

Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care

Submission from the Department for Education (SA)
in relation to 3-year-old preschool

February 2023



Government
of South Australia

Department for Education

Acknowledgement of Country

The department acknowledges Aboriginal ways of growing, knowing and learning as well as their language, culture and spirit as being important to their learning and development.

We acknowledge the traditional owners throughout South Australia and we pay respect to the custodians of the land on which we live and learn. We respect their spiritual relationship with Country and acknowledge that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to those living today.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and we acknowledge the cultural authority of Aboriginal people visiting from other areas of South Australia and Australia

Contents

Foreword	5
The importance of the early years	6
Preschool in South Australia	7
South Australian Government preschool	8
Government preschool models	8
Session times	9
Costs	10
Educational programming design	10
Preschool Quality	10
Equity	12
Accessibility	12
Affordability	13
Additional services in preschools	13
Parent choice	14
Preschool for 3- to 5-year-olds	15
Quality teaching and learning	15
Staffing in government preschools	16
Mixed-age learning	17
Hours accessed per week	18
Infrastructure and environment	18
Support for learners with functional needs	19
Addressing barriers to access	21
Session length and wraparound care	21
Regional and remote areas	21
Access for Aboriginal children	22
Cultural accessibility	23
Considerations for implementation of 3-year-old preschool	23
Capacity and infrastructure	23
Impact on playgroups, occasional care and other services	24
Workforce	24

OFFICIAL

Aboriginal employees	25
Challenges associated with the attraction and retention of staff	26
Funding arrangements.....	26
Additional considerations for 3-year-old preschool.....	28
Early intervention	28
Wraparound care	29
Appendices.....	30

Foreword

The South Australian Government has a long, strong history of delivering high-quality preschool programs to children between 3 and 5 years of age. South Australian Government preschool is a play-based early childhood education program delivered by degree-qualified early years teachers and other qualified educators using the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

The government preschool system has grown from a single kindergarten in 1905 to a statewide network providing universal access in the year before children start school. The Department for Education (the department), and its Office for the Early Years, is proud of its role in the development of its youngest citizens; through the efforts of its dedicated and hardworking teachers, educators, and leaders, it has established preschools that consistently rate highest in the nation on quality.¹

The department believes that all children have the right to thrive and experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

High-quality universal preschool ensures every child at preschool makes progress towards learning and development outcomes. A high-quality universal preschool is open and inclusive. It is not one size fits all. It is responsive, reflective, and intentional around a child's individual and developmental needs, and staffed by teachers and educators who are highly qualified, highly skilled, and supported to provide a quality learning experience.

High-quality preschool, underpinned by evidence-informed education programs and practices and by strong relationships built by teachers and educators with children, has a fundamental role in establishing the foundation for lifelong learning, social development and wellbeing. However, preschool education is not only about preparing a child for the rest of their life; it is also an important time for every young child to simply experience being 3, 4, or 5. It is about children belonging, being and becoming.²

The department's position is that all children in South Australia have the right to high-quality educational preschool programs that support their learning and development, and that all children have a place in their local government preschool.

The department's sights are set on building an education system that is genuinely recognised as world-leading. As the first universal interaction South Australian families have with the education system, government preschools have an important and unique role for children, families, and communities in providing children with their best start in learning and in life.

This submission, provided by the department, aims to provide the Royal Commission with an understanding of how the department delivers high-quality, accessible, and affordable preschool to children aged 3 to 5 and key considerations for extending preschool to all 3-year-olds.

¹ National Quality Framework, Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority

² Early Years Learning Framework, Australian Government Department of Education

The importance of the early years

The neuroscience evidence is clear that the early years impact significantly on children's brain development and their future life chances. The first 5 years in a child's life are vitally important; they are where children are set up to thrive or falter. Research shows that children who start behind stay behind.³

The early years is a significant time of growth and development. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) measures how children are developing as they transition to their first year of school based on 5 key domains of development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive skills and communication skills and general knowledge.

A child's earliest environmental, learning, and developmental experiences are critical to the way their brain develops. Nurturing, attachment, and growth are important for all children to develop for success in education, work, and life.

A strong early years system has enormous benefits. Children tend to grow up healthier and happier, and there are significant economic benefits through reduced downstream costs and a boost to the skills market. A strong early years system also provides more rewarding careers for early childhood professionals and increases workforce participation, especially for women.

Universal services are a critical part of the early intervention picture; they are the base on which we build the early years system. An effective universal early years system identifies and addresses vulnerability early, through maternal health, quality care and early education. It is critical that universal services be accessible, affordable, and culturally responsive so that all families can engage with them, regardless of their individual circumstances.

This incredible opportunity of strengthening and investing in the early years has been recognised nationally. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is now a standing agenda item on the National Cabinet agenda and is seen to be one of the most powerful levers for workforce participation. State and Commonwealth governments are working together on a long-term vision for ECEC, underpinned by the principles of quality, equity, accessibility, and affordability.

There are a number of national commitments and initiatives underway to contribute to building a strong early years system in Australia, including the development of the Commonwealth Government's Early Years Strategy, the Productivity Commission's broad inquiry into ECEC, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's inquiry into the costs and availability of childcare labour, the National ECEC Workforce Strategy and the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership which is contributing to Closing the Gap.

In addition to the Royal Commission into ECEC, the South Australian Government is progressing a range of state-based initiatives aimed at strengthening early intervention, boosting the ECEC workforce and ensuring all young children are thriving and learning.

Preschool plays a fundamental role in the early years system. All Australian Governments recognise the importance of preschool and the significant contribution that high-quality early learning makes to lifelong educational achievement, productivity, wellbeing and success. Preschool is a fundamental

³ O'Connell, M., Fox, S., Hinz, B., & Cole, H. (2016). *Quality Early Education for All: Fostering Entrepreneurial, Resilient and Capable Learners*, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne.

part of the ECEC system, providing universal benefits to learning and development as well as opportunities for families to be supported as their children's first teachers.

South Australia has a proud history and strong commitment to quality early childhood education and is committed to working with international partners at both a local and global level to promote the rights of children, including former Adelaide Thinkers in Residence Dr. Fraser Mustard and Professor Carla Rinaldi.

Realising the potential of each and every child and their learning is our ongoing responsibility as a state. The late Dr Mustard, an Adelaide Thinker in Residence (2006 to 2007), highlighted this in his report *Investing in the Early Years: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do* (Attachment 1), in which he drew urgent attention to early brain development and its effect on lifelong behaviour, learning and health. Dr Mustard's recommendation to develop children's centres is discussed further later in this report.

Building on Dr Mustard's influential work, Professor Carla Rinaldi further emphasised the need to focus on the rights of children as citizens. At the close of Professor Rinaldi's residency, she provided recommendations about strengthening early childhood across the state through the *Re-imagining Childhood: The inspiration of Reggio Emilia education principles in South Australia report* (Attachment 2). The report offers South Australians profoundly challenging questions to provoke the state's thinking about childhood.

Early Learning Strategy: All Children Thriving and Learning

In 2021, the Office for the Early Years (OEY) was established within the department. The purpose of OEY is to provide a single point of leadership in the sector for universal services being provided to children in their early years in order to increase the proportion of children who are developmentally on track when starting school.

In recognising the importance of a strong early years system, the department launched the 10-year Early Learning Strategy: All Children Thriving and Learning in 2021 (Appendix 1). The Early Learning Strategy encompasses child development and learning from birth to school and involves a range of government and non-government agencies in its implementation.

The Early Learning Strategy has the following goals:

- Strong partnerships across government and non-government sectors to increase the proportion of children developmentally on track, regardless of background or location, with additional specific support provided to Aboriginal and disadvantaged children
- Well-supported parents highly engaged with their children, enabling them to learn and reach their potential
- High-quality educational programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning.

The work towards creating an environment that encourages and enables continuous improvement is well underway.

Preschool in South Australia

South Australia has a low-cost, universal preschool system that has been in place for over 100 years. It includes a mixed model of preschool service provision, with around 80% of enrolled children attending a preschool delivered by government, complemented by non-government preschool

delivery. Most services⁴ fall within the scope of the Education and Care Services National Law (National Law) and Regulations (National Regulations) and are subject to the National Quality Framework (NQF) assessment and rating process. The naming of preschool is not consistent across the sector, with the most common titles being ‘preschool’, ‘kindergarten’, ‘children’s centre’, ‘early learning centre’, or ‘child parent centre’.

All South Australian children are eligible to access 600 hours of preschool in the year before full-time school. Aboriginal children and children under the guardianship of the Chief Executive of the Department for Child Protection (or who have been under guardianship) are entitled to access 12 hours of preschool per week from 3 years of age.

Preschool in South Australia, as in the rest of Australia, is not compulsory; however, it is recognised as a valuable service to support children’s learning and development and to build the skills that children need to thrive into their later years. Preschool in South Australia has a strong history, and the majority of parents choose to access preschool at a government preschool.

Research shows that high-quality preschool benefits individual children and society.⁵ Children who attend preschool are more likely to be developmentally on track at the entry to school and maintain this advantage throughout their schooling and beyond. This correlates to improved performance in literacy and numeracy as well as to a lower risk of emotional and behavioural issues.

While preschool is of benefit to all children, it has particular benefit for children experiencing disadvantage. Access to a high-quality preschool program has been shown to mitigate the effects of disadvantage on children’s development. A two-year preschool program generates greater developmental gains for children, with these gains being even higher for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children grow and learn in the context of their family. It is important to recognise that families are children’s first and most important teachers, and preschools work with families to help support them in this role. Supporting families fundamentally supports children and working in genuine partnership with families supports children’s learning and development.

The department acknowledges Aboriginal ways of growing, knowing, and learning as well as their language, culture and spirit as being important to their learning and development.

South Australian Government preschool

South Australian Government preschools are constituted under the *Education and Children’s Services Act 2019*. In South Australia, approximately 15,200 (80%) of children enrolled in preschool attend a government service (as at August 2021). This includes children aged from 3 to 5. In 2022, the department had 383 government preschool sites operating under the National Law and Regulations.

Government preschool models

The department delivers preschool primarily through two management models: standalone and school-based.

⁴ There are 2 preschools that are out of scope as they primarily provide an intervention service.

⁵ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2018). *Early Learning Matters*.

The standalone preschool model was established by the former Kindergarten Union. Standalone preschools were established in local communities with the intention that families could walk to and from them with their children. They make up the largest proportion of the preschool portfolio (273 of 383). They are under the leadership of an ECEC qualified preschool director who has a teaching load of up to 24 hours per week and an administrative load. They also have Early Childhood Workers (ECWs) and may have additional teaching staff, depending on enrolments.

School-based preschools were established from the 1970s. They were built on school land. By government moving to make the investment in building preschools, rather than relying on community investment as per the standalone model, it increased accessibility in areas where community investment was not possible. Of the government preschool portfolio, 110 are school-based preschools. They are under the leadership of a school principal and are staffed by teachers who have a teaching load of 22.5 hours per week and may also be allocated Student Support Officers (SSOs), depending on enrolments.

An important feature of government preschool delivery is that families are encouraged to directly contribute to decision-making for their children and for the preschool. Preschools are governed by governing councils, that work with the site leader to engage with the community to develop local policies and set the broad direction and vision of the site, ensuring it is contextualised to the local community. This community and family led decision-making is a key strength and a point of difference in government preschools.

Session times

Government preschools provide programs and set session times that are responsive to community needs, in line with the department's approach to involve families in local decisions through the preschool's governing council. The department provides guidance about a range of session models that are workable from both an industrial perspective and to meet the varying needs of a range of communities.

Of the 383 government preschools, 170 operate on a full-time basis. 'Full-time' is defined as having 2 groups of children attend across all 5 working days of the week. The other 213 government preschools operate on a part-time basis and only have one group of children attending. These centres are staffed to operate for half of the working week.

Part-time centres, or full-time centres that have available capacity, may also deliver an early childhood program, such as occasional care or a playgroup.

To deliver the entitlement of 15 hours a week, common government preschool service models include the provision of 6 hours of preschool between the core hours of 8.30am to 3.30pm, with families accessing either 2.5 days of preschool each week (15 hours per week) or 5 full days over a fortnight (12 hours in the first week and 18 in the second).

Other less common service configurations include the provision of preschool over 2 longer days of 7.5 hours each and the provision of 2 days (12 hours a week) for the first two terms of the year and 3 days (18 hours per week) in the second two terms. A high proportion of sites that operate on a full-time basis have fixed groups; for example, one group attends Monday and Wednesday and alternate Friday mornings, and the second attends Tuesday and Thursday and alternate Friday mornings.

From 2023, government preschools will have two preschool intakes per year: the beginning of the year for children who are 4 years of age before 1 May, or the beginning of term 3 in the year children turn 4 between 1 May and 31 October.

Costs

In 2021, the annual base staffing cost to deliver preschool in government settings was approximately \$113.3 million. Of this, \$95.5 million was provided by the state government and \$17.8 million by the Australian Government through universal access funding. This cost does not include additional resources provided to preschools, such as inclusion support funding, bilingual support, and various operating grants.

Across government preschool services, total costs per site vary between standalone and school-based settings as well as metropolitan and non-metropolitan locations. According to department data, a majority of preschool costs are associated with staffing, accounting for 85 per cent of costs in non-metropolitan standalone services, and up to 96 per cent in school-based metropolitan preschool settings.

Educational programming design

Government preschool teachers and educators work with the principles, practices, and outcomes of the EYLF and department preschool curriculum resources that support the framework, including the Indicators of Preschool Numeracy and Literacy. Children's learning is dynamic and holistic, with each child learning in their own way and at their own pace through purposeful play supported by intentional teaching.

Preschool Quality

The National Quality Standards (NQS) sets a high national benchmark for ECEC and out of school hours care (OSHC) services in Australia. It includes 7 quality areas that are important outcomes for children. The notion of quality for ECEC is generally considered within the context of NQS Assessment and Rating outcomes, which include both structural and process quality domains.

Structural quality generally refers to centre facilities/resources, staff-to-child ratios, and staff qualifications that are more easily measurable in determining quality.

Process quality is the nature of interactions between the child and teacher, child and child, teacher and parent, and teacher and teacher, as well as the nature of centre leadership and teachers' pedagogical skills. Process components influence everyday early childhood education and care settings, and they directly influence the quality of a child's day-to-day experience. These aspects of process quality are fostered and supported in a high-quality system through leadership, mentoring, and professional learning.

Process quality is said to have the strongest impact on a child's development. However, structural quality has a large impact on process quality – so structural quality is still an important pillar.

NQS quality ratings in government preschools

Government preschool provision is associated with the highest quality in South Australia. Across all government preschool ratings, 98 per cent of preschools meet or exceed the NQS, with three quarters of services exceeding the NQS.

A key focus for the department is on exceeding practice in NQF Areas; 1 - Educational program and practice, 5 - Relationships with children and 7 - Governance and leadership. These are the key levers of process quality and support children's learning and development outcomes.

Preschool Quality Model

The department understands that positive outcomes from preschool are conditional on the service provided and that levels of quality must be maintained to enhance children’s overall development. To address this, the department has developed a preschool quality model and resources purposefully designed for the unique context of departmental preschools. The resources intend to support preschool leaders to implement high-quality educational preschool programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learnings in every preschool.

The preschool quality model provides an opportunity to be clear about what the department aims for in its preschools and the support needed to embed high-quality teaching and learning in every preschool. The preschool quality model:

- Connects the ongoing work in preschools with the initiatives under the Early Learning Strategy.
- Emphasises the important work government preschools do to offer quality programs for children.
- Demonstrates the key interaction between leadership, quality teaching and learning and improvement planning.
- Shows the improvements in the system that will support government preschools to achieve high-quality outcomes for all children.



Preschool Position Statement

The preschool position statement (Appendix 2) is the keystone in the South Australian Preschool Quality Model. It sets out the department’s aspirations for how government preschools help all children thrive and learn. It is a key recommendation from the Early Learning Strategy.

The statement aims to build a shared, consistent understanding of the department’s aspirations for quality in every preschool and the experience of children and families who access them. It is a clear statement about what the department believes and values about the purpose of preschool

education and provides clarity about the approaches it will use in government preschools.

Preschool quality improvement planning

Ongoing self-assessment and review against the NQS – particularly through a greater focus on strategies for improving learning underpinned by the EYLF – drives continuous improvement. This is essential in providing quality learning outcomes for all children.

The department’s preschool quality improvement plan, informed by evidence of children’s learning, provides a common process for continuous improvement across the system.

All preschools use the preschool quality improvement plan template to continuously improve their teaching and leadership and most importantly, maintain a strategic focus on children’s learning and on implementing the EYLF.

Preschool leading practice papers

The department’s preschool leading practice papers take current early childhood research and apply it in the context of South Australian government preschools. They provide specific guidance to preschools leaders on how to use this information with their teams.

Equity

The department’s preschools uphold the principles of equity and opportunity so that children have the support they need to engage fully in the preschool program. This includes identifying and addressing barriers such as language, physical, emotional and behaviour challenges, and family complexities, and advocating for children and families to overcome them.

Aligning with the EYLF, the department’s teachers and educators are committed to equity and believe in all children’s capacities to succeed, regardless of diverse circumstances and abilities.

The provision of appropriate support enables children to participate fully in and benefit from the preschool program. Teachers and educators are supported by expert knowledge and advice. The department recognises the benefit of providing additional supports when children need them to enable them to achieve their learning and development goals.

Teachers and educators offer differentiation in curriculum and practice to ensure individual children’s learning and development needs are met. Teachers and educators work with families to learn about what each child knows, can do and understands so they can engage with and respond to children with diverse learning needs.

Accessibility

The department aspires for government preschools to be accessible to all families.

One of the great strengths of government preschools is the accessibility and provision of a statewide service, including in remote and regional areas.

For regional populations, the nearest government preschool is on average 25km away. For the nearest long day care service, this extends to nearly 65km. This highlights the South Australian Government’s role in ensuring access to preschool across the state.

Accessibility is not only about geographical and physical access, but also about cultural responsiveness and responding to working families. Strategies to ensure that families are supported to access government preschools are discussed elsewhere in this submission.

Affordability

Government preschools are funded to provide 15 hours of preschool per week for children in the year before school (600 hours per year), with the state providing funding for 12 hours per week of preschool for children in the year before school. Since 2009, the Australian Government has provided funding for the remaining 3 hours. The funding from the Australian Government was provided through the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (UANP) until 2022, when the UANP was replaced by the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA).

Under current arrangements, preschool directors and principals of school-based preschools (principals) and governing councils are responsible for developing, approving, and collecting preschool contributions (fees for families) and other charges.

There is no legal compulsion to pay the contribution, and a service cannot exclude a child from a government funded preschool education program because their parent, guardian or carer did not pay it. The school card scheme, which provides financial relief to low-income families, does not apply to preschool services as the preschool contribution is not compulsory.

While government preschool remains extremely affordable for families, the ability of preschools in higher socio-economic areas to generate higher revenue through the preschool contribution can result in differentials in the quality of amenities between preschools in higher socio-economic areas and those in lower socio-economic areas. Individual preschools also supplement their allocated budget through fundraising activity, which again tends to favour preschools in more affluent areas.

The preschool contribution charge helps cover the costs of running a government funded preschool education program over the course of a year. Other charges cover extra experiences (e.g., an excursion) that are not part of the preschool education program. When a parent, guardian, or carer does not pay for an extra experience, the preschool is not obliged to provide the relevant service. Where a preschool community is not able to contribute to these costs, it will mean that children may not receive the same experience as children attending preschools in communities that have more capacity to contribute to the cost of these activities.

Government preschool contributions vary across sites and range from \$15 per term to \$320 per term, although a small number of preschools in some locations do not charge a contribution, such as on the APY Lands. On average, government preschools charge \$61.28 in contributions per term for school-based services and \$122.53 per term for standalone services.

Additional services in preschools

While not a direct component of government preschool delivery, government preschools support families through a range of additional services offered at preschool sites. These are not available at every preschool but are distributed based on community need and have evolved over time. Nevertheless, the additional services described below contribute to the offering families receive from their children's preschool.

Rural Care

The department funds and operates 17 small rural care services. They were first established in the 1990s in small rural areas where non-government childcare operators would not operate due to financial viability issues.

The department also operates centre-based long day care at Keith War Memorial Kindergarten and Kalaya Children's Centre.

Children’s centres

Children’s centres were established from 2005. The department’s 47 children’s centres bring together care, education, health, community development activities and family services for families and their young children. Each centre offers a different range of services tailored to their local setting. These services are offered with a strong focus on partnerships with the local community and other agencies.

Integrated sites

Integrated services provide both preschool and long day childcare options for families. They are primarily provided in country locations where there is a lack of supply of childcare.

Occasional Care

The department delivers occasional care services for babies, toddlers, and children under school age at 102 government preschools and children’s centres in rural and metropolitan South Australia. Occasional care services are targeted at children who are not accessing alternative early childhood education and care programs, including preschool, a long day care centre or family day care. Occasional care is an important service for families who for whom traditional childcare services, such as family day care or centre based long day care, are either inaccessible or unaffordable.

Playgroups and playcentres

Playgroups and playcentres promote young children’s development through play experience and provide an opportunity for parents to build supportive networks, make friends and share experiences with other parents. Parents attending playgroups experience reduced social isolation, improved parenting skills and self-confidence, increased knowledge of relevant community services, and a greater awareness of their child’s needs.⁶

Community playgroups are run by families for families for children aged from birth to 5. Many SA government preschools and children’s centres offer community playgroups for a small cost (e.g., a gold coin donation). Playgroups, led by a trained facilitator, are offered to children from birth to 5 through the Learning Together Communities program on department sites.

Playcentres are play-based learning programs established in communities where there are not enough eligible preschool children to establish or maintain a preschool program. They offer activities run by an ECW or SSO for children under school age and their families. They promote children’s early learning and development and are managed and staffed by the department.

Parent choice

In developing the Early Learning Strategy, the department undertook a survey with parents to better understand their views on preschool.

The majority (95%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that attending preschool is important for children’s education. Regarding which factors influence their choice of preschool, the majority of respondents chose the service’s reputation or word of mouth (68.3%), followed by its location (66.3%), providing a supportive transition to school (49%), and the service’s particular approach

⁶ Supported playgroups for parents and children, Australian Government Australian Institute of Family Studies

(e.g., Nature Play, Montessori, Reggio Emilia) (49%). Likewise, 30.7% of respondents chose the NQS rating as a key factor. Respondents' overall views about preschool included:

- Key factors were teaching and learning approaches, learning environments, support for parenting, the age children are able to start preschool, the teachers and educators at the service and transition to school
- Barriers to accessing preschools for working families
- Access to play-based learning, and the presence of nature in the physical environment for preschools.

Anecdotally, families with both preschool and school-aged children tend to prefer school-based preschools or a co-located preschool, as it provides greater convenience around drop offs and pickups. Preschools on school sites can also offer an easier transition into school.

Preschool for 3- to 5-year-olds

Quality teaching and learning

The department believes that learning and development is underpinned by quality educational program and practice and the relationships that teachers and educators develop with children.

A principle of the EYLF is that teachers hold high expectations for all children and their learning progress, so care is taken to build on children's strengths and capacities. Preschool teachers and educators actively plan for improving outcomes for every child holistically and in partnership with families. They are guided by knowledge of children's typical learning and developmental trajectories or pathways, and these support teachers and educators to strengthen curriculum decision-making to progress children's learning.

Active developmental monitoring ensures that children are demonstrating age-appropriate developmental milestones that underpin successful learning and provide a platform for developmental progression. Teachers and educators use formative assessment strategies to monitor and assess children's learning and regularly report to parents on children's progress and outcomes.

Universal access to preschool for 3-year-olds should be underpinned by differentiated, individualised curriculum planning that is responsive to the needs of the community and is appropriate for the developmental needs of individual learners. The program should be delivered by qualified, adequately supported teachers and early childhood workers.

In 2023, the department will release new curriculum resources in five separate domains: social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical. These domains align with the developmental milestones in the EYLF, NQS and AEDC. These resources will provide evidence-informed curriculum guidance for teachers and educators of 3- to 5-year-old children to support quality teaching and learning in preschools.

The curriculum resources will support teachers and educators to consider how educational programming looks for children aged 3 to 5, recognising that children may spend up to 2 years in a preschool setting. These resources will provide guidance to teachers and educators in applying appropriate levels of stretch and challenge as well as focusing on developing foundational life skills. A bank of learning trajectories will be available for educators to enable them to analyse, through teaching, what is happening for a child and what the next step is for them.

It is recognised that the needs of 3-year-olds may differ to 4-year-olds in some developmental areas,

such as toileting, sleep and rest, and independent eating. The department's highly professional educators take the time required to form relationships with the child's family to determine what families are doing at home so that educators can implement appropriate strategies at preschool. Educators use these developmental opportunities as intentional learning experiences.

To successfully support the learning and development of preschool children, teachers and educators make creative, contextualised, local decisions about curriculum planning and resources. Decisions should be made not only on evidence-informed practice but also in a way that meets the needs of the individual child and family.

The introduction of universal 3-year-old preschool provides teachers and educators with an opportunity to connect with children and establish relationships with their families over a longer period of time, enabling greater, richer learning experiences. This is expected to be a major benefit for 4- and 5-year-olds as well.

Services to support the development of self-regulation of emotions and behaviour in preschools

Regulation is the ability to manage emotions, attention, and arousal level to meet the demands of the environment and respond in socially adaptive ways. Regulation is a developmental process which occurs across a person's lifespan through supportive relationships and repeated co-regulation experiences. Children who can regulate are better prepared to engage, participate, and learn in preschool and school.

Social and emotional learning and development is central to the delivery of preschool to 3- to 5-year-olds. This is essential to ensure that children can learn and engage effectively with their world at preschool and throughout the rest of their education and their adult life.

The department will continue to provide teaching resources to support 3- to 5-year-old children in preschool develop critical social and emotional skills, such as resilience and self-regulation. These resources cover emotional self-expression and awareness, emotional responsiveness to others, social connection, and social citizenship.

Government preschools can also access the department's self-regulation service to help preschools meet children's needs, with a focus on regulation. Options to support preschool educators include coaching and supporting, whole of preschool or child level development, online learning models and implementing best practice, evidence-informed programs, for example regulation spaces (indoor or outdoor) or sensory kits for the preschool.

Staffing in government preschools

A key component in the quality of a preschool is its staff. Preschool teachers and educators are relational, responsive, knowledgeable, and intentional in their work with children. They are committed to ongoing learning and reflective practice and have high expectations for every child. Preschool teachers and educators have specialist knowledge in how young children learn and in pedagogical approaches to promote and enhance learning and development.

The positive impact of early education is driven by the type, consistency, and quality of the interactions between educators and children. These relationships are integral in improving children's communication skills, thinking ability, emotional control, relationship navigation, and confidence. They are also an important opportunity for children to experience positive, meaningful interactions with adults. This can be particularly critical for some children who do not have this in their home environment.

Preschool teachers and educators consider children’s needs, ideas, theories, and interests to plan for individuals, small groups, and the whole preschool. They work with and alongside children, co-constructing knowledge and building thinking skills, social connection, and dispositions. They use intentional teaching strategies and high-quality interactions to invite, challenge, and provoke children as they extend and deepen their experiences and learning. Effective teaching, where teachers and educators can combine explicit teaching with sensitive and warm interactions, is at the core of quality early education.

The NQF outlines the minimum qualifications and educator to child ratios for ECEC services. For children aged 3 years and older, there is a 1:11 staff to child ratio, meaning there needs to be one staff member for each 11 children at the service.

Government preschools are ranked from category 1 to 3 according to the degree of social disadvantage and geographical isolation a centre may have. Under departmental policy, category 1 sites (most disadvantaged) have 1 educator for every 10 children. Category 2 and 3 sites are staffed at 1:11 in accordance with the National Regulations.

In school-based preschools, the first educator must be a university-qualified early childhood teacher, with the second educator (if required) being a student support officer. If required, the third educator will be a teacher. In standalone preschools, the first two educators are teachers, and the third (if required) is an early childhood worker.

Leadership is recognised as a primary driver of quality in preschools. Strong educational leaders are needed to guide high-quality and evidence-informed practice, and to facilitate continuous improvement.

Preschool leaders impact outcomes for children through developing and maintaining a collaborative culture of ongoing learning and reflection to drive improvement. Reflective practice is at the centre of preschool culture and leaders guide all teachers and educators to support each other to critically reflect to challenge and improve their practice

On-site leadership of teaching and learning in preschools is a critical lever in quality outcomes.

The provision of ongoing, supported professional learning and mentoring ensures that teachers and educators can maintain their focus on quality outcomes for children in contemporary, research-informed and practice-driven ways. Integrated, whole team professional learning, developed over time, is most effective in supporting teacher and educator effectiveness. The department invests in ongoing professional development learning programs for teachers, educators, and leaders to ensure continuous support and improvement and to recognise achievements.

To deliver preschool to an expanded cohort of 3-year-olds, educators in all settings may need support and professional development resources. The department will continue to ensure that appropriate professional development programs are available for and provided to all staff working with 3-year-olds in its preschools.

Mixed-age learning

The department believes that children’s learning should not be limited by their age; instead, there should be a holistic approach, with focus on the continuum of development. It is important to observe children closely, look at their areas of learning and development, and be responsive and intentional in determining what the next steps are for that child, regardless of their age. Children’s learning is not linear, and support should be individualised in collaboration with the family.

Government preschools currently provide mixed age learning for children aged 3 to 5. Research suggests that mixed-aged preschool services may be beneficial for the academic and social gains of

younger children. Mixed-aged preschool grouping can provide younger children behavioural role models in older children, benefiting their academic and social gains, and older children may provide a teaching and scaffolding role for younger children⁷. Mixed-age preschool grouping also provides opportunity for a wider range of social interactions, fostering empathy and self-regulation.

Preschools and their teachers and educators base curriculum planning decisions and learning experiences (including group sizes and structures, and age group integration) on the individual needs of children, irrespective of their age. Positive teacher interactions with children and high-quality teaching and learning ensure that mixed-aged groupings are not detrimental to the development of older children, and that appropriate educational stretch and challenge is available.

Hours accessed per week

The evidence suggests that engaging in 15 hours per week of high-quality preschool is the minimum required to impact developmental outcomes. This is consistent with the current entitlement of South Australian children to 600 hours per year (which on average is 15 hours per week) of preschool in the year before fulltime schooling. This is also consistent with public commitments from the South Australian Government to providing a minimum of 15 hours per week of universal 3-year-old preschool.

As noted earlier, children accessing preschool in the year before school will be eligible to enrol in two intakes from 2023. However, Aboriginal children and children in care are currently entitled to be enrolled immediately after their third birthday. Continuation of this policy would ensure that these cohorts continue to access preschool for close to two full years before starting school.

Research shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds experience the greatest gains from preschool attendance and may benefit from attending more hours of preschool.⁸ However, overall quality has shown to be more significant of an indicator of ECEC outcomes than hours accessed or program duration.

Infrastructure and environment

Research highlights that the physical attributes of the environment support and facilitate children's abilities to utilise and have meaningful reactions within the space. Physical environments can impact behaviour, cognition, and emotion for children with both larger play spaces and the opportunity for outside play having a positive impact⁹.

Outdoor learning environments with inclusive play spaces are important for encouraging healthy behaviours and improving the physical, educational, and mental wellbeing of children and young

⁷ Lillard A. S. (2016). *Montessori: The science behind the genius*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2015). *Literature review of the impact of early childhood education and care on learning and development: working paper*. Cat. No. CWS 53. Canberra: AIHW.

⁹ Johannessen, K., Bjornestad, E., Nilsen, A. K. O., Ylvisaker, E., Nornes-Nymark, M., Engsaeter, M., Pedersen, L., & Aadland, E. (2020). Associations for preschool environmental quality with outdoor time and moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in Norwegian preschools. *Journal for Research in Arts and Sports Education*, 4(2), 7-25.

people. They also connect children and young people to the natural world creating a sense of responsibility for the environment.

Nature play encourages children to move in ways that are different to other types of play, which promotes their physical wellness and upper body and core strength, which are essential for developing writing and other fine motor skills. Evidence shows that nature play can have a significant positive effect on children's play, social behaviours, and mental health¹⁰.

For all new builds and expansion and refurbishment to existing preschool sites and outdoor spaces, the department aspires to build learning spaces that are designed to support high-quality and are contextualised to the local community. The department's sites also meet the disability standards and guidelines set out in the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. Planning for physical environments will also need to consider best practice inclusion approaches to ensure quality local options for children with additional needs.

The department's outdoor learning environment standard details the minimum and recommended standards for creating and maintaining an outdoor learning environment that provides children with optimal learning opportunities.

The department's design standards provide minimum departmental standards for contractors who design, build, and maintain government preschools and meet the relevant standards set out in the NQS. These standards are regularly reviewed to take account of changes to contemporary practice and will continue to be used for any new builds and refurbishments.

Support for learners with functional needs

The department recognises the importance of all children having the assistance they need to be able to fully engage with preschool, with teachers and educators also supported by expert knowledge, advice, and support services.

Preschools access a range of tools, resources, and professionals for timely and effective assessment of children's learning and development need and recognise that interventions and supports are most effective when they are applied at the right time and in the right way.

Specialist support services, like those described below, enable teachers and educators to access the professional support and guidance they need to ensure all children are included in government preschools and making progress in their learning and development.

Inclusive Education Support Program

The Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) provides support to children and students with disability in preschool and school and is based on a child or student's functional needs. Funding is allocated to children and students in mainstream preschools and schools based on the documented adjustments that are described in their personal learning plan.

¹⁰ Nicole Miller, Saravana Kumar, Karma L Pearce & Katherine L Baldock (2022) The perceived benefits of and barriers to nature-based play and learning in South Australian public primary schools: A cross-sectional study, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 22:4, 342-354

For preschools, an IESP site grant is provided to support the implementation of interventions for children with disabilities or additional needs that are less than 8 hours per week.

Where a child's functional needs and adjustments require support that is 8 hours per week or more, preschools apply for an 'extensive category' of funding to the IESP state-wide centralised panel.

Inclusive preschool programs

Inclusive preschool programs (IPPs) support eligible children with disability and high support needs to optimise their learning outcomes within a localised preschool setting. IPPs are provided with an additional 0.6 FTE teacher and 22.5 hours per week ECW allocation. Preschools that offer two IPPs are provided with an additional 1.2 FTE teacher and 45 hours per week ECW allocation.

Specialised preschools

There are some preschools that offer more specialised support. These include The Briars for young children with significant disability, Kilparrin Early Learning Centre for children who are vision impaired, or deaf and hard of hearing, with additional disability, and Klemzig Auslan Bilingual Preschool program for children who are deaf and hard of hearing, or children from deaf families.

Speech and language programs

Speech and language programs (SLPs) provide an intensive level of support for eligible children whose severe specific language and/or speech impairment is their primary area of need, and who are making slow progress with their current targeted level of speech pathology support. These programs are provided with an additional 0.6 FTE teacher, 0.4 FTE speech pathologist and 0.1 FTE psychologist.

Services provided by Student Support Services

Student Support Services (SSS) provide an integrated, multidisciplinary service to assist schools and preschools to meet the needs of children with additional learning needs, including behaviour support needs, complex communication needs, and other complex support needs. The department directly employs speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, special educators and behaviour support coaches within SSS to support children with disability. The services that can be accessed are negotiated and include specific goals and timelines.

