

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD ORGANISATION (EChO)**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Held at the Education Development Centre, Hindmarsh,  
15<sup>th</sup> November, 2008.

### **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

EChO continues to gain recognition as a respected member of professional associations. This may be evidenced by the increasing number of invitations to contribute at the table of the wider education forum.

The Early Childhood Organisation has been invited to a variety of eminent Committees throughout 2008: the Early Years Stake Holders, Reconceptualizing Reception, Australian Early Years Development Index, the National Curriculum Board Australian Teachers' Standards, and DECS Strategic Planning Committee. That said, this year witnessed the induction of five new members onto the Planning Committee, each of whom has made a significant contribution to our Organisation.

Membership remains relatively steady with 127 registrations (2007 – 139, 2006 – 110) and yet, given the current economic uncertainty, from a marketing viewpoint, continued flexibility in the packaging of our product mix will be vital to the long-term viability of this Organisation. It is essential therefore, that we not merely retain present Members, but entice new Membership.

Professional acceptance of EChO's core Professional Development products continues apace; EChO's continued popularity is reflected in the fact that, to date, 357 people have attended our professional development sessions in 2008. This figure excludes a further two Country Conferences.

Our first Conference, led by Dr Trudy Sweeney, Lecturer in Digital Media, Flinders University, revisited the theme on 'Multi-literacies'. President also, of the Computers in Education Group for South Australia, Dr Sweeney was well credentialed to demonstrate the potential of ICT in early years education and how young children utilize the internet. Understandable, therefore, that interest in this topic was quite extraordinary; registrations totalled 140 and significant numbers were declined, unfortunately, once capacity at EDC Hindmarsh was attained.

In Term 2, Jan Brooks, the Department of Education and Children's Services Policy and Program Officer, introduced us to recent developments in the areas of Science and the Science Program, Primary Connections. Once again, this topic proved most enticing, with 99 people attending.

With 135 registrations, the Term 3 Conference almost emulated the Term 1 sell-out. Esme Capp, Deputy Principal of Wooranna Park Primary School, Victoria, delivered a most impressive presentation on the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning. Therein, we learned of the innovative manner in which Wooranna Park has implemented an early years approach across the entire school. News of this session's originality consequently prompted countless emails and inquiries from leadership teams across educational sectors throughout South Australia.

Such public interest in EChO's activities perpetuates a theme. In 2006, for example, EChO collaborated with the District Office to co-finance the delivery of a Conference at Port Lincoln, replete with a variety of noted presenters. The Eyre Peninsula's embracement of the event was such that the Committee determined to underwrite a biennial country Conference. Accordingly, this year EChO responded to an appeal for support from the Early Years Co-ordinator for the Limestone Coast region in the South East.

Josie Miels and Marilyn Zulian journeyed to Penola, and later to Robe, to present the Project Approach. Therein, attendees developed greater understandings of how to integrate Science and a project approach into practice, whilst simultaneously reviewing their current practice. Participants at both venues expressed the fervent hope that discussion around this pedagogy will continue. Moreover, they were magnanimous in expressing their gratitude for not having had to commit precious time - and finances - to travelling inordinate distances in pursuit of professional development.

Whilst mindful that EChO traditionally offers Saturday morning conferences/ workshops, this year's Committee determined to pursue innovative methods delivering professional development. Thus in the follow-up to the Term 3 Conference, Members' sites were offered grants of \$2,000 to inquire into early childhood educational practice. The acceptance process, advertised via the Term 3 Conference and our website, invited sites that could demonstrate an inquiry approach in the early years; the trade off being presentation of their

findings at our Term 4 Conference. The successful applicants were: Angle Vale Primary (Cheryl Martin), Galilee Catholic School (Carmen Moyse, Tina Adams), Rendlesham Kindergarden (Judy Will), Sheidow Park Primary (Heather Grealy) and Sturt Street Primary (Jo Fahey). The Committee, in conjunction with those successful applicants, are to conduct a review of the process.

A priority of particular importance this year was the wholesale up-grade of EChO's web site, which was realized largely through the engagement of consultant Stephen Osborne. Interested individuals may now avail themselves of the up-graded version, which incorporates an up-load of relevant, important links and, whenever possible, attachment of Conference presenters' power-points.

Certain, unheralded, individuals and organisations beaver quietly away behind the scenes in support of EChO; they warrant public recognition - our stated appreciation of their efforts. So, firstly, I would like to thank our resilient caterer, Max Rattley, for his tasty offerings and continued support over many years. And Glen Hollis of *Book Distributors* for his ever reliable delivery of quality productions and generous price reductions. Primary thanks also, to those practitioners who sacrifice precious Saturday mornings to share their professional practice with our participants, participants who are forever grateful for a practical demonstration of the implementation of concept into practice.

Recognition is due too, to the clerical support of the Council of Education Associations of South Australia, to the accommodating personnel of the Education Development Centre – nothing's ever a 'problem' for them – and, finally, to our own volunteer Committee Members, some of whom have managed - despite unexpected, additional burdens in daily life: whether accommodating personal or family health problems, requirements attendant of ageing parents or grandchildren, job changes or the extra-curricular demands of their campus - they have, nevertheless, managed to find time to organize wonderful professional development opportunities for early years practitioners.

A deserved thanks, therefore, is due to: Sharon Arney, Andrea Bowen, Jenny Chartier, Margaret Dell, Deb Duckmanton, Karen Duval, Janet Gifford, Josie Miels, Kerry Southwell and Marilyn Zulian, Vice-Presidents: Sue Close and Mary Stacey, Secretary: Suzanne Dunn, and Treasurer: Aggie Marziale. On behalf of

all EChO Membership, may I offer you - one and all - our sincerest appreciation for your selfless and dedicated input throughout 2008.

In conclusion - and as I indicated at the outset of this address - an over-riding challenge in these unstable financial times, will be, not only to maintain our current membership, but to attract new members and so cover the natural attrition rate.

Thank you for your support over the past year; mere words cannot express adequately, my appreciation. I wish you all a successful conclusion to this academic year, and both you and your families a happy, safe and restful recuperation over the forthcoming festive season.

Thank you for your attention.

Heather Lawes.