article is a report of a research project which investigated an aspect of multiliteracies, and one child's use of the language of drawing to make his thinking visible.

Marianne Fenech's article provides one final example of how early childhood educators work to hold opposing views together in tension. She turns our eyes to the regulatory aspects of our working environments with which we are all familiar, in this case specifically, the NSW Children's Services regulations and the NQIAS. She looks at how these instruments act as discursive constructions, and how they can work for better and for worse (McWilliam, 2004), as they impact on our work and our satisfaction with our work.

In this edition of AJEC we are exposed to a diverse selection of research and inquiry into various aspects of our work, and we urge you to use this collection of articles to

prompt your own reflections and possible re-thinking of practices, in your quest for better ways to work with and for young children (Black, 2004).

Felicity McArdle and Ali Black

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