

ASG celebrating the joy of early learning

early horizons

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Why men?

Collaboration for
developmental concerns

Transition
to school



ASG 



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"The children laughing, playing, working and negotiating to the accompaniment of the babbling creek makes my heart sing."

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From our CEO

JOHN VELEGRINIS



It with sadness that I welcome you to the last and final issue of *Early Horizons*. While it is hard to farewell something that has grown and developed so successfully, this decision was made with our future business plans in mind.

Notwithstanding our decision, today's *Early Horizons* is full of uplifting articles and stories, shared by educators such as yourself.

When it comes to school enrolments Aboriginal children fall behind. Since May 2017, Pathfinders—a not-for-profit company—has been running the Aboriginal Transition to School Program (ATTS) and operates a broad range of programs and services. Amanda Doye, Program Facilitator, tells us how the program aims to break down the barriers that are stopping these children from getting the best early education possible.

Even after spending 16 years in early childhood and care, Steven Cameron—a 2012 ASG NEiTA recipient—still hears people say, 'It is so good having a man here!' To attract and retain men in early childhood, perceptions that men can't provide the same care as women, need to change. According to Steven, "early childhood is the perfect time to sow the idea that our gender doesn't define who we are, or who we can be."

Are you aware that therapists get their clients to talk about their childhood? This is because assumptions, habits, views and values planted in young minds often stick around for life. Writer-illustrator Julie Davey says as early childhood educators, you are in a prime position to nurture positive thoughts. Weed out the

self-doubts by teaching young children how to change their attitudes from, 'I can't' to 'I can'.

Children love Emma and so does the community, and in 2016 they nominated her for an ASG National Excellence in Teaching Award for Early Career Teaching. For Emma early childhood education is an opportunity to make a real difference in the life of a child. It is a chance to capture the 'Wow' moments—those times when children make a discovery about the world around them that amazes them.

The early years are also the most important for brain development and much depends on the quality of the environment that is offered. Childcare centres and preschools can offer an optimal environment for development—one that is well structured; where babies and children feel nurtured and gently challenged through play. However, some children may have had limited opportunities at home and may show signs of delay in some areas. Belinda Joyce, a midwife and healthcare nurse tells you what to do if you are concerned about a baby or child's development.

In a world where children are raced from one activity to another, Kathy Walker's *What's the hurry* is a book for parents and leaders, for teachers, and for society in general. The book reminds us that childhood is not the same as adolescence or adulthood and that we need to set an appropriate pace of life for our children.

How would you like to teach children by the banks of a freshwater stream—with the sunlight falling through the gaps of the branches? Katchia Avenell, who

believes in play pedagogy has seen first hand how connecting with nature changes the way children interact with each other. She has been amazed at the depth of learning, the incredible leaps in physical and cognitive development that has occurred from the richness of this setting.

And among these learnings children need good healthy food to sustain themselves. But what is healthy food? Kate Wengier is a mother of four, a family dietician and nutritionist. She says research shows that food habits track, so what you eat and your relationship with food as a child, strongly dictates your choices as an adult. She shares her experience with us on how to make children confident and able eaters.

We hope you enjoy reading these articles as much as we enjoyed bringing them to you.

Season's greetings and best wishes for a happy new year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Velegrinis'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

John Velegrinis
Chief Executive Officer, ASG

Transition to school

Amanda Doye is the Program Facilitator of the Pathways Program, an Aboriginal transition school program for children aged three to six.



Pathfinders is a not-for-profit company that operates in the New England—north west and mid-north coast regions of New South Wales.

Pathfinders have been running the Aboriginal Transition to School Program (ATTS) since May 2017 and operates a broad range of programs and services. The aim of the program is to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of children, youth, and families in the communities we service.

The Pathways Program offers many services, including:

- » **IFYSS** – Inverell family and youth support service
- » **ATTS** – Aboriginal Transition to School program
- » **PNABC** – Pathfinders National Aboriginal Birth Certificate Program
- » **SHS** – Specialist Homelessness Services and the women's refuge
- » **Support your Path** – Assisting people with disabilities
- » **Ability links** – assisting people with disabilities
- » **Links to Learning**
- » **FRS** – Family Referral Service
- » **Pathways** – Out of home care
- » **NPSS** – Non-Placement Support Services.

The Pathfinders Aboriginal Transition to School program (ATTS) is a free service to provide Aboriginal children between the ages of three and six with easier access to quality preschool and school education.

ATTS is funded by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet under the Indigenous advancement strategy.


The program's aim is to break down the barriers that are stopping these children from getting the best early education possible. Through this program we hope to encourage both the children and their families to see education, and in particular, early education as a crucial step in their child's future. And, so far we have had a fantastic response.

Our two main areas of focus are transition from day care to preschool and from preschool to primary school.

Each child and their family has vastly different needs and because of this the program is tailored to suit each individual child and their family. My role as the ATTS program facilitator is to support the children and their families on their educational journey to ensure that their experience is as positive as possible. I want every child and their family to see education as a positive step in the child's future.

I am very passionate about giving every child the best possible start in life. For the children who are not developmentally ready to attend preschool or school my role is to engage them in a dynamic education-based program. We refer to this as our learning circle. Participation in this learning circle aims to accelerate the child's learning process so they are not on the back foot from the start when they do start preschool or school.

If the child needs a more target approach I work with them on a one-on-one basis until they either begin attending the learning circle or are ready to attend mainstream preschool or school. These sessions aim to develop the child's school readiness skills. ATTS services Inverell, Tingha and Ashford and provides outreach to Armidale, Uralla and Walcha in NSW.



"I want every child and their family to see education as a positive step in the child's future."

School readiness refers to a broad range of skills and with these skills as a foundation, children can quickly find themselves playing catch up with their peers. Children achieve better results if teachers can build on these existing skills, rather than starting from scratch.

School readiness skills include but are not limited to:

- » Self-regulation – the ability to maintain and change emotional behaviour, attention span and activity levels.
- » Sensory processing - processing environmental stimulation.
- » Receptive language skills – comprehension of the spoken language.
- » Expressive language – speech that can be easily understood by others.
- » Emotional regulation – the ability to perceive emotions in others and regulate their own emotions.

- » Social skills – the ability to engage in reciprocal interactions with others— both verbally and non-verbally.
- » Some academic basics - writing their own name.
- » Ability for self care - independent toileting, opening their own lunches.
- » Attention and concentration spans.
- » Physical skills - gross motor and fine motor skills.

The 2016 *Close the Gap* report states that in 2016 the overall attendance rate for Aboriginal children nationally was 83.4% compared with 93.1 per cent for non-Aboriginal students. Creative Spirits quotes that 60 per cent of Aboriginal children are significantly behind when they start year 1 and that in 2015 only 87 per cent were enrolled in early childhood programs.

There can be a lot of barriers in the way of families accessing early education programs. These include cost, transport,

opening hours, complex paperwork, leaving children vulnerable to illness, poor fit with family values, and preschool/schools not culturally diverse and/or inclusive.