Targeted support for teachers and educators that is provided by SSS includes:

- Assessing and recommending adjustments to improve outcomes for children
- Coaching and working alongside educators
- Providing advice on evidence-informed programs
- Supporting development and implementation of plans.

This support is in addition to occupational therapists and speech pathologists in children's centres.

Research shows that early intervention is most likely to be effective earlier in a child's life rather than later.¹¹ Appropriate support and inclusion resources will be essential for 3-year-olds and their families to benefit from universal access to preschool.

¹¹ Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, *Early Childhood Intervention*, <<https://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/early-childhood-intervention>>

Addressing barriers to access

Lack of access to ECEC may be the result of a combination of multiple barriers, such as costs, issues with transport, a lack of alternative childcare options, awareness of services and their benefits, and availability of appropriate services times.

Some of the known barriers for preschool access relate to session length, living in regional and remote areas, and transport to and from preschool services.

Although the experience of barriers varies between families and cohorts, overall, they are more likely to be experienced by Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Information about some of the key barriers, and considerations for addressing these, are below.

Session length and wraparound care

Over time, government preschools have moved from a sessional model in which preschool was delivered in morning or afternoon sessions of approximately 3 hours to a model with full days of 6 hours (or in some cases 7.5 hours). This has been a response by preschools to the needs of families where one or both parents or caregivers participate in the workforce. Nevertheless, days of 6 hours, and the half day of 3 hours where children are enrolled for 2.5 days per week, still present a challenge for working parents.

Based on 2021 data, the department has 41 government preschools that operate alongside a long day care service. In addition to these preschools, in 2021 there were 41 government preschools that are located on the same premises as a care service outside of preschool hours (OSHC). Subject to the availability of places, families using these services may have some access to education and care before and after preschool. Specific data on the number of children using these before and after school services is not collected.

These 82 preschool sites represent 19% of enrolments in government preschool, suggesting that at least 81% of children enrolled in government preschool do not have access to care outside of preschool hours at the location of their preschool.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that because care is not available outside of preschool hours at government preschools, families in which one or both parents or caregivers work must make significant lifestyle adjustments for their child to participate in a government preschool. Parents or caregivers will often need to limit work hours to align with preschool hours or rely on other family members, such as grandparents or kinship carers, to deliver and collect children.

Session times and before and after preschool care need to be accessible, flexible, and responsive to local community to ensure a high number of children access 3-year-old preschool and receive the benefits associated with this. This may also have a flow-on effect of contributing to supporting workforce participation for families.

Regional and remote areas

Of the more than 15,000 children enrolled in government preschools, around 5,000 are enrolled in country preschools, representing almost 30% of all enrolments. More than 40% of government preschools (167) are located in country areas. In this context, country encompasses all schools and preschools outside of the greater Adelaide metropolitan area.

Lack of access to transport can be a significant barrier for many families in regional and remote areas

and areas with limited transport options and for families who do not have access to private transport.

The department's Country Education Strategy 2021-2028 aims to ensure access to quality education regardless of location through initiatives that address issues like workforce attraction and retention and access to the infrastructure and support that preschools need to be effective. It includes actions such as:

- Deliver improvements to early learning, including reviewing policy around access to preschool programs
- Review current incentives and support for working in the country and recommend changes to better attract and retain teachers and leaders
- Introduce targeted business improvement support in country schools and preschools to reduce administrative burden
- Strengthen infrastructure improvement planning, decision-making and investment for all country schools and preschools
- Improve the adoption, integration, and innovation of digital technology in country schools and preschools.

The department is committed to continuing to offer high-quality preschool in regional and remote communities, especially where government is the only ECEC service provider.

Access for Aboriginal children

Developmental vulnerability in any area is a strong predictor of future school and wellbeing outcomes. AEDC data shows that around half of all Aboriginal children enrolled in the first year of school were vulnerable in one or more areas measured. Data collected by the department shows that 20% of Aboriginal children have a verifiable disability.

As per Australian Bureau of Statistics data, by the age of 4, nearly 100 percent of Aboriginal children are enrolled in preschool; however, attendance is not high. Increasing access to high quality ECEC services for all Aboriginal children is a priority, as positive gains made in the early years will have lasting developmental and educational benefits¹².

Education is a compelling social determinant of identity, health, and future life expectancy for all Aboriginal people¹³. There is an increased uptake of early learning programs by Aboriginal children when the services run in the context of community partnerships, have culturally relevant practices, and appropriate teacher training and support.

The department recognises its important role in progressing the commitments made under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, in particular Priority Reform Two: Building the Community Controlled Sector, Outcome 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong, Outcome 3: children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood

¹² Melhuish, E., Ereky-Stevens, K., Petrogiannis, K., Ariescu, A., Penderi, E., Rentzou, K., Tawell, A., Slot, P., Broekhuizen, M., & Leseman, P. (2015). *Review of research of impact of ECEC CARE: A review of research on the effects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) upon child development.*

¹³ Department for Health, (2013) *The Social Determinants of Health*

education in their early years and outcome 4: children thrive in their early years.

Through its Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019-2029, the department is committed to providing access to high-quality early childhood education and care experiences for Aboriginal children and their families. These should be culturally appropriate and build on the strengths of Aboriginal nations and their cultures. These experiences will be complemented by engaging families and communities in their child's learning and development planning. The department's 10-year goal is that Aboriginal children's cognitive, emotional, social and communication skills and overall health and wellbeing support them to succeed.

Through the Aboriginal Family and Literacy Strategy, an additional teacher is allocated to eligible government preschools with Aboriginal 3-year-olds enrolled at the site. This is a valuable role that supports Aboriginal children and their families to be fully engaged in a preschool program.

Cultural accessibility

Research shows that bringing migrant and refugee children and their families together for culturally appropriate, fun, and safe preschools can significantly improve a child's mental health and wellbeing, as well as help them to transition into school with more confidence. Preschools can also help families develop the social networks needed to belong in a community.

The department is committed to supporting access to government preschools for children from non-English speaking backgrounds. Additional support may be needed for children with limited English to enable them to fully participate and benefit from preschool.

The Preschool Bilingual Program provides funding to support the access and participation of children from non-English speaking backgrounds, in government preschools, to ensure optimal outcomes. The program provides an annual allocation of 30 hours of bilingual support per site for each requested language. The allowance is paid at current ECW and SSO standard cost.

Considerations for implementation of 3-year-old preschool

There are a number of factors to be considered where universal access to 3-year-old preschool is to be implemented in government settings. The most critical of these are capacity, infrastructure, workforce, and funding arrangements.

Capacity and infrastructure

Of the 383 sites in the government preschool system, 326 sites are owned by the department. The average 'year built' of the preschool buildings is 1977.

The remaining 14% (or 57) are not owned by the department but leased, generally from local government bodies. In recent times, local councils have sought to increase peppercorn rental agreements to commercial rental rates.

The year in which the leased buildings were built varies from 1870 to 2000, with the average being in the 1960s. As such, maintenance of leased sites has been a longstanding problem for the department, and ensuring leased sites are adequately maintained and funded to meet the requirements of an education and early childhood site is an ongoing issue.

The physical capacity of early childhood services, including government preschool, is governed by the NQF. The physical capacity across government preschool sites varies from accommodating 15 to 85 children at any one time, with the average size being 38.

Based on capacity calculations, the department's 383 government preschools, if staffed full-time, would have the physical capacity to accommodate over 29,000 children at any one time. However, capacity is not evenly spread across the preschool system, and a number of government preschools are operating at or near their physical capacity. These enrolment pressures are attributed to the nature of established metropolitan areas where the design and age of the centre has limited potential for expansion, and to outer metro and country areas of substantial housing growth.

The department is assessing capacity across the state to understand how universal access to 3-year-old preschool can be accommodated in government preschool settings from 2026 as required. As the only provider of ECEC in many regional communities, ensuring capacity in regional areas is a particular focus.

In areas with known capacity issues, the department is exploring both infrastructure and non-infrastructure solutions.

Impact on playgroups, occasional care and other services

As noted earlier, many preschools provide complementary services such as playgroups, occasional care, and rural care. Children have the opportunity to learn through play, develop social and language skills and experience a soft transition to preschool or to other services and supports. Families can make friends, feel connected to their community, be connected to other services, and feel valued as a parent. Evidence shows that children who don't attend a playgroup are 1.7 times likely to be more developmentally vulnerable¹⁴.

These services are an important part of the early childhood development landscape as well as being highly valued by parents and the community. In considering capacity in existing preschool sites, it is important to be conscious of the capacity requirements of other services operating from those sites.

Workforce

As discussed earlier in this submission, workforce is a critical component of high-quality ECEC. The department staffs its preschools above the levels required by regulation, supporting its preschools to be consistently rated amongst the best preschools in Australia.

As one of the largest providers of preschool education in Australia, the department funds a number of employer-level initiatives, workforce programs, and career development pathways for its ECEC workforce. For example:

- *The Early Career Teacher Development program* – supports beginning teachers to move from the graduate to the proficient career stage of the teacher standards and achieve full teacher registration. The program involves a range of induction resources, professional learning modules, workshops, and ongoing mentoring. Funding is provided to preschools to release early career teachers to participate and to support their mentoring.

¹⁴ Sincovich, A., Harman-Smith, Y., & Brinkman, S. (2019). *The reach of playgroups and their benefit for children across Australia: A comparison of 2012, 2015, and 2018 AEDC data*. Telethon Kids Institute, South Australia.

- *The Future Leaders Program* – identifies future leadership potential and capability and facilitates a targeted development focus for emerging leaders. The program supports 4 cohorts of aspiring leaders each year, with one cohort specifically dedicated to early childhood leadership.
- *Orbis* – delivers capability building professional learning programs for preschool leaders and teachers. The current programs focus on literacy and numeracy learning for young children through a blended approach, including face to face intensives, coaching, and applied learning in preschool settings.

Furthermore, the state government is currently delivering five technical colleges which will cater for students from years 10 to 12 and will be run in conjunction with nearby secondary schools to allow students to successfully complete their SACE while obtaining qualifications. Early childhood education will be one of the priority sectors targeted by the Findon Technical College, set to open in 2024.

The department is also developing a workforce strategy to support the long-term attraction and ongoing development of high-quality teachers, leaders, and support staff. The department's vision is to enable every person in its workforce to perform at their best to achieve growth for every child, in every class, in every school and preschool.

The department is supported by a large and diverse workforce across many disciplines, including allied health and specialist educators in Student Support Services. In order to tailor the approach to the specific employee groups, the Workforce Strategy is being developed in 4 chapters. The first two chapters, which relate to Aboriginal workforce and educational leaders and teachers, have been launched. The last two chapters relate to support for teaching and learning for classroom and student support and corporate and administrative support in development.

The department is actively participating in the implementation of strategies in the National ECEC Workforce Strategy, which is focussed on building a sustainable, high-quality, professionally recognised ECEC workforce, while recognising current pressures on the system.

From January 2023, 12,500 fee free training places have been made available for students to train, retrain, or upskill with no tuition fee at TAFE SA and through selected non-government vocational education and training providers. This includes Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care and the Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, which are essential qualifications to become an ECW.

Aboriginal employees

The department's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees play an important role in education, and the department is committed to bringing their cultural knowledge, experience, and perspectives into everything the department does. The Aboriginal Workforce Plan outlines how the department will work to build and grow its Aboriginal workforce.

As of June 2020, 737 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed by the department. This accounts for 2.4% of the total workforce. Of this number, 55 are employed in a preschool setting, including 10 preschool directors.

The department recognises that having a strong Aboriginal workforce is key to improving educational outcomes and the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and to creating environment where all Aboriginal people can thrive.

The department has recently developed a Culturally Responsive Framework to ensure learning and work environments where Aboriginal employees, children and young people, and where Aboriginal

families feel welcomed and supported.

Through its Aboriginal Workforce Plan, the department will continue to implement strategies to employ more Aboriginal staff, specifically in teaching roles, provide Aboriginal staff with training and career progression pathways into leadership roles, and ensure that Aboriginal staff and the community are confident to engage with children's learning.

Challenges associated with the attraction and retention of staff

The department acknowledges the workforce challenges due to the decline in enrolments in approved educator and teacher qualifications, increased demand for early childhood teachers, and a growing shortage of primary school teachers.

ACECQA estimates that an additional 39,000 ECEC teachers and educators are needed across Australia by 2023 to meet the demands of the sector. Furthermore, the National Skills Commission has projected that the number of early childhood teachers is expected to increase by 21.6% (10,600 jobs) and the number of child carers will grow by 5.9% (7,900 jobs) from 2021 to 2026.

ECEC workforce pressures exist across Australia, with early childhood teachers and educators and childcare workers on the skills priority list and identified as occupations with strong future demand.

The department sees its approach to staffing preschools as a key strength, with its current policy settings directly influencing its high-quality outcomes. As such, it is committed to ensuring that workforce policy settings, as they evolve, continue to drive quality outcomes.

The department also acknowledges the current workforce challenges nationally in attracting and retaining people to the ECEC sector and its need to build its pipeline of early childhood teachers to enable this.

The department will also need to carefully consider workforce shortages for allied health professionals, as this impacts upon the delivery of support and inclusion resources within preschools.

Recognising that workforce is a critical challenge irrespective of the setting in which 3-year-old preschool is delivered, the department is working across government and with the education and training sectors to understand the workforce pipeline and develop strategies to address any identified gaps.

The department will monitor and build on the workforce strategies being used to expand the preschool workforce for mid-year intake (to be implemented from 2023).

The department will continue to build a workforce where every school and preschool has access to quality leadership and expert teachers by attracting graduate teachers, strengthening the underpinning conditions that enable leaders and teachers to thrive, and increasing teachers' confidence and capability in delivering the curriculum and stepping into leadership positions.

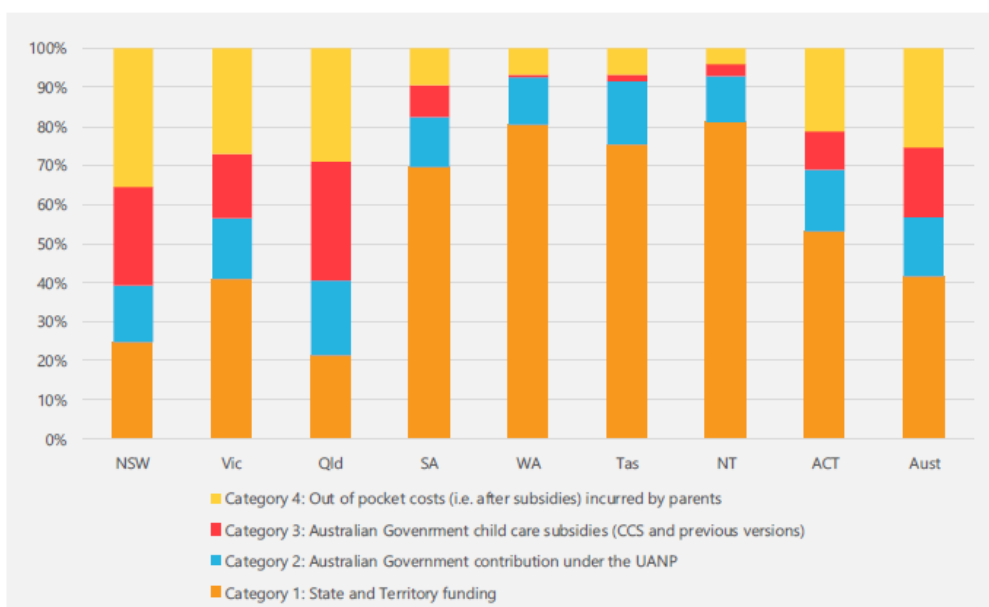
Funding arrangements

ECEC should be affordable and within the means of all families; however, not every family has access to the ECEC service they want or can afford. The national conversation about ECEC has been strongly influenced by calls for government to invest in universal access to high-quality ECEC in the two years prior to school.

The South Australian Government has committed to the delivery of affordable, universal 3-year-old preschool. Currently, the South Australian Government invests significantly into the provision of high-quality preschool. The way in which preschool is funded varies across Australia. The *UANP Review: Final Review Report*, the report of a 2020 review commissioned by the COAG Education Council conducted by Nous Group (the Nous report), highlights the different funding profiles across jurisdictions. Funding for preschools is made up of out-of-pocket costs paid by families, funding under national arrangements, and state and territory contributions.

The Nous report notes that comparisons need to be made with caution given that methodologies for calculating funding are not uniform across jurisdictions. However, the report also notes the general conclusion that funding profiles vary widely. It also notes that higher rates of childcare subsidy tend to flow to jurisdictions with higher preschool enrolments in long day care settings and that these jurisdictions appear to have higher out-of-pocket costs for families. Conversely, states that tend to deliver preschool directly attract less childcare subsidy (CCS) funding, commit higher levels of public funding, and appear to have lower out-of-pocket costs.

The table below demonstrates the estimated contribution of funding to preschool programs for 600 hours for children in the year before school preschool across jurisdictions¹⁵.



The department advocates for the need to have a national conversation about funding equity and ECEC affordability. This is consistent with the national vision to provide ECEC underpinned by the principles of affordability, accessibility, quality and equity.

¹⁵ Nous Group (2020) p. 30 *UANP Review: Final Review Report*

Additional considerations for 3-year-old preschool

Early intervention

Intervention is likely to be more effective when it is provided early in life rather than later. Introducing universal access to preschool for 3-year-old children will create a new connection point between families and services, enabling intervention supports to be offered earlier.

Providing specialised support and services for young children with developmental delays and their families promotes development, wellbeing, and community participation. It also contributes to providing an opportunity to provide support and build effective parenting capacity. Developmental delays can be addressed earlier with the support of preschool staff, other professionals, and families.

Further, providing preschool for children from the age of 3 to 5 provides the department with more time to observe the individual child's behaviour, recommend interventions in collaboration with other professionals, adjust teaching skills, support families, and ensure the support mechanism is effective.

Social Ventures Australia, the Centre for Community Child Health, and Deloitte Access Economics are collaborating on an initiative which seeks to mobilise integrated child and family centres across Australia to reduce disadvantage. The vision for this initiative is for all young children in Australia who experience socio-economic vulnerability to have access to high-quality, integrated child and family services that support them and their families to thrive.

The department has almost 20 years' experience in providing integrated child and family services through its children's centres. Children's centres were first established in 2005 in line with the government's statewide inquiry into early childhood services that resulted in *The Virtual Village: Raising a Child in the New Millennium* report. The approach to the delivery of integrated early childhood services was further informed by Dr Fraser Mustard, who in his report *Investing in the Early Years: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do* recommended the establishment of universal early child development and parenting centres that provide integrated services, are still relevant to the early years today.

Three critical reports that provide strategic direction and recommendations on the future of children's centre services are: *The life they deserve*, produced by the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission Report; *Child protection: a fresh start*, produced by the government in response to the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission; and *Children's Centres in South Australia: A Report on the Measurement of Processes and Impacts*, which examined the impact of children's centres and made recommendations to further strengthen their efficacy. All 3 reports highlighted the need for greater consistency and integration of practices in the early childhood service system in South Australia.

With the required system support and commitment, children's centres could be leveraged as part of the broader early years system to ensure children's developmental vulnerabilities are identified and addressed early and that families are actively engaged and provided with the support they need as children's first teachers.

Children's centres intend to support children and families to achieve the best possible learning, health, and wellbeing outcomes in a universal setting with targeted responses for children and

families who may require additional support. In addition, co-located services are more likely to be accessed by vulnerable families¹⁶. Children's centres are tasked to provide universal services with targeted support to impact population outcomes in four areas:

- Children have optimal health, development and learning
- Parents provide strong foundations for their children's healthy development and wellbeing
- Communities are child and family friendly
- Aboriginal children are safe, healthy, culturally strong, and confident.

The children's centres concept of a 'one stop shop' that enables families to access a range of services in one location, including ECEC, allied health services, and community programs, holds much appeal for families and communities and encourages a collaborative approach between multi-disciplinary services.

Wraparound care

The primary barrier to the delivery of wraparound care to preschool children (otherwise referred to as OSHC for preschool children) in government settings is the complexities associated with services meeting requirements to be eligible for CCS. Without access to CCS funding, the service becomes more expensive for both families and government, impacting on viability.

Because before and after preschool care options in government preschool settings are limited, families seeking care outside of preschool hours need to use an OSHC service at a primary school, a long day care service, or family day care. The extent to which children can access these services is dependent on available places, whether there is prioritisation of those places for younger children, and the proximity of the service to the preschool the child is attending.

The importance of offering a preschool program that meets the needs of families and increases workforce participation, especially for women, is recognised. The provision of before and after preschool care in government settings may increase uptake of high-quality government preschool by families who would not otherwise attend due to operating hours.

Wraparound care must be consistently high-quality, accessible, and affordable. The department is actively planning for the provision of before and after preschool care in government settings, considering a range of models that could be utilised to ensure access to CCS and overall service viability.

¹⁶ Centre for Policy Development (2021) *Starting Better a guarantee for young children and families*

Appendices

1. Investing in the Early Years: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do
2. Re-imagining Childhood: The inspiration of Reggio Emilia education principles in South Australia report
3. Early Learning Strategy
4. Preschool Position Statement

Investing in the Early Years:
*Closing the gap between what
we know and what we do*

ADELAIDE

thinkers
in residence



Fraser Mustard
Thinker in Residence 2007



Government
of South Australia

Investing in the Early Years: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do

Prepared by J. Fraser Mustard
Adelaide Thinker in Residence
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
c/o GPO Box 2343
Adelaide
SA 5001

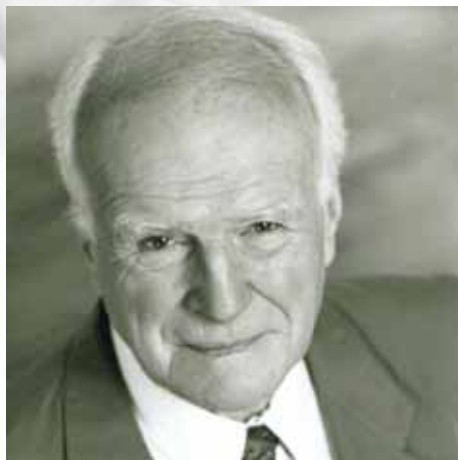
April 2008

©All rights reserved – Crown – in right of the
State of South Australia

ISBN 978-0-9804829-4-2

www.thinkers.sa.gov.au

Fraser Mustard



Dr. Fraser Mustard, Companion of the Order of Canada, Founding President and Fellow, The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR), has had a diverse career in the health sciences, research and the private sector. After earning his MD from the University of Toronto and Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, Dr. Mustard moved from the medical faculty of the University of Toronto to help establish the new school of Medicine and Health Sciences at McMaster University.

In 1982, he took on the task of creating and establishing a unique Canadian institute, The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. The Institute's programs have had a major focus on science, technology, innovation and economic growth and the effect of economic change on the social environment and the health and wellbeing of individuals and populations.

Dr. Mustard has been a leader in Canada in examining the socioeconomic determinants of human development and health. A particular emphasis has been on early childhood and the role of communities. He co-chaired a report for the Government of Ontario on early learning (The Early Years Study) with specific community recommendations. Recognition of this has led Dr. Mustard and his colleagues to emphasise to all sectors of society the crucial nature of the early years in providing a healthy and competent population. Dr. Mustard is involved with governments in Canada and Australia, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNICEF and the Aga Khan University in Pakistan in emphasising the enormous importance to society of early childhood development.

Dr. Mustard has received numerous awards for his work including the Companion of the Order of Canada, the Order of Ontario, the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Prize in Medicine, the Gairdner Foundation International Award for Medical Research, the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis Robert P. Grant Medal. He received the most prestigious Starr Award from the Canadian Medical Association and most recently was inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame.

Dr. Mustard currently leads The Founders' Network, which links together 1,000 or more individuals in the private and public sector in Canada and other countries who helped him build CIAR. A number of these individuals are involved with the Founders' Network in applying the knowledge from the Institute's programs in their communities. He is Chairman Emeritus of the newly incorporated Council for Early Child Development and Parenting.

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present the report of our eleventh Adelaide Thinker in Residence, Dr J Fraser Mustard, *Investing in the Early Years: Closing the gap between what we know and what we do.*

Dr Mustard is a noted authority on the socio-economic determinants of human development and health. He has received many awards and honorary degrees, including the Gairdner Foundation International Award, the Canada Council Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Prize, and the William J. Dawson Medal of the Royal Society of Canada. He is a Companion of the Order of Canada and a Laureate of the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame.

In late 2006 and early 2007 Dr Mustard brought his credentials as a world leader in early childhood development to South Australia.

Throughout his residency, Dr Mustard highlighted the importance of early childhood development and strengthened partnerships, promoted innovation in parenting programs, built strategic legacies and enhanced South Australia's reputation as a committed leader in the field.

Our Government recognises that the early influences and experiences in the life of every child have enormous implications for their futures and for the futures of those around them. For this reason, integrated early childhood development programs are essential if we are to give future generations of South Australians the competencies that they need to become confident, capable and productive members of our communities.

Dr Mustard's contributions have left a lasting impression on policy directions in our State and have supported the objectives of South Australia's Strategic Plan, particularly with regard to expanding opportunity.

As a result of Dr Mustard's influence, both through his residency here in Adelaide and through his wider body of work, our State is even better positioned to provide the very best start for all South Australians. Ensuring that our children develop to reach their potential as healthy and competent members of our vibrant, inclusive and innovative society is a priority for the Government of South Australia.

I thank Dr Mustard for sharing his time, his insight and his commitment to early childhood development with the people of South Australia, and I commend his report to those among us who share his vision.



Mike Rann
Premier of South Australia
April 2008

Contents

Executive summary	5
Summary of Recommendations	6
Introduction	10
How does experience in early life affect brain development?	12
How well are children in South Australia developing?	14
How can we improve the development of our children?	16
What changes to government programs and policies are needed to promote early child development?	19
How should we staff the early child development and parenting centres?	21
How can communities promote early child development?	23
How can the Government work with Aboriginal communities and families to improve outcomes for their children?	25
How can the Government support vulnerable families to improve outcomes for children?	27
How can young professionals promote early child development?	29
How can we measure how well our children are doing?	30
Why invest in early childhood?	32
How can business and community leaders contribute to early child development?	35
Conclusion	37
Acknowledgements	38
References	39

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

My work as an Adelaide Thinker in Residence took place in two stages – in October and November 2006 and in February and March 2007. The objective of my residency was to increase interest and understanding across all sectors of the South Australian community about the crucial importance of the early years in developing a healthy and competent population.

In my report I draw urgent attention to the new knowledge that is emerging about early brain development and its effect on lifelong behaviour, learning and health. I recommend that this knowledge be spread as widely as possible to all people whose work affects outcomes for very young children. This includes, of course, parents and community caregivers.

The recommendations I have made for South Australia cover the need for improvements and change in the work of universities and TAFE and the need to raise the standard of education and training for staff in all disciplines that affect the development of infants and young children.

I recommend more involvement in gathering reliable and comprehensive data on early child development and learning, and I advocate the continuing establishment of universal early child development and parenting centres linked to local primary schools. These centres must provide integrated services, with an integrated program that is supported through whole-of-government funding. I support the inclusion of publicly funded child care and preschool education within the centre program and call for the State to support paid family leave over a period long enough to influence the healthy development of children.

Recognising the economic and social value that derives from providing the very young with the foundations for a healthy and successful life is essential to South Australia's future. My final recommendation examines the possibility of setting up an independent council for early child development and parenting in South Australia that would not be subject to the short-term imperatives of the electoral cycle.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Neuroscientific research and teaching

- The Government of South Australia should work with the universities and related institutions to establish a program or institute in human development based on developmental neuroscience and the related biological pathways that set trajectories in health, learning and behaviour. This program should support research to ensure optimum development of all children in the early years of life. It should also help existing child and family related disciplines to present this new understanding.

2. Measuring children's development in South Australia

- Given that 25% of children from all backgrounds show poor development at the time of school entry, the State has to have the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in place as an outcome measure to assess how well families and communities are achieving equity in early child development.
- The Government of South Australia, in cooperation with the AEDI partnership, should carry out an annual AEDI assessment for all children entering the school system in all communities, and make the findings available in aggregate to those communities. This will help communities to work towards equity in early child development.
- The Government of South Australia should, in partnership with the universities, establish a database that allows the AEDI results to be linked to children's health status and their educational performance. As in Manitoba, Canada, these data should not be about individuals but about communities.

3. Taking steps towards improvement

- South Australia should continue with its policy of putting in place universal integrated early child development and parenting programs linked to the primary schools that begin early in infancy, that are of high quality, and that continue into the early years of school.
- The early child development and parenting centres should be capable of starting to work with parents and infants shortly after birth, if not during pregnancy. The centres' program should help parents 'learn parenting by doing'.
- To make it possible for parents to be involved in these centres in the early years, South Australia should have a policy to allow parents with a new child at least 18 months parental leave, with income support (at least 80%). The first six months should be maternity leave and the next twelve months should be parental leave that can be shared between the mother and the father.
- Early child development and parenting centres must, where appropriate, provide non-parental care when parents have to work or take education programs.

4. Changing Government programs and policies

- The Government of South Australia should establish a policy for the continuing support and funding of high quality early child development and parenting centres with a schedule for these centres to cover all of the State in ten years.

- Once the Government has set the appropriate legislation and schedule for the development of the centres, the post secondary institutions, along with the Government, will need to have a strategic plan for providing relevant education and training for existing and future centre staff. At present, in early childhood settings, there are too few staff with appropriate education and training.
- The Government should establish an early child development applied research program with the universities to work with communities to assess the AEDI outcome measure and help the Government of South Australia and communities improve AEDI outcomes by recognising the need to take action when children are young.
- The Government should establish with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) an effective 'whole-of-government' approach for policies related to the funding, evaluation and accreditation of early child development and parenting centres.
- The early child development and parenting centres should be accessible, available and affordable for all families with young children.
- The Government should develop a strategy to bring quality child care programs into the early child development and parenting centre initiative.

- The Government should improve the effectiveness of the whole-of-government approach to early child development by working towards better integration of the work of the different ministries and government departments.

5. Educating child development staff

- All students graduating from university and TAFE programs that relate to child development and families should be educated in developmental neurobiological science relevant for their work.
- The South Australian Neuroscience Institute (SANI) should strengthen its base in developmental neuroscience, including work in the gene environment interaction (e.g. epigenetics, microRNAs).
- The universities should establish education programs for all staff working in early child development in order to ensure that they have a common knowledge base about experience based brain development that is relevant to their work.
- Because brain development in the period before formal education sets a child's capability to take part in formal education, the university faculties of education should ensure a sharing of this understanding by introducing new knowledge about experience-based brain development for all students for primary and secondary education programs.
- The Government should provide incentives for the universities and TAFE to better integrate their programs for people working in child development and education.

- In view of the importance of early child development for the future economy and quality of South Australian society, the Government should set up a program for all public servants to ensure understanding of what experience based brain development means for their work and the strategic goals of South Australia.

6. Involving the community

- The Government should set up community boards in association with the Department of Education and Children's Services to develop and implement early child development and parenting programs linked to or part of primary schools.
- All staff engaged in community based early child development programs should be well educated in the cultural diversity of Australia. Programs must have staff members who reflect the cultural characteristics of today's Australian society.

7. Sensitivity to the needs of Aboriginal families

- It is important for the Aboriginal community to help establish early child development and parenting centres sensitive to their language and culture. The centres should include non-Aboriginal families. These centres should provide programs that start at the birth of the child, if not during pregnancy.
- The Department of Education and Children's Services should ensure that the early child development and parenting centres are culturally sensitive, have Aboriginal staff, and attempt to introduce infants (birth to seven months) to their Aboriginal language and English in the centres.

8. Supporting vulnerable families

- The early child development and parenting centres should be able to have children in their program who are caught in family disruption and dysfunction and in the care decisions of the justice system. The child's official care provider (for example, foster parent) should be included. Centres should also work with homeless parents from all cultures to provide stability for early child development.
- The courts should have the power to assign vulnerable children to the centres with their designated care provider.

9. The views of young South Australian public servants and students

- The Government of South Australia should set up a program for all public servants of all ages to ensure they have a good understanding of early child development and human development in respect to health, learning and behaviour and how this relates to Government programs and their work in Government. The young public servants could be leaders to do this in the Government of South Australia.
- A youth representative should be on the proposed Council for Early Childhood Development and Parenting.

10. Integrating the data

- The data from the AEDI assessments should be integrated into a State data system for health and education and social indicators. All the individual data must be confidential and not used to label anyone.

- The Government of South Australia should establish a linked integrated data system from the work of its various departments that relates to physical and mental health, early child development, education, behaviour and socioeconomic factors. This could be modeled on the program established by the Government of Manitoba with the University of Manitoba more than 15 years ago. The findings from the integrated database should be publicly reported on an annual basis.
- Assessments of development and education of children should be population based for the age cohort not just school based.

11. The value of investing State resources in early childhood

- As the Government of South Australia invests in early child development and parenting centres, they must take steps to improve the necessary infrastructure and provide adequate sustained funding to ensure an incremental increase in the number of these centres over the next five to ten years.
- In keeping with the ideal of public education, the Government of South Australia should incorporate its preschool program into the programs of the early child development and parenting centres and fully fund them for all children from birth.
- One major goal of the early child development and parenting programs should be to reduce by 50% in 20 years the cost of mental health, addiction, crime and violence occurring in later life to individuals and society.

- Another goal of the early child development and parenting program is to ensure that South Australia has the talent base to effectively compete in the globalised knowledge based economies of the 21st century with improved equity in high quality human development and enhanced social inclusion.
- Since the early child development and parenting centres are part of an integrated program for human development (early child development and education), they should be publicly financed.
- To achieve the whole-of-government approach for early child development, the Government of South Australia must develop an integrated budget for each early child development and parenting centre with one set of guidelines and one set of accountability measures. At the present state of development, annual AEDI assessment of children in each centre will be a critical outcome measure.

12. Establishing an independent body

- Members of the South Australian community should consider establishing a council independent of the Government of South Australia to help set up child development and parenting initiatives. This could be called the South Australia Council for Early Child Development and Parenting, linked with the Canadian Council for Early Child Development and Parenting (a group in South Australia is taking preliminary steps to see if they can establish such a council.)

Introduction



Human societies have varied throughout history in their understanding of and attitude towards the development of young children and the future quality of societies. Five hundred years ago, Erasmus, a Dutch humanist and theologian, said, 'One cannot emphasise too strongly the importance of those first years for the course that a child will follow throughout his entire life'. During the 20th century, studies by Piaget, Vygotsky and others started to describe factors influencing early child development and its importance for future development of individuals. During this period it was generally assumed by most societies that early childhood development was handled by families, particularly mothers. It was also recognised by some that the social environment was important. This led to the statement, 'it takes a village to raise a child', and some communities established early child development programs such as those at Reggio Emilia in Italy.

Today the exponential growth in knowledge in the neurosciences and biological sciences has shown how brain development in the early years can set trajectories that affect health (physical and mental), learning and behaviour for life. The new understanding about early child development and its effect on human development has ramifications for most university disciplines, including health sciences, economics, developmental psychology, education, other social sciences, and for government departments concerned with the economy and the health, wellbeing and competence of its citizens (quality of human capital) and our attempts to establish tolerant, healthy, pluralistic, democratic societies.

