Teaching from the heart

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Creating joy and wonder for learners

“I wanted to have paint up to my elbows.”
- David Gilkes
Welcome to your Spring issue of Early Horizons.

Allen Blewitt, the Chairman of the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards, has spent 41 years in the education sector. In this issue, he discusses the value of educators who inspire and exceed expectations to transform young lives.

Two such inspirational early childhood educators, Ariel Wadick and David Gilkes, were among the 12 national award recipients at this year’s ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA). Both Ariel and David made career changes to become early childhood educators and neither have looked back since. We spoke with them about their contribution to early childhood education, which earned them the prestigious NEiTA awards.

If you are familiar with Reggio Emilia you would have heard of Loris Malaguzzi. We know he developed the Reggio Emilia philosophy and in this issue we find out more about who this great man was and what he achieved.

Like Loris Malaguzzi, Professor Collette Tayler has had a lifelong commitment to early education. We talk to the Chair in Early Childhood Education and Care at The University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education about her brilliant career.

We also chat to Nancy Bell, Chief Executive of Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand about the ‘Continuity of learning’ approach currently being promoted in New Zealand to help children moving from their early learning environments to school. This approach links early childhood services and schools to help smooth the transition.

Networking can be the last thing on a busy educator’s mind, however it is a powerful tool that helps you connect with other professionals. We provide you with some tips to help get you started.

We know young children can be fussy with food. Dietician and mother of four, Kate Wengier, provides some helpful advice on how children can build positive relationships with food. And, we also have some healthy the children can get involved with.

Our regular research snippets section provides a snapshot of some of the latest research in early childhood development.

Don’t miss your chance to win one of 15 copies of Brain Rules for Baby, by John Medina, in our book reviews section on page 21. We also review some other great resources for adults.

Finally, if you haven’t done so already, be sure to check our new Early Horizons Facebook page at www.facebook.com/earlyhorizonsmagazine. ‘Like’ the page to share news, and all things early childhood related.

John Veleginis
Chief Executive Officer, ASG
It’s a good guess that the young students under David Gilkes’ care will never forget him. His sincerity, dedication and sense of humour are obvious, and when his face lights up at the mention of teaching it’s clear that this is a man who has found his calling. He doesn’t need to tell you there’s nothing he’d rather be doing than instructing, inspiring and collaborating with his young students. It’s as transparent as the crystal clear water of Tasmania’s bays, where he has lived for the past 10 years.

Gilkes was at Flinders University in Adelaide studying for a primary teaching degree about 20 years ago when his placement landed him in a year two classroom. Initially, he was discouraged and didn’t think it was a grade level he would enjoy teaching, but in retrospect “it was the best thing that had ever happened to me”, he said. “I wanted to have paint up to my elbows.”

“I’ve always been a very hands-on creative person who likes to get their hands dirty,” Gilkes explained, and “I just love getting down on the floor with the kids.” Needless to say, he swapped his degree, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Now teaching kindergarten students at Illawarra Primary School in Blackmans Bay, Gilkes is devoted to creating “experiences of joy and wonder” for his early learners. “We laugh all the time,” he said. “I like to sing and perform and we do a lot of songs together. Some of them are quite silly and we have a great time laughing together.” Gilkes’ humour is easy to spot—he has a natural story-telling voice that is full of intonation and melody.

There’s also a lot of depth below the surface, and Gilkes is eager to explain his teaching philosophy. “We laugh at our mistakes ... we don’t see it as a problem, but as a way of going forward.” He’s keen to explain too that teachers should take nothing but their best selves into the classroom, and leave any personal problems at the door. “The kids deserve us to be there, and support them and be alongside them ... and we can’t do that if we’ve got our own issues,” he said.

Nominated for an ASG National Excellence in Teaching Award (NEITA) in 2014, Gilkes is deeply respected by both his parent community and his teaching colleagues. Described recently by a former colleague as a “treasure from Tasmania,” it appears those words are a well-shared sentiment both in Canberra—where he taught for 15 years—and in his current role in Tasmania.

“I aim to go in to work every day and approach it with joy because that’s what kids deserve and that’s what makes learning happen,” Gilkes said. “If there’s no joy—no relationship in that way, then there’s no learning.”

In Tasmania, kindergartens are part of primary schools and Gilkes is a big fan of this organisational approach because it provides an easy transition for the children from kindergarten to prep. “Our kindergarten is attached to the school, but our outside area is separated from the main school,” he said. “As the year goes on we give them opportunities to transition into that big space.”

There’s also easy access to the beach at Blackmans Bay and a bush reserve close by, so the children are lucky to be surrounded by rich, natural learning environments. Gilkes ensures the local shops are part of their learning program too, so the children can develop and nurture important connections with their own community.

One of the most valuable features of the week is the kindergarten kitchen that sees children participate in preparing their own lunches on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. A vegetable garden supports the kitchen so that children can see where their food comes from, and Gilkes ensures the lunches are a celebration that fosters relationships between the children and the food they eat. They set the table using real
glasses to drink water from, instead of plastic drink bottles, and place a vase of fresh flowers on the table.

The biggest influence on Gilkes’ teaching is Reggio Emilia, and he rejoices in its emphasis on cooking and sitting around the table celebrating food and each other’s company. “In Reggio Emilia, the kitchen staff are part of the school,” he said, describing the interwoven facets of the approach.

“It’s not just about us saying ‘This is where food comes from’—we’re constructing that knowledge together.”

Gilkes also endeavours to develop meaningful relationships with his students’ families. “I’m a really strong believer that a family is the child’s first teacher, and they’re the most important thing in the child’s life,” he said. When family members walk into his classroom Gilkes wants them to feel that they’re in “an extension of their home; an extension of their beliefs; an extension of their values.”