Whatever skills or strategies I use with a child I pass on to their parent/carer so they can continue the education in the home. This helps the parents feel more connected to their child and the child feel that their parent is interested in their educational journey.

The first five years of a child's life are incredibly important to their overall development and wellbeing. This is when their brains develop the most and the education experiences in these early years is extremely important. Other important and influential factors in a child's development at this age include family groups, early education, where and how they live and the socio-economical status of their family.



Why men?

Steven Cameron is a Preschool Director at Barbara Kiker Memorial Kindergarten in South Australia. He was the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Award (NEiTA) recipient in 2012 in early childhood. Steven's award was for leadership.



“It is so good having a man here!”

This is a phrase that many men—like myself—working in early childhood education and care have heard at some point in their journey as an early childhood professional.

After working 16 years in early education and care I still hear this on a regular basis. I have gotten used to the novelty factor that inevitably accompanies being one of a few, or at times the only male in the early education and care settings I have worked in. However, it is time for me to confess. When parents tell me that they are happy their child will be taught by me—because of my gender—it bothers me. Why? I will get to that.

In my professional career, I have been fortunate to work alongside some truly innovative and inspirational educators. Along the journey I have rarely encountered negative comments that are based on my suitability to work

with children based on my gender. Most comments have been overwhelmingly positive. However, there are still challenges.

As a first year undergraduate student, I was asked why I wanted to do a ‘woman’s job’. In subsequent years I have been challenged further and have been told that men have a better chance of surviving long-term in schools. And, more recently during a discussion around building quality relationships with children, my contribution was dismissed because I didn’t have the capacity to facilitate a nurturing relationship with a child. Why? Because I am a man. These comments may be few and far between, but are deflating nonetheless.

Perception needs to change

The perception that early childhood education and care is women’s work, or that men are ill equipped to provide the same quality of education and care thus becomes a significant part of the problem around attracting and retaining men within the field.

When these perceptions are shared, it sends a clear message that can potentially position early education and care as an inaccessible career for men. There is something very wrong with this thought—that men don’t belong in the early childhood setting. This thinking also communicates the same message to children, leading to the same gender stereotypes continuing to be reinforced with each new generation.

We have a number of male staff at our kindergarten. A significant part of the reason why male early childhood educators are so easily accepted within our community is because of the outstanding practice and advocacy that these men demonstrate. Children and their families get to witness firsthand their commitment to achieving high quality outcomes for children through building relationships with them. Such exemplars are critical in changing the perception of men working in early education and care.

My maleness doesn’t define me

I don’t think that men make better or worse early childhood educators than women. There is nothing about my ‘maleness’ that positions me differently as an educator from my female counterparts. Yet men are still frequently singled out in early childhood for the benefits they bring.

The conversations that I have had about the benefits of men working in early education and care has more to do with the image of a stereotypical male—that we are about rough and tumble play, risk taking and ball games. This bothers me, because my gender doesn’t define my professional interests, beliefs or strengths. I love risk-taking and promote it in my preschool, not because of my gender, but because of the benefits it provides the children. This is the same justification I have for all curriculum and pedagogical decisions.



Yet men are still frequently singled out in early childhood for the benefits they bring.



Challenging stereotypes

We are now more than ever looking to challenge these historical stereotypes that have existed in the workforce—that there are specific men's and women's work. As an early childhood educator, I want the children I teach to know that gender does not define who they are or what their interests and skills should be. Gender should not limit the opportunities they pursue within education or throughout their lives. However, you can probably still recall recent conversations you have had with young children who already have preconceived ideas about boys and girls toys, clothes, play choices, and even colours! Children are exposed to these stereotypes from birth through implicit

and explicit messaging, and these views can be difficult to change once established.

Breaking barriers

Consider how challenging it is still for women to consider careers in STEM (Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology). These subjects have traditionally been dominated by men—despite the advocacy and support that is now available. We recognise and understand the gender gap and barriers that impact women entering the STEM fields, however, the challenges still remain and persist. These exist because a person or groups of people still believe that women don't belong in the scientific fields.

One of the core reasons why it is so important to have men working in early education and care is that we need both men and women to jointly challenge these traditional gender stereotypes as they take root early.

All of us are impacted by these narrow, and often inaccurate generalisations about what gender leads us to be. We have to challenge children's concept of gender to prevent those ideas becoming an established bias, and the message is stronger if both men and women challenge these generalisations together.

Early childhood is the perfect moment in time to sow the idea that our gender doesn't define who we are, or who we can be.



From 'I can't' to 'I can'

It's no surprise that therapists prompt clients to talk about their childhood. Assumptions, habits, views and values planted in the fertile sub-soil of young minds often stick around for life.



The subconscious mind doesn't discriminate whether the information it receives is beneficial. It just records it for later use—for better or worse.

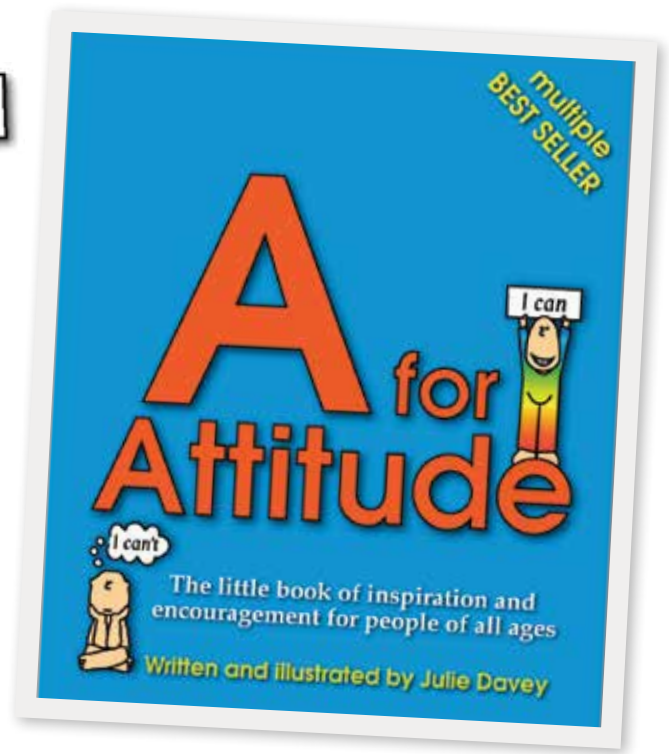
Children who receive positive parenting tend to trust their ability to try new things. However, those who live with continual criticism—or even worse are wrapped in cotton wool—struggle to ever reach their potential. Their limiting beliefs and negative self-talk sabotage them. Anxiety grows.

But these children can flourish under the loving guidance of a positive teacher. Psychologists who explored the impact of positive-to-negative interaction ratios, revealed that it generally takes five uplifting interactions to balance a negative comment or experience.

So when a child says, "I can't" ... invite them to consider five things they 'can do'. For example: 'Someone doesn't like you? – find five who do!'

The ability to switch focus from what we don't like or don't want, to more positive thoughts, is the key to problem solving. It is a strategy that will empower children as they progress through life.

