



Learning Conversations
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We take this opportunity to wish you and yours a festive holiday season and to invite you to our annual '**Post- Christmas celebration**' from **4:30pm on Tuesday 5 January at 272 Oxford St, Leederville**. Hope to see you there!

Learning Conversations News

As we come to the end of the year, we are finishing work, planning for the New Year and submitting proposals for new projects. We fondly remember past lives where things slowed during December and January - a thing of the past perhaps! Still, Anna is endeavouring to have time with her family who are visiting from Germany and celebrating the marriage of her son Mark to Claire, and Marie is singing her little heart out in a variety of Christmas celebrations. For those of you wishing to be Christmassed, you might like the **Red Kite** fundraiser 6:30-7:30pm on Tuesday 15 Dec at the Christchurch Church, in Claremont, the **UWA Choral Society** "Childhood of Christ" 6:30pm on Sunday 20 Dec or the **Georgian Singers** Nine Lessons and Carols at St Patrick's Church in Mt Lawley 7:30pm on Monday 21 December (in all of which, Marie sings).

Recently Marie spoke at Association of Independent Schools seminars for heads of department about '**Generational Attitudes**' as a way for helping staff work together more effectively. Anna has continued her evaluation of the **FIELD project**. Marie worked with **Childside Community School** about levels of achievement. We are still finalising curriculum for **Consumer and Financial Literacy** for the Professional Teaching Council of WA and countless other small tasks needing end of the year attention.

Once again we attended the **Australasian Facilitator's Network conference**, this year in Nelson, New Zealand. It was a truly stunning conference which wonderfully incorporated Maori culture and people such as the initial welcome and the use of the local beautiful Hakatu Marae for some sessions. Equally impressive were the number of Pakeha (non-Indigenous people) at the opening and close who confidently responded in Maori. It was a powerful reminder of how far we in Australia have to go to truly achieve reconciliation with our own indigenous people.

As usual, the conference provided a great launching pad for our annual business review. We now have a new 'Statement of Intent', new 'intentions' and new 'directions' for the next three years. Our focuses will remain on learning, and we have a special interest in the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework and the implications of the National Curriculum. But we intend to broaden our facilitation and co-facilitation training and make more use of these skills in organisational planning including Anna's growing knowledge, experience and skills in governance, beginning with 'governance sensitisation' i.e. 'the why' of 'good governance' as well as 'the how'. We are planning a calendar of workshops and encourage people who might wish us to facilitate workshops for teachers, schools, community groups, organisations and families to contact us soon so we can include you!

Reflections

We seem to again be at a time in our society where people are worried about quality and are looking at ways of ensuring that it happens. Child care regulations, the Early Years Learning Framework, National Curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority are all impacting on education. We are sure it is happening in other professions and workplaces too.



At the bottom of 'quality', however, there are people. Total Quality Management requires the involvement of all employees. The five Ss (sort, store, shine, standardise and sustain) require people to eliminate materials that do not belong, create logical storage, clean, make the work area the same so that procedures and abnormalities are obvious and to internalise rules and make them habits. In Business Process Re-engineering we need to identify capabilities which can and should influence the process design, including staff skills. Quality Control Circles require workers to take responsibility for self-correcting errors. Total Production Maintenance requires people to work as a team. At the root of it all, quality is about people. People work with and in relationships - and we can't legislate for good relationships!

Some years ago, Tim Muirhead showed us a 'circle of we' and pointed out that when relationships between clients (children, parents, customers) and staff are strong, energy is generated that reaches into the community and influences government. When relationships fall down, governments set up legislation, communities seek regulations and clients demand accountability. Whatever 'quality' processes we are living through actually depend on us.

Quality processes, when they are used by people doing the work can be fantastic tools for reflecting on the work being done *and learning*. Ensuring quality then becomes a framework for being, belonging and becoming rather than an imposition that causes stress and angst. Perhaps the New Year gives us an opportunity to think about how we can restore the balance so that quality is generated from us rather than imposed by others – and that we put the quest for good relationships at the heart of quality in any setting!