One of the profound pieces of wisdom that Gilkes acquired on his first trip to Reggio Emilia was that families should be the main actors in constructing the school. It was a concept that resonated with him and that has become part of his teaching philosophy. He believes parents should be deeply involved in their children’s learning and worries that the more common tokenistic ways parents are invited to participate, such as reading or helping with art activities, badly shortchange them.

At the beginning of each day Gilkes makes himself completely available to children, their parents and families. “There are so many things that can happen, and that happen all at once,” he said, “but that part of the day is the most important for me.” He opens the door at 8.30 am, and “When I open that door in the morning and parents come in,” he said, “a switch goes on inside me and I say ‘Today is going to be the best day ever.’”

“I make those kids and families feel so welcome by my enthusiasm—my energy, my excitement—for what the day is going to hold.”

Gilkes has travelled to Reggio Emilia in northern Italy three times and is convener of the Tasmanian Research Network. Highly regarded within the Reggio network, he is dedicated to sharing Reggio inspired education with fellow teachers and educators. He is also a strong believer that a lot of key elements of the Early Years Learning Framework sit easily within Reggio Emilia philosophy.

Creative out-of-the-square thinking comes naturally to Gilkes and when he says: “We have a choice in how we approach things,” he is demonstrating the true pioneering spirit that has seen him become so widely respected in the early learning sector.

Opposite page: David Gilkes
Below: Children getting their hands dirty at Illawarra Primary School

“We laugh at our mistakes ... we don’t see it as a problem, but as a way of going forward.”
The brilliant career of Professor Tayler

Professor Collette Tayler’s lifelong commitment to teaching children and researching early childhood has changed the educational landscape for many young children in Australia.

SHARON LAPKIN

There are few academics and educational researchers who can draw on almost half a century of professional experience and knowledge. But Professor Collette Tayler, who holds the Chair in Early Childhood Education and Care at The University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education can. And if the early education sector could nominate its living treasures, she would be on the list and applauded—without a doubt—by those whose lives she has changed.

In the 1960s Tayler trained as an early years infant specialist teacher. After graduating, she taught in pre and lower primary schools in regional, rural and remote locations in Queensland. Then she moved to Western Australia where she raised a family and worked in education over a further 23 years.

Tayler’s dedication to the education of young children has seen her take up academic posts in five different universities over more than four decades. Her work has been in roles such as head of school of early childhood, and in the academic areas of both early childhood and primary teaching.

After working at the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in Paris where she was involved with Dr John Bennett in the 20 country review of early childhood education and care provision, Starting Strong II, Tayler was recruited by Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education in 2007 to lead the development of its graduate program in early childhood.

It was a serendipitous move because it has ended up being a role that has brought work from “the country, the rural and all of my travel together”, Tayler said. “I’ve come right back around now in my research, and much of my work is through the [Australian Research Council’s] Science of Learning Research Centre with very young Indigenous children and families in rural and remote locations.”

Tayler is currently director of four major research studies into early childhood. The largest of these is the E4Kids study, which is spanning a period of five years and looking at ‘the effectiveness of early childhood education and care programs in two states of Australia’.

The E4Kids study commenced in 2010, and it was the largest Australian Research Council grant ever awarded to the social, behavioural and economic sciences. With an ambitious goal of tracking around 2500 three and four year old children through childcare, kindergarten and preschool programs over five years, the study is now in its final stages.

Trained researchers used tests from the Woodcock–Johnson Tests of Cognition and Achievement to measure the children’s intellectual abilities. The children were assessed individually every year for three years in their early learning and school settings, and the last sample of this cohort is currently taking the NAPLAN tests.

Some early results from the E4Kids study are showing that the bottom decile of children (those who generally need the most support) “are moving away from their peers, and are effectively progressing too slowly in those years before they enter school”, Tayler said. “It says a great deal to us about the importance of really well-focused, intentional teaching in play settings, and why it’s important to have very good early intervention services.”

While play remains the central context for children’s learning, Tayler said that “inside of play the amount of instructional support is relatively low in any of the settings observed, and where it is higher we have evidence that children are doing better”.

The answer is not simply creating a play setting and giving children the opportunity to explore. “Educators have to put active ingredients in to make it work, to advance learning,” Tayler said. “I don’t think that
understanding has been clear enough, and it’s not as easy to do as it may sound ... adults need to interact very particularly with young children to build their attention, to advance their receptive and expressive language, and to build the depth of understanding about concepts in the very early stages."

Adults in play settings are “critical catalysts in advancing children’s learning and their early reading,” Tayler said, “and, to some extent, that leaves adults in some tension”. When do you intervene? How do you not take control, but prompt and cue? The answer lies “within the method of play-based learning—of not taking over and totally directing, but ensuring you really are probing and pulling out the learning, the concepts, the language and the mathematical understandings.” Tayler explained.

Quality feedback to young learners is also very important. Emotional support is essential and yet strokes such as ‘Well done!’ don’t sufficiently activate learning, Tayler explained. Whereas, asking ‘What makes it work?’ or ‘How did you do this?’ and other open questions that push out enquiry are beneficial. Explaining out loud sequential steps in an activity, modelling language and using learning formats that facilitate children’s enquiry are also effective tools.

Some early learners such as new migrants or refugee children, and children who come into Australian early childhood settings where they make their own choices all day, effectively vanish and can spend a lot of time wandering, Tayler said—not engaging with other children or their educators. “They’re not trouble,” she explained, “they’re just quiet and can be unnoticed in a busy play setting.” Educators and teachers need to be “attuned and attentive to intentional teaching inside of play and ensuring at a child-level that we’re really looking at what’s happening.” Supporting these children to learn how to get along, become involved in activities, and building the social cohesion skills of the group is essential to all children’s development, she said.

For children from different language groups, Tayler advocates paying careful attention to understanding the concepts being built as these children advance their home languages and English. “The concepts are not always the same and educators may not realise that even though children might be using English, they are still building a conceptual base in a different language and those concepts are different,” she said. “We have to be more probing and thoughtful about introducing concepts.”