As early childhood educators, you are in a prime position to nurture the positive. Weed out the self-doubts before they take too strong a hold and importantly, teach young children how to do it for themselves.



A for Attitude

A positive life skills resource, *A for Attitude* is a helpful guide for teachers and parents of children of any age.

Universal success principles pared back to basics and illustrated with ageless generic characters allow anyone to put themselves in the picture.

A for Attitude has worked so well for some children that they still refer to the book 19 years after receiving their first copy.

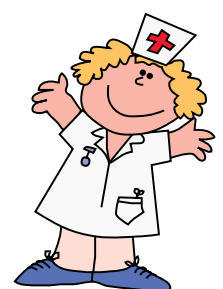
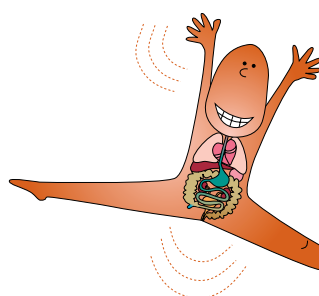
Henry Ford's famous quote, 'Whether you think you can or think you cannot, you are right'—the inspiration for the book—paves the way for 68 productive and instructive topics.

In your classroom, it can serve to remind children that attitude is really in their mind. It is a choice. The person with the wooden leg is not disabled at all. They are able to achieve more than the one who simply decides not to try.

The main theme running through the book is the connection between mind and body.

The book begins with 'Attitude is everything.' Simple graphics illustrate how positive and negative thoughts affect the body.

The section on 'Body' prompts young children to think about their 'good points' rather than the things they are 'unhappy with'.



The segment on Health encourages children to take care of their bodies and to be aware of messages they receive ...

- » 'If I forget to dry between my toes ...'
- » 'My tummy gets upset when I ...'
- » 'My eyes get sore when I ...'

Building a positive self-image early on will help protect children mentally against bullies and critics.

How to use *A for Attitude* in your classroom

- » **Start a conversation** by asking children to talk about topics or pictures they like or don't like and why.
- » **What's your word?** – A group activity

Everyone selects an *A for Attitude* topic, or 'word' from the book. The corresponding page is read aloud. Children and teachers consider their topic and later ask about their experience. 'Did you feel angry / sad / happy / jealous / bullied etc. today? Why? What did you do about it?' This helps children as they hear how others handle various situations—including you as an adult—and provides insights for parents and teachers.

» Hands on learning

Children choose seeds to plant in small, labeled pots, then learn how to tend to their crop. When harvesting, discuss why carrot seeds produced carrots and not peas. Connect this to the topic on Mind and why positive thoughts about ourselves and others is so important.

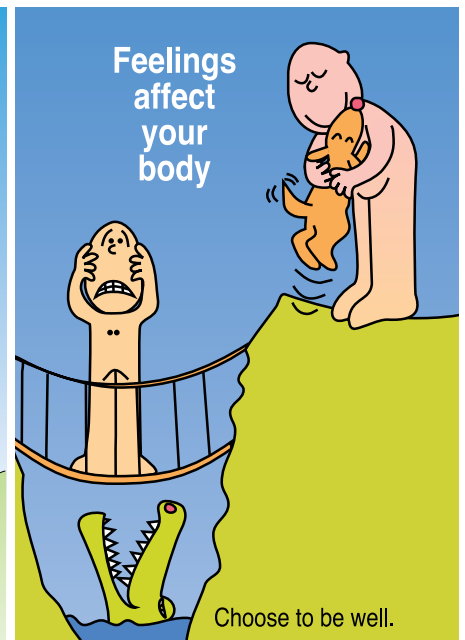
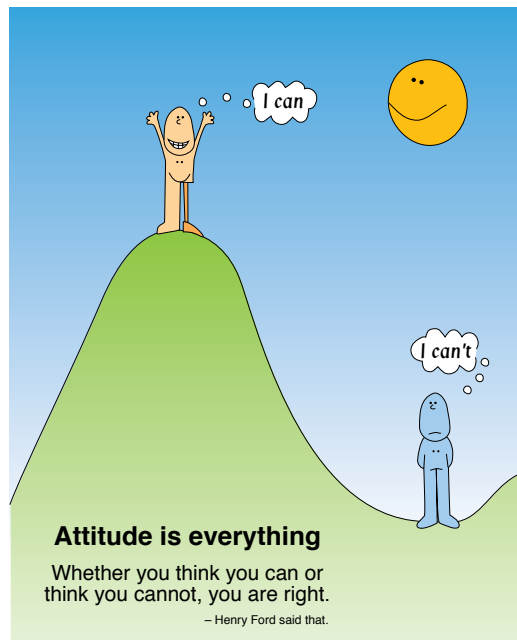
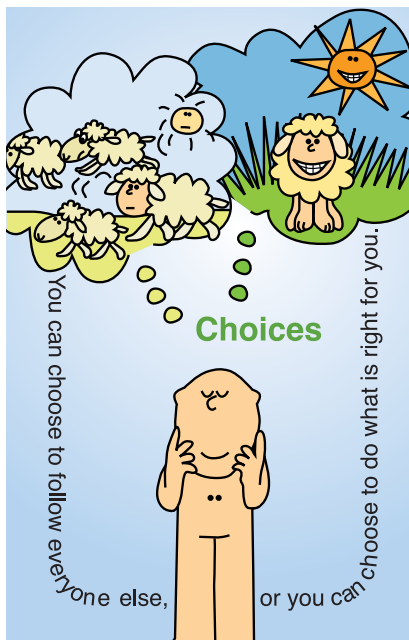
» Reading time

An opportunity for children to learn valuable lessons that will help them throughout life.

What you can expect by using *A for Attitude* in your classroom

- » A 'go-to' manual for teachable moments
- » An answer/guidance for 69 typical situations
- » A recipe for creating a 'can do' classroom environment
- » A simple meditation to balance and refresh young minds.

Extra benefits happen when parents use the book at home to enable positive family communications.



Julie Davey is a former registered Nurse Div.1 whose interest in the mind-body connection led her to write, illustrate and self-publish a series of inspirational books. These books have been translated into other languages and are enjoyed by people of all ages in 15 countries. Julie has also illustrated bestselling books for other authors.

She has presented at conferences around Australia and regularly speaks in schools. In 2015 she launched the Attitude Books Foundation, a nonprofit organisation, dedicated to boosting resilience in children.



Q&A with Emma Larsen

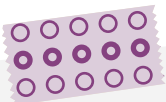
Emma Larsen is a recipient of the 2016 ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards. Her National Award was for Early Career Teaching.



Tell us about yourself: why did you want to be an early childhood educator?

When I was a little girl growing up in country Victoria, I was lucky to have high-quality teachers in Prep and Grades one and two. They inspired in me a love of learning and sharing my knowledge with others. I think I knew, even then, that I was going to be a teacher. As I grew older, my family helped me to fall in love with books and learning, and I decided that I was going to inspire others to feel the same.

For me, early childhood education is an opportunity to make a real difference in the life of a child. It is a chance to capture the 'Wow' moments—those times when children make a discovery about the world around them that amazes them.