Interesting Connections

[How Young People are Faring '09: The National Report on the Learning and Work Situation of Young Australians](#) by Lyn Robinson, Stephen Lamb from [Foundation for Young Australians](#), October 2009, examines downward trends in terms of young people engaged in employment or study, and also looks at young people's wellbeing. Approximately 70 per cent of young people aged 15–19 were studying and 14 per cent were working full-time. Unemployment rates have risen sharply, and transition to the labour market is becoming more difficult. About 60 per cent of young people obtained a post-school qualification by the age of 24, with SES background influencing the type of qualification obtained. Social and economic wellbeing was associated with success in work and study.

[OECD Education Working Papers No. 24: Assessment and Innovation in Education](#) by Janet Looney, 2009. The effects of high-stakes testing on innovative teaching and assessment are examined in this report. While high-stakes testing has benefits, it can encourage teachers to 'teach to the test', and discourage risk-taking and innovation among teachers and students. These problems can be exacerbated when test results are used to judge and rank teacher and school performance. This study proposes three ways to redress the balance between the need for assessment and innovation. Firstly, a wide range of performance measurements need to be developed for both students and schools, assessing cognitive skills as well as content. Secondly, the alignment of standards and assessment needs to be reviewed. Thirdly, the impact of high-stakes assessments on teaching and learning needs to be evaluated further.

[The Implications of Poverty on Children's Readiness to Learn](#) by Fiona Hilferty, Gerry Redmond, Ilan Katz from [ARACY, WA](#), 2009, reviews research related to childhood poverty and the implications for children's capacity to learn, to inform a new agenda for reform. It reports that one in seven Australian children, and half of all Indigenous children, grow up in poverty, which can compromise children's ability to learn. Differences in language and behavioural development between children growing up in poverty and other children can be seen from around two years of age. Disadvantage can affect children's learning opportunities in several ways: the quality of the home



environment; the quality of parent–child interactions; the quality of care and learning outside the home environment; and the mental and physical state of the child's parents. High quality, intensive, and easily accessible preventative programs that offer services both at and outside the home environment can make a significant difference to children's development.

ACARA will release the **draft curriculum for K-10 English, mathematics, science and history** mid February and seek public consultation to May 2010. ACARA encourages your participation during this consultation period. Find out how you can get involved and provide feedback. Curricula for English, mathematics, science and history have been developed according to the stages described in ACARA's *Curriculum Development Process* paper. Work on national curriculum development in the second phase for geography, languages and the arts have begun in earnest. ACARA has recently developed position papers for these learning areas and is now working on producing initial advice papers for consultation in mid 2010.

Two important documents on Child Care have been released recently. The Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee has produced a report on the **Provision of childcare** and COAG has just released the **Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms**.

To learn more about the National Volunteering Strategy read the **National Volunteering Strategy Background Paper** or read the **communiqué** from the first meeting of the Volunteering Policy Advisory Group.

The **Playful Learning Wiki, four theoretical models of play**, includes Ralph Koster's **Theory of Fun for Game Design**, Brian Sutton-Smith's **Ambiguity of Play**, something from the **National Institute for Play** (a.k.a. Stuart Brown) and **Scot Osterweil's Four Freedoms of Play** - Freedom to Experiment, Freedom to Fail, Freedom to Try on Different Identities and Freedom of Effort.

The Innocenti Insight **Children in Immigrant Families in Eight Affluent Countries: Their family, national and international context** from UNICEF presents a statistical portrayal of children in immigrant families, drawing on research conducted in eight advanced industrialized countries - Australia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. This is the first study to present internationally comparable data for this group of children.

Realising the rights of young children: progress and challenges in Early Childhood Matters, Nov 2009, 113, from the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Marking 20 years of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this issue looks at various aspects of how child rights are being realised. It starts with a look at General Comment 7 on implementing child rights in early childhood and an interview with Lothar Krappmann, the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Additional articles include contributions from child-focused organisations in India and Brazil, and discussions about child rights in relation to Roma children, the challenges of implementing child rights in emergency situations, the "forgotten article" regarding the right to play, improving child-friendliness of urban environments, improving the education of key professionals, and the development of indicators.