We now know about how experience in the early years affects brain development and how the development of the brain and biological pathways in this period influences health, learning and behaviour throughout the life cycle. Understanding what we know about developmental neuroscience in the early years has implications for all our initiatives to monitor and improve human development.

The challenge for all societies is to close the gap between what we know about the determinants of early child development and what we do. This Thinker's report will discuss how the Government of South Australia is trying to close that gap, and will make recommendations to further this.

Throughout this report, I will use some terminology that is different from the terminology used in a number of Australian and South Australian reports on early childhood. For 'early education and care' or 'early learning' the terminology used in this report is 'early child development'. The reason for this is that this term embraces the new understanding that early child development includes the concept of early brain and biological pathway development, which can set trajectories for physical and mental health problems, as well as learning and behaviour throughout life. Since early brain development has effects on future health and behaviour, it is better in my opinion to use the term 'development' to reflect this, rather than 'early learning'. For these same reasons, I don't like to use the terms 'daycare' or 'child care', however, in this report in order to ensure the readers' understanding when I use the term non-parental care 'child care' is included – 'long day care' or 'child care' terms are used in South Australia.

Throughout the report, I will make reference to a number of appendices. The appendices are essential components of my report and can be found, along with electronic copies of my report, on the Adelaide Thinkers in Residence website www.thinkers.sa.gov.au.



Chapter 1

How does experience in early life affect brain development?

To achieve reasonable equity in the competence, capabilities, coping skills, health and wellbeing of populations will require societies to apply the new understanding of how experience in the early years of life affects the development of the brain and related biological pathways that set trajectories that affect health (physical and mental), learning, and behaviour throughout the life cycle and can contribute to social and economic inequities and violence in societies.

Experience in the early years:

- affects gene expression and the function of sensing neurons and the development of neural pathways
- shapes emotion and regulates temperament and social development
- shapes language and literacy capability
- shapes perceptual and cognitive ability
- shapes how we cope with our daily experiences
- shapes physical and mental health in adult life
- shapes physical activity and performance (e.g. skiing, swimming).

The brain is composed of billions of neurons and trillions of nerve connections (synapses). The neurons in an individual all have the same genetic coding and are shaped for their different functions by sensory experiences. Experience transmitted to the brain in early life by the sensing pathways is key for the development of the architecture and function of the brain.

In the hierarchies of neural circuits that support complex behaviour, cognition and other functions of the brain, there are sensitive periods for the development of neural circuits at lower levels in the hierarchy. The pathways that perform more fundamental functions tend to lose their plasticity before the pathways that form for higher level functions. The sensitive periods or plasticity for most lower level neural pathway circuits end relatively early in life, often by 4 years of age. In contrast, sensitive periods for some high level circuits remain open (plastic) for a longer period. Therefore, early learning (brain development) begets later learning (later brain development), and, as Heckman (2000) states in his papers, 'skills beget skills'.

A brain function that is affected by early life experience and affects individuals throughout life is what is often referred to as stress or the behaviour emotional pathway. Called the Limbic Hypothalamus Pituitary Adrenal (LHPA), this pathway works as a stress, emotional and behaviour 'thermostat'. It is vital for everyday existence and we are now learning how the development of this pathway and its function in early life affects cognition, emotions and behaviour and risks for diseases (physical and mental) throughout life. Touch is a very important sensory stimulus in the early years in respect to the development and function of the LHPA pathway.

Biologists have accepted the hypothesis that the interaction between genes and their environment can affect the function of the genes. Today there is an explosion in knowledge about how the function of normal DNA can be altered by experience. The pathways by which sensory experience mediates brain function have major implications for our understanding of experience based brain development in early life and the effects on health (physical and mental), learning, and behaviour. There is new neurobiological evidence about how experience can affect gene function. Thus, development is affected not just by genetics but also by nurture. Studies of the pathways that regulate and control normal genes and the effect of experience will be a key area of research in this century.

The early years including the in utero period are critical and sensitive for the development of neuron function and neural pathways. The neurons and pathways involved in emotions and behaviour, and language and literacy are very sensitive to the early period of brain development. The early neural pathways are not as plastic as some of the other pathways that form later. The brain architecture and function that forms early is hard to change by the time the children are in the school system. Drugs and social support can be used to help manage some of the behaviour problems such as addiction and mental health problems that manifest in later life. However, it is difficult to fully reduce the burden of these problems in later life.

This new knowledge about the environment and the brain and human development affects most disciplines within our universities (health sciences, education, economics, psychology, law, social sciences and the humanities). A difficult challenge for post secondary education institutions is how to introduce this new framework of understanding within the existing discipline structures to educate students about developmental neurobiological science and the effects on health, learning, and behaviour. The difficult issue is to build the interdisciplinary capability to link and integrate the new knowledge with the social sciences.

South Australia has a unique advantage in having established the South Australian Neuroscience Institute (SANI) involving the three universities and other institutions. This is a potential base for linking developmental neurobiological science with all disciplines concerned with population health, human wellbeing, behaviour, learning and competence. Another organisation, Healthy Development Adelaide (HDA), can also contribute to the integration of knowledge from neurobiological science with health, learning and behaviour. Linking both these organisations in a human development program or institute linked to the universities with a focus on developmental neuro- and biological science and on how the trajectories in health, learning and behaviour are set in early life could make a major contribution to assisting all university disciplines to incorporate this new knowledge into their teaching.

Chapter 2

How well are children in South Australia developing?

Recommendation 1:1

The Government of South Australia should work with the universities and related institutions to establish a program or institute in human development based on developmental neuroscience and the related biological pathways that set trajectories in health, learning and behaviour. This program should support research to ensure optimum development of all children in the early years of life. It should also help existing child and family related disciplines to present this new understanding.

In light of this new knowledge about neural and biological pathway development in the early years, countries are trying to establish ways to measure early child development that reflect neural and biological pathway development. A primary goal of these studies is to measure development during the early period of life. In both Canada and Australia, we have national longitudinal studies of children and youth, which provide a population based measure of child development across all social classes. In both countries, children of age four to five years in the lowest socioeconomic category have a higher proportion with poor outcomes in development measures at the time of school entry. However, in both countries, there is a significant number of children (10 to 12 percent) showing poor development in the highest income group. In both countries, the largest number of children showing poor development at the time of school entry is in the middle socioeconomic category.

In the Canadian longitudinal study (2006), the children who showed poor development at the time of school entry were classified as vulnerable. The authors of the Canadian study concluded:

One of the surprising findings was that the relationship between childhood vulnerability and family income was not as strong as previously believed – 37.1% of children from the lowest income quartile were classified as vulnerable and in the highest income quartile, 24.2% were classified as vulnerable.

These data are similar to those from the Australian longitudinal study and refute the stereotype that the majority of children with developmental problems are from poor families. In Canada, while 37% of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds did poorly, 63% of the children in this income bracket did well. An important point from this research in Canada and Australia is that any program to improve early child development should be universal, not targeted.

In Canada we developed a macro measure of child development that could be used in communities in relation to children entering the primary schools. This measure is referred to as the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in Canada and in Australia as the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI). This measure is a crude macro-assessment of brain development and function at the time of school entry. The measures are all related to the development of brain architecture and function:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive development
- communication skills and general knowledge.

When plotted against the socioeconomic status of the children and their families, the community based EDI results for Canada and the AEDI results for Australia showed the same socioeconomic gradient for poor early child development as the population data from the national longitudinal studies of children and youth in Canada and Australia. In Canada, in a detailed study of all districts in British Columbia, the EDI results showed significant community variation. In these studies they were able to link the EDI results for children at school entry with their Grade 4 tests in reading and mathematics. The percent failing Grade 4 in Vancouver public schools correlated with the EDI scores of the children when they entered the school system. A preliminary analysis of the AEDI results for communities in South Australia also shows that schools in districts with a higher percentage of children with poor AEDI scores did not do well in the Grade 3 tests in reading, writing and numeracy. In districts with fewer vulnerable children, the Grade 3 test scores were better. This evidence indicates that the quality of early child and brain development at the time of school entry affects school performance.

Based on these and other studies, by these measures between 25% and 30% of children in Canada and Australia are vulnerable at the time of school entry. We now know from the Canadian data that these children will have difficulty meeting the test standards

in Grades 3 and 4 and Grade 7 of the school system. We also now know that the gap in school performance between those students from good early child development programs and those from poor early child development programs widens in the school system.

Recommendation 2:1

Given that 25% of children from all backgrounds show poor development at the time of school entry, the State has to have the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in place as an outcome measure to assess how well families and communities are achieving equity in early child development.

Recommendation 2:2

The Government of South Australia, in cooperation with the AEDI partnership, should carry out an annual AEDI assessment for all children entering the school system in all communities and make the findings available in aggregate to those communities. This will help communities to work towards equity in early child development.

Recommendation 2:3

The Government of South Australia should, in partnership with the universities, establish a database that allows the AEDI results to be linked to children's health status and their educational performance. As in Manitoba, Canada, these data should not be about individuals but about communities.

How can we improve the development of our children?

Given what we now know about experience and early brain and biological pathway development, what can families and society do to improve outcomes?

The evidence from studies in different parts of the world shows that quality early child development programs beginning early in life, including the in utero period, and involving parents, substantially improve child development outcomes. The evidence from all these studies is compatible with what we now know about experience based neurobiological pathway development in the early years.

For example, the Abecedarian project in North Carolina (Campbell & Ramey, 2002) showed that children starting at four months of age placed in a full year early child development program involving parents did much better in school in language and mathematics than children not placed in this program.

In addition, they found that when the two groups of children (early child development program and no early child development program) were randomly split at school entry so that one group went into an enriched school program for Grades 1 to 3, and the other group went into the standard school program, the children who received the greatest benefit from the enriched school program were those that had been given the early child development program from four months of age to school entry. These children showed the highest literacy and mathematics scores at the age of 21.

The children given the early child development program but not the special school program also did fairly well at age 21 but the effect was not as strong. The children not given the early child development program but placed in the enriched school program showed a small increase in literacy and mathematics competence but the effect was basically lost by age 21.

The data from this and other studies shows clearly that programs that enhance early child development enhance school performance and that school based programs by themselves cannot, from a population perspective, significantly enhance skills in language and mathematics for children that have had poor early child development.

Countries with early child development programs that begin in the very early years (birth to age two) have the highest population scores in literacy and numeracy. These findings are compatible with what we now know about early child and brain development and language and literacy.

In reviewing all the evidence, including studies from the social sciences, education, epidemiological and developmental neuroscience, the economist Jim Heckman (Nobel Laureate in Economics in 2000), from the University of Chicago, has stated:

We cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults; nor can we wait until they reach school age – a time when it may be too late to intervene. Learning is a dynamic process and it is most effective when it begins at a very young age and continues throughout adulthood.
(Heckman, 2000)

His conclusions are presented in more detail in Chapter 11. Government policies in language and literacy generally fail to appreciate that development in the first years has major effects on the development of language, literacy and numeracy in the present school programs.

In a recent review of early child development, Ludwig and Sawhill (2006), in their paper from The Brookings Institution, outlined three important principles to improve early child development:

- intervene early (at least at the time of birth)
- intervene often
- intervene effectively.

When we prepared the Ontario Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard 1999), we came to the same conclusion when reviewing all the evidence and recommended to the Government of Ontario that it should set up early child development and parenting centres for children from birth to age six, linked to or part of the primary school system. If possible, mothers should be involved in these centres when they become pregnant.

The Government of South Australia has set out a program for early child development centres involving parents. This is reviewed in Chapter 4. The recommendations for these centres are similar to what we have recommended for the province of Ontario and for Canada as a whole.

In its announcement for setting up Children's Centres for early child development and parenting, the Government of South Australia stated that the goal is to enhance early child development, which is to be available for families and children from birth until they enter the early years of school. These centres will:

- identify and respond to the development needs of young children and their families
- provide high quality early child development programs and non parental care as required for children from birth to age 8
- provide access to early childhood, health and family expert professionals
- link families with young children with children's services
- encourage community involvement in early child development
- reduce isolation for parents and young children
- provide parents with opportunities to participate in programs with other parents in the community
- support working parents and those who want to study
- provide a convenient and accessible location to learn more about parenting and young children's learning and development

Chapter 3

- provide the community with a strong voice about early child development programs and development outcomes of the community's children
- help the development and sustainability of the local community
- provide community leadership opportunities
- provide space for community groups to meet, with and without their children.



During the first two to three years of life, the greatest experience for stimulation of brain development comes from the primary caregivers, usually the parents and, from time to time, a close relative. Parents can pick up and learn parenting skills by working with their infants and toddlers in a properly staffed, high quality early child development program with other parents and their children. Thus, the staff in an early child development and parenting centre must be well educated and skilled to work with the infants, toddlers and young children, as well as the parents.

Parental involvement with young children in these centres raises a fundamental issue about the policies on parental leave, particularly for women who are working. These policies should be relevant to experience based brain development and the role of both parents in the early years.

Recommendation 3:1

South Australia should continue with its policy of putting in place universal integrated early child development and parenting programs linked to the primary schools that begin early in infancy, that are of high quality, and that continue into the early years of school.

Recommendation 3:2

The early child development and parenting centres should be capable of starting to work with parents and infants shortly after birth, if not during pregnancy. The centres' program should help parents 'learn parenting by doing'.

Recommendation 3:3

To make it possible for parents to be involved in these centres in the early years, South Australia should have a policy to allow parents with a new child at least 18 months parental leave, with income support (at least 80%). The first six months should be maternity leave and the next twelve months should be parental leave that can be shared between the mother and the father.

Recommendation 3:4

Early child development and parenting centres must, where appropriate, provide non-parental care when parents have to work or take education programs.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

What changes to Government programs and policies are needed to promote early child development?

It is important that government policies change so that working parents with young children do not become consumers of daycare services but join an integrated child development program that incorporates education, the community, and the State's human development initiatives.

Early child development programs are not babysitting services for working parents but are the first tier of education and development programs that set the foundation for future success.

Since an early child development and parenting centre is basically designed to enhance early child and brain development which flows naturally into education, it does not make sense to charge fees for families with young children joining these centres.

In Australia there are many programs that provide support for families with young children. They range from daycare to small, integrated programs involving parents supporting early child development from birth to Grade 1. In the school system, both the Commonwealth Government and the Government of South Australia play different roles in the early child development period.

External assessors of these various programs have pointed out that Australia's complex multi-layered system of funding and provision of programs for early child development inhibits attempts by communities to create integrated programs that are linked to or part

of the primary schools. Although some of these programs are very good, they present families with young children with a poorly integrated and confusing collection of programs for early child development.

The report of the South Australian Government's Inquiry into Early Childhood Services, *The Virtual Village: raising a child in the new millennium* (2005), recommended that the Government of South Australia implement a whole-of-government approach to early child development initiatives to create order out of what can best be described as chaos.

It is clear that when the Government of South Australia announced its program for establishing 20 Children's Centres for early child development and parenting in association with the primary schools, many community groups were anxious to help in establishing these integrated programs.

In the brochure published jointly by the Department of Education and Children's Services, the Department of Health and the Department for Families and Communities, they state that in the Children's Centres:

qualified early childhood staff work with families and their children to provide quality learning and care to support children's development, health and wellbeing.

What changes to Government programs and policies are needed to promote early child development?

It is clear that many of the groups and individuals presently working in early child development could and should become part of an integrated early child development centre associated with the primary schools.

Recommendation 4:1

The Government of South Australia should establish a policy for the continuing support and funding of high quality early child development and parenting centres with a schedule for these centres to cover all of the State in ten years.

Recommendation 4:2

Once the Government has set the appropriate legislation and schedule for the development of the centres, the post secondary institutions, with the government, will need to have a strategic plan for providing relevant education and training for existing and future centre staff. At present, in early childhood settings, there are too few staff with appropriate education and training.

Recommendation 4:3

The Government should establish an early child development applied research program with the universities to work with communities to assess the AEDI outcome measure and help the Government of South Australia and communities improve AEDI outcomes by recognising the need to take action when children are young.

Recommendation 4:4

The Government should establish with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) an effective 'whole-of-government' approach for policies related to the funding, evaluation and accreditation of early child development and parenting centres.

Recommendation 4:5

The early child development and parenting centres should be accessible, available and affordable for all families with young children.

Recommendation 4:6

The Government should develop a strategy to bring quality daycare programs into the early child development and parenting centre initiative.

Recommendation 4:7 The Government should improve the effectiveness of the whole-of-government approach to early child development by working towards better integration of the work of the different ministries and government departments.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5

How should we staff the early child development and parenting centres?

A key issue for an integrated program at early child development and parenting centres is to have a high quality staff, educated and well trained in developmental neurosciences and who understand how interaction with young children affects multiple sensing pathways that affect all aspects of the development of brain architecture and function. The senior staff for the centres should have at least four years of university education and training. A move to this level of education and training for staff will require programs to upgrade the skills and qualifications of many competent people working in this field who do not have the desirable background in child development and developmental neuroscience.

It is also important that all individuals working in the field of early child development have a common framework of understanding of neurobiological development and early child development. For example, staff doing home visits, such as nurses, should have the same education and training background as the staff working in the children's centres. Also, staff working with children from disrupted families need the same educational background. This will provide better integration for all staff working in the field of early child development.

The Government of South Australia should ensure that all senior staff now working in early child development and education in schools and government departments undertake a program in developmental neurobiology and human development so that they can more effectively integrate what they do to set in place initiatives that enhance human development. It would be important for government departments, such as the Department of Education and Children's Services, the Department of Health and the Department for Families and Communities, to ensure that new staff have an appropriate background in neuroscience and child development in respect to learning, behaviour and health and how this relates to South Australia's Strategic Plan.

My meeting with the Office for Youth Policy Action Team (A-Team) indicated that public servants under 30 years of age can easily grasp the importance of early child and brain development in respect to their role in different government departments.

Recommendation 5:1 All students graduating from university and TAFE programs that relate to child development and families should be educated in developmental neurobiological science relevant for their work.

How should we staff the early child development and parenting centres?

Recommendation 5:2 The South Australian Neuroscience Institute (SANI) should strengthen its base in developmental neuroscience, including work in the gene environment interaction (e.g. epigenetics, microRNAs).

Recommendation 5:3 The universities should establish education programs for staff working in early child development in order to ensure that they have a common knowledge base about experience based brain development that is relevant to their work.

Recommendation 5:4 Because brain development in the period before formal education sets a child's capability to take part in formal education, the university faculties of education should ensure a sharing of this understanding by introducing new knowledge about experience based brain development for all students for primary and secondary education programs.



Recommendation 5:5 The Government should provide incentives for the universities and TAFE to better integrate their programs for people working in child development and education.

Recommendation 5:6 In view of the importance of early child development for the future economy and quality of South Australian society, the Government should set up a program for all public servants to ensure understanding of what experience based brain development means for their work and the strategic goals of South Australia.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6

How can communities promote early child development?

During my residency, I visited a range of metropolitan, outer metropolitan and regional communities. I was impressed with the understanding of these communities about the importance of early child development for the future long term health, learning and behaviour of young children.

They varied in their understanding of developmental neuroscience. Many individuals with limited formal training were doing an excellent job in early child development. Some were operating what are called daycare centres that were better described as early child development and parenting centres because of their understanding of early child development and the way they operated their programs and involved parents.

In moving towards a more integrated early child development program with qualified staff, it is important that the Department of Education and Children's Services makes it possible for the competent individuals who have had limited formal education to upgrade their skills and understanding of developmental neuroscience and early child development.

A high quality postgraduate program in early child development with a strong base in developmental neuroscience and biological science will be required. It might be modeled after some of the initiatives of SANI in collaboration with an inter-institutional early child development program.

It is important in establishing these early child development and parenting centres that there is good community involvement. In Port Augusta I had several meetings with a group of key early childhood professionals from a range of disciplines and other meetings with community members. These groups contributed to a paper entitled The equity of opportunity for all young children: Port Augusta (Appendix 3 on www.thinkers.sa.gov.au). In this paper, they promoted a model of integrated early childhood development programs using a 'hub and spoke' model, with one centre (the hub) connected to satellite units (the spokes) in each of the primary schools. The paper recommended the establishment of an enabling committee to represent the diverse demographic characteristics of the Port Augusta community and to guide and support development. The multidisciplinary group that developed the paper would like to set up an incorporated organisation with an early child development board to facilitate the establishment and operation of the early child development programs for their community.

How can communities promote early child development?

The Port Augusta paper proposed:

- a flexible program with flexible operating hours (not just 9am to 5pm)
- yearly AEDI to measure outcomes of the program
- centres of excellence in early child development attracting new skilled staff
- upgrading the skills of existing individuals in early child development
- staff that is well prepared to be sensitive to the culture and diversity of the community, particularly the Aboriginal community
- increasing the awareness of all families with young children about the importance of the early years.

One issue that was repeatedly raised in meetings with the communities was the differences in policies and funding by the various government departments and their programs. For example, the centre based program for early child development is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Children's Services but home visiting is the responsibility of the Department of Health. While both programs have the potential to achieve improvement for children, this improvement would be even greater if the separate responsibilities were integrated. Also, some departments have primary responsibilities other than early child development.

Some staff in the Adelaide based government departments did not understand experience based brain development in the early years and its effect on health, learning and behaviour, while the staff working in some communities did. The Government of South Australia should take steps to close this gap in understanding in its public service.

Recommendation 6:1 The Government should set up community boards in association with the Department of Education and Children's Services to develop and implement early child development and parenting programs linked to or part of primary schools.

Recommendation 6:2 All staff engaged in community based early child development programs should be well educated in the cultural diversity of Australia. Programs must have staff members who reflect the cultural characteristics of today's Australian society.

Chapter 7

How can the Government work with Aboriginal communities and families to improve outcomes for their children?

One of the valuable interactions I had as Thinker was with the Aboriginal Roundtable group. The Roundtable was established to work with me during my exploration of early child development and the Aboriginal community. I asked the group the specific question, 'What would it take for Aboriginal people to be partners in their communities in early child development and parenting centres?' Their response is a paper entitled Aboriginal Roundtable response to: "What would it take for Aboriginal partnership in Early Child Development and Parenting Centres?" for Fraser Mustard (Appendix 2 on www.thinkers.sa.gov.au).

One of the important points in the Roundtable participants' response is that they would like to see early child development and parenting centres that can help prevent children from being taken away from their families. They see one of the roles of the children's centres as supporting parents to be better parents. All the evidence from Canada's and Australia's Aboriginal populations is that our policies of taking children away from their families have been extremely disruptive for children and damaged the development of many children. Thus, one of the goals of culturally sensitive early child development and parenting centres is to involve the Aboriginal families, beginning if possible at pregnancy, and certainly after the child is born. This is also true for families from other cultures.



The group emphasised that government programs (services) are built on the dominant English culture with Aboriginal participation on non-Aboriginal terms. They made the point that they have survived in Australia for 60,000 years and cannot easily give up Aboriginal principles to take part in children's centres that ignore their culture and history. If their children are to become socially included members of a pluralistic, modern, democratic state, the centres for early child development must be culturally and language sensitive. The Aboriginal Roundtable we worked with would be prepared to take part in early child development and parenting centres if they began at an early age, were sensitive to their culture and involved staff with Aboriginal backgrounds.

How can the Government work with Aboriginal communities and families to improve outcomes for their children?

The health of Aboriginal children is extremely important for early child development. Participants made the point that you can't teach a sick child. Poor child health can influence the development of brain function. All early child development centres should be closely linked with the health care system to ensure there is early diagnosis and treatment of problems such as middle ear infections that affect hearing development. It also means that all staff in the early child development centres should receive a thorough education in how illness that affects the sensing pathways (e.g. vision, sound, touch etc.) in the early years affects later development.

One of the features of early child development that interested the Aboriginal Roundtable was that exposure to two languages in the first seven months of life made it possible to easily master both languages with no accent. They appreciate that their language is an important factor for sustaining key elements of their culture. The other factor is that if you develop the brain structures for two languages early in life, it is relatively easy to learn a third and fourth language later on in life. As we move to building pluralistic democratic societies, we will have to learn how to respect and better integrate cultural and language differences.

The Roundtable participants wanted the Aboriginal community to be involved in decision making and in the work of the centres. There should be a strategy for ongoing discussion between the centre staff and the Aboriginal communities to enhance the work of the early child development programs. The governance strategy should include

members of the Aboriginal community. In my meetings with metropolitan and regional Aboriginal communities in Port Augusta, and at the Kaurna Plains School in Elizabeth, I saw excellent sites that could involve both the Aboriginal community and the non-Aboriginal community in a program led by Aboriginal people and based on Aboriginal culture and philosophy.

Recommendation 7:1 It is important for the Aboriginal community to help establish early child development and parenting centres sensitive to their language and culture. The centres should include non-Aboriginal families. These centres should provide programs that start at the birth of the child, if not during pregnancy.

Recommendation 7:2 The Department of Education and Children's Services should ensure that the early child development and parenting centres are culturally sensitive, have Aboriginal staff, and attempt to introduce infants (birth to seven months) to their Aboriginal language and English in the centres.

Chapter 8

How can the Government support vulnerable families to improve outcomes for children?

The early child development and parenting centres in communities can, if properly managed, be effective institutional means to ensure good early child development for all young children regardless of socioeconomic background and parenting structure.

At present, when the courts have to deal with family problems, they end up separating the child from its parents. When this happens in Canada, the young children are left in limbo and the Canadian family court judges recognise that the young children may be damaged permanently. If early child development and parenting centres are established in communities, the courts can recommend that the child be part of an early child development program with whatever caregiver is assigned by the courts. This could be a very powerful way of breaking cycles of poor early child development when there is family disruption.

In the case of homeless parents, often single mothers with young children, it is important to provide a residential base for the homeless parent and child and an accessible early child development and parenting centre for the child and parent.

Professionals working in health care who are involved with pregnant women and mothers with young children should be fully integrated with the early child development and parenting centres. If the centres can involve women when they are pregnant, then the people with the health background can work with the centre staff to ensure the mothers understand the importance of high quality prenatal development. During infancy and the toddler stage, they can provide support for the families and centre staff when the children become ill.

Another important role for early childhood development and parenting centres is supporting parents who have mental health problems, such as depression, and providing interaction with their young children. It is important that the early child development and parenting centres can provide the support and guidance necessary for these parents in early child development. Mayo House in Adelaide has a very good program for mothers with depression. The Lady Gowrie Child Centre's Through the Looking Glass program offers an excellent program for mothers with attachment issues. Port Augusta has an excellent program for young children with development and behaviour problems. These programs should be closely linked with or be part of early child development and parenting centres.

How can the Government support vulnerable families to improve outcomes for children?



We now recognise how adverse experience based brain development in the very early years can lead to mental health problems, alcohol addiction and drug use. It is important that the staff in the centres as well as the home visiting staff understand this. The centre's staff must work with the vulnerable families and the courts to prevent the kind of environments that cause faulty development of the brain.

Recommendation 8:1 The early child development and parenting centres should be able to have children in their program who are caught in family disruption and dysfunction and in the care decisions of the justice system. The child's official care provider (for example, foster parent) should be included. Centres should also work with homeless parents from all cultures to provide stability for early child development.

Recommendation 8:2 The courts should have the power to assign vulnerable children to the centres with their designated care provider.

Chapter 9

How can young professionals promote early child development?

The Government of South Australia's Office for Youth established a Policy Action Team drawn from government and universities to interact with the Adelaide Thinker in Residence on early child development. All members of the group were under 30 years of age and worked independently on this subject. In its final report (2007), the Policy Action Team made a number of important points:

- there should be a universal program for early child development associated with the primary schools
- the Government of South Australia should provide sufficient funding to develop and sustain early child development centres
- there should be universal education and training in early child development, and community understanding of the early years should be cultivated
- the universities should create a South Australian institute of human development
- early child development and its relationship to health, learning and behaviour should be part of the curriculum of South Australian high schools
- education and training should be available for the upskilling of existing health care professionals and early childhood educators in areas of neuroscience and early child development
- the community needs to be made aware of the needs and services associated with early child development
- an independent South Australian early child development council led by an ombudsman for children and families should be established to advocate for healthy early child development

- community participation in the development, implementation and running of early child development centres should be facilitated.

The Policy Action Team concluded that 'we should not underestimate the power that the early childhood picture has to change the world for all South Australians. We look forward to working with you to change the world!'

It is important that the older generations in South Australia appreciate that this sample of the next generation appreciates the significance of good early child development programs for the future of South Australian society. Therefore, a key issue is whether the Government of South Australia can ensure the same level of understanding of this subject among all members of the public service.

Recommendation 9:1 The Government of South Australia should set up a program for all public servants of all ages to ensure they have a good understanding of early child development and human development in respect to health, learning and behaviour and how this relates to Government programs and their work in Government. The young public servants could be leaders to do this in the Government of South Australia.

How can we measure how well our children are doing?

Recommendation 9:2 A youth representative should be on the proposed Council for Early Childhood Development and Parenting.

There is a need for a good population based measure of child development.

There are population measures of development that begin with the birth of a child. Gestational age and birth weight of the child are two examples. These measurements are universally collected in all developed countries. The second population measure that can be carried out in countries with public education systems is the assessment of the development of children at the time of school entry. In Canada, this assessment is referred to as the EDI (Early Development Instrument), and in Australia, as the AEDI (Australian Early Development Index). We have not yet established universal development measurements for child development at different stages between birth and entry into the school system, although it is possible that such a technique might be developed for a population based assessment of development in conjunction with immunisation programs at earlier ages.

The AEDI (EDI) is a crude macro-measure of brain development at the time children enter the school system. We now know that this measure provides evidence of how well children will perform in the school system but it is important to emphasise that this is not

a diagnostic measure and that it is only valid for population assessments of children, not for individual children.

The AEDI can provide communities with evidence about the quality and coverage of early child development programs in their district, and communities can use this information to improve their early child development programs. In order to take the necessary steps towards improvement, communities should have a council or board for early child development.

A linked population database (Health, Education and Behaviour) can be used for basic and applied research on the factors contributing to inequalities in health, learning and behaviour throughout the life cycle. It is now possible to link the development of some brain and biological pathways in the early years to physical and mental health problems and behaviour and learning in later life. This makes it possible to explore how the social environment can 'get under the skin' to influence gene expression at different stages of development leading to future health, behaviour and learning problems. This initiative could provide better linkage between fundamental research in the neurobiological sciences and the social sciences.

In establishing the population assessments, it is important that the assessments be population based not institution based. We often use school based assessments to measure developments in language, literacy

and mathematics. Unfortunately, in Canada there are many children in each age bracket who do not take these school tests for a variety of reasons. Without a full population assessment, there are no adequate measures of the development of the whole population in the different age groups.

The size of South Australia and its strong track record in applied research in early child development gives it particular advantages in developing further programs which link research activities and service practice. It is important to pursue such avenues to avoid continuing decline in the State's research capacity.

Recommendation 10:1 The data from the AEDI assessments should be integrated into a state data system for health and education and social indicators. All the individual data must be confidential and not used to label anyone.

Recommendation 10:2 The Government of South Australia should establish a linked integrated data system from the work of its various departments that relates to physical and mental health, early child development, education, behaviour and socioeconomic factors. This could be modeled on the program established by the Government of Manitoba with the University of Manitoba more than 15 years ago. The findings from the integrated database should be publicly reported on an annual basis.

Recommendation 10:3 Assessments of development and education of children should be population based for the age cohort not just school based.



Why invest in early childhood?

There is consensus among many economists that the quality of human capital is a key factor influencing economic growth and the quality of societies in the complex 21st century. These economists now understand that the impact of early child development on cognitive and non-cognitive functions is important. Heckman (2000, 2006) and others have estimated that in relation to behaviour and crime, the social cost of poor early child development to individuals and society in the United States of America is close to \$1.3 trillion per year. For the State of South Australia, the cost to individuals and society is probably about CAD\$7 billion (Canadian dollars) per year.

In Canada, the province of Ontario (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) has estimated that the costs of mental health and substance abuse to individuals and society in Ontario is about CAD\$34 billion per year. Based on the fact that the population of South Australia is about one-eighth of the population of Ontario, the cost to South Australian could be around CAD\$7 billion per year.

The cost to Ontario's individuals and society for mental health and substance abuse, crime and violence is about CAD\$65 billion per year. The cost of a universal high quality early child development and parenting program as outlined in this report for all families with young children in Ontario would be approximately CAD\$6 billion per year.

The cost of crime and violence and mental health and behaviour for individuals and society in South Australia is about CAD\$7 billion whilst universal, high quality early child development programs for all families with young children in South Australia would be about CAD\$750 million.

High quality universal early child development programs could reduce the costs of mental health and crime to individuals and society by more than 50% in 25 years (the time it would take from beginning universal early child development programs to influence the quality and capability of the next generation).

Based on these rough estimates, the cost to put in place universal high quality early child development and parenting programs in place in South Australia would be about CAD\$750 million per year if all families with young children took part. If only 50% of the families took part, one could project that the cost to South Australian society and individuals in terms of mental health, addiction, behaviour and crime and violence would be reduced to less than CAD\$3 billion per year.

In his World Bank papers on early child development in the developing world, Jacques van der Gaag (2002) made the point that investment in early child development programs enhances the equity and quality of a society, limits social exclusion and is a very important factor in economic growth and prosperity.

Heckman has done extensive work on the quality and competence of the United States labour force and has concluded that a major contributor to the failure to improve the competence of the United States labour force over the last 25 years is a lack of investment in early child development. He has made the point that the period of early child development sets cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics that are important for adult economic productivity. Heckman has linked the new understanding from the neurobiological sciences with his work as an economist. He has emphasised that the greatest return on investment in human development is in the early preschool period of development. The return on investments in today's schools is smaller than the return on investment in early child development.

Using US data, Heckman concluded that school age remedial programs for children and youth with cognitive limitations have generally had a poor record of success. He also concluded that public job training programs for disadvantaged adults yielded low economic returns. However, he made the point that although investments in older individuals realise relatively less return overall, such investments are still beneficial to individuals and society. In his work with psychologists and development neuroscientists, Heckman came to the conclusion that early childhood experience has a powerful influence on the development of the cognitive, social and emotional capacity and the health and wellbeing of adults that are prerequisites for strong economic productivity in the adult population. He made the point that the success of modern economies depends in part on a well educated and adaptable labour

force that is capable of learning new skills so that they remain competitive in a continually changing global market.

In a recent series of articles on the globalised knowledge based economies, The Economist magazine has pointed out the increasing need for talent. It made the point that there is a growing shortage of talent and growing global competition for talent.

A key issue in the battle for brain power and talent is how to fund the early child development centres. The Economist magazine (18 July 1998) concluded:

It is perfectly possible to devise a system that will produce more children and still keep women at work, though it may not come cheap. The principle of free education for school age children is already entrenched throughout the rich world; there would be nothing incongruous about extending it further down the age range. In the Nordic countries, widely available and good quality child development programs, together with generous maternity and parental leave arrangements, have kept birth rates near replacement level even though most women go out to work. Many other rich countries make a nod in this direction by subsidizing child care and giving either tax allowances for children or some other direct child benefit.

In their book *Children of the Lucky Country*, Stanley, Richardson and Prior (2005), bring out the impact of the revolution in the role of women in today's society and early child development. They outline the strategies that could enhance early child development in today's changing world.

Why invest in early childhood?