"I saw children crawl through caves, dodge waves at the beach, feed horses and climb trees ..."

Why did the community nominate you for an ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards?

I was nominated by the president of our committee of management on behalf of the community.

I think that the committee saw in me a willingness to 'lead from the front' and to get my hands dirty. It was alongside them that I painted the kindergarten walls, planted vegetable gardens, attended working bees, and volunteered my weekends at community BBQs. I sometimes think that as educators, we forget to acknowledge the contributions of these amazing people who give up their time and expertise alongside us.

Without the incredible support and faith of the committee, I would have been unable to make any changes and I am incredibly grateful to them for that.

What changes did you bring about that were not there before? What were the effects?

One of the biggest changes I introduced was an indoor-outdoor program that encouraged children to take charge of their own learning and to participate in long periods of uninterrupted play. This created an environment where the children took the lead and where educators worked in partnership with children to

facilitate their learning, rather than a traditional 'teacher-learner' dynamic.

Another major change was to encourage children to explore 'beyond the kindergarten gates'. We would venture out into the community in a group to collect acorns at the primary school, purchase butter at the local general store, kick footballs on the oval or slide down the enormous slide at the playground. This had the flow-on effect of transforming the kindergarten from a simple place of learning to a community hub.

How do you take a holistic approach to children's learning and growing?

I do this by:

- » acknowledging each child as a unique and capable learner
- » recognising the individual context and background not only of the child but of their families
- » remembering that each child will develop at their own pace
- » providing opportunities for children to take risks, to get messy and to make mistakes—it's the only way to learn.

Tell us about the program you put in place for Avenel Kindergarten. How did you manage to up the enrolments from 14 to 44?

It was certainly a surprise. In a small community, word of mouth is the best

tool to drive enrolments. Word of our work got around pretty quickly and enrolments went up. One of the first tasks in my new role was to create an active Facebook page where we shared our journey and advocated for the importance of play and childhood. This quickly became one of our most active forms of communication for both current and prospective families. It became a little glimpse into who we are and what we believe in. As more and more families found out about us and our innovative ways of nurturing children's curiosity and learning, enrolments started to rise.

Tell us about your trip to Iceland and the International Play Iceland conference?

Participating in the Play Iceland conference was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. Educators working in the early years settings have an incredible faith in the importance of play. Play-based learning is the norm until the child is seven. The idea of a 'sit down curriculum' for children in Grade two was horrifying to the educators at Icelandic institutions.

Instead, they encouraged risky play to build a connection to nature.

I saw children crawl through caves, dodge waves at the beach, feed horses and climb trees far higher than I would have believed possible. In a country such as Iceland, there is simply no such thing as too cold or wet to play—wet weather gear was put on and removed as required. This freedom and embracement of the outdoors is something I have tried to emulate in my own practice. In my experience, it is far easier to dry off after a rain shower than to spend a whole week inside cursing the weather.

Where are you now? What changes have you brought about in your current workplace?

I am currently teaching children in Grade one and two at Eastside Lutheran College (ELC)—a small K-10 school in the eastern suburbs of Hobart.

The school embraces the idea of individual education and works hard to create an environment where students

and families work in partnership with educators to ensure the best outcomes for everyone.

As part of the ELC team, I have written a school-wide Early Childhood Framework and have extended the learning through play program to include not only children in the kindergarten and prep classes, but also those in Grades one and two. My current school is very supportive and appreciates the value of play in developing children's dispositions for learning. My students are creative, curious and willing to take risks!



What advice/suggestions would you like to share with other early childhood educators—especially early career teachers?

- 1 Everybody teaches differently and that's okay. One of the formative experiences of my graduate year was to visit a number of early childhood services within the Goulburn Region Preschool Association cluster. They were all different—yet each service met the individual needs of their children, families and communities. It is normal to want to emulate other teachers but it is important to figure out your own style—what works for you and why. The best way to do that is to make mistakes, and then reflect on them critically.
- 2 There is so much pressure on teachers these days to create a 'Pinterest-worthy' classroom—sometimes at the detriment of relationships. It is important to step back and ask 'Who am I doing this for? What value does it bring?' Sometimes, the least aesthetically pleasing experiences are the most enriching.
- 3 Relationships, relationships, relationships! As a brand new graduate, a local principal informed me of the most important element of teaching. You cannot be at your most effective without strong relationships with your children, your families and local services.
- 4 Find a mentor that gets you. I was fortunate enough to have the most incredible mentor for my first few years of teaching. Robyn gave me advice and strategies, encouraged me, celebrated my successes, and listened to me cry on the phone for hours. I would not be the teacher I am today without her and I am forever grateful. Without a strong mentor, it is very difficult to grow as an educator.

Collaboration for developmental concerns

Belinda Joyce is the author of *Survive and Enjoy Your Baby – How to Find Your Path to Parenthood*, available early 2018.

She is a midwife and maternal and child health nurse in Victoria. She's passionate about helping families to enjoy their babies and children on their parenthood journey.



We know that the early years are the most important for brain development and much depends on the quality of the environment offered. Babies and children come into your life at different ages and stages of development, both physical and emotional.

Childcare centres and preschools can offer an optimal environment for development—one that is well structured; where babies and children feel nurtured and gently challenged through play.

Some children may have had limited opportunities at home and because of this may show signs of delay in some areas.

When you are concerned about a baby or child's development:

- » Discuss the concern with your colleagues.
- » Observe the area of development by offering appropriate activities to assess that skill.
- » Allow regular opportunities to master the skills required.
- » Ask the parent if they have any concerns and what the child's ability is like in the home setting. We know that parent's concerns are important. They are the child's expert.

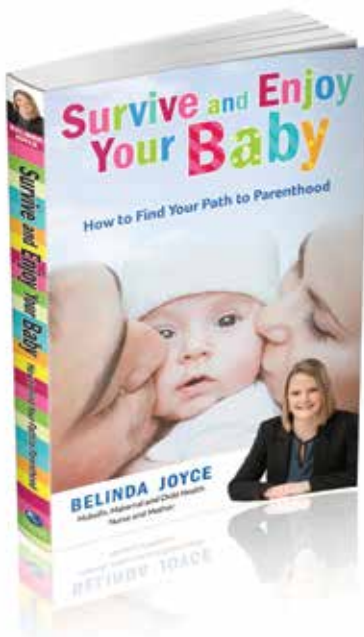
Conversations with parents can be quite difficult. Sometimes parents don't think there is a problem, or they are not ready to accept that there may be a delay in their child's development. Always be gentle and respectful in your approach and make it clear that you are working in partnership with them for the best outcome for their child.



"Early identification of possible developmental delay is always best."

Babies and children develop at different rates. A baby who has mastered self-feeding with a spoon may not be able to pull themselves up to stand, while others of the same age may have mastered this. Try not to compare babies and children as the most important part of development is 'gradual progress'. However, if they don't seem to be progressing like others of a similar age, you may need to take some action.

