A different perspective—the value to children of mixed age groups

“From an evolutionary perspective, the normal social play of children involves kids of various ages.”

The age-segregated education and care environments that we have today developed from the mid 19th century and have expanded in the 21st century to the stage where many children are directed into a proliferation of age-graded, adult-organized recreational and sporting activities as well. We have come to expect that children are best grouped according to age and may even begin to worry about our children if they do not have sufficient age-mates.

Research into mixed age groupings, where the age difference is two years or more tells us that children learn more from others who are older or younger than themselves than they do from age-mates. Experiences with younger children provide older children with opportunities to be the mature ones in relationships and thereby practice nurturance and leadership. Researchers have also found, not surprisingly, that children exert much more leadership when they collaborate with younger children in joint tasks than when they collaborate with age-mates.

Teaching and learning are sometimes described as bidirectional activities, experiences through which the teacher and learner learn from one another. When older children explain concepts to younger ones in age-mixed play, they must share their previously implicit, unexpressed knowledge in a way that younger children can understand. This challenges them to explain the ‘how to’ in words as well as encouraging the children to demonstrate in a practical way that the younger child can follow.

Younger children in age-mixed environments learn by watching and listening to the older ones. When children all nearly of the same age play a game, competitiveness can interfere with playfulness. Our modern, Western culture, puts emphasis on winning and on all sorts of comparisons aimed at determining who is better. In contrast, when children of widely different ages play a game together, the focus shifts from winning to having fun and fun means learning. With an increase in single child families, wider age gaps between siblings and greater living distances from extended families many children today have little opportunity for mixed-aged play.

Some schools utilise this knowledge of mixed age learning by having buddy systems when children commence school, others have shifted to have mixed age classes for reception to year 2. Since 2012 the Lady Gowrie Children’s Centre is Adelaide has had mixed age groupings for their youngest children 0-3 years. While some families were initially unsure of this change and how it would impact on their child they are now confident it has created a positive learning environment for all.

It may be difficult for us to shift from the way we ‘expect’ things to be, looking at education and care settings through a developmental perspective, to one where we view children as managers of their own learning. However it is the children themselves who benefit most from mixed age groupings.

Reference: American Journal American Journal of Play, volume 3, number 4. © 2011 by The Strong. Contact Peter Gray at grayp@bc.edu

Raising Beaut Kids - Parent Evening Wednesday November 5th

This parent evening 7-9pm will have Bill Hansberry as guest speaker. Bill is the author of Raising Beaut Kids: Recipes for Parents on when to say ‘yes’ and how to say ‘no’. His workshop will be focus on how to build positive behaviours and manage tricky behaviours. This is a child free evening which will also provide the opportunity for you to meet with the educators in your child’s room, view children’s portfolios and other room documentation of children’s learning and discuss this with educators.

Supper will be provided so please register your attendance on the parent notice board.

**Diary Events:**

Please put the following dates in your diary:

- **Parent Evening - Raising Beaut Kids**
  Wednesday November 5th 7-9pm
- **Early closure at 4.30 pm** for educator professional development Tuesday 11th November
- **National Recycling** week Nov 10-16th
- **End of Year Celebration:** Tuesday December 16th 6.15-7.30

**Centre closure 2014:** Dates are confirmed: closing at 6pm on Friday 19th December 2014 and reopening at 8 am on Monday 5th January 2015.

**WCCC’s 20th Birthday** celebration Wednesday 25th March 2015 5-8pm. This will be an early closure day with the Centre closing at 4.30pm

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**AUCS Board and WCCC PAG Matters 2014**

The Adelaide University Childcare Services Inc (AUCS) Board meets on the last Monday of the month and will meet next on Monday 29th September. The AUCS Board continues strategic planning for 2014-16.

The WCCC Parent Advisory Group (PAG) and Sustainable Futures Committee meets on the third Monday of the month with our next meetings on Monday 20th October.

Planning for our 20th birthday in 2015 will continue.

The PAG will have some members retiring at the end of 2014 with children transitioning to school. If you are interested in joining this group please speak to Merrilyn or Kaarin

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**Waite Campus Childrens Centre’s 20th Birthday**

Remember to put this date in your diaries Wednesday 25th March from 5pm to 8pm.

**Celebration book**

One of the ways we will celebrate is by publishing a book of favourite family foods and experiences. We are seeking your input and would like any great recipes that your young children love and also places you go and fun outdoor things you do with young children.

This may be a trip to a park that is family friendly or a walk around your neighbourhood, a great National Park or camping trip, a museum or other places to visit that are children friendly or even a great game to play on a rainy day? Copies of the book will be sold to mark the 20th birthday.

While the PAG is integral to planning this event we are also seeking all parents to contribute ideas, skills, experience and time to make this a fun celebration for all.

Please email your recipes and ideas to childcare.waite@adelaide.edu.au

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**Educator research projects – early closure November 11th:**

Educators in all rooms have been very engaged in reviewing documentation of learning to improve what, how and when they document and who and where this documentation is displayed this for families.