In their paper for The Brookings Institution, Ludwig and Sawhill (2006) state that in their assessment of early child development in the United States:

Preserving the status quo has its own consequences. Specifically, a course of inaction runs the risk that our society forgoes the chance to help all our children realize their full potential and to improve the skills (and consequent competitiveness) of America's future workforce. Based on the available evidence, we think that present knowledge strongly favors our proposal of stepped-up investments in early education from birth to age ten.

Recommendation 11:1 As the Government of South Australia invests in early child development and parenting centres, they must take steps to improve the necessary infrastructure and provide adequate sustained funding to ensure an incremental increase in the number of these centres over the next five to ten years.

Recommendation 11:2 In keeping with the ideal of public education, the Government of South Australia should incorporate its preschool program into the programs of the early child development and parenting centres and fully fund them for all children from birth.

Recommendation 11:3 One major goal of the early child development and parenting programs should be to reduce by 50% in 20 years the cost of mental health, addiction, crime and violence occurring in later life to individuals and society .

Recommendation 11:4 Another goal of the early child development and parenting program is to ensure that South Australia has the talent base to effectively compete in the globalised knowledge based economies of the 21st century with improved equity in high quality human development and enhanced social inclusion.

Recommendation 11:5 Since the early child development and parenting centres are part of an integrated program for human development (early child development and education), they should be publicly financed.

Recommendation 11:6 To achieve the whole-of-government approach for early child development, the Government of South Australia must develop an integrated budget for each early child development and parenting centre with one set of guidelines and one set of accountability measures. At the present state of development, annual AEDI assessment of children in each centre will be a critical outcome measure.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12

How can business and community leaders contribute to early child development?

The 2005 Virtual Village report recommended that the Government of South Australia establish a Children's Council with responsibility for working on integration and oversight of all early child development services. This Council was not established, but the Government of South Australia did establish a Council for the Care of Children, the purpose of which is to:

- promote the rights and interests of children
- advocate for or on behalf of children
- advise government
- inform the community about the best care and support for children.

The Council's primary role is to ensure the care and protection of children and support for their families, and it reports to the Minister for Families and Communities.

Recognising that it will take time to establish quality early child development and parenting programs linked to the primary schools and that governments may change every four to five years with different ideologies, in Canada we established a national council for early child development funded by support primarily from the private sector. This was in part to ensure sustained development of early child development programs in Canada over the next 25 years, regardless of changes in governments and their ideology. The role of the council in Canada is to close the gap between what we know and what we do. To help close this gap, the council recruits and trains Fellows from all sectors and communities in Canada.

The Council's action plan includes:

- harnessing the evidence
- connecting and working with communities and groups in communities
- helping develop public policies for universal non-compulsory early child development programs for all families beginning with pregnancy
- cultivating leaders
- monitoring results and helping communities improve outcomes
- integrating and expanding existing programs within the early child development centres in association with the primary schools.

In our continuing experiments in civilisation, we face the challenges of the 21st century – population growth, ageing populations in many countries, resource constraints, the need for sustainable development, and equity and equality of opportunity in societies. We have to work out strategies for free market capitalism with social accountability. The health, well being, and competence of populations will influence whether humans can achieve prosperous, stable, non-violent, equitable communities in the 21st century.

Recommendation 12:1 Members of the South Australian community should consider establishing a council independent of the Government of South Australia to help set up child development and parenting initiatives. This could be called the South Australia Council for Early Child Development and Parenting, linked with the Canadian Council for Early Child Development and Parenting. (A group in South Australia is taking preliminary steps to see if they can establish such a council.)



Conclusion

Governments in some developed countries have increasingly taken a role working with communities and parents to ensure equity in development for young children in their rapidly changing societies and cultures. This is in keeping with the increasing interest in the rights of the child and the role of society and parents to protect these rights.

South Australia has taken a major step to close the gap between what we know and what we do to enhance early child development. If the full scale of the project can be implemented within ten years, all children entering the school system will have had good early child development involving parents and community. This will lead to a healthy, competent population 25 years from today that can help South Australian society be a leader in adjusting to the changes and opportunities of the 21st century.



Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

Throughout my residency I met with hundreds of people who helped me gain an insight into Early Childhood Development in South Australia. I thank you all for helping to shape my residency and this report.

Partners

- Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- Department of Education and Children's Services
- Department of Health
- Department for Families and Communities
- Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division, Department of the Premier and Cabinet
- University of South Australia
- University of Adelaide
- Flinders University
- Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology

A special thanks to the three project catalysts – Alexandra Diamond, Sue Emmett and Kathryn Jordan – whose work was extremely helpful in meeting people and understanding the goals of South Australia to improve early child development.

References

References

Campbell, F.A. and C.T. Ramey. 2002. Early Childhood Education: Young Adult Outcomes from the Abecedarian Project. *Applied Developmental Science* 6(1):42-57.

Government of South Australia Office for Youth. 2007. Policy Action Team (A-Team) Recommendations: Early Childhood Development and Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting.

Government of South Australia. 2005 *The Virtual Village: Raising a child in the new millennium*, Report of the Inquiry into Early Childhood Services, DECS, Adelaide, SA.

Heckman, J.J. 2000. Policies to Foster Human Capital. Joint Center for Poverty Research Working Papers 154. Northwestern University / University of Chicago


Ludwig, J. and I. Sawhill. 2006. Success by Ten: Intervening Early, Often, and Effectively in the Education of Young Children. *Policy Innovation Initiative*. The Brookings Institution.

McCain, M.N. and J.F. Mustard. 1999. Early Years Study: Reversing the Real Brain Drain. Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Toronto, Ontario.

Government of South Australia: Department of Education and Children's Services, Department of Health, and Department for Families and Communities. Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting: Quality Learning and Care. Stanley, F.J., S. Richardson and M. Prior. 2005. *Children of the Lucky Country*. Sydney, Australia: Pan Macmillan Australia.

Statistics Canada. 2006. National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth.

The Economist magazine, A Survey of Women and Work. July 18, 1998, pg. 16. van der Gaag. 2002. From child development to human development. In *From Early Child Development to Human Development*. Ed. M.E. Young. Washington: The World Bank.



Adelaide Thinkers in Residence

*bringing world-class thinkers to Adelaide to assist with the
strategic development and promotion of South Australia*

adelaidethinkers@saugov.sa.gov.au
www.thinkers.sa.gov.au

Re-imagining Childhood

The inspiration of Reggio Emilia
education principles in South Australia

Carla Rinaldi



Adelaide Thinker in Residence 2012 - 2013

Re-Imagining Childhood

The inspiration of Reggio Emilia
education principles in South Australia



Prepared by Carla Rinaldi,
Adelaide Thinker in Residence 2012–2013



**Government of
South Australia**

Department of the Premier and Cabinet C/O PO Box 2343 Adelaide SA 5001
June 2013 © All rights reserved - Crown - in right of the State of South Australia



No way. The Hundred is there

The child is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.

A hundred. Always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling, of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding
a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.

The child has
a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.

They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
to love and to marvel
only at Easter and at Christmas.

They tell the child:
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety-nine.

They tell the child:
that work and play
reality and fantasy
science and imagination
sky and earth
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way. The hundred is there.

Loris Malaguzzi, (translated by Lella Gandini)

from the Catalogue of the Exhibition "The Hundred Languages of Children",
© Preschools and Infant-toddler Centres - Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, Italy
Reggio Children, 1996



Contents

Introduction	2
Premier's Foreword	6
About Carla Rinaldi	7
The Partnership	9
The Residency	10
Residency Objectives	11
A Vision for South Australia	13
Provocations from Carla Rinaldi	15
What is the image of the child and childhood?	15
The relationship between childhood and society	17
The child as citizen: the competent child, the child as possessor of rights	18
The Hundred Languages	20
What does it mean to be an educating community?	21
What is the role of the school in society?	24
What is the role of the environment in the human experience?	28
What are the Principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project?	31
Provocations for South Australia	37
Diagnosis of South Australia's Early Childhood system	37
De-constructing and re-constructing perceptions	42
Recommendations	43
South Australia's evolving responses	51
Conclusion – The 'Magic Moment'	61
References	66
Bibliography	67
Acknowledgements and Special Thanks	69



Premier's Foreword Message from Jay Weatherill

Professor Carla Rinaldi has challenged South Australians to think differently.

Her report has left South Australia with profoundly challenging questions: What is our image of a child? What is the role of the school in society? How do we view education and care, and why do we separate these into distinct categories?

Carla Rinaldi is widely regarded as the world leader in the Reggio Emilia approach to learning and teaching in the early childhood years. This approach embodies something which I regard as fundamental. It treats the child as a citizen – competent, connected to adults and other children, and in a perpetual state of active learning.

A priority of this government is to provide Every Chance for Every Child. By declaring this to be a priority, we make a firm commitment to children and young people. This is why I invited Carla Rinaldi to South Australia as Thinker in Residence.

We are committing to doing whatever we can to improve the quality of our children's formative experiences, and to provide them with the stable and supportive relationships to which they are entitled, so that they in turn can be resilient, creative, and self-determined.

South Australia has a rich history of leadership in education, especially in the early years. Realising the potential of each and every child and their learning is our perennial responsibility. The late Fraser Mustard, a former Thinker in Residence, left an indelible mark on this State through his focus on the early years.

Building upon his influential work, Carla Rinaldi further emphasises the need to focus on the rights of children as citizens. Helping children realise their potential would enhance the strength and wellbeing of the whole community.

It is a wonderful endorsement that over 60% of the partner organisations involved in this residency have come from outside government. The commitment and work of this group has positioned South Australia to lead the nation in rethinking early childhood.

The influence of this residency is rippling out into our childcare centres, kindergartens, schools, local governments, health and community development sector and to families. There are over 35 prototypes already underway, involving new research and projects that challenge thinking and traditional practices.

Carla has urged us to examine long held beliefs and question our perceptions of the child and childhood. Our future will be determined by how we interact with children today.

I hope this report inspires you as much as it has inspired me. It will become a trusted resource to guide early childhood development in South Australia for years to come.

Jay Weatherill

Jay Weatherill, Premier of South Australia



Professor Carla Rinaldi

Adelaide Thinker in Residence 2012–2013
Professor Rinaldi is a world leader in education for children in the early years. She has been the President of Reggio Children since 2007 and is the first President of the Reggio Children-Loris Malaguzzi Centre Foundation. Carla is also a Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

Professor Rinaldi worked side-by-side with Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach, from 1970 until his death in 1994 in the municipal infant toddler and preschool system of Reggio Emilia, where she was the first pedagogical coordinator.

Carla has been working as pedagogical/scientific consultant for Reggio Children since 1994, following the supervision of all Reggio Children initiatives. She was responsible for research projects in collaboration with Harvard University, the University of New Hampshire and the University of Milan - Bicocca.

Professor Rinaldi has been vice-president of the Gruppo Nazionale Nidi-Infanzia (National Early Childhood Association) and has had tenures as visiting Professor at the Webster University (St. Louis, Missouri) and at the Colorado University (Boulder, Colorado).

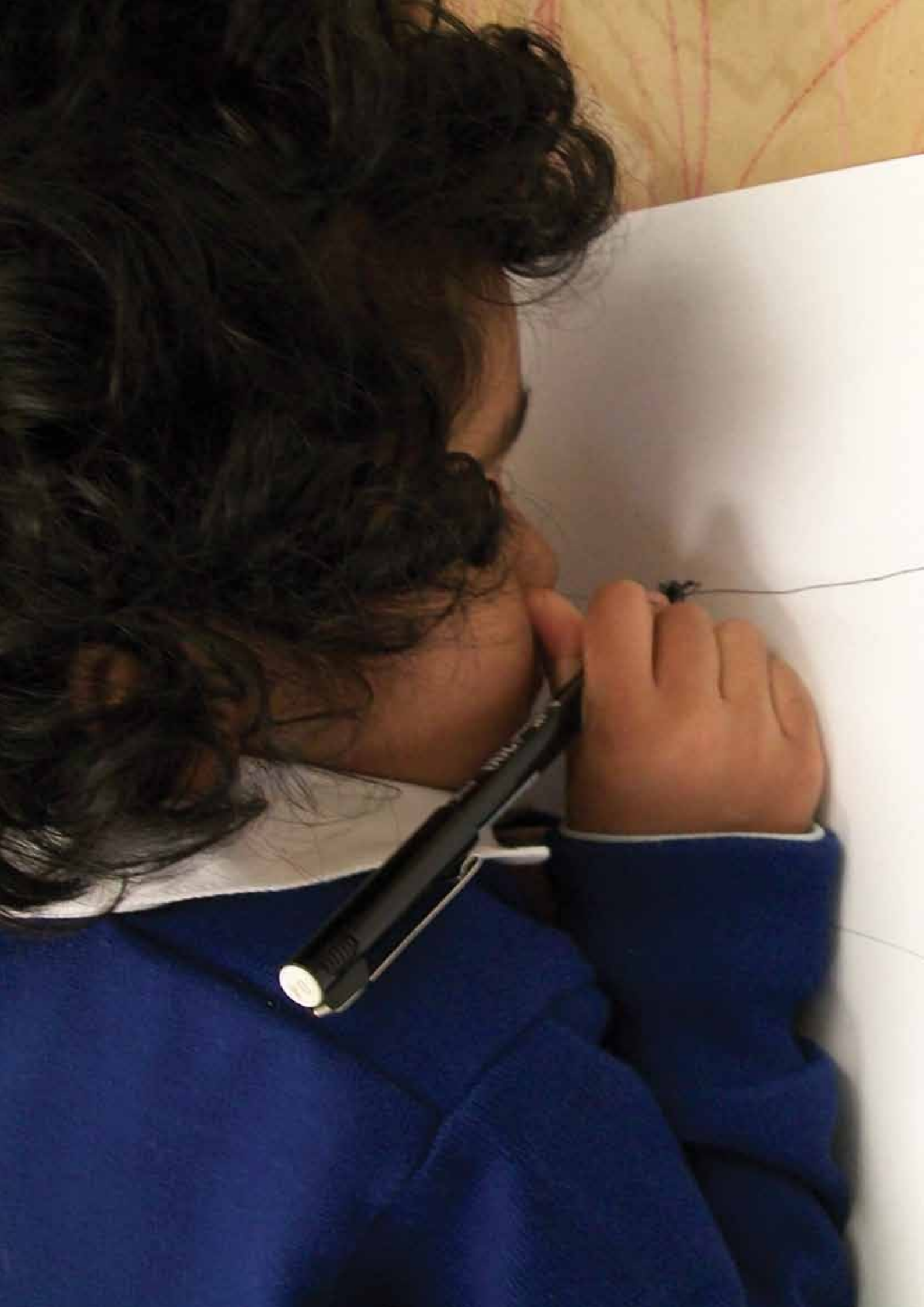
From 2004-2007, Carla Rinaldi was a member of the Reggio Emilia City Council.

In 2007 and 2008, Carla Rinaldi was appointed as a consultant in several different Commissions of the Italian Ministry of Education.

Carla Rinaldi has been a speaker at numerous seminars and conferences in Italy as well as in Europe, the United States, Australia and Asia. In 2011 she was invited to participate in the Presidential Conference on Early Childhood Education and Care "Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Education and Care", Budapest. In 2010 she participated in the UNESCO World Conference on Early Childhood Education and Care "Building the Wealth of Nations", Moscow.

Professor Rinaldi lectures frequently on the Reggio Emilia experience, and has published many articles, chapters, and books in Italian and English.





The Partnership

It was after Premier Weatherill returned from Reggio Emilia in Italy in 2011 that the negotiations with Reggio Children began in order to attract Professor Carla Rinaldi as Adelaide's Thinker in Residence. The government already had a strong advocate for the early years in Premier Weatherill himself. In addition, an initial scan of the early childhood sector quickly revealed a strong appetite for this residency in South Australia. In an unprecedented level of commitment, the partner organisations that invested in this residency were over 60% from non-government sectors. This indicated a breadth and depth of interest in the Reggio Emilia approach to early years learning. Partners soon revealed their leadership in discovering possibilities for the Reggio Emilia principles coming alive in Australian contexts.

The lead partners in this exciting venture were the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) and Goodstart Early Learning. DECD has responsibility for 585 preschool, care and early learning sites in SA. Goodstart brought a national perspective to the residency with their 655 centres around Australia, 44 of these in SA.

The Rinaldi partnership group also included Catholic Education SA with 103 schools and the Association of Independent Schools of SA with 96 schools and 34 preschools and Early Learning Centres.

Our other partners were: Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange (REAIE); the Local Government Association; Flinders University; University of South Australia; TAFE SA; Early Childhood Australia (SA Branch); Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI); Early Childhood Organisation (EChO); Northern Connections; The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI); and the Office for Design and Architecture.

The commitment and engagement of these partners has strengthened the residency and ensured that South Australia has a critical mass of people who are researching the principles from the Reggio Emilia approach and are continually learning as they trial various ways of implementing the principles in the South Australian context.





The Residency

Professor Rinaldi made three trips to South Australia between March 2012 and April 2013. Over the duration of the residency, she

- Attended over 120 meetings with partners, political leaders and education groups
- Met with the Premier of South Australia, Hon. Jay Weatherill MP
- Presented to South Australian Cabinet Ministers
- Met with Hon Grace Portolesi MP, Minister for Employment, Higher Education and Skills
- Met with Hon Jennifer Rankine MP, Minister for Education and Child Development
- Met with Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Early Childhood and Child Care
- Engaged with over 3300 people in her first visit (March 2012)
- Engaged with over 880 people in her second visit (August 2012)
- Engaged with over 4000 people in her final visit (April 2013)
- Visited over 15 childcare, preschool and school sites throughout South Australia
- Attracted 2000 people to her inaugural lecture with more than 200 online live video streaming connections to her inaugural lecture
- Reached 22,502 people via Twitter with over 113,452 impressions
- Attracted 1800 people to her final lecture
- Enabled The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition which attracted over 3,500 visitors to the State Library of South Australia and was supported by 200 volunteers

Residency Objectives

The objectives of the residency were to contribute to Premier Weatherill's strategic priority area, Every Chance for Every Child by:

Challenging common perceptions of children and their learning, and provoking 'deep thought' and reflection about these perceptions and beliefs

Stimulating and influencing a state wide review of the structures, organisation and coordination of early childhood education and care services in South Australia

Opening dialogue and influencing debate about the culture of childhood and the value of the child as citizen from birth

Building a collaborative culture among the various groups and sectors researching the Reggio Emilia principles in order to consider how these principles could inspire South Australian pedagogy and practices

Stimulating change in the processes for the design and provision of spaces and places for children through deepening understanding of the interdependence of physical and psychological elements of space with learning and wellbeing

Stimulating new research to sustain learning about the possible influences of Reggio Emilia principles within South Australia.

The influence of Carla's presence among educators in South Australia has already been deep and profound. Educators have talked about the challenge of the Reggio Emilia principles not providing a package or a model to be superimposed upon our Australian settings. Rather, it offers us all a philosophy, a way of being, of living, of teaching and learning.

"The 'Reggio Approach' in other parts of the world, outside Reggio Emilia only makes sense if we are capable of re-inventing it, if we are capable of understanding the context we work in, the values in which each culture believes, and then compare these with what Reggio has been capable of creating in its own specific context, and with its own resources."

Howard Gardner 2012

Introduction to Reggio Emilia Video:

<http://youtu.be/IWf9mBJ548k>





“Nothing
without joy.”

Loris Malaguzzi, 1995

A Vision for South Australia

South Australia has an amazing opportunity to THINK and REFLECT ON early childhood as a new source, a new source that can inspire a big cultural, philosophical and economic change for the country. Early childhood centres that don't simply want to offer services for families, but as places of and for learning for children, teachers, parents and the community, 'a learning community'.

South Australia can redesign a political and social project where democracy and education can find a fusal moment and can offer and guarantee a "bottom up" process of participation: a new possible style of democracy.

The wellbeing and the sustainability that comes as a consequence is the idea of a society inspired by the Aboriginal cultures where the welcoming and wellbeing of children is the welcoming and wellbeing of all the human beings from 0-99 years of age.

The children become the best essence and expression, not only of human beings but also of nature. We are humans and nature together because we are first of all part of nature and the universe. We are reciprocal, we are interdependent. We have to take responsibility for our interdependence.

The challenge for South Australia is not to separate or make a special pedagogy for the disabled, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the children at risk or the Aboriginal children. The challenge is to create a pedagogy, with schools that are able to welcome all differences that come from the uniqueness of each child, all human beings, and create a context where the differences can learn to dialogue and enrich each other.

The competent child is in Australia, in South Australia, in every culture. The competent child is amazing if we are able to make them visible. The competent child, the competent teacher and the competent parent can and do exist in South Australia. They are waiting for our pedagogical, cultural, social and political decisions.

Through Reggio Children and South Australia working in a close and permanent relationship we can develop a system that can guarantee continuity of learning from 0 - 99; a holistic approach related to research on human development and neuroscience, learning by doing, learning how to learn with an approach where we do not separate the body and the mind.

Through working in partnership with Reggio Children, South Australia can become the vibrant state of quality education; a new economy, a leader in Australia and the Asia Pacific. However the quality can only be guaranteed by working in partnership with Reggio Children to develop an original South Australian approach and I strongly recommend the commencement of a permanent research. It is impossible to replicate the Reggio Approach but it is possible to develop a local South Australian approach that has the traces of the Reggio Emilia principles. Education must be constructed within its local context.



Provocations from Carla Rinaldi

What is our image of the child and childhood?

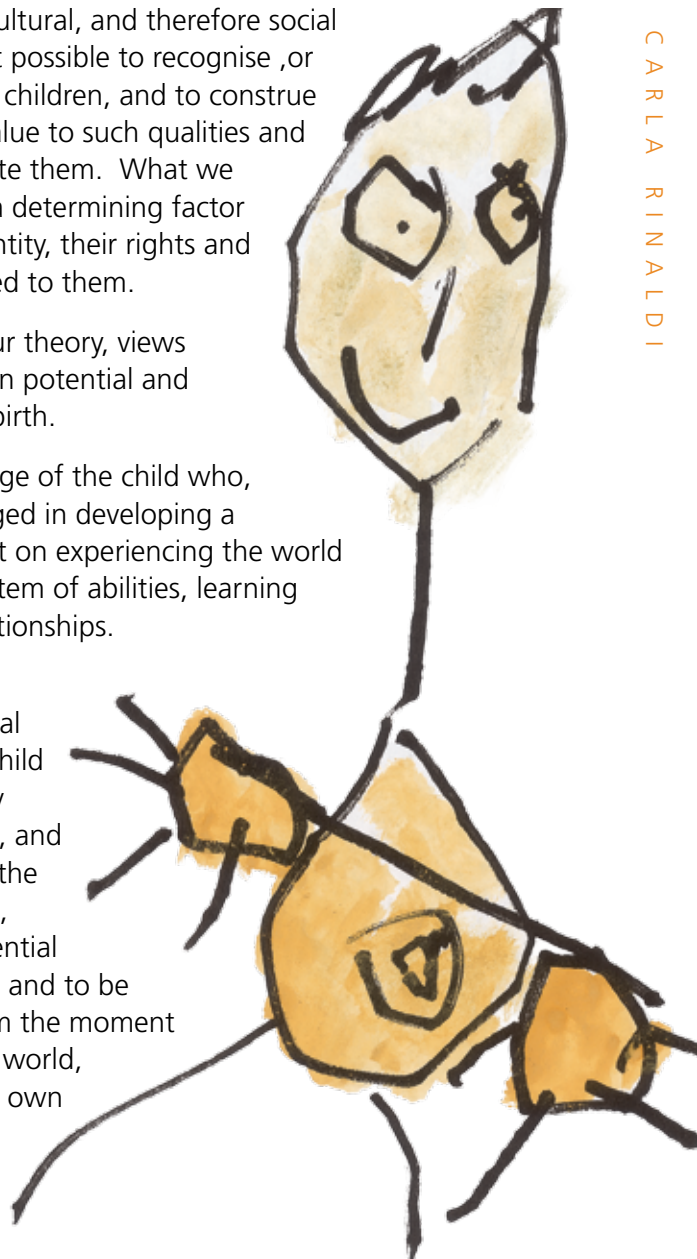
There are many images of the child, and many images of childhood. We need only think of psychoanalysis or the various branches of psychology and sociology. Though these theories are quite different, they tend to have one recurring aspect in common: the deterministic identification of the child as a weak subject, a person with needs rather than rights.

The image of the child is above all a cultural, and therefore social and political convention that makes it possible to recognise, or not, certain qualities and potentials in children, and to construe expectations and contexts that give value to such qualities and potentials or, on the contrary, to negate them. What we believe about children thus becomes a determining factor in defining their social and ethical identity, their rights and the educational and life context offered to them.

Our image in Reggio Emilia, part of our theory, views children as strong, powerful and rich in potential and resources, right from the moment of birth.

As Loris Malaguzzi wrote, it is the image of the child who, from the moment of birth, is so engaged in developing a relationship with the world, and intent on experiencing the world that he or she develops a complex system of abilities, learning strategies and ways of organising relationships.

In this sense, we share the values and meaning of the constructivist and social constructivist approaches. We see a child who is driven by the enormous energy potential of a hundred billion neurons, and by the incredible curiosity that makes the child search for reasons for everything, and who has all the strength and potential that comes from the ability to wonder and to be amazed. A child who is powerful from the moment of birth because of being open to the world, and capable of constructing his or her own knowledge.





This image first espoused by Loris Malaguzzi as a result of the research emanating from the early childhood centres in Reggio Emilia is now further confirmed and endorsed by the ever-evolving research coming from neuroscience which indicates that the human brain is a 'work in progress', beginning before birth and continuing through the life-span. Neuroscientists have found that the first three years are the period of most rapid growth, during which there are specific sensitive periods for optimal learning in particular areas. However, a significant proportion of human brain development also takes place up to approximately 8 Years of age.

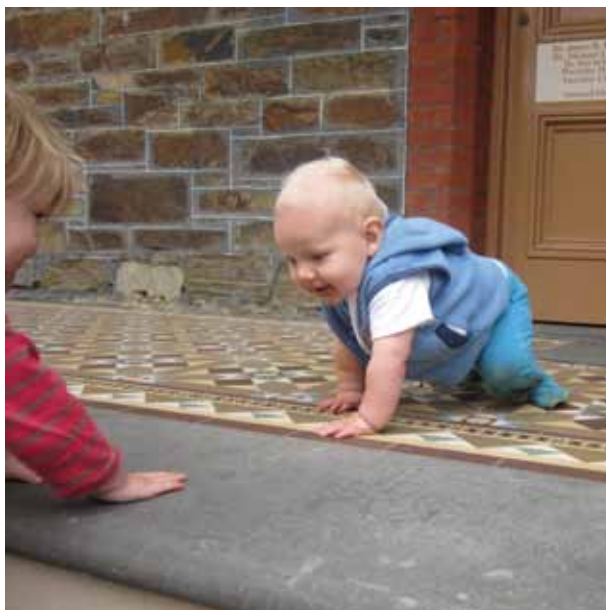
(Shanker, in McCain et al., 2007:13).

Our image is of a child who possesses his or her own directions and the desire for knowledge and for life. A competent child!

Competent in relating and interacting with a deep respect for others and accepting of conflict and error. A child who is competent in constructing; in constructing his or herself while constructing the world, and who is in return constructed by the world. Competent in constructing theories to interpret reality and in formulating hypotheses and metaphors as possibilities for understanding reality.

A child who has his/her own values and is adept at building relationships of solidarity. A child who is always open to that which is new and different. A possessor and builder of future, not only because children are the future but because they constantly re-interpret reality and continuously give it new meanings.

Our image is of the child as a possessor and constructor of rights, who demands to be respected and valued for his/her identity, uniqueness and difference. To think of a child as a possessor of rights means not only recognising the rights that the society gives to children, but also creating a context of 'listening' in the fullest sense. This means that we must recognise and accept the uniqueness and subjectivity of each human being (and thus each child), as well as create spaces that are self-generative, that is, spaces where each child can create and construct new rights.



A society which 're-cognises' (re-knows, re-understands) its childhood adds not just a social subject but modifies itself because in recognising children's rights it recognises new rights for everyone.

The relationship between childhood and society

I believe a possible and important nucleus for reflection in South Australia is the relationship between childhood and society.

The concepts we need to deconstruct relate to questions such as:

What is childhood?

Who defines it?

How is it defined?

What identities, what rights are given to childhood?

And what IMAGE of the child (human being) do we have?

Childhood, we know, is a cultural interpretation and construct. Every society, and every historical period defines its own childhood in determining what is meant by, expected of and dedicated to childhood.



Competent Child Video: <http://youtu.be/5A4j0DDHGfk>

The child as citizen: the competent child, the child as possessor of rights

The key concept for us in Reggio Emilia is the concept of “child as citizen” right from birth. Not just the child as a private subject (the son or daughter of....) but as a citizen.

The emergence of this new subject of rights has incredible implications on the cultural, social and political levels of a society. Recognising the child as citizen makes it necessary to re-examine the very concept of citizenship, but especially to revisit the organisation of all the social and educational places of children’s lives, not only early childhood centres and schools, but also hospitals, theatres, swimming pools, the town squares and streets, the architecture of our homes. We must re-conceptualise participation, and democracy itself. What is the relationship between rights and duties? A citizen, citizenship, and therefore a concept of democracy is defined and expressed beyond the traditional boundaries.

Moreover, when we define the child as ‘a competent subject’, we mean competent first of all in learning and therefore in living. When we talk about the child as ‘a possessor of rights’ we want to affirm something even more innovative.

With the first declaration, ‘The competent child’ we declare the competence of the child, of all children, to learn, and at the same time the inseparability of the right to life and the right to education, affirming education as a responsibility and duty of the society in which the child lives, and not just the family into which he or she is born.

With the second declaration, ‘the child as possessor of rights’, from birth, we make a declaration that is complex, certainly, but that is now more than ever topical: recognising the child’s right to citizenship, so different, so ‘foreign’ and so far from the concept of the statutory citizen who goes to the polls to vote, places at the centre of attention the rights of all ‘others’; the rights of women, of victims, of outcasts, of others who are ‘foreigners’ with respect to ‘statutory citizenship’.

The child is an expression of the identity of humanity, of a human being who knows how to ask questions and ask himself questions, a child who is the first ‘foreigner’ among us. The child is a ‘foreigner’ in terms of being an ‘outsider’, outside the rules and the conventions. A foreigner is the one who, despite our predictions, is not predictable, and as such changes our schemas of expectation, the paradigms of reference (Malaguzzi’s “challenging child”).



A 'foreigner' who with her foreignness may be able, as Freud said, to reveal the 'foreigner in us' that is, the part of us that we do not want or know how to recognise in ourselves, the 'Other' who is in us. The child who brings the unexpected, the certain and the future that is inside of him.

This search for life and for the self is born with the child, and this is why we talk about the child who is competent and strong in this search toward life, toward others, toward the relations between self and life. A child, therefore, who is no longer considered to be fragile, suffering, incapable; a child who asks us to look at him or her with different eyes in order to empower their right to learn and to know, to find the meaning of life and of their own lives, alone and with others.

In Reggio Emilia, ours is a different idea and attitude toward the young child, who we see as active and who, along with us, searches every day to understand something, to draw out a meaning, to grasp a piece of life.

For adults and children alike, understanding means elaborating an interpretation, that which we call an 'interpretive theory', that is, a theory that gives meaning to the things and events of the world, a theory in the sense of a satisfactory explanation. We take the term 'theory' which usually has such serious connotations, and instead make it an everyday right, and we recognise this right in the child who we define as 'competent.'

Can a three or four-month-old child develop theories? I like to think so, because I feel that this conviction can lead to a different approach and, in particular, to these concepts of listening and relational creativity. A theory, therefore, is viewed as a satisfactory explanation, though also provisional. It is something more than simply an idea or a group of ideas. It must be pleasing and convincing, useful and capable of satisfying our intellectual, affective and also aesthetic needs. That is, it must give us the sense of a wholeness that generates a sense of beauty and satisfaction.

So I must ask directly, What is the image of the child in South Australia?

"I will never think of children in the same way again. You have opened my eyes to their capability and potential."

Teacher of 4 year olds



Competent Teacher Video: <http://youtu.be/qQfEh4ECIno>

The Hundred Languages

An important question for all people, is to consider what it means to see the child as full of potential from birth? At the same time we must ask ourselves what it means to learn in a global and pluralistic world inundated with information.

As human beings, children possess a hundred languages, a hundred ways of thinking, of expressing themselves, of understanding and encountering others, with a way of thinking that creates connections between the various dimensions of experience rather than separating them.

The hundred languages are a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials of children, their knowledge-building and creative processes, the myriad forms with which life is manifested and knowledge is constructed.

The hundred languages are understood as having the potential to be transformed and multiplied in the cooperation and interaction between the languages, among the children, and between children and adults.

It is the responsibility of the infant-toddler centre and the preschool to give value and equal dignity to all the verbal and non-verbal languages.

“I’ve been saying that I see children as capable, but if I’m really honest I’ve really had two views of children: one for those who find learning easy and an empty view of the children who have learning difficulties. Why didn’t I see this before?”

Teacher of 5 year olds



What does it mean to be an educating community?

I believe that South Australia can rise to my challenge of being an ethical state. But when can a state, a city, a community be defined as ethical? I think it can be when a community is an educating community.

Educating, this present participle, is not describing a quality, a state of mind, as the word educating can be, but it is a permanent process, a vocation, and an organisation that allows this process to be made accomplishing its incompleteness.

What and how is an educating community/city?

Who educates whom?

What does it mean to educate?

The Latin roots of the verb 'to educate' "ex ducere" means coming out, making do-able (visible) what is possible, what is implicit in each individual since childhood: its power, its potentials, its value as a person, its human dignity.

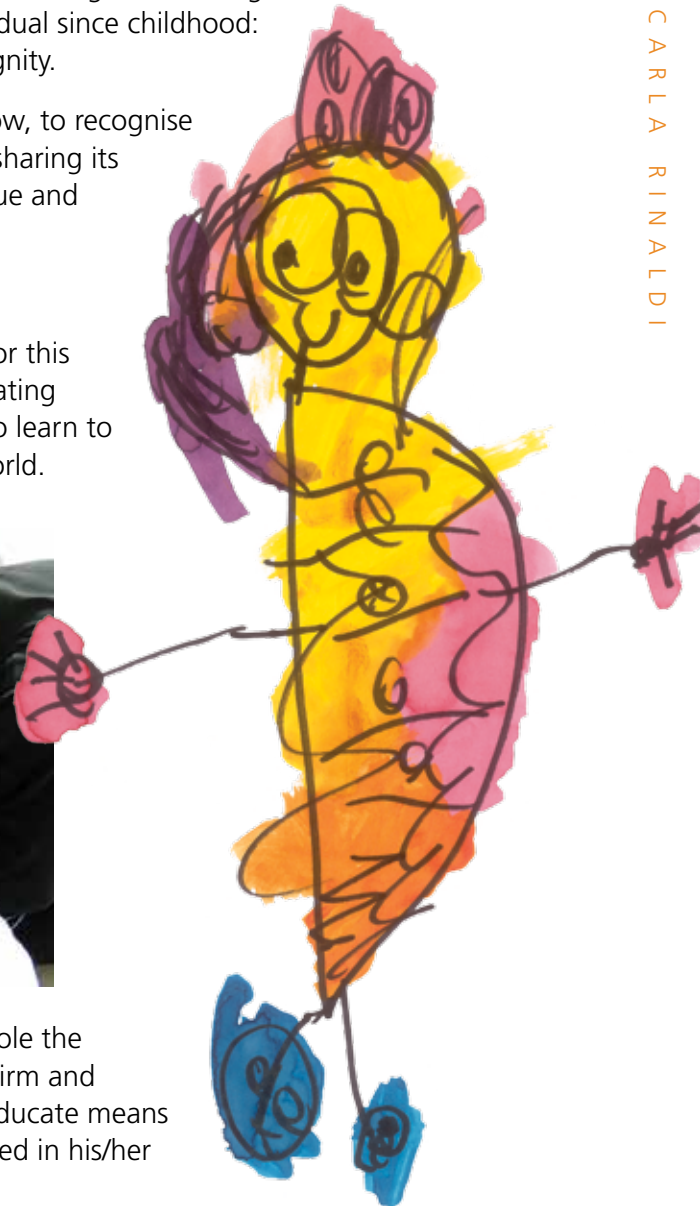
Allowing therefore each one of us to be known and to know, to recognise ourselves in a culture and to know the signs and symbols, sharing its values and at the same time innovating them in the dialogue and exchange.