If you are still concerned, encourage the parent to follow up with their GP, child health nurse or paediatrician for further assessment. In many cases the doctor or nurse may take a 'wait and see approach', and book a follow-up appointment in a few months' time. Often, they will give the parent strategies to use at home. Ask the parent what the doctor or nurse suggested and maybe you can implement some of these strategies while the child is in your care as well.



The best outcome is when the specialist thinks there is no need for concern, but don't feel that you have overreacted. Early identification of possible developmental delay is always best.

Some children will require referral to early intervention services. Most of these agencies have waiting lists so it's important to make an immediate booking.

This approach supports Quality Area 6 in the National Quality Standard – Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

Tips to improve developmental outcomes:

- » Place an article in your newsletter encouraging parents to attend all offered health and developmental checks with their child health nurse or doctor. We know that children who attend these have better developmental outcomes. In Victoria, there are 10 key age and stage visits, which start soon after birth and continue until 3.5 years of age.
- » Make the time to meet with parents to discuss their child's development—particularly if you are concerned.
- » Make the time with colleagues to discuss children you are concerned about.
- » Consider providing parents with a letter outlining your concerns to take with them to health care professionals.
- » Keep notes and records at your centre.
- » Play-based learning in all settings is most effective—share your ideas with colleagues.
- » Organise professional development for all staff to increase knowledge and skills.
- » Consider inviting healthcare professionals to present to your centre's parents on childhood concerns. You can invite speech therapists, podiatrist, psychologist, optometrist, GP, or a Child Health Nurse. You may even have some parents at your centre within these professions.



What's the hurry? 2nd edition

Reclaiming childhood in an overscheduled world.

KATHY WALKER

The first edition of my book came out 10 years ago and even then I was worried we were racing our children too quickly through the early childhood years. Ten years later, it seems the pace is even faster. In fact the overscheduling and rushing around is so common it is hardly acknowledged as a challenge in today's world.

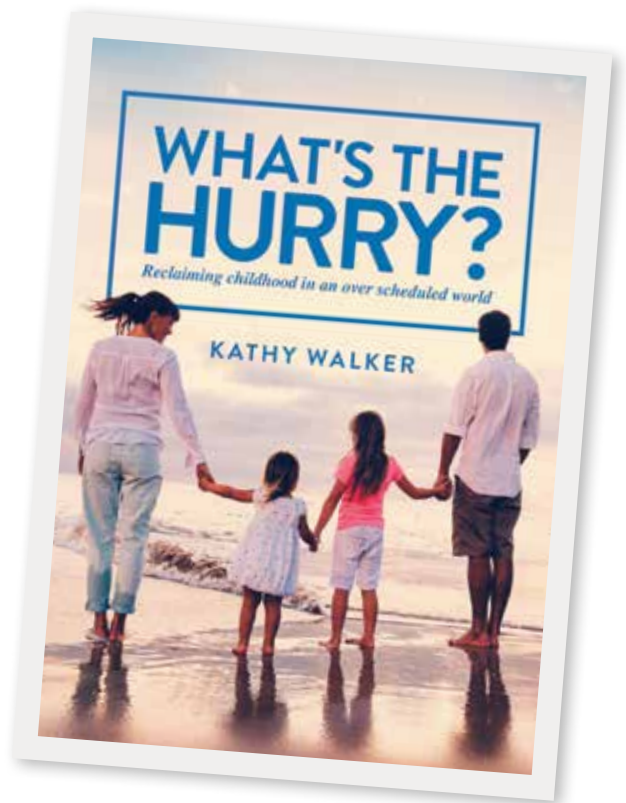
I am not so shocked anymore, but still more worried than ever before that so many families don't eat together regularly around a meal table. Yet parents ever increasingly worry about their children's eating habits and behavioural problems at dinner time!

The lack of routine—irregular bed times, no time for reading together before bed time, watching TV or videos right before bed—all continue to be counter to what young children most need in their early years. Children need order, calm, predictability, routine, and the modeling of key adults in their lives. Daily activities like talking about the day—as a family—sitting around a dinner table, and reading together helps early literacy and oral language without children even noticing.

It is very important for children to have down time and for it be valued, instead of the constant racing from one activity to another.

I have some questions for you:

- » How do we dispel the myth that starting everything earlier and earlier always leads to a more successful life?
- » How do we assist and encourage families to value playing outside, in the park, being together as a family—just hanging around?
- » How do we embrace technology but not become a slave to it?
- » How do we engage young children in the real world around them?
- » How do we help children value waiting, time passing, and anticipation?



We talk a lot about the importance of resilience, mindfulness, self-esteem and social cohesion. The irony is that our general fast-paced western lifestyle is in direct opposition to these.

- » How can we be mindful when we never have time to stop?
- » How can we be resilient when we are always given everything?
- » How can we develop a realistic sense of self when we are given gold stars and ribbons for coming last in a race?
- » How can we learn to engage and converse and be literate when we stare and engage with a screen that has no empathy—looking back at us for the majority of each day?

I wrote *What's The Hurry* 2nd edition to include more about the use of IT. As early childhood educators, we need to be mindful that technology should always be nothing more than a tool for creativity or short bursts of entertainment. The old argument of 'Well, we are in a technological world so children should have lots of it when they are young', is a simplistic and ignorant perspective. Children will grow up one day and wish to drive a car too. We don't start driving lessons in early childhood!!

What's the Hurry reminds society that childhood is not the same as adulthood or adolescence. This is being forgotten to a large degree in today's world.

Children don't need to bear all the burdens of society. They don't need to be overwhelmed with all of the issues of the world when they are three or six years of age.



How can we be resilient when we are always given everything?



As educators and parents, we need to remember that modeling—not lecturing—is the most important way in which young children learn.

If we want our children to grow up to be mindful and resilient, then we need to set an appropriate pace of life. If we don't want them to be addicted to screens or machines of technology we need to model appropriate use of them ourselves.

If we want children to be calm, we need to model a calm, routine and predictable lifestyle.

The book provides practical ideas on readiness for school, so parents don't feel pushed into rushing their children into school just because they may have reached the legal age. It reminds

educators and parents that Australia has one of the youngest age entries in the world.

The book also examines how to use technology with children in ways that suit their age and maturity and gives permission to put tablets and phones away and to turn off screens and encourage activity outside. This is particularly important when Australia has such a childhood obesity challenge.

What's the Hurry is a book for parents and leaders, for teachers, and for society in general. We all need to slow down, embrace what is most important in life. This includes feeling good about ourselves, our relationships with others, and finding meaning and purpose in life that suits the stage of life we are in.

Teach without fear

I spend my weekly work days on the stony banks of a freshwater stream.

As the sunlight falls through the gaps in the branches and dances its reflection around our 'room', I am grateful to have this space to call my classroom. It's idyllic, and the sound of the children laughing and playing and working and negotiating to the accompaniment of the babbling creek makes my heart sing.

Our kindergarten operates three days a week amid a long day care centre—nestled within the grounds of Ananda Marga River School. This is a sentient vegetarian, neohumanist, independent school in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

I am at the creek from around 7.45 am in the morning, setting up space for our first children to arrive at 8.00 am. By 9.00 am we have around 17 children from three and a half to six years old, snacking on second breakfast and watching the kookaburras warbling among the trees. We return to the centre around lunch time, depending on the flow of the day and we are lucky it is only a short stroll.