Guidelines for treatment and assessment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) have been updated by the NHMRC and the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) to draw on the latest science and research. The draft guidelines have been written to help parents and doctors create holistic health plans for children with the disorder, with a view to fewer medications being prescribed

[Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children](#), from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, 3 December reports on a study that's been running since 2004 and has found today's children are less active and more obese than those born 20 years ago. Today's children are likely to be less anxious, have better social skills, more likely to have a working mother and attend childcare than their predecessors. A large amount of research from the study came out at the recent Growing up in Australia conference. One researcher has found one-in-five women smoked while pregnant, despite understanding the implications, and they're also more likely to continue after the birth of their baby if their partner smokes. Another researcher looked at how 'naughty' children responded to yelling and found that boys respond better to gentle reasoning while girls responded to either style. The research also shows 13 percent of three and four-year-olds and 20 percent of seven and eight-year-olds have TVs in their bedrooms. Meanwhile parents who are worried their children are using drugs or hanging out with the wrong crowd are turning to private investigators to spy on their children and are ordering drug testing kits online. A recent poll shows around 50 percent of parents are allowing their teenagers to drink at home, a practice which experts says potentially could harm their still developing brains. And a national survey of households with children has found more than half of families surveyed continue to experience financial hardship as a result of the Global Financial Crisis.

[Life Support: Young People's Needs in a Digital Age](#) by Michael Hulme from **[YouthNet](#)**, 2009. examines the needs of young people aged 16–24, for whom the internet is a 'natural' space. The internet is a key part of young people's lives; young people use the internet and other devices to build complex relationships with each other and online. The internet is considered a social and supportive place, and respondents feel that it brings people together and provides them with the high-quality, expert information they seek. The benefits of anonymity on the internet mean that young people, and particularly women, are more likely to seek advice and be honest. Young people want constant connectivity and instantaneous access to information, and are knowledgeable about navigating potential online risks.

[Connections between oral language and beginning reading](#) (from **[Bridging Divides: National Conference For Teachers Of English And Literacy 2009](#)**) by Susan Hill and Nicola Launder. A study has examined programs to develop the literacy levels of young students at a school serving a diverse, disadvantaged community. The staff at Blair Athol Primary in Adelaide had observed significant variation between the oral language proficiency of different groups of students. Over one year a teacher-researcher worked with a university academic and other teachers at the school to assess the oral language, vocabulary, phonology and levelled reading ability of 23 children in their first school year. A range of assessment tools and procedures were used. Based on an analysis of the results the teachers set up a play-based program to promote children's spoken literacy. The program was adapted as it progressed. Results were analysed after several months. The researchers identified complex variations in the vocabulary, reading achievement and phonological awareness of children from different cultural backgrounds. Indian students tended to score highly on reading assessments but low on vocabulary. Typically this group of students worked hard, with parental help, on drill and practice activities. The teachers commented that these students' focus on decoding supported their strong early reading performances, but might not equip them adequately for comprehension tasks involving more complex texts in later years. Another group of students was strong on vocabulary but weak on reading. They often had highly literate, affluent parents and literacy-rich home environments; they typically caught up on reading in later years. Children low on both vocabulary and reading typically came from refugee, Indigenous or low-income families. They generally lacked parental support for reading. Their phonological awareness was low, hindering them from segmenting words into distinct sounds. Contrary to expectations, the study did not find a strong relationship between oral language and reading proficiency. It therefore raises questions about the extent to which oral language development forms 'a neat, sequential base' for proficiency in written



language. Reading aloud and storytelling provide ways to develop children's vocabulary, phonological awareness and syntax simultaneously. The paper discusses a number of differences between spoken and written language.

Interesting Resources

[Teaching for Intercultural Understanding: Professional Learning Program](#)

Curriculum Corporation, Nov 2009 Intercultural understanding is essential for the development of a harmonious and democratic Australia. This professional learning program for values education offers support for educators in developing knowledge and competencies in teaching for intercultural understanding; it focuses on the importance of consciously and explicitly fostering social cohesion and social inclusion in local and global contexts. It draws on the intercultural understandings highlighted in two related resources, [Side By Side](#) and [World of Values](#). The modules cover topics such as developing a common values language, highlighting local, national and global issues of communities, peace and conflict, and exploring sociocultural boundaries.