But this is not enough.

To educate means building together identity and future. For this reason the early childhood centres and schools, in an educating community, play a primary role for the children that have to learn to become citizens of a community but also citizens of the world.



The role of the teachers is crucial, but also essential is the role the community can play, not only to integrate, but also to confirm and expand the concepts and the values discussed earlier. To educate means above all an act of reciprocity. Who educates is also educated in his/her knowledge.





Professor Gardner writes that his “favorite example of an ethical community is a small city called Reggio Emilia in northern Italy. Aside from providing high-quality services and cultural benefits to its citizens, the city provides excellent infant and toddler centers and preschools. Children feel cared for by the community. So when they grow up, they return this regard by caring for others. They become good workers and good citizens. The tone has already been set at such a high level that one rarely encounters compromised—that is, qualitatively or ethically sullied—work.”

Howard Gardner, 2012

You can only learn ethical thinking, such as the synthetic or the creative one, very dear to Professor Gardner, through an act, an action, a good and ethical context, a context in which people have the right to understand why they do and learn what they do and how this knowledge can be used for constructive purposes.

Institutions therefore must be the first to ensure and secure that they are ethical places and that they offer themselves as parameters of reference for all places of work, public and voluntary associations that intend to act primarily as educational places.

It therefore becomes crucial to reflect on the fundamental relationship that exists between education and democracy.

An educating community is a community, a city, where early childhood centres and schools, play a key and crucial role. The role they play is not only for learning formal knowledge by children, but for learning values on which the community itself bases its identity and can reflect on the moral aspect of becoming a citizen and a worker in, and of, a society. A school that gives time to all expects time to be given by all to the society.

“As adults, we must offer ourselves spaces for reflection: the experience of discussion groups and exchange of viewpoints between and with parents and teachers has always characterised our way of working. Parents, children and teachers can view themselves in the light of new stories if the world, and culture, and therefore schools, offer them this privilege. The privilege and right of a family to be perceived as the bearer of theories, of expectations, and the possibility of exchanging them and seeing them from different points of view.”

Gunilla Dahlberg, 2012.

It is also a community where these questions can find many places to look for answers but above all giving back meaning to existence itself. A community, an educating city, is the one that educates citizens but also can be educated and changed by its own inhabitants. Life long learning is therefore not only an educational project but also it is a community project, where the citizens, not just workers, can learn to give and receive, build new and diffused knowledge and create courageous and unexpected futures.

“A Reggio preschool is a special kind of place, one in which young human beings are invited to grow in mind, in sensibility and in belonging to a broader community.”

Jerome Bruner, 1998

Now more than ever it is necessary to believe that schools can still have the duty and the task of being a ‘cultural agent’. In particular it is time to recognise that early childhood centres can have this extraordinary role and power. Not just ‘can’ but ‘must’.

I know all the difficulties that schools and early childhood centres encounter today, in particular difficulties at the economic and logistic levels, and difficulties in terms of identity. But thinking big, acting within and for broader landscapes, in perspective and with strategies that are rich in future and therefore in hope is an obligation for educators.

“My real hope is that we will see Reggio Emilia as a provocation. To be discussed, debated, and experimented with. Hopefully, we can document our findings and through this to discover, perhaps, a new image of the child and, as outstanding documenters and tireless collaborators, see ourselves as life-long learners in relation to our profession.”

Jan Millikan, 2003



Education and Social Values Video: <http://youtu.be/uLRIIWLy9I>

What is the role of the school in society?

“By the time of compulsory schooling, we risk having squandered children’s resources and potential, making the rich child poor: rather than making children fit for school, we need schools that are fit for children.”

Rinaldi & Moss 2004

In considering this question I will refer to school as a term that encompasses all places of learning, from birth to adulthood. For South Australia, this includes preschools, child care, early learning centres, primary and secondary schools.

I urge South Australia to examine a fundamental question that is a permanently open question:

What is the role of the school in this society?

Alongside this question, I urge consideration of the following questions:

How can schools be places where you build quality standards for the quality of life for children?

What is a teacher’s role?

How can schools aspire to be not only family services, but also education places for all? Places of rights for all?

The role of school can be defined as a fundamental place for the formation of the citizen according to the constitutional dictates. This gives all of us, teachers first of all, a responsibility that is far more complex than the teaching of specific disciplines: that is, the responsibility to be educators. Not the only ones, but certainly among those who can understand the meaning and the difficulty, and therefore seek alliances in this complex task, starting with the families, and then to the broader context in which the child lives.



The school can be identified as one of the cultural places that can and must contribute to the definition of the concept of “new citizenship” by both acting upon it and developing theories around it. School is a living organism and a fundamental tool for a civil society.

School is not a place only to transmit culture but to create it, to encourage critical thinking, creativity and relationship. No longer can schools simply be reproducers of knowledge. They are places where children and adults construct knowledge and their understanding of the world together.

“Reggio Emilia... inspires us with its profound understanding of knowledge and learning. Challenging the vertical relations between child and teacher, it has been able to contest the transition model of teaching, where the adult is viewed as the one owning knowledge; as well as the child-centred model, that has often led to a passive teacher and an active child. For Reggio Emilia, learning is a relational place; a process of co-constructing meaning, always in relationship with others. It entails being sensitive to the unpredictable results of children’s inquiries and research.” Gunilla Dahlberg 2012

Fundamentally, schools are places of research, cultivating attitudes of research and capacities for life long learning. Schools and teachers have a responsibility to be listeners: listening as an attitude, to the ideas, questions and answers of children and then struggling to make meaning from what is said without preconceived ideas of what is correct or valid.

“We know that children are born with amazing potential and capacities: curiosity, a drive to understand, the ability to wait, to wonder and to be amazed, the capacity to express themselves in many ways and the desire to form relationships with others and with the physical world. What kind of schools and what kind of teachers do we need to foster these capacities?”

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange

Teaching can exist if it is based on the learning processes of children as observed, experienced and documented. It is not simply to change the way of traditional teaching but learning how to teach based on the learning processes of children. It is a context in which the teacher has a concept of constant professional development.

This way the teacher becomes a researcher of learning, as the children are researchers of the meaning of life. This is a paradigm shift of viewing the child as cute and weak to an image of the child as competent.



THE PLACE OF RESEARCH IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS.

The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition brought home to me the frequency of skills developed by children of this age which frequently appear in senior secondary schooling. In particular, I am referring to the processes of assessment, self-assessment and the significance of research. Research is often seen as an academic pursuit and seldom linked to the everyday decisions people make. These daily decisions reflect the principles of research in identifying issues, investigating them and finding solutions. At this time in secondary schooling there is a need to teach these skills to students as a way of expressing their understanding of the capabilities required of young people today to practice active citizenship and make a positive contribution to society. The fact that decision-making capacities are developed at a young age has a major impact on character formation and the capacity to think wisely in later life.

John Smith,
SENIOR SECONDARY CONSULTANT, CATHOLIC EDUCATION SA

What then does professional development mean to us? It is learning. Our job is to learn, because we are teachers. It means staying away from balance, from what has already been decided, pre-constructed, from what is certain. It means staying close to the place where objects and thoughts interconnect: it means doing and reflecting, theory and practice, emotions and knowledge.

Professional and personal development means rejecting the idea of development as “shaping” from one way of being to another. This kind of personal and professional development tries to think and act with the idea of becoming, of changing in mind.



“When teachers begin exploring the principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project alongside their children, something magical happens. It’s almost as if they fall in love with teaching again. They always loved the child, but had fallen out of love with teaching...but not now.”

Lisa Burman

What is the role of the environment in the human experience?

I urge you to think of the environment not as a shell but as a skin – how does it change with those in it? How is it nourished?

The Reggio experience has always been very attentive to the subject of spaces and also on a more general level, to environments in education. Loris Malaguzzi as well as defining spaces as ‘the third educator’ also made a declaration on the rights of the child to a quality environment.

Designing the space of an infant-toddler centre – or perhaps we could just say designing a school – is a creative event not only in terms of pedagogy and architecture but more generally in social, cultural and political terms.

In fact, schools can play a very special role in cultural development and real socio-political experimentation, so that this moment (designing) and this place (the school) can be experienced not as a time and space for reproducing and transmitting established knowledge but as a place of true creativity.

Designing a school means, above all, creating a space of life and of the future.

This requires the shared research of pedagogy, architecture, sociology, and anthropology, disciplines and fields of knowledge that will state their own epistemologies and compare their languages and symbolic systems, in a new freedom born of the desire to dialogue and exchange ideas.

Only by working in this way can we guarantee that the architectural project will be in itself research, and therefore capable, day by day, of taking stock of its own outcomes, of the effectiveness of its language, of its capacity to dialogue with the process of ‘becoming’





which is the basis of true education. This means constructing a ‘metaphor of knowledge’ that both represents and suggests possible changes and actions.

Architecture is not the assembling of spaces. To ‘give a school meaning’ involves a philosophy; a way of thinking about education, learning, the teaching/learning relationship, the role of action and doing in the co-construction of knowledge. The school building is a pedagogical project and, as such, must be the result of careful, in-depth dialogue between the pedagogical and architectural languages.

The physical space can be defined as a language, which speaks according to precise cultural conceptions and deep biological roots.

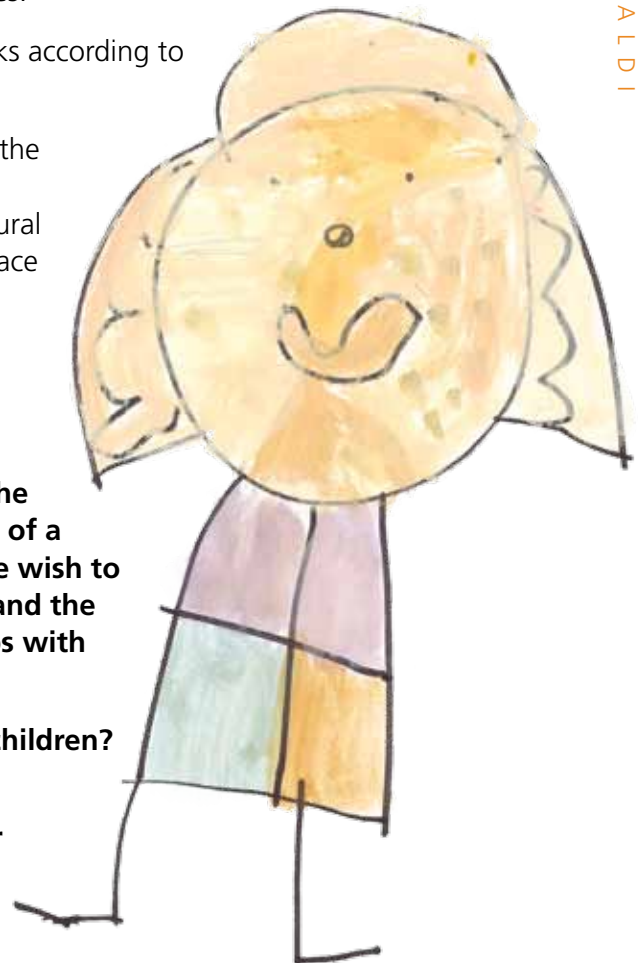
The quality of the space can therefore be defined in terms of the quantity, quality and development of these relationships. The pedagogical approach must be interwoven with the architectural project in such a way as to support the processes that take place in the space, the processes of learning, teaching, sharing and understanding, on the part of all the protagonists; children, teachers and parents.

Architecture and Pedagogy group

We are looking for a new paradigm with the focus on the ‘child as citizen’ including improving our understanding of a child’s sense of place and use of space. In this sense we wish to broaden our agenda beyond school facilities to homes and the wider community – our context is all of our relationships with the built environment.

How, then, do we undertake proper consultation with children?

We believe that it is important to lift the profile of the physical environment as critical to everything we do for children – it is not external or peripheral to learning, but an essential element.







What are the principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Project?

Children are active protagonists of their growth and development processes

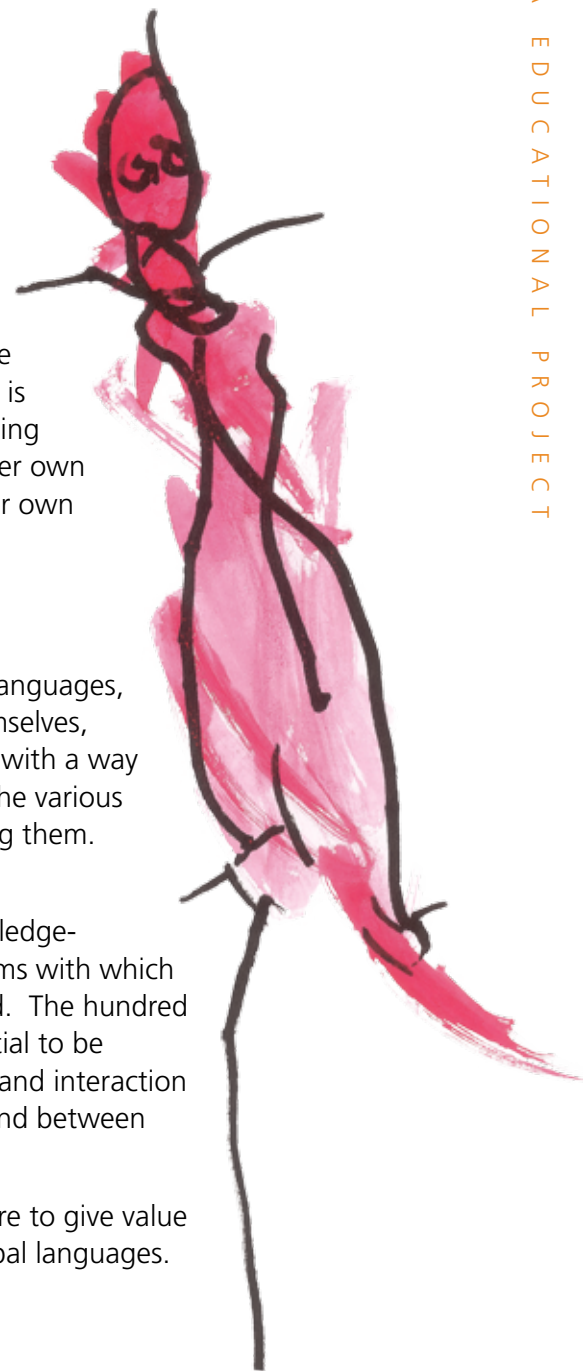
Children possess extraordinary potentials for learning and change, as well as extensive affective, relational, sensory and intellectual resources that manifest in an ongoing exchange with the cultural and social context. Each child is the subject of rights, first and foremost possessing the right to be respected and valued in his or her own identity, uniqueness, difference and in his or her own rhythms of growth and development.

The hundred languages

As human beings, children possess a hundred languages, a hundred ways of thinking, of expressing themselves, of understanding, and of encountering others, with a way of thinking that creates connections between the various dimensions of experience rather than separating them.

The hundred languages are a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials of children, their knowledge-building and creative processes, the myriad forms with which life is manifested and knowledge is constructed. The hundred languages are understood as having the potential to be transformed and multiplied in the cooperation and interaction between the languages, among the children, and between children and adults.

It is the responsibility of the infant-toddler centre to give value and equal dignity to all the verbal and non-verbal languages.



Participation

Participation is the value and the strategy that defines the way in which the children, the educators, and the parents are stakeholders in the educational project; it is the educational strategy that is constructed and lived day by day in the encounter with others and in the interpersonal relationships.

Participation gives value to and makes use of the hundred languages of children and of human beings, viewed as a plurality of points of view and of cultures; it requires and fosters forms of cultural mediation and develops in a multiplicity of occasions and initiatives for constructing dialogue and the sense of belonging to a community.

Participation generates and nurtures the feelings and culture of solidarity, responsibility and inclusion; it produces change and new cultures that contend with the dimension of the contemporary world and globalization.

Listening

In participated education, an active attitude of listening between adults, children and the environment is the premise and context of every educational relationship.

Listening is an ongoing process that nurtures reflection, welcoming and openness towards oneself and others; it is an indispensable condition for dialogue and change.

The attitude of listening raises the threshold of attention and sensitivity toward the cultural, values-related and political scenarios of the contemporary world.

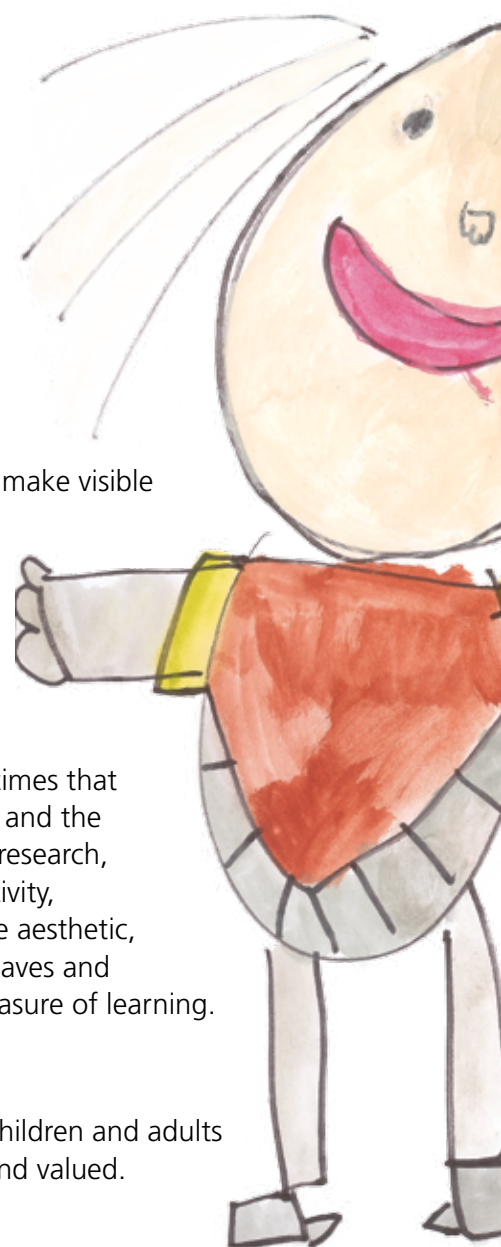
The infant-toddler centres have the responsibility to foster and make visible these processes by means of the pedagogical documentation.

Learning as a process of individual and group construction

Each child, like each human being, is an active constructor of knowledge, competencies and autonomies, by means of original learning processes that take shape with methods and times that are unique and subjective in the relationship with peers, adults and the environment. The learning process is fostered by strategies of research, comparison of ideas and co-participation; it makes use of creativity, uncertainty, intuition, curiosity. It is generated in play and in the aesthetic, emotional, relational and spiritual dimensions, which it interweaves and nurtures. It is based on the centrality of motivation and the pleasure of learning.

Educational research

Research represents one of the essential dimensions of life of children and adults alike, a knowledge-building tension that must be recognized and valued.



Shared research between adults and children is a priority practice of everyday life, an existential and ethical approach necessary for interpreting the complexity of the world, of phenomena, of systems of co-existence, and is a powerful instrument of renewal in education. The research made visible by means of the documentation builds learning, reformulates knowledge, underlies professional quality and is proposed at the national and international levels as an element of pedagogical innovation.

Educational documentation

Documentation is an integral and structuring part of the educational theories and teaching practices, as it gives value to and makes explicit, visible and assessable the nature of the individual and group learning processes of both the children and the adults, processes which are identified by means of observation and which become the common wealth. The educational experience that unfolds in the infant-toddler centres assumes its fullest meaning when the documentation produced in progress is revisited, reconstructed, re-signified, and assessed; that is, interpreted, in the exchange and with the contribution of different points of view. Viewed as a “public place”, documentation substantiates the idea of the preschool and infant-toddler centre as a forum in which a culture of childhood and of education is elaborated by means of a democratic process.

Progettazione

The educational action takes shape by means of progettazione, which is the process of planning and designing the teaching and learning activities, the environment, the opportunities for participation and the professional development of the personnel, and not by means of applying predefined curricula.

Progettazione is a strategy of thought and action that is respectful and supportive of the learning processes of the children and the adults; it accepts doubt, uncertainty and error as resources, and is capable of being modified in relation to the evolution of the contexts.

It is carried out by means of the processes of observation, documentation and interpretation in a recursive relationship, and through a close synergy between the organization of the work and the educational research.

Organization

The organization of the work, the spaces and the time of the children and the adults is a structural part of the values and choices of the educational project. The organization constructs a network of choices and the assumption of shared responsibility at the administrative, political and pedagogical levels; choices that contribute to guaranteeing identity, stability, and security to the children and to the educational service, connoting it in its potentialities, quality, and praxis. The administrative, political, and pedagogical levels also bear shared responsibility for a constant and systematic assessment of the consistency between the principles of the educational project and the organizational choices made. Particular importance is given to the working conditions and the contractual forms that foster stability, continuity and a sense of belonging.

Documentation Video: <http://youtu.be/hUVi-fLc0zA>



Environment, spaces and relations

The interior and exterior spaces of the infant-toddler centres are designed and organized in interconnected forms that foster interaction, autonomy, explorations, curiosity and communication, and are offered as places for the children and for the adults to research and to live together. The environment interacts with, is modified by and takes shape in relation to the projects and learning experiences of the children and of the adults in a constant dialogue between architecture and pedagogy.

Care of the furniture, the objects and the activity spaces by the children and the adults is an educational act that generates psychological well-being, a sense of familiarity and belonging, aesthetics and the pleasure of inhabiting a space, which are also primary premises and conditions for the safety of the environments.

Safety is therefore a quality that is generated by the dialogue and the shared elaboration between the different professionals who are engaged and concerned with this aspect, and who must likewise assess both risk prevention and the richness and quality of the opportunities offered.

Professional development

Professional development is characterized as a process aimed at building understanding and awareness of the meanings and methods of education, the central qualifying points of the educational project and the specific competencies of the various professional roles. Ongoing professional development is both the right and duty of each individual and of the group, and is included and taken into consideration in the work schedule and organized collectively in terms of its contents, forms and the methods of participation of each individual. Professional development is given priority within the daily activity of the centres and schools through the reflective practices of observation and documentation, with the weekly staff meeting being the primary occasion for in-depth study and sharing.

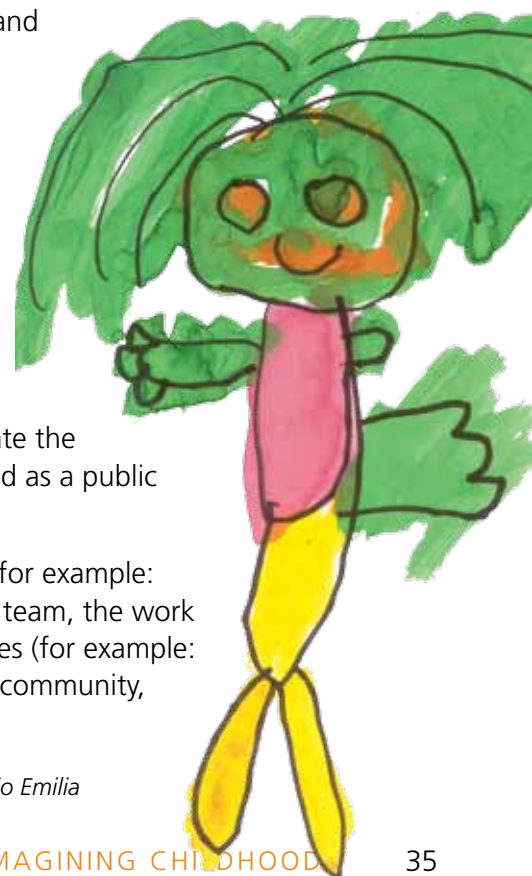
Assessment

Assessment, being an action aimed at the continuous attribution of meaning and of value, is a structuring process of the educational and administrative experience.

The assessment process is part of the totality of the aspects of scholastic life, including the children's learning, the professionalism of the personnel, the organization and quality of the service. It is understood and proposed as an opportunity to recognize and to negotiate the meanings and intentionalities of the educational project and is configured as a public action of dialogue and interpretation.

To this end, the infant-toddler centres make use of specific instruments (for example: the Community-Early Childhood Councils, the pedagogical coordinating team, the work group and the co-presence and co-responsibility of teachers) and practices (for example: documentation, the participation of the families and of the surrounding community, participation in the integrated public system).¹

1. *From: Indications: Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia Reggio Children, Italy*





AMPA!
ALL SPORTS

T

Harvey Norman
COMPUTERS • ELECTRICAL

T GROSS

CX

Bardot

TALK
TEXT
4GB
ONLY \$39

NEW

6X

uniquely rundle mall

uniquely rundle mall

and about events



Provocations for South Australia

Diagnosis of the South Australian Early Childhood System

Fragmentation

The current situation is the fragmentation of early childhood services:

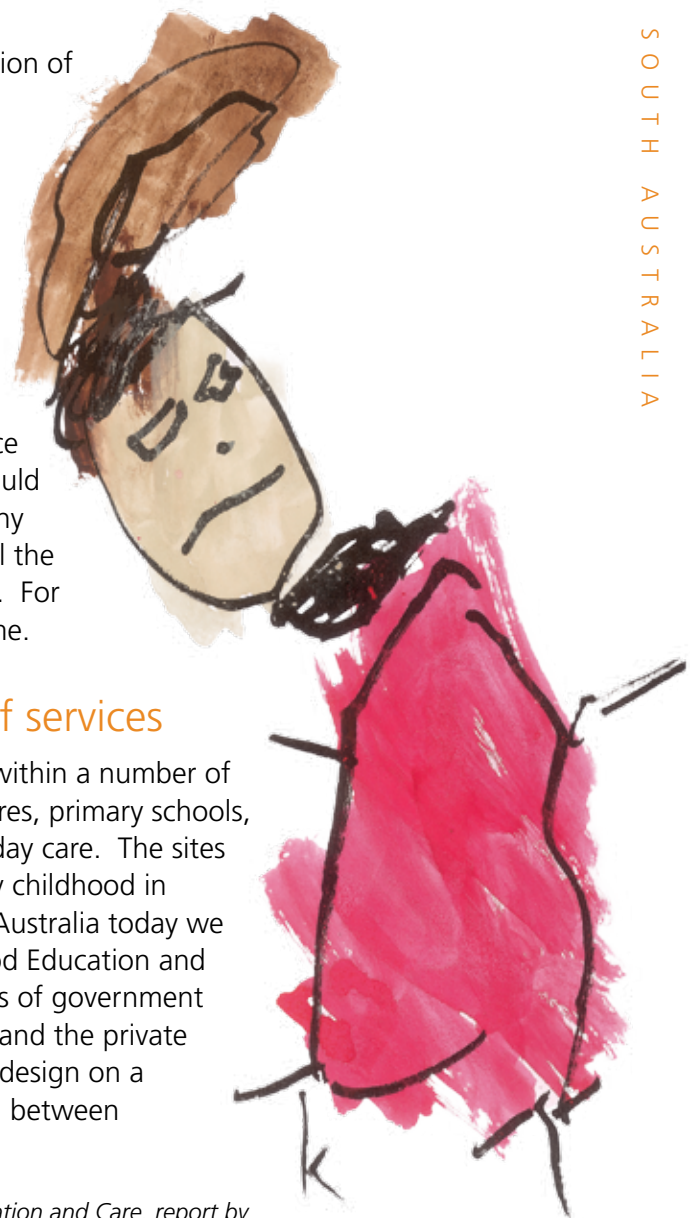
- 0-3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- 6 years

The fragmentation is experienced from the child's perspective in that it can be possible for a child to experience a different setting every day; a child could even be in five different situations in any one day. The relationships change. All the relations, systems and cultures change. For some children no two days are the same.

Organisations and range of services

Each early learning site is an "island" within a number of systems: preschool, early learning centres, primary schools, long day care, occasional care, family day care. The sites do not connect. The language of early childhood in South Australia is not consistent. "In Australia today we have a very fragmented Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system with all three levels of government involved as well as community groups and the private sector. There is also no overall system design on a national basis with significant variation between jurisdictions."²

2. *A Practical Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care*, report by Pricewaterhouse Coopers Australia, March 2011





The challenge for South Australia is not to continue to separate or make a special pedagogy for the disabled, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, the children at risk or the Aboriginal children.

In the current system, "Indigenous children do not participate in child care at the same rate as non-Indigenous children, while children living in remote areas and children with disabilities also participate at a lower rate."³

Ignoring the opportunity and evidence of neuroscience (0-6 years)

The implications of and opportunities presented by the vigorous brain development research of 0-6 years are not evident in the provision of services and in the general community. In countries all over the world, systems of services are set up in support of the work needs of parents, often with little regard for the educational rights of children. "Many families construct a patchwork of care for their young children, supplementing the system of formal care with informal arrangements or modified work arrangements."⁴

Concerns

This fragmentation results in:

Discontinuity of the required conditions and protective factors for wellbeing and education of citizens from birth.

A community unaware of the value of childhood

Structural and community confusion

Problems for the supply and quality of workforce

Discontinuity of provision of education and care services from birth

"Placing the interests of the child at the centre of decision-making around ECEC services provides a common focus and orientation for the full range of stakeholders, including parents, providers, policy makers and the broader community."⁵



3. *A Practical Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care*, report by Pricewaterhouse Coopers Australia, March 2011

4. *Ibid* p 41

5. *Ibid* p 41

A fragmented week – from a child's perspective

Among the rights of children and in particular the very small ones, there is the right to live and be in situations in which it is possible to build long-lasting, constant relationships.

In these relationships, time and space are structuring themselves in order to help the child to recognise and be recognised, to give and to have continuity, and helping him be oriented in the affective environment and in his relationships.

In this way, the child builds his own identity and his security: at home and in the situations in which he is welcomed.

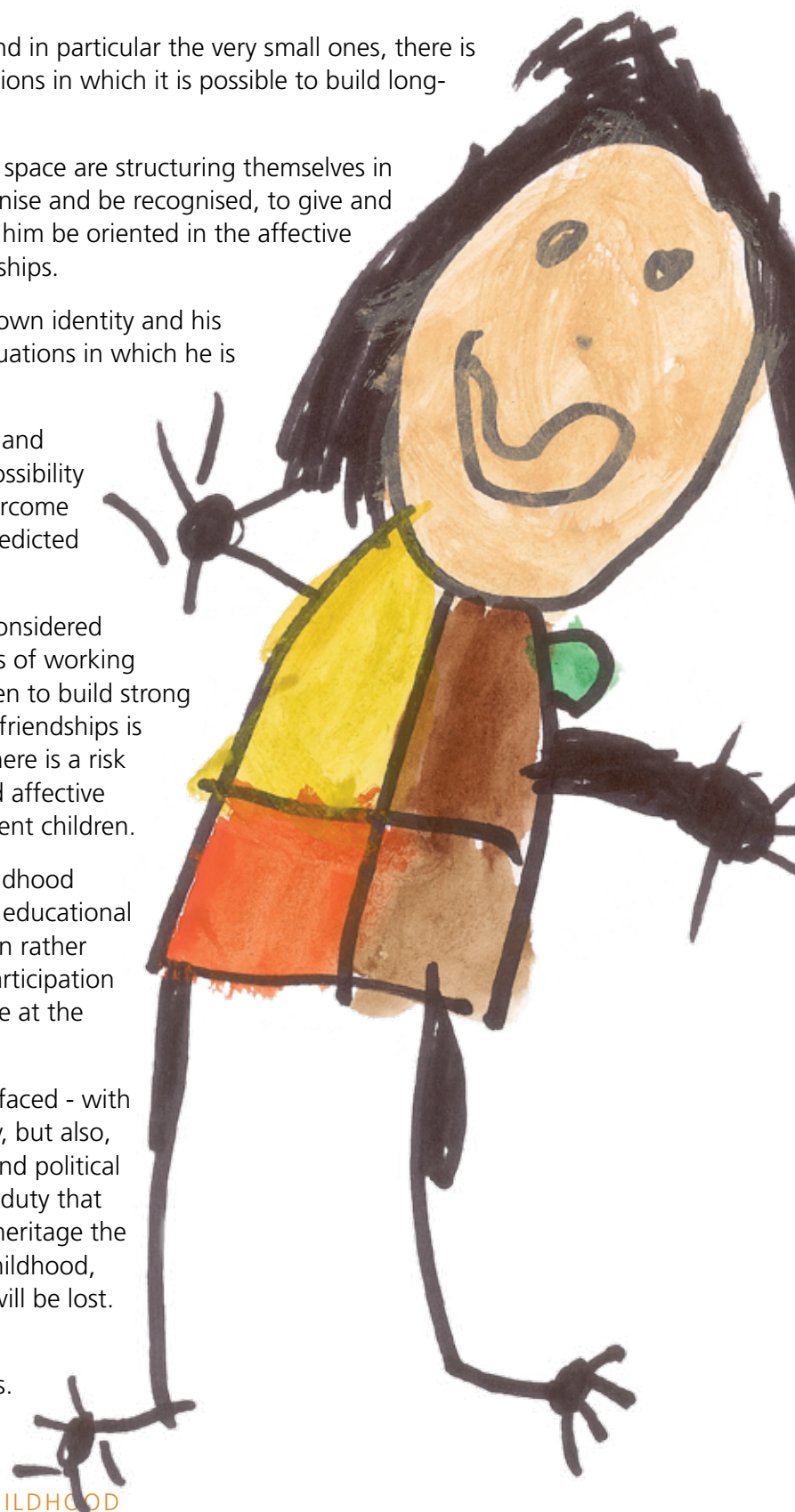
Rituality, rhythms, relationships and continuity are giving him the possibility to recognise himself and to overcome small and big stresses and unpredicted change.

If early childhood services are considered just as places to meet the needs of working families, and the right of children to build strong and constant relationships and friendships is not taken into consideration, there is a risk of environmental, cognitive and affective fragmentation that could disorient children.

It must be possible for early childhood services to be places where the educational quality and the rights of children rather than the needs of workforce participation of their parents and families, are at the centre of the attention.

This is a truth that needs to be faced - with the families and the community, but also, and above all, from the social and political point of view. It is a goal and a duty that cannot wait, or the significant heritage the society has: its children, their childhood, their present and their future, will be lost.

What follows aims to be a contribution to these reflections.