I found my way into nature pedagogy from the beginning of my teaching career. My first schools had either no classrooms for me, or limited resources, so I had to find ways of teaching with what I found. When I moved into family day care, I transferred that knowledge base from mainstream classrooms into early childhood education and care, supporting it with amazing professional development, events and training from Inspired EC.


I've seen first-hand how connecting with nature changes the way children interact with each other—the depth of learning that can be explored and the incredible leaps in physical and cognitive development that can occur from the richness of the setting.



I am not sure if I have become a better teacher—or a lazier one—as nearly all we need for learning is provided in our space. We use tools, ropes, twine. We draw, paint, glue, build, make, deconstruct, dance, sing, mark-make, risk assess, meditate, rest and even sleep. And, I never need to scour the web for 'science activity ideas in the early years'. It is literally at (and under) my feet—it is running across shallow waterways and moving in the tree branches overhead.

Back at base camp (or the kindy building) we have fences. This keeps us in, but it doesn't keep prying eyes out. There's a long drive way that runs behind the side gate, and although it's not busy, there are cars that slow down—and even stop—to shout BE CAREFUL! over the fence.

My children aren't running with switch blades. They might be rolling a mass of tyres down the hill, or duelling each other with sticks, or holding long bamboo poles in the air to determine which one is taller, teetering and tottering them around until they are arranged (with child-pole-holder) from smallest to biggest. I am usually lurking in the shadows, leaning on a pole or sitting among the ferns—close enough so I can lean in and



"I've seen first-hand how connecting with nature changes the way children interact with each other."



listen to the thoughts and mutterings, but not so close that I will disturb the play or be asked to 'help'.

The BE CAREFUL's disturb our play. It disturbs our exploration. We stop and look at each other and I am forced to come out from my hiding space to peacock across the grass and proclaim by my presence that I am watching. That I am here, that the Foucauldian gaze is travelling across the Panopticon of my kindly classroom and that I am knowledgeable and aware, and am keeping them safe. Why? What is it we fear?

We often don't trust the children to keep themselves safe, in the same way we don't allow them the time and space to explore the complexities of society. Take death for instance.

Often children's role plays have death and resurrections, funerals and services. Yet often when the day care pets die, they are squirrelled out less little eyes should see.

One of my chickens died during a day care day and we gathered round in solemn reverence. "What happened?" they asked. They had helped nurse her during the day, feeding the ailing hen with syringes. "She was old and sick. Her body gave out."

"Why doesn't she just respawn?" a five-year-old asked. We wondered if there was a difference between video games and the physical realities of death. After much consultation, we decided to bury our beloved pet. We wrapped that little

red chicken in a tea towel, chose a spot under a flowering native and we took turns in digging a hole. We laid her in and covered her over with soil, then spent time decorating her grave with special flowers and twigs. We talked about the animals we had lost, the people we had lost, the special toys forever gone. These intimate and emotional moments are the stuff of growth and development.

Even though there is some research around children not understanding the irreversibility of death fully until around age 7, there is much that the passing of pets can teach us on our journey of life and understanding.

When my Nona died, the passing of beloved dogs and pet chickens had prepared me for the overwhelming grief I would feel. It prepared my own children in understanding the process. They freely shared that 'we had a goodbye party for Nona and then we put her in a fire'. The conversations with adults were often stilted and awkward. The kindly children asked meaningful questions, compared answers and losses, told their own stories.

What is it that we fear in having these conversations, in allowing these risks?

How do you allow children to make meaning of the world around them in your space? Perhaps if you lead with love and trust in yourself and your children, you too, can teach without fear.



Katchia Avenell (M. Ed; Grad. Dip Ed; B. Mus T, Cert III Children's Services) is an educational consultant with Inspired EC and a nature pedagogue at Ananda Marga River School.

Katchia is an advocate of democratic and consultative education, nature-based learning and alternative education, the arts and PLAY. A strong ethics, gender and inclusivity lens underpins her work with both children and adults, and she is passionate in facilitating this discussion with others. You can follow her blog at www.teachwithoutfear.blogspot.com or on Facebook Katchia Avenell: Teach Without Fear.



Communities of Learning

In 2014 the New Zealand government introduced Communities of Learning.



Primarily, Communities of Learning or Kāhui Ako in Maori are about collaboration where:

- » schools and early childhood education services work together sharing resources and expertise
- » every child succeeds—wherever they are—along the education pathway
- » teachers identify the achievement and challenges in their community
- » challenges are addressed or overcome.

Simply put, this means schools within a geographic area nominate teachers from each school to meet regularly to:

- » discuss and exchange ideas
- » teach innovations, strategies
- » plan to meet and address an educational challenge in the community.

Clare Wells, chief executive of New Zealand Kindergartens says, “We know education in the 21st century is about collaboration at multiple levels and in multiple ways. The idea of Kāhui Ako has merit. The New Zealand government is keen to channel its initiatives and support through funding, for children who need additional learning support, and for teachers’ to pursue professional development.”

“The New Zealand government now needs to encourage all schools and ECE services to participate in this initiative. Currently only 65 per cent of schools and six per cent of ECE services are involved,” Clare said.

Blenheim, located in the north east region of the South Island was one of the first to adopt Communities of Learning. It now has two Communities of Learning

joined together creating the Piritahi Community of Learning (which also includes early learning).

Piritahi means ‘coming together as one’ and the benefits from doing so have been positive. “Initially we competed against one another, but the Community of Learning has changed that. We are stronger together than we are on our own,” said Renwick School Principal, Simon Heath.

Marlborough Girls’ College Principal, Karen Stewart agrees. “It also makes us focus more broadly on our kids. They are our kids, no matter what school they go to. It’s about what’s best for them and what’s best for the region.” From a teacher’s perspective, Simon said, “We are all responsible for learners in our community—whether they’re in early childhood, primary or secondary. We have to have a laser-like focus to attain achievement challenges and best practice.”

One such achievement challenge set by Piritahi is to improve writing skills in Maori, Pacific Islands and male students.

In the primary schools, a two-year action plan is underway with a goal for 85 per cent of students to be at or above national standards. But it must all begin at the early childhood level.

Wendy Logan, general manager of Marlborough Kindergarten Association said, “We believe that everyone needs to be engaged right from the start. While there’s a degree of innovation in each kindergarten, school, classroom or curriculum area we’ve all got a common

purpose. We know the outcomes we’re trying to achieve and what the checkpoints are.”

While the Piritahi Community of Learning acknowledge there has been mistakes, they are quick to point out valuable lessons have also been learnt.

Although they understand why there has been resistance they agree, “There is so much potential in this work that can not only benefit our learners but also our teachers. It is important not to rush but to take our time so that strong relationships, culture and trust can develop.”