Tayler is also working with communities in remote Australia that implement the Australian Abecedarian Approach (3A program). Professor Joseph Sparling, pioneer of the world-renowned approach, has travelled from the United States to advise on the programs, involving very young Aboriginal children and their local communities. The program focuses on deep language learning and intensive regular interactions between caregivers and children, and Tayler expects these initiatives to make a significant difference to the participants’ lives.

Ensuring that early childhood teachers receive the best pedagogical instruction available is another of Tayler’s passions. She points out that a lot of work has been done “providing educators with contextual understandings about what it’s like to work in the field” but she is concerned that there are gaps in this well-intentioned approach.

“We’ve paid a lot of attention to the context of education, and to some of the theories, but I’m not sure there is enough time given now to the practical pedagogy and the techniques,” she said. Teacher education, and practice with coaching makes a difference. “In our program at the Graduate School we use a clinical model where the candidates must demonstrate teaching and pass oral praxis examinations each semester. We teach not so much about teaching, but how to teach.”

If you’re interested in learning more about Tayler’s research visit the following sites.

http://bit.ly/1AHgXVq

Opposite page: Professor Collette Tayler

“They’re not trouble,” she explained, “they’re just quiet and can be unnoticed in a busy play setting.”
Allen Blewitt discusses the value of our inspiring educators who exceed expectations and transform young lives.

This year marks 41 years since I ventured into a secondary school classroom as a first year out teacher; 41 years of continuous learning and appreciation of the positive power of education to transform lives. It is fair to say that I have always been an idealist and for me helping others achieve their full potential remains a powerful motivator whether I am acting as a teacher, a lecturer, a manager of people or a mentor to emerging leaders.

My core educational values came from my parents and my maternal Dutch grandmother. I had a sense from them that my role was to achieve to the full extent of my skills. But had also to give back to society and help others where I could, to respect differences and extend tolerance to others, care for those less fortunate, and be committed to justice and equality of opportunity.

As Chair of the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) I feel privileged to encounter the work of so many inspirational teachers and educators whose impact on Australian and New Zealand children goes far beyond what society expects of them. The work we see has not occurred overnight, it is the fruit of passion and hard work, of patience and structured care, of inspiration and love. If you have children who have been taught by one of the ASG NEiTA recipients over the years, you have been given a blessing and your children have been given a legacy, which will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

I reflect on the fact that I was fortunate to be taught in year 6 by a wonderful man who had emigrated from Lithuania after World War II and brought his considerable educational skills to bear on an inner city primary school. He understood his students. He was strict but trusting and provided stretch learning and cultural richness. Competition was evident but kept in balance with recognition of individual skills. He identified and encouraged my interest in choral singing, which still gives me great pleasure today. This teacher would certainly have been an ASG NEiTA nominee had ASG NEiTA been around at the time!

One of the trends we have seen in ASG NEiTA in recent years has been an apparent increase in the number of nominees from the early childhood sector. With all the pressures on success in selective school entry exams and university entrance scores it can be easy for some to overlook the fundamental importance of good early childhood education. I am pleased that parents and communities value their early childhood educators.

From my time as an education lecturer I think I developed an almost intuitive sense of what made a good early childhood educator. Of course, we had criteria to be met, but parents I talk to agree that the moment you walk into a good early learning environment, the warmth, energy, care, creativity and focus

Allen Blewitt is Chair of the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) and Chair of the Education Advisory Committee at ASG (Australian Scholarships Group). He has been appointed to fill a casual vacancy on the ASG Board of Directors.

Allen is currently Associate Director for Cambridge English Language Assessment in Australia and New Zealand, and a director of Cambridge Box Hill Language Assessment. He has been a secondary school teacher, university lecturer and teacher educator in NSW. Allen has also served in a variety of senior positions including Deputy CEO and Director of Education and Professional Development with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (ICAA).
on individuals becomes obvious. When you add a strong knowledge of how children develop and how to create positive learning experiences, and progressive development of literacy and numeracy, then the foundations are there.

Good teachers and educators—and especially good early childhood educators—are always open to new ideas and experiences. In Australia today there is interest in the whole philosophy of Reggio Emilia—a form of inquiry learning, which is being pursued by many educators. We saw several ASG NEiTA nominations from teachers who were exploring nature learning and with an increasing emphasis on collecting various examples of child work (photos, voice recordings and work samples) we are seeing what is called pedagogical documentation develop more strongly. After all, when you think about it, such examples of the work of a developing child can be much more informative and powerful than a short sentence on a report card as a way of tracking educational progress.

Over time, I hope to see ASG and ASG NEiTA become a source of thoughtful and independent commentary about education and current education issues. After all, we are working with significant numbers of the most influential change agents in the country; except that their focus is on our future citizens, not just on corporate success.

- Allen Blewitt

About the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards

The ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) is an initiative of the Australian Scholarships Group (ASG). For 21 years ASG NEiTA has given communities the opportunity to formally thank their hard-working and inspirational educators, centre directors, teachers and principals across Australia and New Zealand.

Founded in 1994, ASG NEiTA has established itself as a leader in identifying and promoting the good work of outstanding educators and teachers.

Great teachers change the future, and the NEiTA awards are a celebration of teaching and learning for the entire educational community.

In Australia each year, ASG NEiTA presents 60 state and territory awards to recipients, with 12 of those recipients selected to receive national awards. In New Zealand 18 regional awards are presented to recipients every two years, with six of those recipients selected to receive national awards.

Recipients of the national awards in Australia and New Zealand receive a specially crafted NEiTA crystal apple and a professional development grant.

In Australia, a Disability Inclusions Grant is also awarded to one national recipient, and one teacher is selected as the Australian teacher ambassador to attend the International Space Camp held at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Alabama.