A fragmented week – Two children's perspective

Tuesdays

- Parent at home – all day

Mondays & Wednesdays

- Parent 7.00am – 8.15am
- DECD Preschool 8:15am – 3.45pm
- Grandparent/Family Friend Care 3.45pm – 5.30pm
- Parent 5.30pm – 7.00pm

Thursdays & Fridays

- Parent at home 7.00am – 9.00am
- Montessori Preschool 9.00am – 3.00pm
- Parent 3.00pm – 7.00pm

*Data collated by Early Childhood Australia –
South Australian Branch, March 2012*

Monday

- 8.00am – Arrives with Dad at long day care
- 8.00am – 6.00pm Long Day Care Centre
- 6.00pm – leaves long day care with Mum

Tuesday

- 8.00am – Arrives with Dad at long day care
- 8.00am – 6.00pm Long Day Care Centre
- 6.00pm – leaves long day care with Mum

Wednesday

- 8.30am Arrives with Mum at long day care
- 8.30am – 3.30pm Preschool
- 3.30pm – 6.00pm Grandparent/Family/
Friend
- 6.00pm – leaves long day care with Dad

Thursday

- 8.30am Arrives with Mum at long day care
- 8.30am – 3.30pm Preschool
- 3.30pm – 6.00pm Grandparent/Family/
Friend
- 6.00pm – leaves long day care with Dad

Friday

- 8.30am Arrives with Mum at long day care
on Alternate Fridays
- 8.30am – 12.30pm Alternate Fridays
Preschool
- 12.30pm – 6.00pm time with Grandparent/
Family/Friend
- 6.00pm – leaves long day care with Dad

*Data collated by Early Childhood Australia –
South Australian Branch, March 2012*



Deconstructing and Re-Constructing Perceptions

Reimagining childhood first and foremost requires a fundamental change in thinking about the child:

Moving from the view of the child as being 'weak' or 'cute', to recognition of the competent and capable child who possesses many resources from birth.

Moving from an emphasis on children with needs, to a focus on the rights of all children.

Moving from the acceptance that children are invisible, to recognition that children are fully participating citizens from birth.

These re-constructions will need to occur in attitudes, in ways of thinking, and in approaches to early childhood.



Recommendations

1. Children are citizens from birth

- 1.1 Declare the child as ‘the competent child’ and a possessor of rights. This declaration should be made as a preamble to legislation on child development.**
- 1.2 Changing the language of relevant legislation to include learning and the nature of learning as beginning at birth.**
- 1.3 Conducting a complete review of existing State policies and practices with the lens of the child as a fully participating citizen from birth.**

The concept of a child as a citizen from birth makes it necessary to re-examine the very concept of citizenship, but especially to revisit the organisation of all the social and educational places of children’s lives.

When the child is declared as the competent child, he or she is competent first of all in learning and therefore in living.

Every child must be regarded as a fully participating citizen from birth.

This new perspective is a way of conceptualising participation. Provision of programs and spaces such as hospitals, theatres, swimming pools, the town square, schools, streets and the architecture of our homes can be redesigned with deeper thinking about children’s rights. South Australia must have a change in thinking and understanding from a needs or deficit position to an acknowledgement of rights and competence of children.

2. An integrated early childhood system birth to age 6

This should involve

- 2.1 Creating in South Australia an integrated early childhood system of services for children 0 - 6 years where ‘integrated’ means that care and education are inseparable.**
- 2.2 Redesigning early childhood education with a focus on two distinct learning groups: 0-3 years and 3-6 years and developing a culture of entry into primary school in the year the child turns 6.**
- 2.3 Create a pedagogy and schools that are able to welcome all differences that come from the uniqueness of each child, each human being.**
- 2.4 Create a culture in schools that fosters in each parent an awareness of his or her own role as a protagonist in their children’s learning.**

An integrated early childhood system is one where care and education are inseparable and where services and educators demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between care and education.

The evidence of current neuroscience, biology and anthropology give us the responsibility and the duty to create quality places of learning for children, teachers and parents.

The focus of learning in learning groups extends beyond the learning of individuals to create a collective body of knowledge. Learning groups share a focus on learning how to learn in a group and epistemological concerns such as understanding the understanding of others and how understandings are developed and modified. When individuals participate in learning groups, they come to see the group as a way to foster individual competencies and discoveries; they learn that the uniqueness of each person benefits from and acquires value in dialogue with others. Redesigning learning groups (0 – 3 years and 3-6 years) will create a sense of belonging to a group and promote continuity of learning.

This new system will welcome all children. The value of subjectivity with related affirmations regarding the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each individual is strongly connected to the value of difference: difference in regard to gender, race, culture, religion and abilities. By valuing differences we find a richer and more contemporary definition of the value of participation and avoid the risks of homogenization or standardization.

Involving parents as active protagonists in the educational project, requires educators to construct high quality education with the children, families and the community. The relationships both with and between groups of children, educators, families and the wider community are fundamental to an integrated, quality early childhood system.

Learning is an ongoing and reciprocal process that comes from relationship with one another and with the environment. Identifying early childhood learning centres as schools respects the knowledge that learning occurs from birth. This recognizes children as learning and growing in the present and the continuity of lifelong learning.

Children are not only the future but they are citizens of the present.



3. Develop a new perspective for the role of school and early childhood centres in South Australia.

Recognise and name all places of learning, from birth, as schools. Establish a common language for South Australia regarding teaching and prior-to-school settings, recognising that learning occurs prior to school. For example, remove the 'pre' from preschool.

Words are to change in order to welcome new concepts.

- 3.1 Refine the pedagogical approach in early childhood education to be one that is based on the image of the child as a competent child.
- 3.2 Ensure that all those working with children 0-6 have:
 - (a) Recognised degree qualifications in learning and teaching; and
 - (b) Ongoing quality professional learning opportunities to ensure teachers are engaged in research based on the learning processes of the children and how this should influence their teaching.
- 3.3 Establish a postgraduate Masters degree with a focus on Pedagogy and Pedagogical Leadership (see also recommendation 4).
- 3.4 Develop undergraduate programs in relation to early childhood, linked to the concepts of the Reggio Emilia principles, for inclusion in degrees across the variety of professions. These could include nursing, medicine, allied health, social work, architecture, planning and design
- 3.5 Promote and support ongoing collaborative research regarding pedagogy and architecture in South Australia based on the concepts of child as citizen from birth and the competent child (see also recommendation 4).

From this new perspective of the competent child and the child as a citizen from birth there is a need to revitalize the role of the teacher in schools and early childhood centres.

Redefine the role of the teacher and the school to teachers as researchers and schools as places of research. To refer to teachers as practitioners implies that they act without thinking: it is impossible to separate thinking from acting. The traditional relationship between theory and practice, which designates practice as consequent to theory, is redefined and therefore surpassed. Theory and practice are places in a relationship of reciprocity, but one in which, to a certain extent, practice takes precedence over theory.



The qualification of teachers working with children 0-6 years is crucial to the provision of quality learning opportunities. If we recognize children as citizens from birth and that learning occurs from birth then we must acknowledge that children from birth have a right to well qualified teachers. There is a strong link between the qualifications of teachers and quality: "International research and experience suggests that the qualifications of ECEC staff is the most important determinant of quality, with clear links demonstrated between a higher proportion of qualified and experienced primary contact staff and a higher quality service."

The teacher should have a concept of constant professional learning that is focussed on the learning processes of the children, teachers and parents in the school and early childhood centre. The teacher is able to be in constant dialogue with the learning process, is very well prepared, reflective, and sees his or herself as a learner and researcher. Reflective thinking allows us to step back from ourselves, creating a distance that prevents us from getting caught up in 'events' thereby increasing our awareness of what we are learning and also of the dimension of the possible - of that which it is possible to know and to be. This phenomenon permeates the processes of adults and children alike.

"Documentation is an ongoing opportunity and responsibility to notice and respond to the continuous learning processes of children by their community, self, peers, educators, families."

Making Learning Visible research project participant, April 2013



Schools, Early Childhood Centres and Architects need to collaborate in researching the time, space and environment of learning spaces. The environment is essential to the learning processes of children.

The objective is thus to construct and organize spaces that enable children:

- to express their potential, abilities and curiosity;
- to explore and research alone and with others, both peers and adults;
- to perceive themselves as constructors of projects and of the overall educational project carried out in the school;
- to reinforce their identities, autonomy and sense of security;
- to work and communicate with others;
- to know that their identities and privacy are respected.

The construction and organization of the space should enable the teachers:

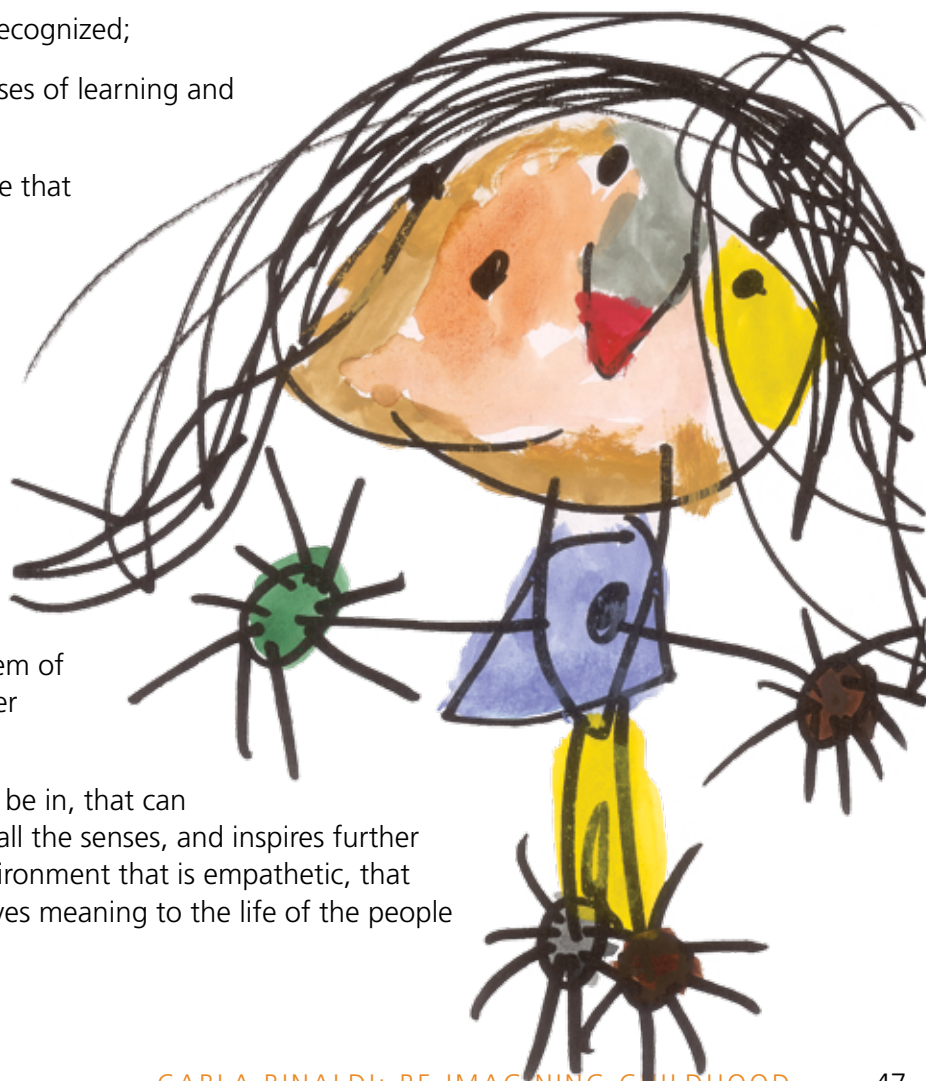
- to feel supported and integrated in their relationships with children and parents;
- to have appropriate spaces and furnishings to satisfy their need to meet with other adults, both colleagues and parents;
- to have their need for privacy recognized;
- to be supported in their processes of learning and professional development.

And finally, the space should ensure that parents can:

- be listened to and informed;
- meet with other parents and teachers in ways and times that foster real collaboration.

This is process-oriented architecture, which fosters communication and is itself communication. A form that is capable of sustaining the projectural interweaving - this system of systems - which is the infant-toddler centre:

An environment that is pleasant to be in, that can be explored and experienced with all the senses, and inspires further advancements in learning. An environment that is empathetic, that grasps the meaning of, but also gives meaning to the life of the people who inhabit it.





4. Establish a South Australian Collaborative Early Childhood Project

South Australia has a strong history of excellence, innovation and leadership in Early Childhood Education and Child Development. Leadership and coordination of a South Australian Collaborative Early Childhood Project would sustain and further develop the work that has commenced during the Rinaldi Residency. This Project could utilise the expertise, interest and willingness of the Rinaldi Residency Partnership Group to ensure the Project has positive outcomes across sectors of the South Australian community.

“The view a society holds of children will determine policies and the quantum of resources allocated for their care and education. The Reggio educators have made visible to their community the crucial importance of the early years; the subsequent resourcing of the early childhood schools in Reggio Emilia demonstrates what is possible when the community responds.”⁶

The Project should be hosted by the State of South Australia and be influenced by pedagogical leaders from all education and care sectors. The project should be cross-disciplinary with openness to working with any discipline which involves children such as architecture, health, social work, and law.

The work of the South Australian Collaborative Educational Project could involve:

- The establishment of continuous research, professional development and networking with Reggio Children, SA through the international study tours, Winter Institutes in Reggio Emilia and week long Institutes in SA with Reggio Children involving pedagogistas, atelieristas and teachers collaborating with Australian educators
- Professional exchanges between Australia and Reggio Emilia
- Annual leadership intensives with visiting educators and leaders from Reggio Emilia working with Australian educators
- Annual conferences for national audiences with Reggio Emilia keynote presenters
- Continuing the development of prototypes initiated throughout the Rinaldi Residency. This includes schools and early childhood centres (currently over 50 sites)
- Continue to encourage and develop the collaborations of the pedagogy and architecture group
- Gain permanent access in Australia (including regional centres) and the Asia Pacific Region to The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition
- Establish a Masters in Pedagogical Leadership in relationship with Reggio Children (under negotiation with Uni SA, DECD and Reggio Children).

“Reggio is not a blueprint. It is an inspiration to be yourself and to find your own excellence and perfect it.”

Jerome Bruner (2000)



⁶ Millikan, J. 2003 *Reflections – Reggio Emilia Principles within Australian contexts* Pademelon, NSW, p 39



South Australia's evolving responses

The Department for Education and Child Development has initiated the "Every Chance for Every Child – Image of the Child Research Project" in collaboration with Jan Millikan. The project invites participants to research their image of the child and reflect on how this affects their relationship and engagement with young children and their families. There are 100 participants from across agencies, preschools, schools and policy areas of DECD involved in the research project.

A prototype in the form of a book club was created to enable educators to explore the concept of pedagogical documentation. This book club focused on the text 'Making Learning Visible – children as individual and group learners Project Zero, Reggio Children'. As a result of this prototype, educational leaders from a diverse range of educational sites across South Australia are engaging in professional learning communities. The focus of these learning groups is on researching quality early years pedagogy, and the value of documentation to make visible the learning processes of children and adults.

Major financial support was provided for The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition held in the State Library of SA from 8 April until 10 May 2013.

Four DECD staff members attended professional learning opportunities in Reggio Emilia in 2013.

DECD staff are working in collaboration with the neo natal unit at Adelaide's Women's and Children's Hospital to explore how the Reggio principles can assist and support the community of parents at the neonatal unit with an emphasis on the competent baby and child, parents, hospital staff, relationships and the environment





Over 3500 people visited The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition between 8 April and 10 May 2013 during its time at the State Library of South Australia. The associated Facebook campaign reached over 100,000 people and Twitter had a reach of 13,367 from #100Languages hash tag. During this time, more than 200 volunteers assisted by supervising the Exhibition and assisting visitors with questions and conversations.

Catholic Education South Australia

Catholic Education South Australia is a system of 103 schools across the state. Inspired by this residency we have established an Early Childhood Network for educators working with children from birth, and Early Childhood Reference Group as well as an Executive Reference Group.

These groups will guide a whole of system learning community approach to continue our research and learning in the area of early childhood education and what this means for our practice in teaching and learning and our service to children and families.

A new professional learning framework based on the principles of teacher as researcher is being implemented with a focus on exploring our Catholic identity in relation to our image of our child and childhood. Theological study of childhood has also commenced.

2014 will be a year of Celebration of Childhood for Catholic Education South Australia. In preparation for this celebration, a position paper on the child and childhood will be developed and documentation will be explored as a strategy for making the learning of children and educators in Catholic Education South Australia visible.



Reconfiguring Quality in Goodstart Early Learning Centres

The purpose of this project is to generate and establish a methodology for designing and systemically implementing a professional learning program in order to embed the principles of Reggio Emilia across all centres in South Australia. Participation in this program should build the capacity of the leadership group that sits around each centre (i.e., Area Manager, Early Learning Consultant and Centre Director) who, in turn, will provide a circle of influence that supports the staff working directly with children and families in each centre. The outcome is to work on a shared agenda to raise the quality of both pedagogical practice and pedagogical leadership across the 44 SA Goodstart early learning centres.

For the program of professional learning itself, there will be a core group of participants that will include:

- 5 Area Managers
- 3 Early Learning Consultants
- 44 Centre Directors

Across the 12 months, it is anticipated that the professional learning program will follow an alternating monthly frequency. That is, one month will focus on pedagogical practice (6 sessions) and the next month will focus on pedagogical leadership (6 sessions). Each focused formal program session will be 3 hours.

The professional learning program will be for an initial period of 12 months. A minimum of 12 months will present initial changes but a commitment of 3 years would enable sustained change to become embedded into the everyday practices, procedures, places and professional identities of the educators who live and work at the centres.

Goodstart Early Learning Whyalla

Goodstart Early Learning Whyalla has been exploring the principles of Reggio Emilia and as a result made some changes to the physical environments within the Centre and their approach to early learning pedagogy.

Reflections from the leaders involved include:

- Changes to the environment increased the trust the educators have in the children – they have planned the use of spaces together. Families, children and the educators were all consulted before any changes and alterations were made.
- There is an observable difference in the calmness of the children.
- The educators have an approach based more on the interests of the children while engaging in intentional teaching.
- The day to day routine is no longer governed by time and is more led by the children collaborating with the educators.
- There has been a process of transformation in the educators and with that, transformation of the environment.
- There has been a change of attitude in the staff. The educational purpose of what is being brought into the environment is being considered more.
- The language of the children has changed – they are now using words we hadn't heard previously like "let's explore".

Participating in the Rinaldi Residency has motivated the educators and has reignited their passion for early learning



Reflections from Salisbury North Goodstart

Before we had the opportunity to become involved in the Rinaldi Residency, we knew that we needed to change, but we didn't know where to begin. Then we met Carla Rinaldi... who taught us to see that the inspiration was right in front of us the whole time, our children.

We reflected on Carla's provocations, our practice and our image of child.

- **Do our spaces provide the children the opportunity to develop relationships?**
- **How do our environments show respect to our children?**
- **How do our environments inspire our children, our families, and ourselves as educators?**

Slowly our practice began to change, we began asking the children what they would like to see changed. This involved mind maps, conversations & drawings. We built meaningful relationships with our children which allowed us to know them and understand them better.

This approach helped us create an environment that truly reflected them.

We are never going to stop learning, we will never be finished, our journey has no end date or time line... The difference now is that we learn alongside our children



TAFE SA

This residency has further influenced and inspired the Early Childhood professionals of South Australia in our work with children, families and the community. At TAFESA, we will continue to investigate and explore the Reggio Emilia philosophy and educational principles which will inform our practice in delivering quality training and education, in the field of Early Childhood, across South Australia.

Carla has asked us to reflect on how we raise and educate our children from birth. At TAFESA we believe this is a question for all us within the community, as children are our citizens.

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange has coordinated the largest group of Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange Australians attending the International Study tour in Reggio Emilia in April 2013. With a total of 101 people attending, the largest single group within this was 31 from South Australia.

These 31 educators from various different schools and sectors met before leaving on the study tour and will meet again afterwards to discuss, share and consolidate their learning. REAIE also organised a national conference for 350 in Adelaide titled Reimagining Childhood: Rights, Potentials and Responsibilities in Dialogue with Carla Rinaldi, Frank Oberklaid and Mark Rose.



The Making Learning Visible project

The Making Learning Visible project began during the residency with the aim of the bringing together services and schools to use the principles of the Reggio Emilia Educational Approach as a tool for deepening their understanding and practices in early childhood education.

More than 40 participants from 21 sites across each of the schooling sectors and including TAFE and Flinders University participated in an intensive and challenging project using the strategies of research and documentation, formal learning and professional dialogue to challenge learning and teaching.

Participants expressed a strong commitment to the project and desire to continue:

We have begun a journey and are only just at the beginning.

We have wet our toes... can not stop there, too destabilising to stop now.

We want to continue to go deeper into knowledge and learning processes.

We want to leverage the already positive impacts for children and teachers.

We wish to express this desire with a shared voice.

MLV March 8th 2013

Partners are currently investigating or already implementing ways of continuing the valuable learning and collaboration begun in this project.



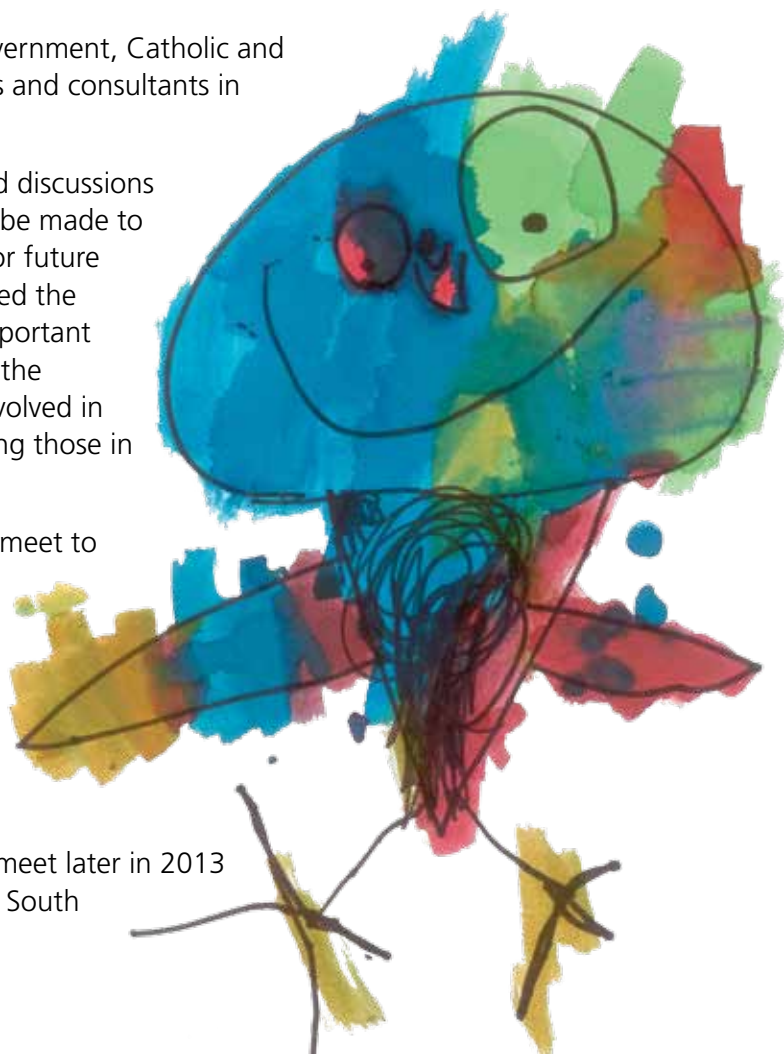
A Pedagogy and Architecture Working group was established as part of the residency to encourage a dialogue between educators and architects around the implications of the physical environment on learning. It included consideration of the outcomes from the Pedagogy & Architecture workshop event held with Professor Rinaldi, and to develop strategies and recommendations for future action.

The group comprises educators from the Government, Catholic and independent education sectors and architects and consultants in Government and private practice.

The group met on a number of occasions and discussions considered appropriate recommendations to be made to Prof Rinaldi as well as general observations for future exploration. These observations have informed the recommendations but are also considered important in driving future change in individuals and in the culture of organisations in South Australia involved in education and the built environment, including those in the training of teachers and architects.

It is intended that the group will continue to meet to further its explorations and to develop research projects in order to maintain the momentum of the residency and the interdisciplinary collaboration.

31 educators and leaders from South Australian early childhood services and schools attended the 2013 study tour to Reggio Emilia. This cross sectoral group will meet later in 2013 to consider possibilities and opportunities for South Australian children and educators.



EChO (Early Childhood Organisation SA Inc.)

EChO (Early Childhood Organisation SA Inc.) has named 2013 as their prototype year for exploring the principles and practices of Reggio Emilia in primary schools. The 'Reimagining Childhood' Project is a yearlong commitment for schools, with four primary schools and one Children's Centre having begun participating in a mentoring project. This Project targets the educators of schools and centres, with inclusion of leaders in order to encourage a whole site approach.

The project includes learning days, leader's days, a reading group and days when the mentors visit teachers on site.

Each site is working towards developing an inquiry question relevant to their community. Although it is still quite early in the project, several themes are emerging, including learning environments, learning through inquiry with children and teachers as researchers.

The Reimagining Childhood Project will grow annually, building the capacity of both mentors and the teachers involved – this is a systemic and structured way of building capacity over time. There are currently four mentors who together with a facilitator are growing knowledge and networks.

"I see a groundswell extending beyond the 0 -5 sector. The gulf between the primary and pre school needs to be bridged in a meaningful way. We are investigating the transition of practice into primary schools. Not the transition of children but of practice...schools being ready for children, not the reverse. "

Barbara Murray AISSA

Early Childhood Australia South Australia Branch

Early Childhood Australia South Australian Branch (ECA SA), DECD Eastern Adelaide Region and Campbelltown City Council developed a partnership in response to the AEDI data and the DECD Every Chance for Every Child discussion paper. We wanted to explore what we could do better for the children of Campbelltown.

As a partner in the Rinaldi Residency ECA SA invited our colleagues to join us in some of the Rinaldi workshops. This participation has initiated a new model of consultation with children for the Campbelltown Council. Such consultation has resulted in changes to spaces, such as the library maze and new projects with a number of schools and preschools in the area. The staff of the Campbelltown Council have since drafted a paper that considers their new image of the child as a competent citizen and what this could mean for decision making processes within the council.

During Professor Rinaldi's first visit ECA SA hosted a meeting with Professor Rinaldi to provide a context of early childhood in South Australia. This meeting involved executive members, branch members, Professor Irabinna Rigney and ATIR staff.

To further support Professor Rinaldi ECA SA conducted and produced case studies of children's current experiences with Early Childhood Services and mapped South Australia's Early Childhood Service provision.

ECA SA also hosted an evening forum "Advocacy: What does it mean? Who for and Why?" and networking dinner for members with Professor Rinaldi and Wendy Lee.

Council of Education Facility Planners International (CEFPI)

The 2014 CEFPI Australasia Region Conference will be held in Adelaide and is currently being organised by the South Australian CEFPI Chapter.

Planning for the Conference has been deeply influenced by the Rinaldi Residency. In particular, the Conference theme "Inside-out Upside-down" has been inspired by the upside down thinking caused by this residency.

A non-traditional conference format is being developed to provide opportunities for participants (predominantly educators and architects) to collaborate and learn in conversations about learning environments. The intention is to have tutors and mentors rather than 'presenters' to encourage exploration of ideas and sharing of experiences.

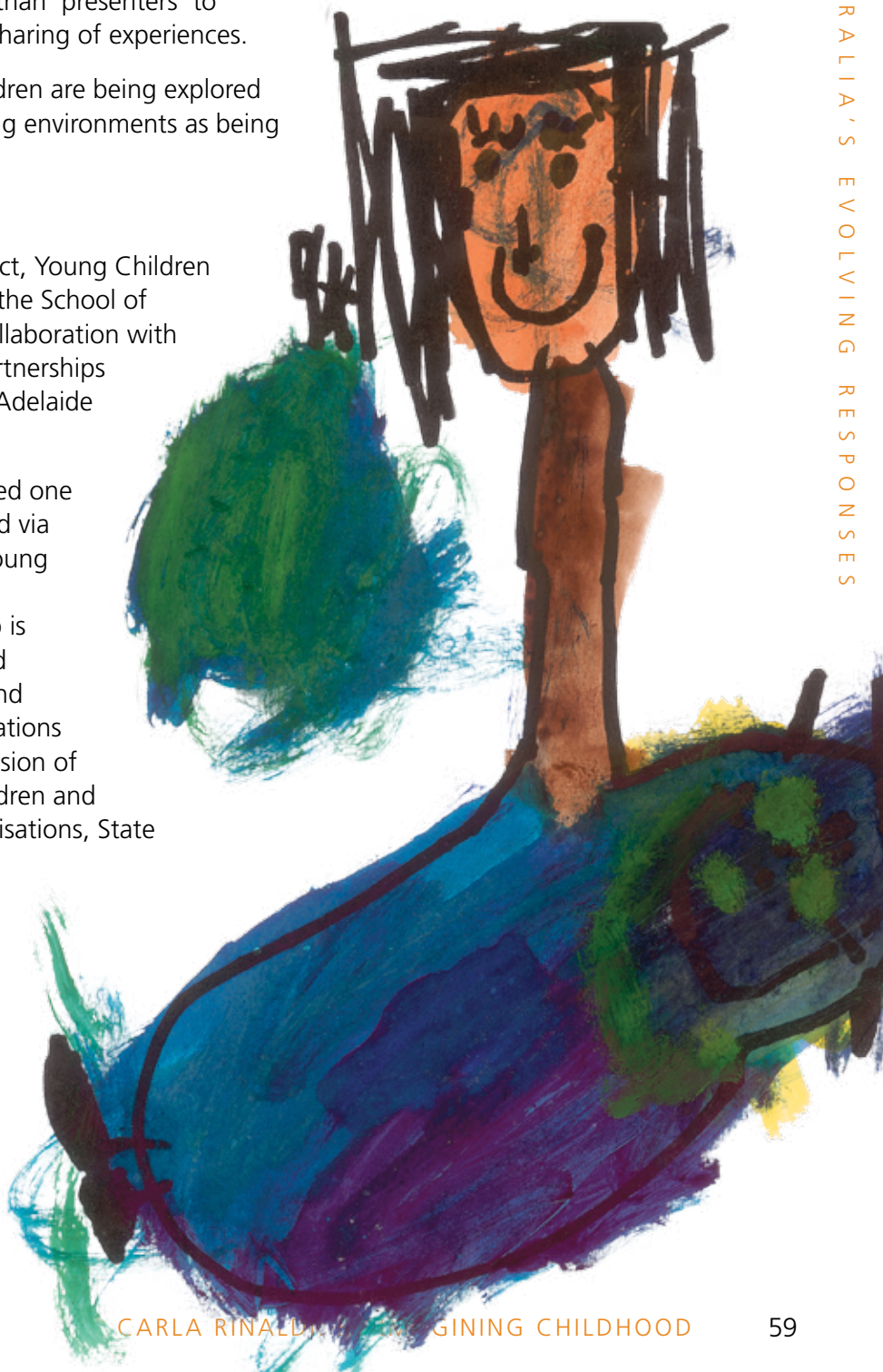
Opportunities for engaging with children are being explored to reflect the nature of school learning environments as being their environments.

Flinders University

During the residency a research project, Young Children as Active Citizens was conducted by the School of Education at Flinders University, in collaboration with the Southern Knowledge Transfer Partnerships Office at Flinders University, and the Adelaide Thinker in Residence Carla Rinaldi.

The first phase of the research involved one council area of southern Adelaide and via a survey examined the inclusion of young children in local government policies and plans, and how active citizenship is defined. The second phase examined in greater depth patterns of access and participation in all of the key organisations within the council including the provision of services and programs for young children and families (e.g. Non-government organisations, State government etc).

After the first phase, a literature review paper was presented to Carla Rinaldi and analyses of the local government data was published in a final report. Respondents in the survey indicated a willingness to further the research project with a focus on becoming more inclusive of young children as active citizens.





Conclusion

The 'Magic Moment'

This is the moment when The 'Thinker' becomes plural and we all have the responsibility.

The response of South Australian individuals, sectors and organisations to my residency has been overwhelming. Attendance at public events as well as meetings, workshops and other events has been significant with more than 6000 people involved. This is including over 3500 who visited The Hundred Languages of Children Exhibition, and over 1000 leaders, educators and collaborators participating in meetings and workshops.

The involvement of so many and the wide spread openness to ongoing learning means that South Australia is in a moment of great opportunity, what I have called 'The Magic Moment'.

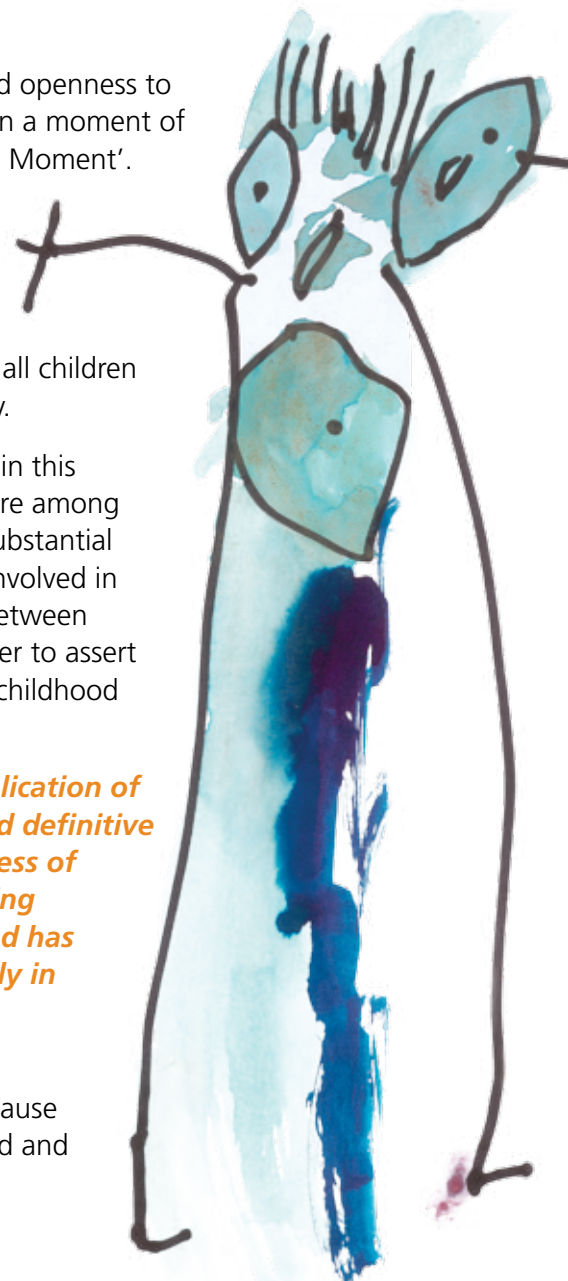
The work in which we have been involved in South Australia strongly aligns with the State Government strategic priority Every Chance for Every Child. I recognise that this State has a leader who is a true champion of the rights of all children which is why he has chosen this strategic priority.

As we came to the end of our partner meetings in this residency, the partners expressed the strong desire among all their organisations to continue to grow the substantial work that has begun. Partners wish to remain involved in confirming and strengthening the relationship between South Australia and Reggio Children, Italy in order to assert South Australia as a point of reference for early childhood education.

'...what we are talking about is not the application of some finalized model, universal in scope and definitive in nature, but rather the adoption of a process of questioning, dialogue, reflection and meaning making which leads we know not where and has no obvious end point: it is work continuously in progress.'