With thanks to and inputs from Clare Wells, Chief Executive, New Zealand Kindergartens Inc and New Zealand Government Education Gazette

The New Zealand government sees Kāhui Ako as the framework for the New Zealand education system. The aim is to:

- » shift government policy settings to extend across 0 – 18 age groups
- » avoid segmentation into year stages or sectors as it is now
- » ensure the system focuses on and supports children as they progress
- » address critical issues such as collaboration—not competition—between schools and early childhood education (ECE services)
- » recognise each teaching environment is unique to learners as they progress along their education pathway.

Do you network?

Networking is an important skill, and helps you to connect with like-minded professionals, as well as develop your own reputation.

When you're working in one of the caring professions—such as teaching and nursing—networking can be the last thing on your mind during and after a busy day. But networking is a powerful strategy for the mutual exchange of ideas and information that could help you develop your skills and abilities as an early childhood educator or teacher.

Networking can be difficult for a person who is timid or shy, but it is nothing more than developing interpersonal relationships with people you meet during the course of your work. This is what everyone does naturally during their daily working lives. You are networking when you communicate with your early learners' parents, and when you reconnect with a former co-worker or catch up with someone you studied with at university. Professional networking is simply using these natural interactions in a manner that enriches and advances your practice as a professional.

How does this work? It's quite simple. During our lives we naturally develop networks that include family, friends and work colleagues. Each of these can, in turn, provide useful connections to new networks that might provide fresh ideas that could help propel your centre or kindergarten to the next level of innovation and excellence.

Start your networking campaign by seeking out local groups in your vicinity. Look for resources offered by childhood associations and similar groups. They may offer events that will enhance your professional knowledge and allow you to forge new relationships with fellow early childhood educators or teachers. Show an interest in your contact's

personal story—what motivated them to choose early childhood education? Ask them about their ongoing career goals. This demonstrates the meeting isn't a one-way street and provides an opportunity to build personal rapport.

Social media has tremendous potential as a tool for professional networking. Facebook, in particular, features interest and community groups where you can interact with peers and share your work and interests. It's not difficult to open a community page for your centre or kindergarten, and implement security settings to keep the group private or ensure people only join with permission. If you're not sure how to go about this look up a Facebook for Business short course at a local CAE or community centre, and go along and learn the ropes. Remember to write a set of rules about what people can post and share.

Professional development days and conferences are also important for professional networking. These events not only allow you to renew contact with people you may have never met, but also to take relationships begun on social media to a new and elevated level.

It might be worthwhile to consider hosting events at your centre, inviting other early childhood educators in your area to visit and see how you do things. Such events can facilitate collaboration and idea sharing that is mutually beneficial in helping improve your practice in ways that might not otherwise occur to you.

And don't be shy about handing out business cards and contact details. Hand these out to your new contacts and acquaintances and happily accept cards from them. Business cards are a convenient way of retaining contact information that will be key to sustaining these relationships after your initial meeting.

However you meet new people in your networking campaign, make a deliberate effort to maintain these contacts over time. Keep in touch via email and make regular, but flexible, catch-up dates. Make the effort and you'll likely be surprised about the personal and professional rewards.

These are just a few simple networking tips that will help you to forge relationships—and even friendships—that will benefit you both personally and professionally.



Attend professional development days and conferences, sit with someone different and introduce yourself.

It's time to teach food



It's time to teach food (not nutrition) to our children. And I mean teach (not preach) food (not nutrition) to our children.

Forget nutrition education for kids (or even adults for that matter), we need to go back to basics and teach food education first. It might sound like this mum and dietician has gone crazy—not teach nutrition?!?

There is plenty of pressure on us educators to get our kids healthier. The numbers are all doom and gloom—childhood obesity, not eating enough veggies, especially if we remove the poor potato, and too many 'discretionary' foods. These are foods outside of the core food groups. And you know what? We are trying, but it's hard. Think screwed up faces at lunchtime, parents asking what their kids ate that day. Sometimes our best intentions are accidentally a little misplaced—statements like “pleeeeee just try your carrots” and “come on just three more bites and you can leave the table”. Under the pressure, it is easy to forget that we aren't force feeding children vegetables. We are trying to teach them to like vegetables and any other food—but whoever knows me also knows that vegetables are my passion.

Research shows that food habits track. So what you eat and your relationship with food as a child strongly dictates your choices as adults. If we take the focus off nutrition for a moment and forget 'eat this cause it's good for you' and forget worrying about serving sizes of vegetables, how do we get kids or even adults to learn to like new foods, including fruits and veggies?

Like any learning, it's a journey and it takes time, so we need to be patient. Kids don't learn to read overnight, so why do we expect them to be confident and able eaters in a flash?

As educators how can you best help kids at mealtimes in your centres? And it doesn't matter if centres provide the food or if parents do?

Teach food by increasing fun food experiences away from the table.

Children need to have multiple positive food experiences away from the table, before they will try and then eat foods. It can take up to 20 experiences with a food before kids might consider trying a little.

You can do the following activities with the children away from the table to make them more willing to try later at the table.

Arts and craft activities promoting fruits and veggies:

- » Drawings – ask children to draw whole or cut fruit and vegetables. Place the fruit or vegetable in the middle of the table for all to see.
- » Print – fruit and vegetable colouring-in sheets or dot-to-dot
- » Fruit and veggie-shaped stampers. You can purchase these or use real veggies as paintbrushes
- » Play dough. Make pretend fruit salad or vegetable soup out of playdough.

Pretend play:

- » Renovate your home corner so kids can make salads and sandwiches as well as cake
- » Create a pretend fruit and vegetable shop
- » Make a pretend vegetable garden.



Cooking:

- » simple dishes—muesli cookies, apple crumble, ABCD balls, pita pizza
- » simple food art—salad people, fruit faces, fruit rainbows
- » fruit salad.

Integrating food education into your daily education:

- » discuss the colours of fruits and vegetables
- » smell herbs and spices
- » cut up fruits and vegetables and count the pieces.

Encourage gardening to:

- » teach kids where food comes from
- » appreciate the joy of digging
- » enhance learning through play
- » pick fresh vegetables
- » smell and taste the food.

More:

- » find foodie books for children—check out the Foost website: www.foost.com.au
- » recipe books - make your own
- » drawing and craft made by the kids or photos of the kids gardening or cooking.

Create a division of responsibility when children are at the table eating

Adults control so much of a child's day, but food is what the children control. So when it comes to the table we need to share responsibility.

Parents provide, kids decide!

A parent should serve healthy food regularly but kids choose what and how much they want. So when you are at the table with the kids, don't pressure them to eat. That's not your responsibility. Your role is to create a nice and positive place for kids to eat. If a child refuses a meal or snack that is ok; let them know when the next meal or snack will be.

Tips for creating a positive mealtime

- » Invite the children when setting the table—pick some flowers and make some colourful placemats.
- » Use descriptive language—crunchy, yellow, soft—to describe food instead of healthy, good for you. Better still don't talk about food at all and chat about other things.
- » Role modelling is great—where possible, sit and enjoy some fruit or veggies with your children while they are eating.
- » Have a 'don't be rude to food table' rule. Inform the children that they don't have to try or eat foods they don't want to, but they shouldn't be rude or say 'yuck'. Instead they should say nothing or 'no thank you'.
- » If the children like a food they should tell everyone as this helps create a positive environment and positive peer pressure.
- » Most importantly, make it fun, positive and no pressure to try or eat.