Room 3 thank their families for contributing to online and personal survey to support this.

To support educator professional development we will have an early closure on Tuesday 11th November. The Centre hours on this day will be 8am-4.30pm
**New Recycling program**
Room 3 children have decorated the box for recycling old toothbrushes tubes and packaging.
This program is registered through TerraCycle® to help provide a second life for toothbrushes, toothpaste tubes, toothpaste caps, floss containers, and their outer packaging materials. Terracycle pays for what we collect and these fund will go to our sustainable futures projects. Terracycle upcycles and recycles traditionally non-recyclable waste into a large variety of consumer products.
This keeps waste out of our landfills and contribute to a cleaner world.
You can learn more at: http://www.terracycle.com.au/

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**Working Bee**
Thank you to everyone who attended the family working bee to weed and mulch Pilyabilyangga on Saturday 20th September. Unfortunately the area has a high weed problem at present with cleavers, vetch and rye grass requiring more regular attention. The maintenance of Pilyabilyangga as a beautiful nature space for children is in the hands of families, educators and children…. If you were unable to attend on this day you can make your contribution to the maintenance of this wonderful space for our children at any time by checking in with Kaarin about what needs doing and when you can help
PS: the deck and bridge still need a new coat.

Karina and Arlo took some time out from the working bee and used found materials to create a special fairy garden

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**National Recycling Week**
National Recycling Week 2014 is November 10-16th
We have planned a couple of projects to highlight fun ways we can reuse and recycle. Our first project will be to decorate WCCC with strings of flags made from old clothing. Please collect some of your colourful odd socks, small children’s T shirts and shorts or even old undies, especially colourful ones. All will be washed before we string them across WCCC.
Our second project is a weaving project so we will need old odd balls of wool and strips of old material. Our third project is to make animals from odd balls of wool and straw.

We are also collecting plastic bottle caps from juice and milk bottles for a future project. Please save these for us and place in the collection bag in the reception area. Plain coloured flat caps (not pop ups) with no logos or writing please. We need hundreds!
Nature Play SA
Nature Play SA has just released its 49 things to do before you are 5 to go with the 51 things to do before you are 12. As with the later children can get a junior passport to record completion of the missions activities. There are also a list of activities that the whole family can do to support young children to engage with the natural world.
Take a look at the Nature Play SA website at: www.natureplaysa.org.au

Why Nature Play?
Tim Gill, author of No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Averse Society, and one of the UK’s leading commentators on childhood says “Our children need engaging, stimulating, life-enhancing environments where children can reach new depths of understanding about themselves, their abilities and their relationship with the world around them”
There is growing evidence that children’s reduced connection to the natural world and the alarming reduction in play in natural environments is inhibiting children’s learning and putting them at risk as teenagers and young adults. Children who do not have opportunities to manage and self assess risks when young can grow up without an awareness of their own abilities and limits leading them to participate in dangerous behaviours as teenagers. Childhood, says Tim Gill, “is being undermined by adults’ increasing aversion to risk and by the intrusion of that fear into every aspect of their lives.” Young children need the opportunity to judge risks through experience with risky situations; like climbing trees and high places, seeing how high and how fast they can swing, judging and overcoming obstacles. Self assessing risks supports the development of the cognitive skills necessary to make more accurate judgments. We also must distinguish between a risk and a hazard. A hazard is something the child does not see, while a risk involves uncertainty of outcome. The later requires a child’s choice of whether to take the risk or not and the adults role is try to eliminate hazards that children cannot see or manage without removing all risks. Most people meet situations that involve some element of risk throughout their everyday lives and we only learn how to make judgements about and manage risks through our experiences as we grow.
Play in natural environments allows children to play in far more varied and imaginative ways, it is untidy, which may be off-putting for adults, but adds to its attraction for children. Play in nature is dynamic, varying from day to day, season to season and year to year. Research has demonstrated that increased contact with nature also improves the way children learn, both formally and informally.
Many education and care settings in both SA and across the world, from preschool to primary, are developing nature play spaces for children and discovering that children who learn outdoors know more, understand more, feel better, behave better, work more cooperatively and are physically healthier.

Project Wild Thing!
There will be an Adelaide showing of David Bond’s documentary Project Wild Thing at the Mercury Cinema on Saturday November 15th at 6.30 pm as part of the Transitions Film Festival.
This documentary film takes a funny and revealing look at a complex issue, the increasingly disparate connection between children and nature, coined “nature deficit disorder” by psychologists. Project Wild Thing is a film-led movement to get more kids and families outside and reconnecting with nature.

The Transitions Film Festival is a visionary film program dedicated to showcasing ground breaking documentaries about our global culture in transition towards a sustainable future. The festival runs from 7th-16th November. http://www.eventbrite.com.au/o/transitions-film-festival-adelaide-4120818211

PS: If you have a free day tomorrow, Tuesday 14th October, or happen to be at Flinders University the Project Wild Thing will be showing in Flinders University South Lecture Theatre 1 at 1pm