

Australia is a signatory in the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child, and as part of our commitment to uphold children's rights, we must ensure that every child participates in early childhood education prior to formal schooling (regardless of parental employment status). I agree with your recommendations to redirect proposed funding for the paid parental leave scheme and inject it into early childhood education and care.

Early childhood education and care is associated with an improvement in academic performance at the age of 13 and found early entrance into early childhood education predicts a creative, socially confident, popular, open and independent adolescent (Adamson, 2008). Adamson also cites findings in *The Economics of Investing in Universal Preschool Education in California* report 2005 which found that children who attended early childhood education were more likely to graduate from high school, earned higher salaries as adults, and were less likely to become involved in crime.

Early childhood education and care can be delivered in various modes from 'long day care', short day ("or preschool"), family day care. Formal early learning settings such as these offer children opportunities to interact with peers and develop essential interpersonal skills that lay the foundation for academic success later in school life (Katz, 2003). Removing preschools from the NQS may incorrectly convey messages to the community that 'preschools' provide better early childhood programs, when instead we should be educating the community the children develop well in good quality early childhood environments.

All formal early childhood programs offer children opportunities to learn pre-literacy and numeracy concepts through play and discussion because it is in these settings that children engage in meaningful interactions with peers. Traditional/structured prior to school activities such as colouring stencils or tracing shapes are developmentally inappropriate for children in early childhood. The interpersonal skills that children develop through: group interaction; self directed play; and group discussion, provide a greater platform for academic achievement later in life than do rigid stencil tracing and other predominantly solitary 'school readiness' activities. *"The most important intellectual dispositions are inborn and must be strengthened and supported rather than undermined by premature academic pressures"* (Katz, 2003, p5).

Furthermore, incorporating nannies who simply hold a certificate 3 in children's services into the NQS will not offer children the opportunity to attend early learning settings where they are able to interact with other children. Likening nannies or grandparents with a certificate 3 to early childhood programs offered in children's services is undermining the social and emotional benefits children gain when attending formal early childhood education services. Children gain 2.5 I.Q points for every year they attend formal prior to school settings as opposed to their peers who attend informal care prior to school (Bernal & Keane, 2010). I believe we need to look at other ways to address access issues of working families for example short day preschools opening for longer hours and not closing over school holidays could be an option.

"It has become necessary to focus our concern on what happens in those early months and years. It is here that action can be taken that will enable all children to become all that they can be. And it is here, if at all, that the selfperpetuating cycle of disadvantage will be broken (Adamson, 2008, p. 34).

References

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