As an educator your role is to teach and support. When it comes to food, let's get back to basics and teach kids the joy of food and eating, rather than preaching nutrition.

If you want to help parents, share our recipes and tips with them and please credit www.foost.com.au

Opposite is a favourite lunchbox snack, which can also be frozen. You can make these in the classroom or share with your centre's parents. You can also find the recipe at: www.foost.com.au/muesli-cookies.

Muesli cookies

Ingredients

- » 3 ripe bananas
- » 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- » 2 cups rolled oats
- » 1/2 cup desiccated coconut
- » 1/2 cup raisins (dried cranberries) or sultanas or any dried fruits
- » 1/4 cup olive oil

Directions

- » Preheat oven to 180 degrees
- » Mash bananas in medium-sized bowl
- » Add the ingredients and mix with wooden spoon
- » Line a tray with baking paper
- » Roll mixture into balls (about a tablespoon per ball) and place on baking tray
- » Press each ball to flatten slightly
- » Bake in the oven for about 20 minutes or until brown
- » Allow to cool on baking tray.

Note

- You can also use this recipe to make muesli bars by following steps 1- 3.
- » Place mixture into a lined slice tray
 - » Press to flatten with your fingers
 - » Cook for 30 minutes
 - » Cool in pan then slice.

For more recipe and colourful tips visit www.foost.com.au

Your chance to win!

Win a Foost cooking and nutrition preschool incursion for up to 20 kids (valued at \$350) or a set of 12 Foost Kids' Safe Knives (value \$140)! Answer this simple question: Why would you love to win this prize?

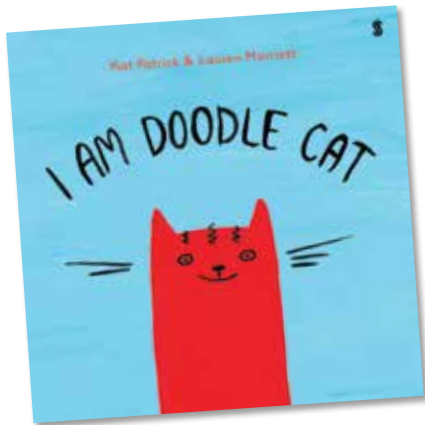
Email kate@foost.com.au with your answer and the name of your centre in the subject line by 15/12/2017. Winners will be drawn at random and notified by email.

Kate Wengier is a mother of four, a family dietician and nutritionist, and the founder of Foost. Her team consists of dietitians, mums and educators who have a passion for being healthy, love food and have a knack for making anything complex seem simple.

Foost runs PD sessions for educators, incursions for kids, parent education sessions, and has a range of resources to help create happier, healthier mealtimes.



Book review



I am Doodle Cat

By: Kat Patrick, Lauren Marriott

A charming, colourful children's book about a tomato-red cat called Doodle Cat who loves everything, from nature and friends to farts and string.

He loves dancing, noise, the ocean and trees, going fast and doodling.

One of the best pages in my opinion was a two-page spread where Doodle Cat announces he loves 'difference'. The accompanying drawing of many cats, all different colours, shapes and sizes imparts a strong message of how to celebrate diversity.

The last two pages are quite a departure from the rest of the book. Instead of illustrated pictures, it contains handwritten paragraphs containing scientific facts about all the things Doodle Cat loves, giving meaning to what might otherwise be considered nonsense everyday things to love.

'I am Doodle Cat' is a feel-good, quirky, hardback book with simple, colourful, doodle-like illustrations that teach kids it's really important to appreciate the world around you, but most of all to love yourself!



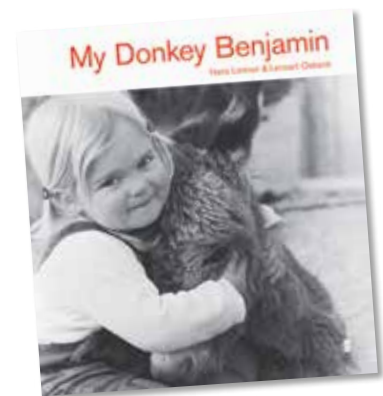
Noonie and the Missing Bone

By: Casey Hawkins

The narration is the striking feature of first-time author Casey Hawkins' *Noonie and the Missing Bone*. Casey is a natural songster, telling the story in simple, everyday language with a good meter and rhythm.

Noonie and the Missing Bone tries to follow the tradition of picture books that encourage the reader to be a fellow author and contribute to the story. The only bit of colour is on the front and back covers—encouraging children to colour in the black and white illustrations and use the pages as a canvas for their imagination.

The book will be great for a 'read aloud'. Don't be surprised to find lower primary aged children attempting their own rhymes at the end of the book, as was the author's intention.



My Donkey Benjamin

By: Hans Limmer, Lennart Osbeck

A cute little story about Susi, a chubby little blond girl, who finds a baby orphan donkey while out walking with her father around their Mediterranean island home.

First published in the 1960s, this book is written from a child's point of view, but in a much older voice.

'My Donkey Benjamin' chronicles how Susi has to bottle-feed her new pet she calls Ben with milk, how she plays with him, tries to bathe him, takes him for walks around the village, goes to the beach with him and even sleeps with him, until one day when something frightening happens.

Ben takes himself for an early morning walk. While chasing after him little Susi gets lost and eventually has to rely on Ben to lead her home again, which happily he does.

This is a feel good book, delightfully illustrated with black and white photographs. Be warned it was written in the 1960s, so some of the concepts, such as a little four year old wandering through a village unaccompanied except for a baby donkey, might raise some eyebrows.

But, be assured, kids love this book about the special bond between a little girl and her pet and on all book forums it averages five star or close to five star ratings.



ASG's Local Community Program

Engaging with the early learning sector around Australia

Do you know about ASG's Local Community Program, which has more than 300 participating Early Learning Centres (ELCs) and kindergartens across Australia?

These participating ELCs and kindergartens receive educational resources from ASG of up to \$450 just for participating in the program. Also, ASG is awarding two participating centres grants of \$2000 every six months—benefiting not only the children attending the ELCs, but the wider community as well.

To participate and apply for one of these grants please tell us in 200 words or less how receiving \$2000 will benefit the children in your centre.



ASG is awarding two participating centres grants of \$2000 every six months.

For Bold Park Community School, Wembley in Western Australia, the grant meant that they could complete their new playground area with a shade sail (pictured). Sue Wyatt, of Bold Park Community School says, "Our daily program seeks to develop each child's connectedness to their environment. It is important to provide sun-safe areas outside, where our students can learn through play and exploration—not only in our Wildspaces but also in our other play areas. Thanks to ASG, our students now enjoy the wonderful addition of the shade sail to our primary play area."

To find out how to apply please contact: **Claire Aldham** on 03 9276 7997 or email marketing@asg.com.au

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