Dahlberg. G, Moss P. and Pence A., 2007.

Endless is the effort that we all should make because we, together with our children, could understand and live learning as an act of love.







Love which is at the same time pleasure and desire to enter in relationship with the world and with the others, to recognize ourself in the others, to be moved every time something new encounters our glimpse and caresses our minds.

Children know this emotion very well and they are biologically pre-disposed to welcome the world with a curious, enchanted and sympathetic glimpse.

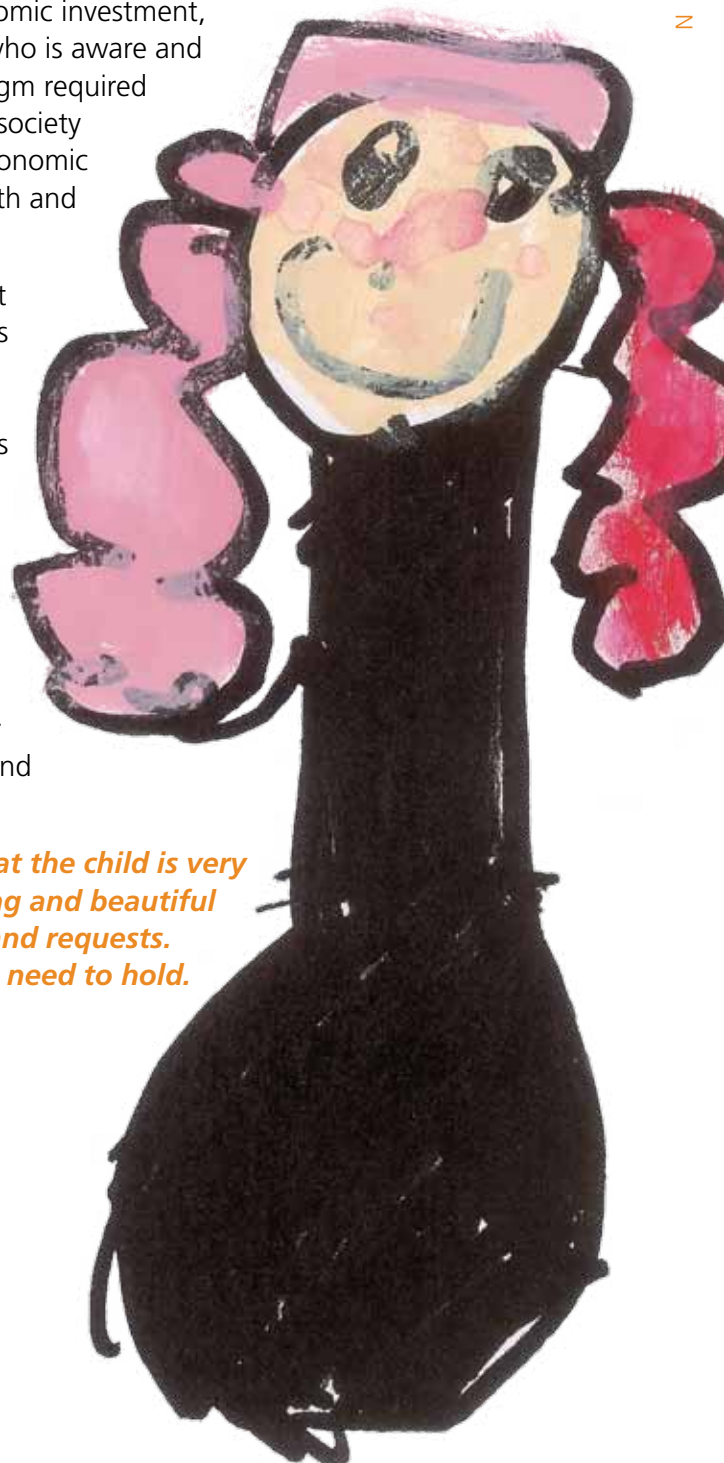
The places of education we want to create for them are schools of poetic quality of life. A project, as the one that has been proposed in this report, that, more than economic investment, requires courage. The courage of who is aware and responsible of the change of paradigm required to teachers, parents and the whole society and supports it with cultural and economic investment giving continuity, strength and future to the project.

It is a project that requires time, that does not tolerate hurry and the tests that aim to evaluate the child and its results with economic criteria, forgiving the beauty and uniqueness of every child and human being, his rights as subject and citizen of the present.

In their minds, in the quality of education we would be able to offer and to live with them there is not only the economic future of our country, but the destiny of humankind and of the world we wish for.

It's necessary that we believe that the child is very intelligent, that the child is strong and beautiful and has very ambitious desires and requests. This is the image of the child we need to hold.

Loris Malaguzzi





"If your friends are playing with each other, you can play with somebody else. You have to love somebody to play with them a lot." Montana
"I'm your friend and I want to play with you." George
"You play with friends outside and inside and you say, 'Hi'." Nikita
"You show you are friends."

"They care for each other and play with them a lot." Isabella
"You play with friends they have to share." Isabella
"If we play with friends they have to share." Isaac
"You have to be really nice to them, you have to really take care of them and play with them." Anthony
"You can do what they want." Isaac
"You have to be really happy and they play with you." Anthony

Alberton Primary school children created a wonderful work of art in the form of a quilt which was presented to Carla while she was in Adelaide. The images on pages throughout this report are those created by these children as part of their project with their teacher, Dannielle Gibson.

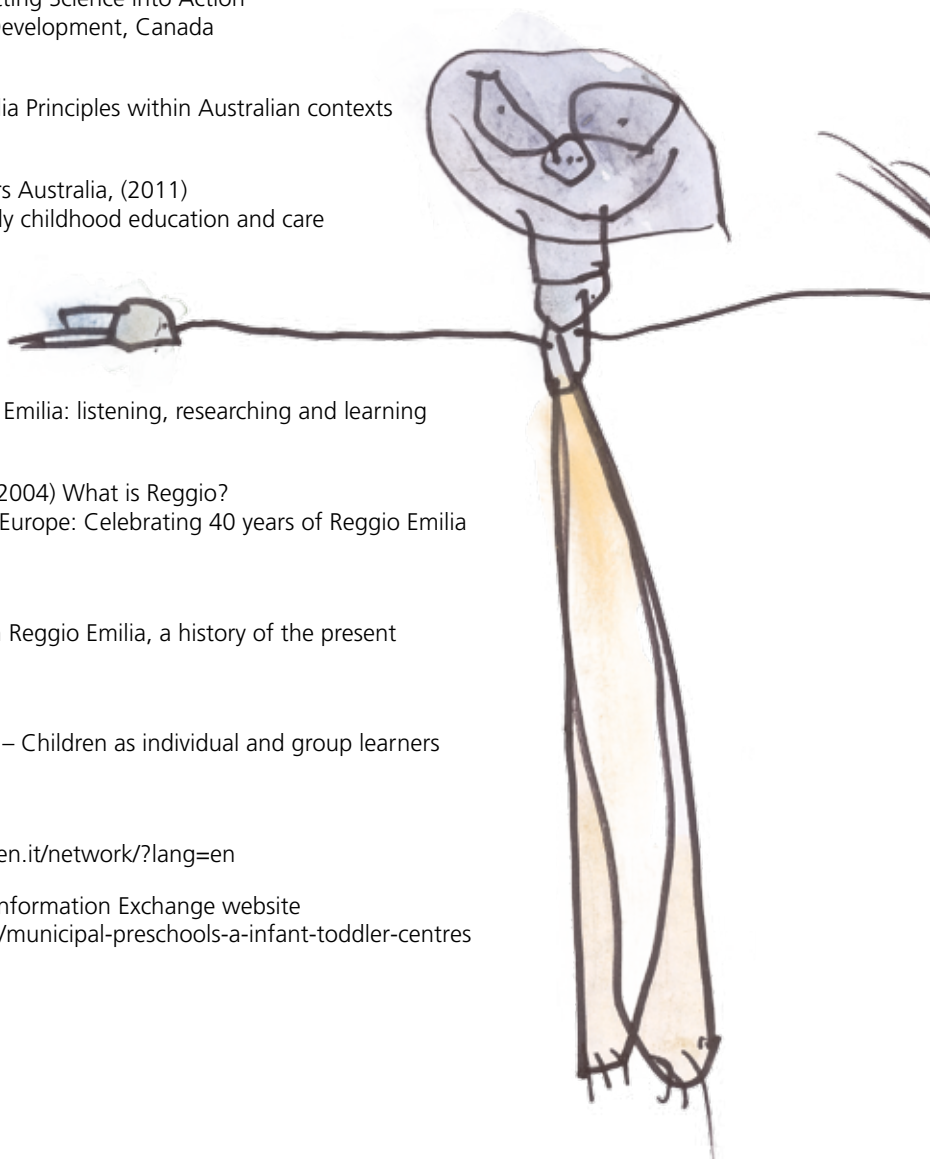
“All the pictures were nice but when we put them together they are beautiful.”

Isabella



References

1. Bruner, J. (2000) "Citizens of the World" in Davoli, M. and Ferri, G. (eds) in *Reggio Tutta: A Guide to the City by the Children*, Reggio Children
2. Dahlberg, G, Moss P. and Pence A., (2007) *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care Languages of Evaluation* second edition Routledge London and New York
3. Edwards C, Gandini, L, Forman G, (eds.) (2011) *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation* Reggio Children
4. McCain, Mustard & Shanker (2007) *Early Years Study 2 – Putting Science into Action* Council for Early Child Development, Canada
5. Millikan, J. (2003) *Reflections : Reggio Emilia Principles within Australian contexts* Pademelon Press, NSW
6. Pricewaterhouse Coopers Australia, (2011) *A practical vision for early childhood education and care*
7. Rinaldi, C. (2006) *In Dialogue with Places* Routledge UK
8. Rinaldi, C. (2006) *In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: listening, researching and learning* Routledge, UK
9. Rinaldi, C and Moss, P. (2004) *What is Reggio?* Published in *Children in Europe: Celebrating 40 years of Reggio Emilia* Scotland
10. Reggio Children (2012) *One City, Many Children Reggio Emilia, a history of the present* Reggio Children
11. Reggio Children (2001) *Making Learning Visible – Children as individual and group learners* Reggio Children
12. Reggio Children website <http://www.reggiochildren.it/network/?lang=en>
13. Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange website <http://www.reaie.org.au/municipal-preschools-a-infant-toddler-centres>



Bibliography

1. Bruner, J. S. (1990) Acts of meaning. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
2. Bruner, J. S. (1996) The culture of education. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
3. Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. and Pence, A. (1999) Beyond quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives. London: Falmer Press
4. Edwards, L. Gandini, and G. Forman (eds), The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Approach to Early Childhood Education. Norwood, NJ: Ablex
5. Gardner, H. (1994), Foreword: complementary perspectives on Reggio Emilia
6. Gardner, H. (1999) The disciplined Mind. What all Students should understand. New York: Simon and Schuster
7. Infant-toddler Centres and Preschools Istituzione of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia, (2010) Indications: Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres of the Municipality of Reggio Emilia Reggio Children, Italy
8. McCain, Mustard & Shanker (2007) Early Years Study 2 – Putting Science into Action Council for Early Child Development, Canada
9. Millikan, J. (2003) Reflections : Reggio Emilia Principles within Australian contexts Pademelon Press, NSW
10. Pricewaterhouse Coopers Australia, March 2011 A practical vision for early childhood education and care
11. Rinaldi, C (2006) In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: listening, researching and learning Routledge, UK
12. Rinaldi, Carlina and Moss, Peter, What is Reggio? Published in Children in Europe: Celebrating 40 years of Reggio Emilia –the pedagogical thought and practice underlying the world renowned early services in Italy. March 2004. Scotland
13. Reggio Children 2012 One City, Many Children Reggio Emilia, a history of the present Reggio Children
14. Reggio Children 2001 Making Learning Visible – Children as individual and group learners Reggio Children
15. Reggio Children website <http://www.reggiochildren.it/network/?lang=en>
16. Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange website <http://www.reaie.org.au/municipal-preschools-a-infant-toddler-centres>



Acknowledgements

It is not easy to find the right words to conclude a report that has the aim to summarize and to give voice to what I have lived and experienced during the past year.

It is not easy to conclude not only a professional but also and above all, a personal experience like the one I have just lived in Adelaide, South Australia.

When I decided to accept the invitation to come to South Australia as “Thinker in Residence”, I was not aware of what I would encounter. I did not realize I was not only starting a new chapter of my life abroad, but I was also embracing a new and unexpected experience I will never forget.

I have been privileged throughout my life to often travel and to visit many different countries of the world, to encounter new cultures, different ways of approaching things, different traditions, and different people. But what I have encountered during my three visits to South Australia is a unique lifetime experience -

a perfect mix of ancient tradition and innovation towards the future, openness and very deep roots to tradition, humanity, strength, competence, passion, commitment, responsibility, enthusiasm, collaboration and collegiality.

I found at least one of these elements in all the people I have had the privilege to meet during my residency and that have significantly contributed to the make this experience like the one it has been.

First of all, I would like to mention a special thanks to the Premier of the South Australian Government, The Honourable Jay Weatherill and his Cabinet for having strongly believed and invested in this important project of the Thinkers in Residence. His vision and ideas have brought me to South Australia to make together “a firm and overt commitment to children and young people”.

Thank you to all the partners who have been able to desire, but above all to build up a new piece of our future.

It is with endless gratitude and appreciation that I would like to mention all the people of the “Thinkers team”: Gabrielle Kelly, Anne Rhodes, Tina Adamo, Trish Tranfa, Jennifer Tirrell, Deanna Howland, Amy Muscara, Margot McInnes, Mike Carroll and Todd Clappis who have significantly contributed to a “good and fruitful residency” with their endless work and strong commitment. Many, many thanks to all of you for your warmth, friendship, solidarity and for having not only supported, but strongly believed in our common shared values.

A big thank you to all the teachers in South Australia who have thought it possible to welcome a new image of the child and therefore of themselves.

A special thank you full of gratitude and affection to Jan Millikan and all the REAIE (Reggio Emilia Australian Information Exchange) for what they have done before and after my arrival into this incredible country.

Another special mention to all those who have strongly supported and believed in the possibility of hosting the Exhibit “The Hundred Languages of Children”.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking all the children of South Australia and all the children of the world. My desire and my hope is that they can take our hands and lead us in the direction we wish to explore together.

Carla Rinaldi, June 2013.

ADELAIDE
thinkers
IN RESIDENCE 

Bringing world leading thinkers to
Adelaide to assist with the strategic
development of South Australia.



Government of
South Australia



ALL YOUNG CHILDREN THRIVING AND LEARNING

South
Australia's
Early
Learning
Strategy



2021 to 2031



Government
of South Australia

Department for Education

N I I N A

M A R N I





We acknowledge that work undertaken to develop South Australia's Early Learning Strategy took place mainly on the traditional lands of the Kurna people, and we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

We also acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today. We also pay respects to the cultural authority of traditional owners from other areas across South Australia.





CONTENTS


Minister and Chief Executive foreword	2
Our plan for success	5
Our vision	5
Our goals	5
Why early learning and child development matters	6
South Australian context	8
Our children	8
Early years system	10
Our services	10
Quality of department early childhood services	12
Our challenge	12
What you told us	14
Early years leadership in South Australia	16
Growing learners: strengthening universal services	18
Why child development checks?	19
What we will do	20
How we will do it	20
World-class government preschools	25
What we will do	25
How we will do it	26
Measuring success	28
References	30
Bibliography	31

MINISTER AND

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

FOREWORD

A strong future for South Australia demands a commitment to giving our youngest the best start in life. When we support children to thrive and learn in their first 5 years, we help them to develop the foundational skills and abilities needed for school and life. This improves children's chances of prospering into the future.



In South Australia we have examples of excellent practice and a well-established, government-provided quality preschool system that is valued by families. The fundamentals are strong but there is still work to be done. A significant number of young children remain developmentally vulnerable against nationally recognised measures. Many of these children will not catch up to their peers at school.

To address this, we need the shared vision and ambitious goals set out in this Early Learning Strategy.

The strategy acknowledges the importance of universal services through the 'Growing learners' stream of the strategy. This stream fosters strong partnerships across government and non-government sectors to collectively and effectively increase the proportion of children developmentally on track.

This work will be led by the Government's newly established Office for the Early Years within the Department for Education, whose mandate will be to provide clear and consistent leadership across the universal early years system.

The 'World-class government preschools' stream builds on this aim, through a commitment to high-quality government preschool programs. These will be underpinned by defined excellence in teaching and learning. Importantly, the Department for Education is committed to sharing learnings with the broader sector.

The principle of equity underpins our approach. The strategy will be backed by additional specific support for Aboriginal children and children with diverse needs and backgrounds, recognising the strengths that they bring. It will complement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the development of the new national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy.

As always, parents and carers are central to the success of this strategy. We will continue to support parents to engage with their child's early learning, so that all children can reach their potential.

This strategy is an important part of the department's broader reform to achieve world-class learning and education in South Australia.

Site leaders, educators, families and communities, other government departments and peak bodies and associations have all contributed to the development of the Early Learning Strategy. We thank everyone who had their say, and look forward to working with you all to deliver our shared ambition. For our youngest citizens and the future of our state, it is essential that we succeed.



Hon John Gardner MP
Minister for Education



Rick Persse
*Chief Executive,
Department for Education*





OUR PLAN FOR SUCCESS

To create a strong future for South Australia, our 10-year Early Learning Strategy is tailored to the needs of our state's children and families.

The new strategy reflects what we heard from parents, community members, teachers and other early education and care workers, leaders and experts in education, child development and health.

It also reflects world's best practice in early childhood development and learning.

This strategy will guide us to deliver a world-class early learning system. By 2031, our measures for success will ensure South Australia is recognised again for our leadership in child development and early education.

Our vision

All young children thriving and learning

Our goals

GROWING LEARNERS

Strengthen universal child development services for children 0 to 5 years old



Strong partnerships across government and non-government sectors to increase the proportion of children developmentally 'on track', regardless of background or location, with additional specific support for Aboriginal children and children in complex situations



Well-supported parents who are highly engaged with their children, so children can learn and reach their potential

WORLD-CLASS GOVERNMENT PRESCHOOLS

Support excellence in teaching and learning



High-quality educational preschool programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning

WHY EARLY

LEARNING AND

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

MATTERS

Every family wants to give their children the best start in life. Research shows that strong early years systems and high-quality early childhood education helps them do so¹.

The skills and dispositions fostered early in life lay the foundation for these same qualities to develop later on. They become the early links in our chain of lifelong learning and development².

Research shows the most important active ingredient in building the brain is the quality of children's relationships with their parents and carers. There is a growing understanding that early child development is influenced, in large part, by the nature of parenting or caring they receive from others.

A strong early-years system is crucial – one that gives children access to universal services and meets local community and family needs. The world is rapidly changing, with increased technology in our homes and more households where both parents work outside of the home. This affects how child development support is accessed by families, who increasingly want flexible, accessible services.

Across Australia, collective action is driving responses to the need for better quality child development and early childhood education. Several other jurisdictions have also developed early childhood-related strategic plans.

High-quality early childhood education helps children build the foundations to become creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners.

We all need these skills to successfully engage in school, work and life.

Research shows that attending high-quality early education and care enhances developmental outcomes for all children, and particularly disadvantaged children³.

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) gives us valuable insight into how children in their first year of school are tracking on 5 key domains:



physical health and wellbeing



social competence



emotional maturity



language and cognitive skills



communication skills and general knowledge.

These essential development areas predict future health, wellbeing and educational success.

When children benefit in these areas, we all benefit. Quality early childhood education has a ripple effect – children improving their social, emotional and cognitive skills, enhances their school and life outcomes. This benefits these children, their parents and carers, as well as the broader community⁴.

Early childhood education is a worthwhile investment, with children, families, communities, businesses and governments all reaping the rewards.



'Health and development checks need to be available and easily accessible for all families. Providing those checks on preschool sites helps to facilitate access for families.'

– Education worker

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

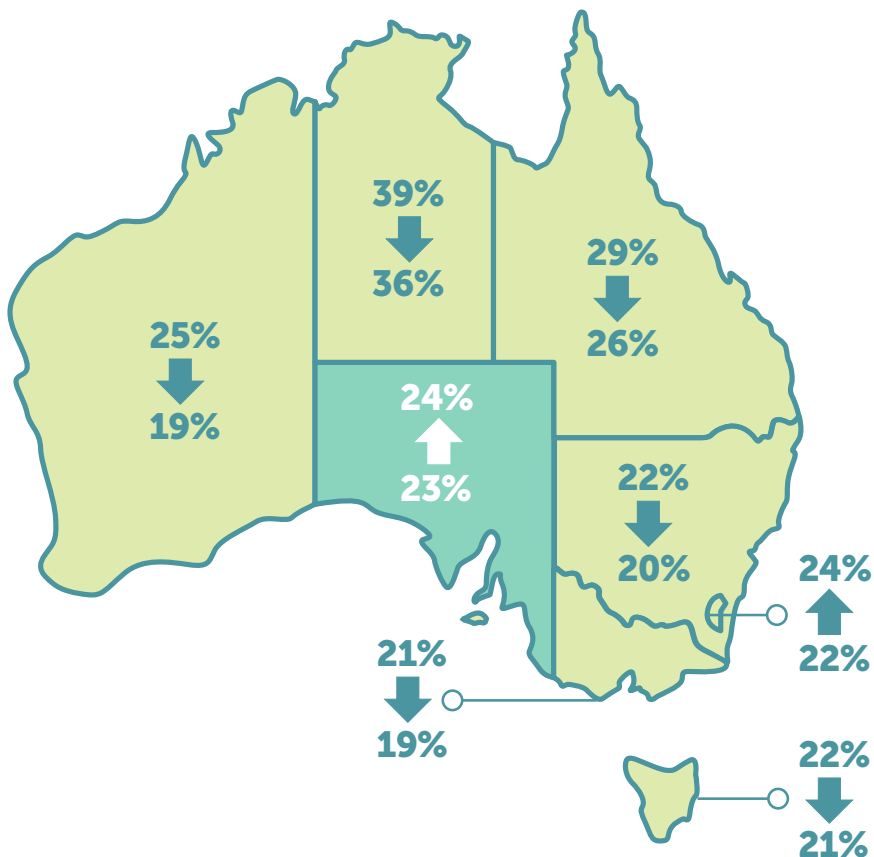
Our children

According to the AEDC, almost a quarter of South Australian children (23.9% compared with the national average of 21.7%) are classed as 'developmentally vulnerable' on 1 or more domains when starting school. Many of these children will not catch up to their peers⁵.


The proportion of our children developmentally vulnerable has increased since 2009, compared with those in most other jurisdictions where vulnerability has decreased. For example, Western Australia improved from 24.7% to 19.4% between 2009 and 2018. Developmental vulnerability in South Australia has now spread across all socioeconomic levels and geographic areas.

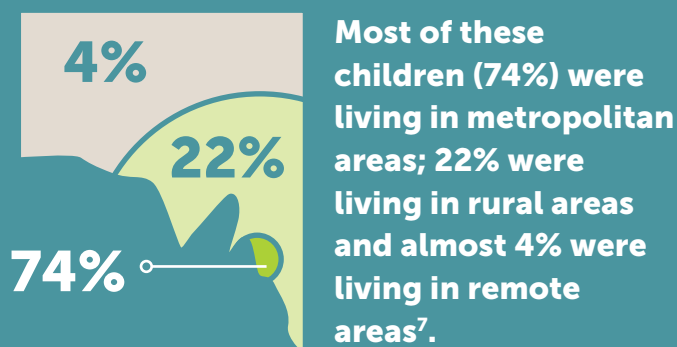
This makes quality early years services and education critically important in our state's aspiration for 'all young children thriving and learning'.


% of children developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains (AEDC) from 2009 to 2018



Young South Australians access early learning through various providers before starting preschool and school

In 2020,  almost 98,000 children were between 0 and 4 years old and approximately **21,000 children were 4 years old⁶.**



In 2020 83% of children enrolled in a preschool program in South Australia accessed a government preschool. 

4% were enrolled in state funded non-government services, and 13% in non-government services funded under the Universal Access National Partnership⁸.



Early years sector case study

Reading and literacy framework

Public Library Services, in the South Australian Department of the Premier and Cabinet, is working with Raising Literacy Australia to develop a Reading and Literacy Framework. This will highlight the unique position of public libraries in our communities to deliver on statewide agendas.

Literacy is crucial in the daily lives of all Australians. The Reading and Literacy Framework will make sure there are consistent principles and practices in literacy support for the library network. The framework will also set a long-term direction for literacy improvement, where a key role will be played by public libraries to improve and embed valuable literacy practices and outcomes in our communities. These advances in literacy will benefit all South Australians from birth to seniors.

Early years system

The term 'early years system' refers to universal (for everyone) and targeted (help directed to specific groups of children) government and non-government policies, programs, services and supports for South Australian children from birth to 5 years, and their families. These include child health, parent support, education, child care, community services and child protection. These are offered through the Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS), government and non-government education and care services, supported and community playgroups, community libraries, local health networks, and specific parenting programs and initiatives.

'I think that having CaFHS milestone ages and stages checks are a huge assistance for families. The checks can pick up any developmental issues early and they can then be addressed with early intervention. Ages and stages at the different milestones can monitor the progression of those interventions and if further assessments from (an) Infant Development team at a hospital need to be done. CaFHS and family home visiting are a crucial part of the team around the child and family.'

– Member of the community

Our services

The Department for Education has a proud and strong history of providing universal preschool education in the year before school.

Preschool is a play-based, early childhood education program, delivered by a 4 year degree-qualified early years teacher, using the national Early Years Learning Framework. The Commonwealth Government and all state and territory governments have committed to delivering Universal Access to Early Childhood Education ensuring that all children have access to 600 hours of preschool in the year before full-time schooling.

Adding to this strong base of universal preschool delivery, Aboriginal children and children in care in South Australia are eligible to start preschool at 3 years of age. The department delivers preschool through various models, such as stand-alone preschools, school-based preschools and Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting. Some of these sites are integrated services providing both education and care, including occasional care or long day care.

Across our services, diverse programs, including playgroups and parenting supports, are delivered both by the department and in partnership with other agencies and organisations.

Within our preschool programs there are also additional services and supports, such as bilingual preschool support, the Inclusive Education Support Program, inclusive preschool programs, and access to allied health practitioners and support services.

The Early Learning Strategy will complement other reviews and reforms underway nationally and here in our state.

In partnership with the department and the History Trust of South Australia, the University of South Australia has developed an interactive timeline that highlights milestones in early childhood education. It begins with First Nations times before colonisation and ends in the present day, embedding in a historical context the achievements and innovations of educators and crusaders in South Australia. The ongoing work, A History of Early Childhood Education in South Australia can be found at:

<https://www.unisa.edu.au/about-unisa/Our-History/early-childhood-learning/>





'I love the nature play, 'loose parts' approach at our local kindy and kids learning through play.'

– Parent

Quality of department early childhood services

The assessment and rating data for South Australian government preschools against the National Quality Standards (NQS) for Early Childhood Education and Care shows South Australian government preschools perform extremely well.

Under this system, services receive a rating for each of the 7 quality areas and an overall rating based on these results. As at the end of April 2021, 77% of the state's 371 assessed and rated government preschools received an overall rating of 'exceeding the national quality standard'.

Results were especially strong in the key quality areas (QA) of educational program and practice (QA1), relationships with children (QA5), and collaborative partnerships with families and communities (QA6).

Our challenge

Across all government preschools, results were weaker in the key quality areas of children's health and safety (QA2), physical environment (QA3), staffing arrangements (QA4), and governance and leadership (QA7).

There is also inconsistency across the system in relation to the key quality areas of educational program and practice (QA1), relationships with children (QA5), and governance and leadership (QA7). For example, school-based government preschools do not currently rate as highly as standalone preschools, and regional government preschools do not rate as highly as metropolitan government preschools.

A world-class system that delivers outstanding outcomes for all South Australian children will have consistent quality results in all sites.

Research suggests that if overall quality thresholds – such as those established by the Australian NQS system – are to accurately predict child outcomes, we need to measure more specific dimensions of quality. This will help us share a better understanding of the attributes of high-quality preschool programs and how they result in better outcomes for children. Examples include the quality of adult-children interactions, the approaches educators take, and the resources available to support learning and development⁹.

Early years sector case study

Goodstart Elizabeth Vale Nunga playgroup

Goodstart Early Learning, in partnership with Aboriginal community health organisation, Nunkawarrin Yunti, has established the Nunga playgroup delivered from Goodstart Elizabeth Vale Child Care Centre. The group supports local families in complex situations. This includes children with global developmental delays, complex social/emotional or physical needs, children at risk of entering the child protection system, or children who are part of a family reunification support service.

The playgroup offers various activities to support children's development, and engages parents in discussions about parenting and the family's role as children's first teachers. It helps to support the transition of children and families into early childhood services and school.

Goodstart Elizabeth Vale was recognised for its ongoing work through receiving the Goodie Award for reconciliation for 2 consecutive years.



WHAT YOU TOLD US

Through reference groups, workshops, one-on-one discussions, submissions, a YourSAy¹⁰ discussion board and our online survey, we heard loud support for an early learning system that:

- is guided by clear, collaborative and coordinated leadership
- provides readily accessible, quality support for child development
- offers responsive local programs and services that support community priorities
- recognises and respects families as their children's first teachers and supports them in this role
- reduces barriers to, and increases participation in early childhood education and care services.

We also heard clear support for government preschool services that have:

- quality teaching and learning programs
- consistent strategic leadership
- responsive system support.

'I think the quality of preschool is very much decided by the training and experience that the staff have had and the quality of the leadership overseeing the staff.'

– Education worker

'Parents are so isolated now, and pushed back to work so quickly that we often don't get to maintain a "village" or support group.'

– Parent

'Play-based activities and opportunity for sensory and nature-based activities are really important.'

– Parent

yourSAy



602
surveys



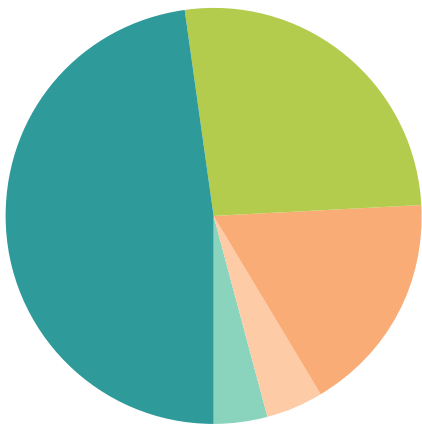
15
submissions



21
comments
on our online
discussion
board

WHO RESPONDED TO OUR SURVEY?*

* Note that the total exceeds 100% as most respondents selected multiple roles



81.4%
were parents

29.1%
were
community
members

7.6%
were site
leaders

45.2%
were early
childhood
education,
care or health
workers

6.8%
were doctors,
nurses or
allied health
professionals

EARLY YEARS LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Healthy development in early childhood builds a strong foundation for a child's future learning and for their adult life.

How a child develops, and whether they meet the accepted milestones of development, is the result of many influences. The Government of South Australia supports early childhood development through programs in education, health, care and community services through a range of government agencies and in partnership with many non-government organisations.

In recognition of the opportunity that clear and collaborative vision and leadership would provide to the early years system, the Government is establishing a new dedicated Office for the Early Years within the Department for Education. A new Head of the Office for the Early

Years will have lead responsibility for early childhood in South Australia and will ensure that agencies are acting in concert to deliver an integrated and effective universal early years system.

Service provision will remain in key agencies (for example, CaFHS will remain within the Women's and Children's Health Network, and preschool oversight within the existing Department for Education structure). The Office for the Early Years will establish system wide governance and tracking of performance and commission new services, where required.

Our goal is to increase the number of South Australian children who are developmentally 'on track' when they start school.



Early Years in South Australia as a multi-tiered system of support

'Clear guidance about what datasets are the most impactful, and support for leaders and educators to interpret and analyse data.'

– Early childhood leader

'CaFHS were amazing. I am only realising this as we have moved to the country and have no access to CaFHS in our district.'

– Parent

Early years sector case study

Mid Murray Family Connections

AEDC data from 2012 was instrumental in the Mid Murray Council's formation of the Mid Murray Family Connections (MMFC) Collective Impact initiative.

As part of this initiative, a Community Accountability Plan reflected the commitment of the MMFC to support families to give their children the best start in life. The plan guides the work of the MMFC Collective Impact initiative and has 4 focus areas:

1. Children and their caregivers share a secure attachment (age group: conception to 2 years)
2. Children are emotionally resilient (age group: 2 to 8 years)
3. Children are engaged learners (age group: 5 to 8 years)
4. Children and their caregivers are safe and supported (age group: conception to 8 years, and their families)

MMFC was recognised for its collective work including invitations to present at the national collective impact conference. It was awarded the 2017 National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) Award for South Australia, under the theme 'Play Your Part', and the 2019 Community Partnerships and Collaboration Award at the Local Government Professionals Australia – SA Annual Leadership Excellence Awards.



GROWING LEARNERS: STRENGTHENING UNIVERSAL SERVICES

GOALS



Strong partnerships across government and non-government sectors to increase the proportion of children developmentally 'on track', regardless of background or location, with additional specific support for Aboriginal children, and children in complex situations.

Well-supported parents who are highly engaged with their children, so children can learn and reach their potential.

For a child to thrive, they need access to high-quality childhood systems and services – whatever their background, wherever they live.

Services during this crucial period include:

- CaFHS
- playgroups
- parenting programs
- community libraries
- early intervention supports
- non-government programs.

The first 5 years of a child's life are critical for their health, development and learning. The first 3 years, before most children enter formal education, are most critical. This is when brain, physical, language, social, emotional and cognitive development is fastest.¹¹

Our Early Learning Strategy recognises the vitally important role that families play in children's development and learning.

'Caring and enthusiastic staff who understand the whole child, particularly children's social emotional needs are important.'

– Allied health professional

'The blue book has been very helpful.'

– Parent

Why child development checks?

The Child Development Council recommends proactive monitoring of all children’s developmental milestones from birth to school age to reduce the number of children entering the education system with unidentified disabilities and developmental delays¹².

We know developmental vulnerability is spread across all communities. Early intervention is critical to reduce developmental vulnerability¹³.

Research shows that there are both short- and long-term benefits in detecting developmental delays early, and intervening with tailored programs. Neuroscience demonstrates that neural plasticity is often bounded by time – this means there is an ideal critical period for altering neural function.

The Government of South Australia is determined to take this window of opportunity.