Almost 30,000 teachers have been nominated by their communities across Australia and New Zealand since the awards started in 1994.

ASG NEiTA started in 1996 in New Zealand. More than $750,000 in grants and prizes have been distributed by ASG NEiTA since the awards started 21 years ago.

Nominations have now closed for the current award cycle. Nominations open again in Australia in April 2016, and in New Zealand in April 2017.

For more visit:  
www.asg.co.nz/neita
When I was younger, I always thought I’d be an artist,” Ariel Wadick tells us, as we sit chatting in a sun-dappled room looking over the garden of the Anne Dennis Children’s Centre in Northcote, Melbourne.

Through the glass window I admire an enchanting garden filled with colour, activities and art—the type of welcoming outdoor space that invites you to dive in and explore.

“I grew up in the country and then moved to Sydney and got the marks to get into a really good design course at UTS (University of Technology Sydney), and that’s really what I thought I wanted to do,” Wadick continues. “I just wanted to make things and be creative, but the restriction and structure of design didn’t really suit me in the end.”

After her visual design course Wadick moved to Melbourne and commenced a course in early learning. Soon she was working in a centre and, “something clicked”. She found she was able to put her creativity and design skills into practice in a “beautiful, spontaneous, experimental, truly creative environment,” which was, of course, the early learning sector.

“That was 12 years ago and I’ve never looked back,” Wadick recalls. “It felt like all of my history and myself could come into this job—I felt fulfilled in so many ways.” In 2008, she commenced her degree, a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education at Deakin University, and is now a qualified and very contented kindergarten teacher.

Wadick says the children she has taught over the years have helped her grow both as an educator and a person. “Working as a teacher has taught me more about myself than anything else I have experienced,” she says. And every day she endeavours to reach out to each of her current students in significant and meaningful ways.

While it can be difficult to provide individual attention to 25 children at the same time—to support them, to listen to them individually and to build trust—it’s something Wadick strives to achieve and with great success. Her accomplishments have culminated in formal recognition on two occasions over the past couple of years.

Wadick was a 2014 Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) NEiTA recipient, and was also presented with the RESPECT (Recognition of Excellent Sustainable Practices in Early Childhood Teaching) award for her ongoing project ‘Making sustainability relevant and meaningful in the kindergarten program’.

Sustainability is Wadick’s great passion and an area in which she has developed a high level of expertise.

The Annie Dennis Children’s Centre has been a mainstay of suburban Northcote’s landscape for more than 80 years, but it is also a centre that has evolved and adapted to new ways of thinking—including environmentally focused teaching practices. Located in a leafy narrow street, just off the main shopping precinct, the centre’s inner-city vibe is contrasted by light-filled spaces, an assortment of animals and a garden that contains various plants, including a Moreton Bay fig tree that must be almost 100 years old.

“Having hands-on contact with animals is vital to help children develop understandings about the world,” Wadick says. The centre also does what Wadick calls ‘the every day living things’ such as worm farming, composting, collecting eggs from the chickens, and vegetable farming.

According to Wadick, it isn’t enough to keep animals and grow food. She advocates and practises extending those activities and having conversations about where food comes from, as well as learning how to take care of “our own waste”. The children have access to the outdoors all the time, and activities, such as giving their food scraps to the chickens, are daily activities that foster their sense of personal responsibility.

Another essential component of Wadick’s program is using as much...
recycled material as possible. Most of her art supplies come from hard rubbish or the op shop, and each year she runs a treasure hunting project where the children, along with their parents and families, bring in bits of recycling they’ve found and collected. “The kids are so open; it’s a perfect age to look at waste in a different way and ask ‘Could we use this again?’ she says.

“The kids become really vigilant,” Wadick adds, as she describes the reports she gets from parents about their children’s eagerness to turn unwanted items into exciting new pieces. “How powerful it can be to teach young children … we feel like we don’t have any power, but we do … we know that early childhood is so important for life habits and ways of thinking,” she says.

The obligatory end-of-year concert doesn’t occur in Wadick’s kindergarten. Instead she organises an annual art exhibition that regularly takes her community’s breath away. Many of the children’s recycling items are used in the art exhibition, which Wadick organises on a weekend in a local community centre. Making an event of it makes it special, and each year it varies depending on the interests of the children. It also provides an opportunity for parents to applaud their children’s creativity and recycling efforts.

Last year it was predominantly “giant intricate wonderland sculptures,” Wadick says, and her hot glue gun was well utilised in helping the children construct their art pieces.

Wadick describes her work environment as a place for self-expression. “My whole room and yard are like my palette,” she explains, and “Being a kinder teacher encapsulates all of my favourite things.” It’s clear that Wadick’s early learners are indeed lucky to be able to spend their days in her care, and it’s tempting to imagine how her creative world view will play out in their lives as they grow into teenagers and adults. Whatever is in the children’s future, they are destined to have an increased knowledge of what constitutes good citizenship through daily exposure to sustainability practices—and perhaps there’s even a great artist being nurtured!
Who was Loris Malaguzzi?

Anybody familiar with Reggio Emilia has probably heard of Loris Malaguzzi—but who was this great man?

SHARON LAPKIN

Loris Malaguzzi knew he wanted to work with children from an early age. Born in 1920, he grew up in the small town of Correggio in northern Italy. Growing up under the regime of dictator Benito Mussolini, he described World War II as something that “gobbled up my youth.”

Malaguzzi studied pedagogy at the University of Urbino in the historic walled hill-town of Urbino in Central Italy, before commencing his career as a primary school teacher. By 1950, he had completed his postgraduate studies in psychology and graduated as an educational psychologist. Malaguzzi founded the Psycho-Pedagogical Medical Centre in Reggio Emilia and worked there for 20 years. He also worked as an adviser to the Italian Ministry of Education.

According to local history, shortly after the end of World War II Malaguzzi heard a rumour about some strange goings-on in town, so he climbed on his bicycle and pedalled over to see for himself.

