

Editorial

In preparing the June issue of *Children Australia*, the editors, Jennifer Lehmann and Rachael Sanders, have shared the task of writing the editorial and developing the content. Beginning with Jennifer's thoughts on the 'Slow Movement', followed by Rachael's overview of the articles and reviews in this issue. Also included is information about the journal's recent change of publisher to Cambridge University Press, as useful information for those planning to submit to the journal.

Thoughts on the 'Slow Movement'

I admit it! When I began investigating the Slow Movement my mood was grumpy. I had been unable to maintain a coherent conversation with a colleague because of the constant attention she paid to her mobile phone calls. I had been almost walked over several times by people rushing 'tunnel-visioned' along pavements and through public spaces that are supposed to be shared, and I'd received a variety of emails in shorthand and symbols that were barely meaningful. I was wondering why people who complained of being stressed, pressured and ever-so-busy did nothing about their situation but off-load to me; and it seemed as though all were following familiar cultural practices — a way of being in the world — that was akin to skating across life itself without appreciation, pleasure or real engagement. And *that* thought troubled me. If this way of behaving and regarding one another is part of our cultural practices in dealing with children, young people and their families, how are we to achieve relationships of significance that underpin growth and development, and address the impacts of disadvantage and abuse?

Of course I'm not the only one to become concerned about the rush and speediness of life. Since the invention of engines and subsequent changes to the speed of travel, a variety of people have expressed concern about the apparent capacity to contract time (Parkins, 2004). And who would want to return to the days of waiting for weeks for important news, for letters or for friends and family to arrive for a visit? However, the Slow Movement does highlight the dangers of living speedily, and without appreciation and mindfulness; warning that we 'diminish opportunities for conversation, communion, quiet reflection, and sensuous pleasure, thus shortchanging the hungers of the soul. In

the name of productivity, Fast Life has changed our way of being and threatens our environment and our landscapes' (Priesnitz, 2011).

The Slow Food movement began with the launch of the Italian Slow Food association in 1986 by Carl Petrini (Pink, 2008). While some question the principles and aspirations of the movement, suggesting it appeals to the affluent middle classes who have the financial capacity to indulge in slowing down, and thus has the potential to increase class divisions (Parkins, 2004), there are a number of elements that are relevant to the work we do in the human services sector — eating together being just one.

The underlying philosophy of the Slow Movement, be that specifically Slow Food, Slow Living, Slow Cities (Cittaslow) or other 'slow' associations, emphasises being in the present and experiencing, in the broadest sense, the activities, social relationships and ambience of the immediate context of living.

Slow living involves the conscious negotiation of the different temporalities that make up our everyday lives, deriving from a commitment to occupy time more attentively. Implicit in the practices of slow living is a particular conception of time in which 'having time' for something means investing it with significance through attention and deliberation. (Parkins, 2004, p. 364).

Writers about the Slow Movement focus on the benefits of appreciative sensory perception with 'investment in the pleasures of everyday life ... a conscious negotiation of life in the present' (Parkins & Craig, 2006, p. 3). There is concern about time and the pursuit of more time given to attending to everyday life through 'engaging in 'mindful



rather than ‘mindless’ practices which make us consider the pleasure or at least the purpose of each task to which we give our time’ (Parkins & Craig, 2006, p. 3). Time, of course, is a key concern in contemporary society. As Parkins and Craig (2006) comment:

When the valuing of time-management and punctuality is placed in the context of an ever-accelerating culture, the result is not only an increase in anxiety and impatience but also the encroachment of work culture onto the private sphere. Given technology such as mobile phones, pagers and laptop computers, a worker is now technically always ‘available’ (i.e., able to be contacted by the office or client). (p. 366).

There is an ethical dimension here that is related to acknowledging ‘otherness’ — of people, place and time — that is lost in the ‘distractedness of fast life’ (Parkins & Craig, 2006, p. 4). In the delivery of human services we need to revisit what Ingold (as cited in Pink, 2008) calls ‘education of attention’ through which we ‘acquire a ‘set of keys’ that serve as clues to the ‘meanings that lie at the heart of the world itself, but are normally hidden behind the facade of superficial appearances’ (as cited in Pink, 2008, p. 101).

So how might we relate these ideas to our work with children, young people and their families? A first step is to avoid imposing our sense of busyness on others — both clients and colleagues. It is more likely we will get to the nub of issues if others feel we have the time for them, the interest in their sense of what it’s like to live their lives, and are not being distracted by phones. Eating a meal, indeed sharing the preparation and enjoyment of a meal, is not an activity that is often contemplated when working with clients, but the impacts of doing so can be surprising and effective. Not only are we modelling the use and enjoyment of food together with conversation and social skills; we are also demonstrating alternatives to fast food and the tendency towards ‘relationship bytes’. A strong memory from my days visiting more remote families is of having to eat at some point between travelling, interviewing and travelling home again. It was not uncommon to be invited to have a light meal; or even share a family’s hot lunch because that was when everyone came in from the farm work. Helping get the table laid and food ready was somehow ‘normalising’ and, once food had been consumed and people more relaxed, the business of the visit could be tackled with less tension and greater honesty.

A second thrust might be to review our ways of case management and planning. These are both important features of contemporary service delivery, but the manner in which we conduct such meetings makes a significant difference to the nature of the outcomes. People who feel rushed are less likely to attempt in-depth explanations, raise issues that might be controversial, or share concerns or reflections. Commencing meetings with references to time is a killer of meaningful exchange — everyone toes the line and only what is deemed essential is said, this also being subject to censoring. Avoiding reference to how much, or

finishing, times, doesn’t mean having never-ending meetings; just managing the time constraints without allowing them to take precedence over opportunity for meaningful participation.