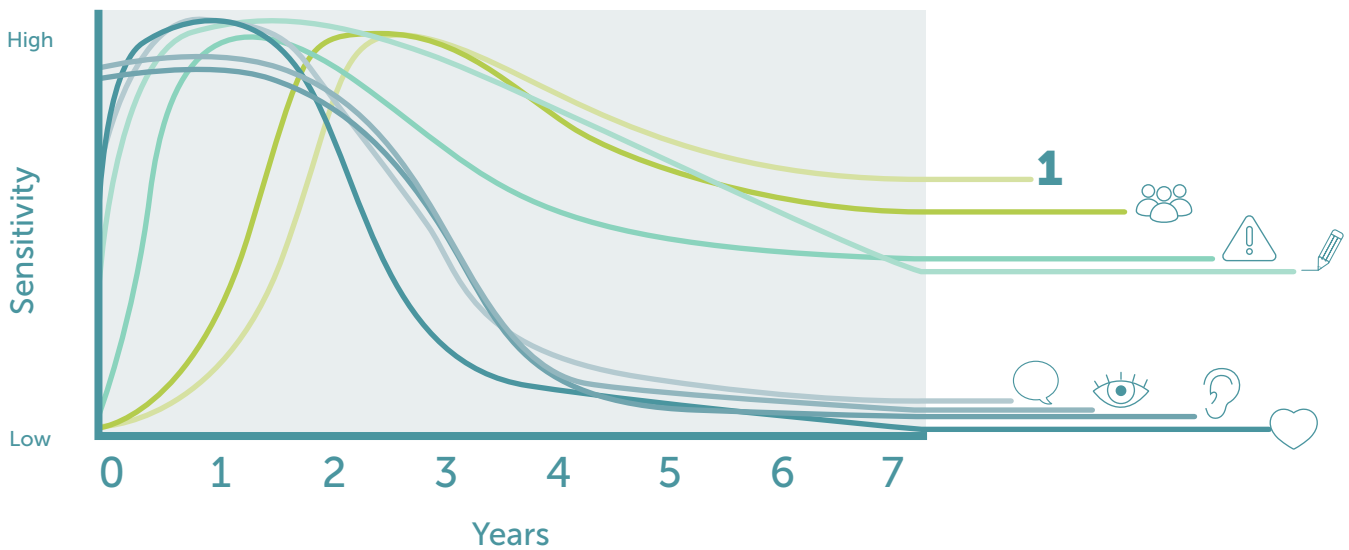
We know from other jurisdictions that reaching universal coverage is extremely challenging.

We will need to find innovative ways to identify families and offer the services where they live.

We will design future actions in partnership with CaFHS and non-government organisations.

Sensitive periods of brain development in the early years

(Source: Council for Early Child Development)¹⁴



1 Numbers

Peer social skills

Symbol

Language

Habitual ways of responding

Vision

Hearing

Emotional control

GROWING LEARNERS: STRENGTHENING UNIVERSAL SERVICES

What we will do

We will explore opportunities to expand and enrich early years child development and learning services across the state to reduce barriers and increase participation.

We will identify opportunities for more responsive services for communities and families that are culturally appropriate and safe. We will support and equip parents, families and carers as the 'first teachers' of their children, in partnership with other organisations.

How we will do it

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Readily accessible quality universal support for child development

Expand the child development screening system – increase reach to 80% of children

Grow partnerships with government and non-government service providers to inform coordinated expansion of the screening system

Educate families about multiple referral pathways where accessible, including private providers, National Disability Scheme (NDIS), community- and hospital-based services

Partner with universities on research to identify future child development levers for change

Explore increased information sharing between services to enable more co-ordinated responses to families

Expand the childhood development screening system – expand schedule to include checks at 12 months and 3 years and incorporate further parent supports and advice during checks

Apply new technologies to facilitate screening reminders, active recalls for checks, milestone prompts, immunisation reminders and connections to other services and information

Increase consistent and readily accessible child development information and education – for example on sleeping and healthy eating

Expand the childhood development screening system – continual improvement of schedule, content, and reach

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Responsive local programs and services supporting community priorities

Update the Outcomes Framework for the government's Children's Centres for Early Childhood Development and Parenting

Share Australian Early Development Census data on Location SA

Identify and build partnerships with local government and non-government service providers to support local evidence-informed delivery of programs and services most needed in communities

Improve the availability and application of Australian Early Development Census data and analysis at the community level

Provide data, tools and resources to local communities to inform local government and non-government policy and program responses

Implement a grants program to support evidence-informed innovation and delivery of local and community-led programs

Implement the new children's centre framework, including greater outreach of centres to communities and neighbouring preschools through a 'hub and spoke' approach

Connect and support a network of quality local early years services comprising government and non-government providers

GROWING LEARNERS: STRENGTHENING UNIVERSAL SERVICES

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Strong support for families as their children's first teachers

Increase grant funding to support community organisations to establish playgroups in response to community needs

Establish a network of educators to mentor playgroup facilitators

Partner with Playgroup SA to map, connect and support playgroups across South Australia

Develop and promote online professional resources for playgroup facilitators

Expand the number of playgroups in South Australia, including at preschools, children's centres, schools, early learning centres and elsewhere in the community

Support a campaign aimed at parents, carers and community organisations to promote the importance of early childhood development

Promote and distribute resources for parents, families and carers including on developmental milestones and home learning environment advice (such as prompts about the best ways to interact with children at home)

Maintain a coordinated, sustainable and high-quality playgroup system across the state, incorporating government and non-government providers

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Reduced barriers and increased participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services

Review policy settings for access to preschool programs in rural and remote areas

Promote and support improved enrolment and attendance in preschools, with a particular focus on 3 and 4-year-old Aboriginal children and children in care

Identify and reduce barriers to early childhood education and care services for children and families with complex needs (for example, in partnership with the early childhood education and care sector, support to access additional child care subsidy and enrol in early learning centres)

Explore barriers to early childhood education and care services such as preschool hours, location of services and transport

Review policy settings for an additional year of preschool for developmentally delayed children

Facilitate community childcare solutions in regional and remote areas

Develop innovative solutions to increase preschool participation, such as availability of 'wraparound' care

Implement policy and program reforms to reflect key factors to maximise attendance in programs and to improve the quality and appropriateness of services

Undertake a systematic review of actions taken to increase participation in early childhood education and care and identify key factors for ongoing consideration



'The most important thing in the life and learning of young children is their family, their parents, their home. If we want to be effective, we need to support families and children.'

– YourSAY comment

WORLD-CLASS GOVERNMENT PRESCHOOLS

All South Australian children can attend government preschool for a year before they start school. In 2020, approximately 15,000 children did so (83% of all children enrolled in preschool that year)¹⁵.

Attending preschool in the year before school is widely seen as beneficial. There is strong evidence about the benefit of quality early childhood education and care, and that vulnerable children benefit most from earlier access¹⁶.

Our state already provides access to high-quality government preschools for 3 and 4-year-old Aboriginal children and children in care. An important component of this strategy is to maximise the enrolment and participation of children who are already eligible.

Children in preschool learn through play-based programs designed and delivered by qualified educators to support social, emotional and cognitive development.

Research shows that quality early learning experiences at this age are not just about preparing for school, and literacy and numeracy, although these are important. Stimulating and nurturing environments to develop children's social and emotional skills, confidence, creativity and sense of self are equally important to set children up for life. Benefits increase with higher quality preschool¹⁷.

South Australia is starting from a strong base. Our next step is to take action on the feedback we have heard, to shape a future where we have a genuinely world-class system, including greater consistency in our services.

'Clear guidance to local education teams and sites around pedagogical repertoire and content.'

– Early childhood leader

What we will do

We will support children to achieve development and learning milestones and to successfully transition into preschool and school through world-class preschool services.

We will develop the skills of and provide additional support for preschool leaders and educators, recognising the importance and breadth of their work. We will deliver ongoing support to reflect global knowledge and contemporary evidence-informed teaching and learning practices for preschool settings.

A department preschool reference group identified an opportunity for the 'World-class government preschools' stream of the strategy to reflect both 'safety net' and 'raising the bar' aspirations with our actions. This acknowledges that each preschool is at a different place in their improvement journey.

While this work is focused on the government preschools that provide a service to more than 4 in 5 South Australian children, we will share resources and learnings with non-government preschool providers.

GOAL



High-quality educational preschool programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning.

WORLD-CLASS GOVERNMENT PRESCHOOLS

How we will do it

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Quality teaching and learning in preschools

Co-design guidance for evidence-informed teaching and learning strategies for 3 to 5-year-olds (such as sustained shared thinking and culturally responsive practices)

Co-design system guidance on evidence informed content, including learning trajectories in key domains (social and emotional learning, literacy, numeracy, health and physical education and science)

Review and revise guidance on culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning

Strengthen professional development for preschool staff, including in educational programming and delivery, and for leaders of integrated sites

Develop and roll out supporting resources to enhance teaching and learning practices in preschools in line with the approved national learning frameworks

Develop system-wide strategic guidance on continuity of learning for children transitioning into preschool and school

Design and establish a system of local review for preschools

Agree and implement practice evaluation tools for preschools and local education teams to enable shared understanding of preschool process quality, for example Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

Embed ongoing reviews and update of guidance on educating children aged 3 to 5 years in preschool programs, to support continual improvement

Short term

Medium term

Long term

Consistent strategic leadership

Establish a team for instructional leadership for preschools in the Department for Education, to provide leadership on early childhood education for corporate, local education teams and sites

Develop a position statement on preschool in South Australia – the safety net, and 'raising the bar'

Distil and disseminate research and evidence to support educational practice in preschools

Design and deliver early years specific professional development for leaders of preschools, local education teams and departmental staff

Share learning tools between government and non-government service providers

Maintain embedded leadership and co-ordinated strategic support for preschool programs

Responsive system support

Review current support for children from diverse backgrounds including Aboriginal children, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children, and children receiving funding through the Inclusive Education Support Program

Review consistency of administrative and management supports for preschools in areas such as information technology, finance, compliance, legislation, human resources, and policy

Introduce system-wide parent health questionnaires for child development and learning

Develop resources for supporting children with diverse needs and backgrounds, with a focus on opportunities to build on the strengths that they bring

Explore solutions and new models of governance and administrative management support, such as fee for service

Develop system-wide process guidance on children transitioning into preschool and school, including between government and non-government sectors

Leverage the Education Management System database to ensure fit-for-purpose administrative and qualitative data to inform corporate, local education team and site decision making processes

MEASURING SUCCESS

Our goal is for South Australia to be a recognised leader in child development and early education. Our services will exemplify best practice in partnering with communities, parents, families and carers to deliver services that meet their needs. Over the next 10 years, we will:

1. increase the proportion of South Australian children assessed as 'developmentally on track' across all AEDC developmental domains
2. reduce the proportion of South Australian children assessed as 'developmentally vulnerable' on 1 or more AEDC development domains
3. increase the number of South Australian children accessing child development screenings
4. increase the enrolment and attendance rates of 3- and 4-year-old Aboriginal children and children in care accessing preschool
5. increase the proportion of government preschools rated as 'exceeding' for Quality Area 1 Educational Program and Practice, Quality Area 5 Relationships with Children, and Quality Area 7 Governance and Leadership under the National Quality Framework
6. deliver ongoing improvement in government preschool programs as measured by an agreed process quality tool
7. increase parent satisfaction as measured by the government preschool parent survey.

Department for Education measurements will be complemented by the measures identified by the Child Development Council under the Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People, which aims to help our youngest citizens to start well, grow strong and experience a good life:

- Proportion of children meeting developmental milestones at 2 and 4 years
- Proportion of children with special needs, birth to 5 years, attending approved childcare services
- Proportion and number of 3-year-old Aboriginal children enrolled in a quality preschool program
- Proportion of children enrolled in a quality preschool program in the year before attending full-time school
- Number of children receiving early childhood early intervention supports through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or with an approved NDIS plan before entering school¹⁸.

'The opportunity for the broader early years community to connect with and access research-informed practice ideas and opportunities to support better outcomes for all children.'

– Site leader



REFERENCES

- ¹ Kagan, SL (ed), 2019, *The Early Advantage 2: Building systems that work for young children*, New York, NY: Teachers College Press
- ² Logan Together, 2018, *Love Grows Brains*, retrieved from: <http://logantogogether.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Love-Grows-Brains-FINAL-VERSION-FOR-WEB-1.pdf>
- ³ Australian Government, 2015, *Literature Review of the Impact of Early Childhood Education and Care on Learning and Development*, working paper, Canberra
- ⁴ PWC, 2019, *A Smart Investment for a Smarter Australia: Economic analysis of universal early childhood education in the year before school in Australia*, The Front Project retrieved from: <https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/images/downloads/ECO%20ANALYSIS%20Full%20Report.pdf>
- ⁵ Australian Government, 2018, *Australian Early Development Census National Report, A snapshot of development in Australia*, Department of Education and Training, Canberra
- ⁶ Source: Quarterly Population Estimates (ERP), by State/Territory, Sex and Age – Sept 2020 ABS website
- ⁷ Source: ABS Estimated Resident Population (ERP) for 30 June 2020. This data uses 30 June 2020 ERP and borrows the 'remoteness area' distribution from the previous year 2019, based on regional population by age and sex (cat. no. 3235.0)
- ⁸ Source: Department for Education, 2020, *Annual Census of Early Childhood Services Data Collection*
- ⁹ Tayler, Collette, Cloney, Daniel, Adams, Raymond, Ishimine, Karin, Thorpe, Karen, & Nguyen, Thi Kim Cuc, 2016, *Assessing the Effectiveness of Australian Early Childhood Education and Care Experiences: study protocol*, BMC Public Health 16, Article number: 352 1-12
- ¹⁰ <https://yoursay.sa.gov.au/decisions/early-learning-strategy/about>
- ¹¹ McCain, M, Mustard, F & Shanker, S, 2007, *Early Years Study: Putting Science into Action*, Toronto: Council for Early Child Development
- ¹² Child Development Council, 2020, *How Are They Faring? South Australia's report card for children and young people*, retrieved from <https://childrensa.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/How-are-they-faring-SAs-2020-Report-Card-FINAL-2020-08-05.pdf>
- ¹³ Nelson CA, 2000, 'The neurobiological bases of early intervention' in Shonkoff, J & Meisels, S (eds), *Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention*, Cambridge University Press, Massachusetts
- ¹⁴ McCain, M, Mustard, F & Shanker, S, 2007, *Early Years Study: Putting science into action*, Toronto: Council for Early Child Development
- ¹⁵ Source: Department for Education 2020 Annual Census of Early Childhood Services Data Collection
- ¹⁶ Fox, S and Geddes, M, 2016, *Preschool – Two Years are Better Than One: Developing a preschool program for Australian 3 year olds – evidence, policy and implementation*, Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 03/2016. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. Retrieved from: www.mitchellinstitute.org.au
- ¹⁷ Pilcher, S, Noble, K, and Hurley, P, 2021, *Stepping Up: Securing the future of quality preschool in Australia*, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne
- ¹⁸ Child Development Council, 2019, *South Australia's Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People*, retrieved from <https://childrensa.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Outcomes-Framework-Final-2019-10-11.pdf>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Australian Government, 2011, National Framework for Universal Child and family Health Services, Australia Government, Canberra
- Australian Government, 2013, A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia 2012 – AEDI National Report, Australian Government, Canberra
- Australian Government, 2020, National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Retrieved from: https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/national-agreement-ctg-mar-21_0.pdf
- Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2020, Children Get the Best Start to Life: A Population Approach to Early Intervention and Prevention retrieved from <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2020/10/20/ensuring-all-children-get-best-start-life-population-approach-early-intervention-and#:~:text=Children%20do%20best%20when%20their,the%20role%20of%20early%20intervention>
- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2014, The Nest Action Agenda: Improving the wellbeing of Australia’s children and youth while growing our GDP by over 70% retrieved from http://www.aracy.org.au/publicationsresources/command/download_file/id/299/filename/The-Nest-action-agenda-technical-document-December-2014.pdf
- Center on the Developing Child, 2007, The Impact of Early Adversity on Child Development (InBrief), www.developingchild.harvard.edu
- Douglass, AL, 2019, Leadership for Quality Education and Care, OECD Working Paper No. 211, University of Massachusetts Boston
- Education Council Australia, 2019, Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration retrieved from: The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration - Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government (dese.gov.au)
- Early Childhood Australia, 2016, Statement on the Inclusion of Every Child in Early Childhood Education and Care, retrieved from <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Statement-of-Inclusion-2016.pdf>
- Heckman, JJ (2008), ‘The case for investing in disadvantaged young children’ in First Focus, Big ideas for Children: Investing in our nation’s future, retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227349437_The_Case_for_Investing_in_Disadvantaged_Young_Children
- Ishimine, K and Tayler, C, et al, 2010, ‘Quality and Early Childhood Education and Care: A policy Initiative for the 21st Century’, International Journal of Childcare and Education Policy, vol.4, no.2, 2010, pp. 67-80
- Murdoch Children’s Institute, 2018, The First Thousand Days: Our greatest opportunity (policy brief edition no 28) retrieved from: <https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/ccchdev/1803-CCCH-Policy-Brief-28.pdf>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016, Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006, Starting Strong II Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD Publishing, Paris
- Page, J & Tayler, C, 2016, Learning and Teaching in the Early Years, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
- Pascoe, S and Brennan, D, 2017, Lifting Our Game: report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions, Victorian Government, Melbourne
- Productivity Commission, 2014, Childcare and Early Childhood Learning, Inquiry Report No. 73, Canberra
- Rorii, K, Fox, S, and Cloney, D, 2017, Quality is Key in Early Childhood Education in Australia, Mitchell Institute, Melbourne
- Siraj, I, Kingston, D, Lysaght, P and Cheesman, S, 2016, Quality Interactions Study (QIS) Final Report, University of Wollongong, Wollongong
- Siraj, I, Kingston, D, Neilsen-Hewett, C, Howard, S, Melhuish, E, de Rosnay, M, Duursma, E & Luu, B, 2016, Fostering Effective Early Learning: A review of the current international evidence considering quality in early childhood education and care programmes – in delivery, pedagogy and child outcomes, Sydney, Australia: NSW Department of Education
- Siraj-Blatchford, I, Sylva, K, Muttock, S, Gilden, R and Bell, D, 2002, Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years, University of London, Institute of Education, Department of Educational Studies, Norwich
- United Nations Children’s Fund UK, 1989, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, retrieved from https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf?_ga=2.78590034.795419542.1582474737-1972578648.1582474737

Published June 2021

EDU0321_165

www.education.sa.gov.au/earlylearning



Government
of South Australia
Department for Education

PRESCHOOL POSITION STATEMENT

All young children thriving and learning

Quality preschools

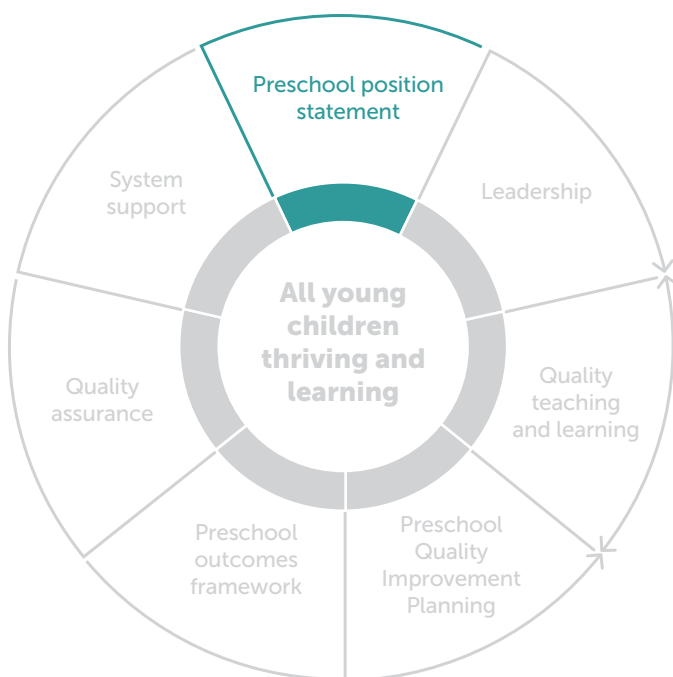


Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Background

This position statement has been developed as a key action of the Department for Education's Early Learning Strategy. It has been developed through consultation with preschool and school leaders, and Local Education Teams. It shares our aspirations for quality in every government preschool and in the experience of children and families who access them. It aims for shared and consistent understanding of our goal of *high-quality educational preschool programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning* in every preschool in our system.

The position statement is the keystone of the preschool quality model and provides overarching context and direction for quality in government preschools.



The term 'preschool' encompasses government preschool in all its forms including stand-alone preschools, school based preschools, Children's Centres and preschools integrated with a child care program or service. While the term represents different service settings, our aspiration for preschool quality in each of these services is the same.

The position statement echoes the Alice Springs (Mpartnwe) Education declaration to enable every child and student to *be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face* (Education Council, December 2019).

The statement promotes excellence and equity and recognises the role that quality preschool education plays in establishing the foundation for lifelong wellbeing and learning underpinned by the educational program and practice, relationships that teachers and educators develop with children, and leadership.

8 key themes were identified through the consultation process:



Children



Families and communities



Learning and development



Support and inclusion



Outcomes



Leadership



Teachers and educators



Quality

These themes are non-hierarchical and reflect the essential elements of quality preschool programs that support and enable all young children to thrive and learn at preschool.

Our system recognises and values the work of all educators who work with children to progress learning. This includes teachers, early childhood workers, school service officers and support staff. However, we recognise the professional role and responsibility of early childhood teachers to plan for and assess children's learning and development and therefore use both 'teachers' and 'educators' throughout this resource.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners throughout South Australia and we pay respect to the custodians of the land on which we live and learn. We respect their spiritual relationship with Country and acknowledge that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to those living today.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and we acknowledge the cultural authority of Aboriginal people visiting from other areas of South Australia and Australia

Children



Children in South Australia have the right to high-quality educational preschool programs that support their learning and development in their local government preschool.

We recognise and understand the role that quality preschool education plays in establishing foundations for every child's lifelong wellbeing and learning. Preschool education is about more than preparation for the future; it is also an important time for every young child to simply experience being 3, 4 or 5. It's about children belonging, being and becoming.

We have high expectations for every child and we know this supports children to develop positive beliefs and dispositions about themselves. We believe that all children can and will grow in their learning and development over time and understand that different supports and tailored approaches are needed for this to be true for all children.

We recognise and value the unique experiences and strengths that children bring to preschool. We acknowledge Aboriginal ways of growing, knowing and learning as well as their language, culture and spirit as being important to their learning and development. We make meaningful connections with Aboriginal families and communities to support children's learning, identity and belonging. We value and affirm diversity in children's cultures, communities, contexts and abilities. We start from where a child is at so each child can experience success in their learning and development.

We view children as capable and competent with agency to make decisions and choices as they develop and learn. Children are citizens and community members and have experiences that enable them to make decisions, and consider fairness, empathy and compassion.

Our preschools provide all children with the opportunity to grow and learn through child centred, play-based approaches which facilitate children's social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical development. Our preschools offer supportive relational environments that foster a child's sense of belonging, confidence, resilience, wellbeing and cultural identity. They aim to make a positive difference for all children through their use of quality early childhood practices.

Children are active participants in our preschool communities. They are connected to the natural and built environs that surround them and are given opportunities to explore, care for and impact positively on these spaces.

A space for children to grow and learn, where their individual needs are recognised, encouraged, supported and celebrated

- preschool leader

Families and community



Children grow and learn in the context of their family and community.

Children grow and learn in the context of their family and we recognise that families are children's first and most important teachers. We understand that supporting families fundamentally supports children and working in genuine partnership with families supports children's learning and development.

As the first universal interaction families have with the education system, preschools have an important role in supporting families and communities to give their children the best start in learning and life. We recognise the value of a positive home learning environment and assist families to support their child's everyday learning at home. We value and respect families' knowledge of their child.

Our preschools are welcoming of families in all their forms and value the diversity of cultural backgrounds and experiences families bring. We recognise that for Aboriginal families the term 'family' refers to parents, carers, families and extended families, Elders and community members.

Educators develop genuine relationships with families. This relationship-based approach means that we can encourage and support families to engage early in their child's learning and development. We know that engaging families in their children's learning brings enduring benefits to children's learning and development over time including in school.

Educators and families develop reciprocal relationships and work in partnership in the best interest of children. Families are encouraged to contribute to decision-making for their children and for the preschool. Educators support families by respecting their views, connecting them with services and building social capacity.

Our preschools reflect and welcome the diversity of their community, and actively contribute to it. We value, encourage and facilitate the engagement and participation of Aboriginal community members including in decision-making processes, governance of centres and co-design of programs and services for Aboriginal children and families.



An inclusive service which provides quality education and care for all children and families within the context of their community
- preschool leader

Learning and development



Children's learning is dynamic and holistic, with each child learning in their own way and at their own pace.

Our preschools aim for all children to progress in their learning and development and understand that individual children will require and receive individualised supports and approaches.

Children learn best through play and hands on experiences, conversation, relationships with others and intentional opportunities to be challenged and extended as they make meaning. Children learn in diverse ways and at differing paces and their learning is dynamic and holistic. Their learning progression is not linear and is influenced by their family and community experiences, their dispositions and capabilities along with their engagement at preschool.

Children's learning in preschool builds on their early learning experiences at home, in their culture and community, and in early childhood services. Learning in preschool includes social, emotional and physical learning and development, alongside and in conjunction with language and cognitive learning and development. This holistic approach ensures a focus on the whole child whilst also setting the foundations for success in literacy and numeracy.

As they develop their identity as learners, children are increasingly able to self-regulate, becoming aware of and able to manage their thinking, emotions and behaviour. These areas are crucial to develop in the first 5 years and are connected with long-term positive attitudes to learning, the development of supportive social networks and health and wellbeing.

Learning is a relational experience and warm, responsive relationships are foundational. Children learn in and through their relationship with others and their environment. Children learn when they have a sense of belonging, are supported to make decisions and to take risks. Our teaching and learning programs are developed with individual children in mind and intentionally connect with where children are in their learning and development, supporting them to take their next step.

Educators work with the principles, practices and outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and department preschool curriculum resources that support the framework. Educators recognise that each child brings to preschool their own strengths, skills and abilities and makes progress over time with increasingly complex skills and knowledge. Teachers plan for children's learning with an emphasis on providing opportunities for purposeful play supported by intentional teaching. All educators engage in high-quality interactions with children.

Educators monitor children's progress over time so they know where every child is at in their learning and make responsive curriculum and pedagogical adjustments to meet individual and group needs, stretching children towards their next learning goal.

Our high-quality preschools have environments that are accessible and inviting, encourage children to make choices, set learning goals and explore ideas, individually and in groups. Children are enabled to exercise agency and contribute to their own learning.

Intentional learning and development for each child through age-appropriate pedagogy to achieve identified learning goals

– education director

Support and inclusion



Timely and effective support ensures children have the assistance they need to fully engage in preschool.

Our preschools uphold the principles of equity and opportunity so that children have the support they need to engage fully in the preschool program. This includes identifying and addressing barriers such as language, physical, emotional and behaviour challenges, and family complexities, and advocating for children and families to overcome them. The provision of appropriate support enables children to participate fully in and benefit from the preschool program. Teachers and educators are supported by expert knowledge and advice.

We recognise the benefit of providing additional supports when children need them to enable them to achieve their learning and development goals. Preschools access a range of tools, resources and professionals for timely and effective assessment of children's learning and development needs. We know that interventions and supports are most effective

when they are applied at the right time and in the right way. Teachers and educators offer differentiation in curriculum and practice to ensure individual children's learning and development needs are met.

Teachers and educators work with families to learn about what each child knows, can do and understands so they can engage with and respond to children with diverse learning needs. Specialist support services enable teachers and educators to access the professional support and guidance they need to ensure all children are included in our preschools and making progress in their learning and development.

Preschools are most effective when they are supported by high-quality systems, at the local and state level. These systems are responsive to the needs of preschools and efficient in their provision of services.



Outcomes



Every child at preschool makes progress towards learning and development outcomes.

Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR 2009) outlines 5 broad learning outcomes for children. These relate to children's identity, connection and contribution, wellbeing, communication and learning. Broad outcomes are most appropriate for young children as they are the foundational areas of lifelong learning and development. They are interconnected and interdependent and allow every child to progress towards them.

Our preschools ensure that the progress of every child is monitored and intentionally planned for and barriers to progress identified and addressed. Multiple viewpoints, including that of teachers, educators, the child and their family are sought and considered. A principle of the EYLF is that teachers hold high expectations for all children and their learning progress, so care is taken to build on children's strengths and capacities.

Teachers actively plan for improving outcomes for every child holistically and in partnership with families. They are guided by knowledge of children's typical learning and developmental trajectories, or pathways, and these support teachers and educators to strengthen curriculum decision-making to progress children's learning. We understand that children will demonstrate outcomes in their own way, at their own pace and over time. Developmental monitoring ensures that children are demonstrating age-appropriate developmental milestones that underpin successful learning and provide a platform for developmental progression.

With the support of educators, teachers use formative assessment strategies to monitor and assess children's learning and regularly report to parents on children's progress and outcomes. Assessment of children's learning is ongoing and underpinned by qualitative and quantitative strengths based data. Data and evidence is collected and analysed as a basis for planning for goals and outcomes for individuals and groups of children. Formal assessment tools that use standardised measurement are used only as necessary for a specific, usually individual, purpose.

Assessment of children's learning and development against expected outcomes supports continuity of learning from preschool into school. Optimal development in all developmental domains along with positive dispositions for learning will give children the foundations for a successful transition to school.



An educating community that welcomes and supports every child and family to thrive through a high-quality educational program that values and teaches thinking for success in their life learning journey.

- preschool leader

Leadership



Strong educational leaders guide high-quality evidence-based practice and plan for continuous improvement.

Preschool leaders intentionally lead the team, lead the teaching and lead the learning in preschools. Preschool leaders also enact administrative and organisational leadership by providing day-to-day management of the preschool, ethical and responsible decision-making and effectively managing resources. Leadership is recognised by our system as a primary driver of quality in our preschools.

Intentional leadership is essential for enhanced outcomes for children in our preschools. Preschool leaders inspire and develop preschool teams to implement high-quality teaching and learning programs that foster learning and development outcomes for children. They lead reflective practice to drive improvement and ensure specific actions are taken, leading to improved learning and development outcomes for all children.



Strong leadership with a clarity of purpose and intention with systems in place to ensure specific actions, leading to improved learning outcomes for all children

- early childhood leader

As leaders of teaching and learning, preschool leaders understand, advocate for and apply the early childhood education evidence base in their work. Preschool leaders have knowledge of curriculum content and pedagogy and lead the team to apply this knowledge intentionally and consistently. Leaders are supported in their critical educational leadership role with resources that assist them to translate research into practice including leading practice papers and preschool curriculum resources.

Preschool leaders impact outcomes for children through developing and maintaining a collaborative culture of ongoing learning and reflection to drive improvement. Reflective practice is at the centre of preschool culture and leaders guide all educators to support each other to critically reflect to challenge and improve their practice.

Preschool leaders actively plan for and lead professional practice and learning for their team. They lead the team to set goals for children and for themselves. They develop a positive team culture using the Early Years Learning Framework planning cycle to consistently observe, analyse, plan, implement and reflect on children's learning and guide educator reflection and practice.

Children in our preschools experience high-quality educational preschool programs because our preschool leaders understand and uphold our commitment to the principles and practices that ensure quality.

Teachers and educators



Knowledgeable, skilled and supported teachers and educators ensure each child progresses in their learning and development.

Preschool teachers and educators are relational, responsive, knowledgeable and intentional in their work with children. They are committed to ongoing learning and reflective practice and have high expectations for every child. In our preschools, teachers and educators have specialist knowledge in how young children learn and in pedagogical approaches to promote and enhance learning and development.

Teachers and educators work together and with families to develop a statement of philosophy to express their shared beliefs and understandings about their work with children and families. These statements of philosophy align with the themes outlined in this position statement and are the guiding document for all teachers and educators. Each person in the team lives the principles of the philosophy on a daily basis.

Each member of the team has an important role in planning for children's learning. The preschool leader, teachers and educators can articulate the goals and strategies the team is working on to improve their own practice and to improve children's outcomes. The team collaborates to develop the educational program and each team member understands how the curriculum and practice connects to approved learning frameworks and philosophy. All educators understand and can articulate why they do the things they do.

Effective preschool teams consider children's needs, ideas, theories and interests to plan for individuals, small groups and the whole preschool. They work with and alongside children, co-constructing knowledge and building thinking skills, social connection and dispositions. They use intentional teaching strategies and high-quality interactions to invite, challenge and provoke children as they extend and deepen their experiences and learning.

Teachers use a range of tools, resources and programs to guide their planning for children's learning. Programs that support the explicit teaching of concepts may assist to increase educator knowledge. Effective teams recognise that in practice they are best incorporated into everyday routines to support play-based learning and children's agency rather than through direct instruction with the whole preschool group.

Effective preschool teams take time together to develop shared understanding and purpose. The provision of ongoing, supported professional learning and mentoring ensures that teachers and educators are able to maintain their focus on quality outcomes for children in contemporary, research-based and practice-driven ways. They are encouraged to inquire and reflect within their teams and in groups of peers. Integrated, whole team professional learning, developed over time is most effective in supporting teacher and educator effectiveness.

Differentiated, play-based learning that is continually reflected on to provide opportunities for continual learning improvement for children

- preschool leader

Quality



Preschools demonstrate high-quality practice at all times in the best interest of children's outcomes.

There is a wealth of research to show that high-quality early childhood education benefits individual children and our society. Children who attend preschool are less likely to be vulnerable on entry to school and maintain this advantage throughout their schooling and beyond. Planning for and measuring quality is necessary to support all children to maximise their potential.

We are committed to the provision of a high-quality preschool system in all of our preschools. Our goal for high-quality educational preschool programs is underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning for all. We know that if every preschool is the best it can be, then our whole system and every child in it, will benefit.

Quality has two elements – 1) structural quality and 2) process quality. Structural quality refers to system level inputs and supports such as centre facilities and resources, staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications, along with an effective, responsive and supportive system. Quality is driven through an embedded culture of improvement through ongoing self-reflection on outcomes for children.

Process quality focuses on the nature of interactions between the child and teacher, child and child, teacher and parent, teacher and teacher, as well as the nature of centre leadership and teacher pedagogical skills. Process components influence everyday early childhood education and care settings, and they directly influence the quality of a child's day-to-day experience. These aspects of process quality are fostered and supported in a high-quality system through leadership, mentoring and professional learning.

The National Quality Standard rates services against benchmarks in seven areas. The path to quality begins with a minimum expectation expressed in compliance and regulation and our department aspires for all of our preschools to achieve the 'exceeding' rating to raise the bar on quality. We have a key focus on exceeding practice in quality areas 1 - educational program and practice, 5 - relationships with children and 7 - governance and leadership because we know that these are the key levers of quality and support children's learning and development outcomes.

Quality teaching and learning is driven through the Early Years Learning Framework planning cycle. Planning for ongoing quality improvement in educator practice is driven by the Preschool Quality Improvement Plan through the improvement cycle. Use of these models and deep understanding of the National Quality Standard demonstrates commitment to high-quality practice at all times and will ensure our preschools achieve our goals and aspirations.

Our commitment to quality in every department preschool and in the experience of children and families who access them is underpinned by the 8 themes outlined in this position statement.

PRESCHOOL POSITION STATEMENT

Key Messages

Quality preschools

Children in South Australia have the right to high-quality educational preschool programs that support their learning and development in their local government preschool

Children grow and learn in the context of their family and community

Children's learning is dynamic and holistic, with each child learning in their own way and at their own pace

Timely and effective support ensures children have the assistance they need to fully engage in preschool

Every child at preschool makes progress towards learning and development outcomes

Strong educational leaders guide high-quality evidence-based practice and plan for continuous improvement

Knowledgeable, skilled and supported teachers and educators ensure each child progresses in their learning and development

Preschools demonstrate high-quality practice at all times in the best interest of children's outcomes





Government of South Australia
Department for Education