There he encountered a group of peasant women cleaning old bricks by the bank of a stream. He asked what they were doing and was told of their plan to build a school. “Our children are just as intelligent as those of the upper-classes,” the women told Malaguzzi, and explained how they wanted to give their children a chance to realise their potential by educating them in a new school.

Evidently, that was enough to win over Malaguzzi and he willingly enlisted in their unique educational initiative. The involvement of parents in the school was direct and ongoing. Everybody contributed in any way they were able. Mothers would show up bearing food and other items that could benefit the children. When money was tight, funds were raised from the local community.

The turning point came when the city council of Reggio Emilia succumbed to popular pressure and established the first municipal preschools in 1963. Then in 1971, the first infant-toddler centres were added.

Fast forward to 2015 and there are now many municipal centres for infants and toddlers, as well as 20+ preschools operating in the town. In all, virtually every child in Reggio Emilia attends some form of preschool education.

Educators and teachers across the world travel to Italy every year to experience the Reggio philosophy in action, and many come away inspired and keen to continue Malaguzzi’s legacy in their own countries.

Loris Malaguzzi once told a story that encapsulates the essence of his educational philosophy. At one point the children in one of the Reggio Emilia preschools wanted to build a table modelled on one that was already in their classroom. At first they measured with their fingers, then their feet, then their shoes. Then, after realising that different shoes provided different measurements, they

“Our task, regarding creativity, is to help children climb their own mountains, as high as possible. No one can do more.”
agreed to use one particular shoe as their ruler. This process of trial and error injected excitement into the educational process as the children learned to solve complex problems independently.

“We must credit the child with enormous potential and the children must feel that trust,” Malaguzzi said. “The teacher must give up all his preconceived notions and accept the child as a co-constructor. This means a willingness to question all your own abilities, your knowledge and to become humble. Only then will you be able to listen to the child, to set off on a common search, to educate each other together.” He saw this as a key stepping stone in the development of children into compassionate, responsible adults.

Anyone visiting an early childhood education centre operating on the Reggio Emilia model will observe so-called asili-nido, which roughly translates into ‘toddlers’ nests’. And each of these nests features an atelier—an art studio that is staffed by a specialist art teacher called an atelierista. Rather than formal art lessons, the atelierista encourages the children to develop symbolic languages through drawing, painting, writing, dramatic play and sculpture, learning to express their understanding of the world around them in their own way. Malaguzzi called this the ‘hundred languages of children’.

This revolutionary view of how best to educate children made Loris Malaguzzi into an icon of early childhood pedagogy across the world. He became a figure of veneration, receiving awards and prizes in recognition of his work—but perhaps more importantly, he gave hope and empowerment to generations of parents and teachers who wanted a better way to educate after the ravages of the war.

Despite his formal retirement in 1985, Malaguzzi continued his involvement in the educational system he had pioneered. He participated in conventions and conducted almost daily visits to Reggio’s preschools. The education of children was a labour of love for Malaguzzi that continued almost to the day of his death in 1994. He died suddenly of a heart attack in his home six weeks after his beloved wife Nilde Bonaccino had passed away. They had one child, a son.

In 1992, Malaguzzi was awarded the prestigious Lego Prize, which was presented to him for his extraordinary contribution to the lives of children. In 1993, he was also recognised by the Kohl Foundation in Chicago for his work in pedagogy. And by 2013, word had truly spread about his educational philosophy and an American CNN news team reported that the Reggio Emilia approach was “considered the world’s best preschool model”.

To watch a rare interview with Loris Malaguzzi (with English subtitles) see this YouTube video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pdaqmPovMo

Opposite page: Loris Malaguzzi

“Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn.”

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

SHARON LAPKIN

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

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

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

Start your networking campaign by seeking out local groups in your vicinity. Look for resources offered by childhood associations and similar groups. They may offer events that will enhance your professional knowledge and allow you to forge new relationships with fellow early childhood educators or teachers. Show an interest in your contact’s personal story—what motivated them to choose early childhood education? Ask them about their ongoing career goals. This demonstrates the meeting isn’t a one-way street and provides an opportunity to build personal rapport.

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

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

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

And don’t be shy about handing out business cards and contact details. Hand these out to your new contacts and acquaintances and attend professional development days and conferences, sit with someone different and introduce yourself.
Daniela Kavoukis’ networking tips

• Find out about your local council network group. Do they have networks for council run centres, or a wider provider network group? Phone and speak to the early childhood development officer at your local council.

• As a director of a community managed group, look at what networks there are out there such as the Children’s Services Coordinators Association network. Attend these seminars.

• Facebook and LinkedIn have network groups. Join these, read and start posting—search for ‘early childhood’ in the search box.

• Open your centre for a ‘twilight evening’ where other local centres can visit and see what you do, and share ideas. Send out invitations to the centres. This enables the staff team to also network.

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

• Make up business cards with your name, your qualification, email address and contact number.

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

We asked Daniela Kavoukis, director of the Flemington Cooperative, National Excellence in Teaching Award recipient and executive member of the Children’s Services Coordinators Association to share her tips for networking.

ASG’s Local Community Program can provide extra funding for your centre

You’re invited to participate in ASG’s Local Community Program in Australia, where you will receive vouchers from ASG education resources and the opportunity to receive one of our community grants, valued at $2500 each.

By participating in our program, you will receive a $150 voucher from ASG:

• if you choose to display our informative brochures and posters in your centre. We can also provide show bags to every child in your centre, which contain lots of goodies as well as information about ASG.

• for every five families from your centre that ASG visits to explain how we support children’s education.

• when an information and educational night is held at your centre, to demonstrate to parents how the foundations for their child’s formative years can be laid.

Register your interest at www.asg.com.au/local or call our team on 03 9276 7997 to find out more about the program.