And we all take time to learn. Our obsession with speed — from Olympic records of milliseconds to travelling from one place to another in the least possible time — will likely do us harm in the long term if applied to learning. Do we want professional qualifications that take minimal time and effort to achieve? Do we want our young folk to know heaps of stuff without the depth and breadth that comes from maintaining curiosity, concentration and investigation? Or do we want to provide one another with opportunities to learn in ways that result in sound and thoughtful knowledge and expertise? Much of our learning takes place through relationships with others; relationships take time to develop — significant relationships even longer; and life learning can be slow and painful at times. Just like Olympic records that might, in the end, have to be achieved by counting nanoseconds, there are limits to how quickly we can learn, but limiting the amount of knowledge in order to decrease the time involved is unlikely to achieve either much satisfaction or the kinds of results that lead to wellbeing. The Slow Learning Movement, albeit a somewhat ambiguous term, takes on an altogether different meaning when viewed from the perspective of speed and superficiality.

But enough of these musings, Rachael has taken on the responsibility of putting the content of the journal together and her comments follow.

The second issue for 2012 includes a number of diverse and interesting articles. We begin with a thought provoking opinion piece by Freda Briggs and Elspeth McInnes. Their article, ‘Can Family Law Protect Young Children?’, takes us through the injustice experienced by some mothers attempting to protect their children from sexual harm perpetrated by fathers. Often times the only place for mothers to seek protection for their children is in the Family Law Court, which the authors argue is ill-equipped to handle matters of alleged sexual abuse. Mothers often face hostile responses to their allegations, and in some instances they lose custody of their children to the state or the perpetrating father. The authors argue that the current system often fails to protect these children from ongoing abuse and requires some reconfiguration.

The second article, by Stewart Redshaw, provides us with a novel and engaging look at young people’s experiences and needs in out-of-home care, by using an innovative visual representation of the data called tag clouds. By analysing key documents, Stewart has developed a list of important themes of care experiences including the overwhelming emotions experienced by young people in care, the characteristics of young people who survive and thrive in care, and the characteristics of quality carers. Moreover, Stewart discusses the validity of using tag clouds as a way of representing qualitative data.

Patricia Hansen provides us with a study entitled 'Rescission or Variation of Children's Court Orders: A Study of Section 90 Applications in New South Wales'. Patricia first discusses the protocol and law surrounding variation of care orders (Section 90 applications), and then investigates the nature or circumstances and outcomes of a sample of recent applications in New South Wales' courts. She found that, while approximately half of the applications were made by the department and the other half by parents, the applications made by the department were significantly more likely to be successful. Specifically, she found a significant increase in variations to care orders that allocated parental responsibility to the minister.

Within their roles as child, youth, and family care support workers, Samantha Hutt and Annaley Clarke have identified six themes that, when engaged, will assist professionals and carers with developing appropriate cultural support for Indigenous Australian children in care. Each theme is accompanied by a list of relevant cultural resources that can be accessed for, and by, children and young people in care.

The book reviews in this issue include a review of *Therapeutic Residential Care for Children and Young People: An Attachment and Trauma-Informed Model for Practice*, written by Susan Barton, Rudy Gonzalez and Patrick Tomlinson. Frank Ainsworth provides us with a positive review of the authors' intervention methodology, but takes a pragmatic approach to the probability of its widespread application in the current economic circumstances.

A second book review, offered by Fiona Gardner, is a thorough and positive review of Pat Beesley's book entitled *Identifying Neglect Ten Top Tips*. Fiona agrees with the general tenets of the text from an educational and practice perspective and believes it is helpful when thinking about how to work with children who have been neglected.

The last book review is provided by Abul Khan, who examines Harry Ferguson's text, *Child Protection Practice*. Abul believes that this book encourages client-focused social work intervention by child protection workers, by engaging with families in their homes as a way of experiencing a family's true reality. Abul promoted the usefulness of this book in practice by stating that it helped him to feel supported and understood, as well as providing him with the opportunity to develop new knowledge and skills.

Finally, I provide summaries of the recently released Senate inquiry that investigated the *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices*, and the *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* (Volumes 1–3) from the inquiry panel of the Honourable Philip Cummins, Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott and Bill Scales. Interestingly, all of the articles and book reviews in this issue address some of the key recommendations put forward by the Cummins review and fit within their proposed

framework or strategy for an improved child protection system.

Jennifer Lehmann and Rachael Sanders

Email: j.lehmann@latrobe.edu.au, rachael_s50@hotmail.com

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Another 'move' for Children Australia ...

In 2011 *Children Australia* commenced being published by Australian Academic Press (AAP) and many of you will remember that this change took a little time to settle following Lorraine Redshaw's retirement and the new arrangements for online submission of manuscripts, among other things. In early March 2012 we were notified of a further change to the publishing arrangements; this time due to the establishment of a partnership between AAP and Cambridge University Press (CUP).

CUP will now be the publisher of *Children Australia* and we are again in the process of negotiating the production arrangements and other elements of the journal processes. Some of you will have noticed that the online submission arrangements were not working for a short period of time; others of you will have noticed that your journal copy arrived later than expected. We apologise for any inconvenience you may have experienced, but hopefully all will settle in the coming months as the new schedule falls into place. Guidelines for authors are on the inside back page of the journal and should be available online by the time you are reading this notice.

The change to CUP brings the benefits of wider readership of *Children Australia* and increased access through databases. We hope to continue to bring you content of quality that relates to research, practice and commentary on key issues affecting children, young people and their families; and we would welcome the submission of manuscripts that address a broad range of issues concerning wellbeing. In addition, letters to the editor are welcome along with reviews of newly released reports, books and other resources. If you are interested in being a reviewer for the journal, enquiries should be addressed to either of the editors, Jennifer Lehmann or Rachael Sanders.