100 must-read blogs for new teachers is an [article](#) in *Online Schools* 20 October 2009 which offers a list of 100 blogs of value for new teachers (but it's actually great for not-so new teachers as well). It covers technology, specific subject areas, news and politics in education, as well as personal and professional issues.

The new issue of PaperTigers, focuses on [Religious Diversity in relation to End-of-Year Celebrations](#), is now live. The end of the year, when so many holy and secular days are observed and celebrated, reminds us of the importance of understanding and being respectful of how others in our communities engage with and express their beliefs. Books play an essential role in helping children learn about differences (for instance, why some people celebrate different holidays, or the same holidays in different ways, while others don't celebrate anything): but more than anything, books can help them realize that, while our individualities do matter, our common humanity matters even more.

Ways to Make a Difference - this Christmas

[Gifts that give](#) – from *Meera Atkinson*. Can't think what to buy Uncle Jim? Why, buy him a toilet of course! With more charity catalogues than ever before to choose from and as many people in need as ever, here are some of the best charity gifts under \$50 this Christmas.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) produced a report in 2005, [The Hidden Cost of Christmas](#), which outlined the impact of Christmas spending in terms of greenhouse pollution, water use, land disturbance and materials used. ACF's Consumption Atlas has shown that it is through the products and services bought each year that Australian households make our greatest contribution to climate change, due to the embodied energy and water in these manufactured items. In addition to excess consumption, the festive season is also traditionally a time of wastage, with food uneaten and unwanted gifts unused.

[Christmas Cards](#), designed and printed in Australia by PrintTogether on 100% post-consumer recycled paper, using vegetable based inks, just like this card.

This Christmas there is no need to overly incorporate plastic and other inorganic compounds into your family holiday celebration. Consider having an eco-friendly holiday season as far as possible. Here are [five fun decoration suggestions to utilize for a green Christmas](#). (Actually there's a lot more than five with the links it includes!)

Up and Coming Conferences

[Helping Belong, Be and Become Essential Early Years Conference](#) (with Maggie Dent) Jan 30, 2010 PLC, Peppermint Grove, WA



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2nd Positive Psychology and Wellbeing Conference, 12-13 Feb 2010 Monash University

Kidsafe WA's Playground Conference: The Nature of Play, 19-20 April 2010 Perth

The Happiness and its Causes Conference, 5-6 May 2010 Sydney

9th Early Childhood Intervention Australia National Biennial Conference, Every day in every way: Creating learning opportunities for every child 20-22 May, 2010, Canberra

The Positive Schools Conference, 21 May 2010 Fremantle

SNAICC national conference For Our Children; Local Strengths, National Challenges Alice Springs 27-29 July 2010.

Fueling the Fire, Early Childhood Australia, Sept 29 - Oct 2, 2010, Adelaide, South Australia

2011 World Forum on Early Care and Education, May 3 - 6, 2011, Honolulu, Hawaii

Learning Conversations' Professional Development Opportunities **Reggio Inspired Weekends**

You could **host a Reggio Weekend** in your school! Negotiate the content for your weekend in 2010! If you are interested in hosting and/or participating in a Reggio Inspired Workshop, please email Marie to express your interest (marie.martin@learningconversations.com.au).

Learning Conversations

Several schools have taken up the opportunity for personalised professional development through *learning conversations*. These conversations are focused on the specific needs of a teacher or a very small group of teachers. Usually, Marie is invited to visit a classroom to help a teacher with a particular issue (e.g. setting up the learning environment, concerns about particular children, setting up an imaginative play centre, developing individualised programs, lesson planning). Marie comes to the classroom, observes the teacher, the children and the environment and has a 'conversation' with the teacher during which an action plan is developed. The teacher then follows this up through email conversations describing the outcomes of the action plan as it is implemented. The cost for a learning conversation is \$220 per hour.

Supporting schools and community organisations

We can create a learning opportunity for your staff or volunteers, whether it be facilitating a conversation about an individual teacher's classroom, a sector of the school or the school as a whole; developing a school or organisational plan; or developing a workshop to help you address a matter of educational or community interest. Please contact us to discuss your interests and strengths!

Contact Us

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