Available in Australia only

About ASG (Australian Scholarships Group)

ASG is dedicated to supporting children’s education – it’s all we do. For more than 40 years, ASG has been helping families to prepare for the costs of their children’s education. Since 1974, more than 515,000 children have been enrolled with ASG and more than $2 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments have been returned to members and their children. But now ASG is moving towards offering more than just education funds, creating an expanding range of resources, online tools and guides to support parents and nurture children in their education journey to reach their full potential. If you’re interested in learning more about ASG, and the important role we play in assisting parents, please visit asg.com.au.
For early childhood educators, watching their bright-eyed graduates move on to primary school can be a mixed experience. While many children make this transition easily, others are daunted by the amount of change required of them. Parents may also struggle with navigating the new ‘big school’ context.

Right now, there’s a real push in New Zealand for ‘Continuity of Learning,’ linking early childhood services and schools to ensure a smooth transition for children.

In May this year, the Education Review Office (ERO) released a national report, which examined how well New Zealand early childhood services and schools are supporting transition.

Nancy Bell, Chief Executive of Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand was on the advisory committee of another report, commissioned by the Ministry of Education describing ways that early childhood education (ECE) services and schools are sharing information about children’s learning in the early years.

She said the two reports identify good practice around transition from early childhood services to school, but also recommend more emphasis be placed on ECE and primary teachers working together to agree on shared learning outcomes for children.

‘At the moment, early childhood teachers will be knowledgeable about their own curriculum and school teachers likewise, but there’s not always a very good understanding of each other’s curriculum. Yet that’s quite important when you’re thinking about early learning continuity. This doesn’t mean a top down approach to what is often called ‘school readiness’. It’s about identifying knowledge, skills and dispositions that are important for learning in each environment combined with skilful teaching that supports every child’s growing competence and confidence in these key areas.

‘I think early childhood educators need to know the primary school curriculum, so thinking zero to eight years—not just about their own curriculum—will help them make the transition links.

‘I think early childhood teachers need to have confidence that what they’re assessing in the early childhood years will be useful and valuable for the child to take into school. So really paying attention to how they’re gathering data about the child’s learning—what do they already know and what interests them—and finding best ways for the ECE centre, child and family to share this ‘learning story’ with the school.

‘Receiving this information ahead of time enables the school to be ready for the child as opposed to the child having to be ready for school.

‘Some shifts in practice are needed to achieve that for every child.

‘There’s often a gap here and so getting the early childhood services and schools working together on planned transitions would be advantageous, but to do this well, there may need to be some shared professional learning.’

Some lower quality services may misunderstand what is required by schools as children transition, said Bell, for example focusing on rote learning and worksheets. That’s a pity because these practices can create anxiety and a negative self image, whereas what schools need is for children to come along with confidence and a sense of themselves as successful learners.

Bell explains, ‘Successful transition will build the child’s sense of confidence and confidence is a learner. Where a transition is not so successful, where the child goes in and experiences a huge disjunct from the early childhood service and says, ‘I can’t do this. I don’t know how to learn’, or they’re very distressed because they haven’t...’
formed relationships that support them as learners, then they’re likely to lose a lot of time and potentially, the child gets into a bit of a negative spiral where they see themselves as not being successful and that can be very difficult to change.”

It’s very important that at every transition point, children carry a positive sense of themselves as learners who are capable of adjusting, changing and forming new relationships and are also resilient.

For children and families who are transitioning from the early childhood sector into the first years of schooling, there are many ways transition can take place.

This can happen informally, where parents take their child along to the school. But where early childhood centres and schools work closely together, teachers can visit children in the centres and talk to parents about what their children can expect, arrange a series of preschool entry visits, and coordinate a school buddy arrangement.

Bell said successful transition plans must take account of children’s different cultural backgrounds.

“It’s very important that both the early childhood service and schools are really understanding of the child’s cultural background, and what strengths they bring to the education setting. It’s really important teachers at both levels are thinking about how things like stories, language and visual images can be incorporated to reflect the child’s culture.”

Where a child has additional learning needs, transition planning is even more crucial.

“When a child has an identified special need, not only will the early childhood teacher, school teacher and parent be involved but there may also be other specialist services that are supporting that child’s learning. So getting everyone involved as early as possible is essential. With so many people involved it’s important that the child’s parents are empowered in that relationship, putting them in the driver’s seat as they work with professionals and establish learning goals for their child.”

Bell acknowledges for transition to be truly successful, there has to be commitment from management.

“One of the things that really struck me from the ERO report was that the leadership of the early childhood service and of the school has to be committed to supporting transition but also reviewing how it’s going. What is recommended is that both the schools and early childhood services are systemically inquiring into the transition processes, doing a self review if you like—’what do we know about our transition and how well are they supporting children’s ongoing learning?’ This means following up on our young learners once they’ve been in school for a while to see how well the transition worked for them, something we tend not to do.”

While the research is specific to New Zealand, Bell said transition should be a focus of most OECD countries.

“There is an international focus on raising achievement and those very early years are seen as formative for children’s ongoing learning and particularly, that transition from early childhood education into school is a very important thing to get right, if children are to have learning success.

“This focus is reflected in the Australian National Quality framework, which makes reference to transition practices.”

Bell admits there are quite a lot of systemic barriers.

“It’s not easy for early childhood educators to find the time for school visits and meetings. The reality is that most ECE services and schools will have multiple relationships, as children at any one centre usually move on to a number of different schools. The logistics can also be quite challenging but I think we’re going to see a growing emphasis on finding ways to make this happen for the benefit of our learners. I think the education sector is up for this challenge because we all want to see our children getting off to the best start.”

Opposite page: Nancy Bell

“Successful transition will build the child’s sense of confidence”
It’s important that young children develop positive relationships with the food they eat. Dietitian Kate Wengier shares her expertise and experience with us.

Be polite to your veggies

One of the huge challenges that many people face when feeding little ones is fussy eating. Liking new flavours is most certainly a process, and doesn’t always happen straight away, but it can be disheartening when kids declare food as ‘yucky’ after one small mouthful or throw food on the floor without even tasting it first.

Keeping the atmosphere positive around food is key to helping create more adventurous eaters and you can use the ‘be polite’ rule to assist, whether you’re talking or reading about food, running a cooking or tasting activity or eating lunch together. The rule is simple—don’t be rude to food. Be polite to pumpkin, courteous to cauliflower and there’s no need to badmouth broccoli.

Toddlers tend to jump to ‘love or hate’ extremes when they experiment with food at first, particularly when it comes to healthy foods. So you can suggest some other descriptive ways that kids can voice their opinions about food, whether they like the food or not. Instead of declaring that it’s ‘yum’ or ‘yuck’, you can encourage kids to tell you other things about the food. For example, you could ask:

- Is it crunchy or soft?
- Is it sweet, sour or salty?
- What is your favourite colour in this meal?
- Does it make a crunching sound when you bite it?
- What does it feel like in your mouth?
This can tie into conversations about the five senses and describing foods in terms of colour, texture and smell. Steer clear of questions that can get a negative response such as ‘Do you like it?’ or ‘Isn’t it yummy?’ as the response could be a defiant ‘No’.

Creating other positive and kid-relevant talk around healthy food can also help to engage kids and keep the atmosphere light, fun and interactive, so that kids can have an enjoyable experience with food. Your class can create its own words and phrases, for example, you can refer to vegetables as colours and try to eat as many colours in one day as possible. Meanwhile, fish might be ‘smart food’, essential for counting or learning the alphabet.

Another great way to help kids to be adventurous and embrace new foods is to empower them and let them make their own choices. Here are some great recipes that allow kids to choose some of their own ingredients.

My muesli cookies

**Ingredients**
- 3 ripe bananas
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 cups rolled oats
- ½ cup desiccated coconut
- ¼ cup olive oil

Kids can choose from the following ingredients, half a cup in total required:
- Craisons, dried cranberries, dried apricots, sultanas, dried apple

**Method**
1. Preheat oven to 180 degrees
2. Mash bananas in medium-sized bowl
3. Add all ingredients and mix with wooden spoon
4. Line a tray with baking paper
5. Roll mixture into balls (about one tablespoon per ball) and place on baking tray
6. Press each ball to flatten slightly
7. Bake in the oven for about 20 minutes or until brown
8. Allow to cool on baking tray

My rainbow fruit salad

Fruit salad is a simple dish to prepare with kids and teachers can pre-cut the fruit and even allow children to slice the pieces smaller with a kid-safe knife.

Group the fruits into colours and kids can build up a layered fruit salad in a plastic cup, colour by colour, selecting the fruits they like.

**Ingredients**
- Use fruits that are in season. You can also use canned fruits (drained) or frozen ones.

- Choice of red fruits: watermelon, strawberries, raspberries
- Choice of orange and yellow fruits: pineapple, cantaloupe, mango, banana, apricot
- Choice of green fruits: kiwi fruit, honey dew, apple, pear, green grapes
- Choice of purple fruits: grapes, blueberries

**Method**
1. Wash fruit
2. Adults cut fruit into large chunks. Kids use kid-safe knife (like the Foost First Knife) to cut into smaller pieces
3. Allow kids to arrange their own salad in a plastic cup

About the author
Kate is a dietitian and mum to four young kids. She specialises in the development of fun, healthy-eating resources, education sessions and products for kids and parents. For colourful recipes and family eating tips visit foost.com.au
Book reviews

NO-DRAMA DISCIPLINE
Author: Daniel J Siegel, MD and Tina Payne Bryson, PHD
Publisher: Scribe
Format: paperback
RRP: $29.99

No-Drama Discipline sets out a dedicated set of insights that if applied judiciously will fulfil the title’s promise. Validate, validate, validate is the name of the game here and the team of Daniel Seigel and Tina Payne Bryson have together shown how their view on discipline will lead not only to happy and well-adjusted children but have the added benefit of lessening the overall angst that this side of parenting often engenders.

The ‘Mindsight’ tools topic is a great insight into a child’s self-control and coping mechanisms. And the upstairs/downstairs brain cartoon that can be read to your child makes the actions, impulses and emotions lesson a breeze.

This is a great book for parents with children of all ages, as well as grandparents trying to come to terms with the way their children are raising the grandkids.

Reviewed by Peter Eerden

PARENTING FROM THE INSIDE OUT
Author: Daniel J Siegel, MD and Mary Hartzell, MEd
Publisher: Scribe
Format: paperback
RRP: $29.99

As a clinical psychiatrist and author Daniel Siegel has more than 20 publications to his name. Some in collaboration with other specialists as is the case here. Mary Hartzell, a child development specialist, is the director of a highly respected Reggio-inspired preschool in the USA. Together with Daniel she wrote a best-selling novel more than a decade ago that has become a parenting classic.

This updated version clearly shows that their ‘guidelines to parental self-understanding’ have stood the test of time. Drawing on new findings in neuroscience and psychology they have completely updated the text and given us a lay person’s look at effective parenting.

Reviewed by Peter Eerden

THE HAPPY SLEEPER
Author: Heather Turgeon, MFT and Julie Wright, MFT
Publisher: Scribe
Format: paperback
RRP: $27.99

Many parents are familiar with the struggle to get their child to sleep though the night. In The Happy Sleeper authors Heather Turgeon and Julie Wright show parents how to introduce structure to their child’s sleeping to assist with falling asleep independently and develop correct sleep patterns for day and night.

As a child grows, their sleep requirements differ, and the book dedicates a chapter to each age range: baby (0–four months), baby and toddler (five months–two years) and child (two–six years).

The back of the book contains useful nap schedules as well as templates for a sleep progress chart, which can also be printed from the website (happysleeper.com).

Reviewed by Kelly McMillan
A book for every new parent

**Brain Rules for Baby**

**Author:** John Medina  
**Publisher:** Scribe  
**Format:** paperback  
**RRP:** $24.99

Playing Mozart to your womb will improve your baby's future maths score, listening to foreign language DVDs by the age of three will improve their vocabulary, and constantly telling your toddler they're smart, will boost their self confidence.

These are just a few of the parenting myths Dr John Medina debunks in the updated edition of *Brain Rules for Baby*.

Medina recognises that parents are swamped with conflicting information about pregnancy and raising a child thanks to websites, blogs, parenting books and well-meaning family and friends. He focuses on the science of brain development and recommends tips on raising a happy and smart child from zero to five years of age.

The author talks about the science of brain development in a way that is engaging and easy to understand. He uses funny anecdotes that will resonate with first-time parents as well as 'old hands' to provide practical tips and strategies to ensure a child has the right tools and queues to grow up to be a well balanced and intelligent toddler.

Each chapter focuses on a different element of raising a child and how external factors will impact on their development. Medina addresses the impact of your actions during pregnancy and how you and your partner’s relationship can affect their development before they are born. Once your child enters the world, he offers dedicated chapters to raising a smart child, a happy child and a moral child.

In these chapters Medina highlights the importance of constant interaction with your child—face time, not screen time. He also demonstrates how your child will benefit more if you praise effort rather than achievement and how to control those inevitable temper tantrums.

This updated edition of *Brain Rules for Baby* also includes a new chapter on sleep. Medina admits that the science behind sleep isn’t guaranteed but believes by explaining the two main different types of sleep—active and quiet—parents will have a better understanding on how to settle their child.

- Reviewed by Kelly McMillan

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**Giveaway**

*Early Horizons* has 15 copies of *Brain Rules for Baby* by John Medina to give away. To submit an entry, email your name and/or organisation and postal address to earlyhorizons@asg.com.au with ‘book giveaway’ in the subject line.

Entries close 30 November 2015. Winners will be chosen by ASG after the closing date.

**Conditions of entry**

One entry permitted per person or organisation. This is not a game of skill; readers must email their name/organisation and postal address to earlyhorizons@asg.com.au with ‘book giveaway’ in the subject line, by the competition closing date. ASG’s decisions as to entries, the allocation of winners across countries, states and regions, and the declaration of winners are final and no discussion or correspondence will be entered into.

The winners’ names will be published in the next issue of *Early Horizons*.

POPULAR EDUCATIONAL APPS FAILING TO TEACH

Some popular applications aimed at teaching young children are failing to teach them anything, research has found.

In a study by Swinburne University BabyLab director Jordy Kaufman and five American researchers, it was found that less than six per cent of the popular preschool applications were based on theories of early childhood education.

Developers didn’t “deliberately mislead” though, said Dr Kaufman. He said many of the apps provided learning outcomes by “instincts and best guesses”.

The research, which was partially published in *Psychological Studies in the Public Interest*, also found that parents were overwhelmed with the choice of educational games available.

“Apps would be vastly improved with guidance on how kids best learn,” he said.

Rather than more regulation being required for educational apps, parents needed to be more involved in their children’s learning, he said.

TWO YEAR DELAY IN DIAGNOSING AUTISM

A study has revealed that most Australian children with autism spectrum disorder are not being diagnosed until age four—two years after they can reliably be identified and provided with intervention.

“The delay is the difference between a child with autism having an intellectual disability and a child with autism not having an intellectual disability,” said Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, study leader and director of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre at La Trobe University.

More than 15,000 children with autism spectrum disorder took part in the survey, which found that less than three per cent of them were diagnosed by age two.

MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS ON MOBILE DEVICE USE

Using a mobile device to occupy toddlers could be detrimental to their social-emotional development, according to researchers.

A study conducted by Boston University School of Education found that for children under three, the use of interactive screen time could impair the development of skills needed for maths and science.

But it’s not all bad news. The researchers also found that some studies suggested the use of mobile devices help toddlers develop early literacy skills, and also improve academic achievement for students with autism.

Jenny Radesky, clinical instructor in developmental-behavioural pediatrics at Boston University School of Medicine, urged parents to increase “direct human to human interaction” with their children.

“At this time there are more questions than answers when it comes to mobile media,” she said.
This structured learning program provides a missing piece in the Early Childhood Curriculum. It has been specifically designed to accelerate the social-emotional development of children and focuses on five key foundation principles—Confidence, Persistence, Organisation, Getting along and Resilience.

The resources in the program have been developed to enhance the motivation, engagement and wellbeing of young children.

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*Conditions apply, see www.asg.com.au/early. Only open to Australian and New Zealand residents aged 18+ years with at least one child aged under 18 years as of 21/12/15 (eligible child). Starts 12/1/15. Ends 5 pm AEDST (manual entries) and 11:59 pm AEDST (online entries) 10/12/15. Maximum one entry per household. Draw: L5,553PSB, St Kilda Rd, VIC 3004, at 3 pm AEDST 21/12/15. Winners of prizes over $250 in The Australian 13/1/16. Prize (total): 1 x $7500 towards ASG fund/s for up to three eligible children (1st Prize); 1 x $5000 towards ASG fund/s for up to two eligible children (2nd Prize); 1 x $2500 towards an ASG fund for one eligible child (3rd Prize); 10 x ASG Little Learner Packs ($49.99 each); 10 x MY ASG membership ($29.99 each). Promoter: Australian Scholarships Group Friendly Society Limited (ABN 21 087 648 879), 23–35 Hanover St, Oakleigh VIC 3166 (Australia). Permits: NSW LTPS/14/10150, VIC 14/6053, ACT TP14/04474, SA T14/2410.
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