

Inspir=Ed Playgroup NSW



Inspir=Ed Playgroup NSW Collaborative Project Report

October - December 2009



Connecting Parents and Children through Creativity

Inspir=Ed was engaged to offer new choices for ‘Connecting Parents and Children through Creativity’ at the NSW Playgroup in Sutherland, funded by NSW Families Services.

The Inspir=Ed Parent-Child Education program is a culturally sensitive parent and children’s program that ensures school readiness through nurturing relationships, free play and developmental activities. The underlying principle of the program is the use of creativity to consolidate and strengthen the parent child relationship. This occurs through a structured program of songs, games, stories, art and craft combined with a calm, nurturing creative play environment.

The Sutherland Playgroup had been running for the last six months with approximately seven young mothers meeting on a regular basis. The group of mothers was socially cohesive but they were interested in new parenting skills to strengthen their confidence. The program successfully introduced new concepts of parent child interaction including the effectiveness of rhythm and repetition in helping with challenging behaviour along with the effectiveness of songs, stories and simple toys to promote independent creative play.

The setting for the group was in the Engadine Church Hall, a large hall with challenging acoustics. The outside unshaded play area was plastic grass enclosed by a metal fence. A small verandah provided the only shaded area and this was where the parents craft activities were conducted.

- **Rhythm and Structure**
Angela Rivas
Inspir=Ed Facilitator:

- *The strong rhythm helped parents and children in the easier transition between activities. Everybody knew what was happening next. After a few sessions I observed parents more and more relaxed in their interaction with their children, as they called them to the next activity. This was, in particular, the case with one mother.”*

‘all natural’ based arrangement. After two sessions and gentle encouragement, they all sat together for at least 10 mins at a time. They chatted as a group, creating more of a community feel. The children sat with their parents being guided by them in their eating.

- *After a few sessions the children and parents began to try the wholesome foods with more enthusiasm each time.*

- *“The children were restless at first during morning tea. They were becoming accustomed to the new routine and the*



Respect for each child - Increased parent-child skills, confidence

• Songs and Stories Angela Rivas Inspir=Ed Facilitator:

• *The children and parents alike enjoyed the songs and story. By the second week they were all sitting quietly and imitating the gestures of the songs and stories. H..... in particular would sit through most of this and have a smile on his face throughout (he is only 19 months old). By the last couple of morning circles H.... imitated the gestures of the songs. Two brothers when I first met them fought a lot, but after a few sessions I no longer saw this type of behavior, instead during one lap song session the older brother rocked his younger brother during the lullaby rather than the dolls. They were joyously doing this together. J.... loved every minute of the program and participated and*

imitated the gestures consistently.

• Art and Craft Activities

- *E..... brought in her candle that she had finished off decorating at home the very next session after it was introduced. She had a great sense of pride in her completed work.*
- *B...wouldn't do the craft activities at first but when she saw other mums loving the activities she joined in and by the end couldn't get enough craft activities to take home. She would bring them to show finished the following week. The mums loved chatting together during these sessions.*



Songs and Stories

Each session there was a time for circle songs and games with the group finishing each week with lap songs, hand gesture games and a short story. The parents sat with their children on the floor. During first weeks the children were restless and some ran around the group in circles as it was a new program and they were unaccustomed to the routine. The parents experienced how it was possible to sit quietly with their children and participate *together* in the songs and hand and gesture games. Outcomes included stronger parent child bonds and increased parent child knowledge.

Art and Craft Activities

The activities over the eight weeks were focused towards Christmas. The parents made a variety of children's toys and completed activities including felting a ball, making fleece and paper angels and a simple knotted doll. Outcomes included increased parent-child skills, confidence and self-esteem. Other benefits of the art and craft activities were that it encouraged the children to engage in independent creative and imaginative play led by Jann and Glen.



Principles of Inspir=Ed Programs

**Creativity, Connection
and Security
Respect, Responsibility,
Rights and Reflection**

Community engagement would have been enhanced by an short 'action learning' workshop for local associated early childhood and health professionals. The Inspir=Ed program introduces a wholistic 'back to basics' way of working with parents and children ... "the Inspir=Ed program revived my spirit and rekindled my passion for working in early childhood settings." Siobhann Loosmoor,

Increased readiness for school - Stronger family and community bonds

Calm Environment and Natural Toys

The hall at Engadine was transformed each week with simple pastel coloured cotton and flannelette sheets that were draped over the plastic toys and other distractions. The natural toys were carefully arranged in the play area with a cubby house set up inside and block and wood play outside. The quieter colours had a calming effect on both parents and children.

The natural wood and handmade toys led to the children's play being more creative and imaginative. Over the weeks the children engaged in creative play for longer periods. There was increased independent play and more harmonious social interaction between children.



- **Calm Environment**
Angela Rivas
Inspir=Ed Facilitator:

- *J. is now talking more quietly and in a softer tone to her two sons resulting in them being more cooperative. During the first few sessions she would raise her voice loudly at the boys to get their attention when the boys found it challenging to sit still, particularly at morning tea time and storytime.*

- *N.... created the game where the play cloth peg became a crane that lifted the crayons one by one.*

- *J...., aged three used the long planks of wood to roll the wooden blocks and then the wooden cars down the plank..... intently observing*

how each block and car either stayed on or fell from the wooden plank.

Jann Gibson, Co-Facilitator, Play-group NSW

- *“As the weeks have gone on there has been a calmer atmosphere”*

Natural, simple and creative toys
Glen Brak, Engadine District Youth Services

- *“The toys – I have honestly been surprised ...they enjoy playing with them...engaging children in creative play. Plastic toys limit their imagination. A plastic truck can only be a plastic truck whereas a pine cone be anything.”*

Stronger parent-child bonds - Improved parent knowledge and behaviour

Improved health and nutrition of parents and children

Each week the children would have the hands washed with lavender water and then knead whole-meal bread dough. Some of the children were initially reluctant to have their hands washed but by the end of the program the children were lining up sometimes to have their hands washed twice. The bread-making was followed by the children wiping the table with sponges and sweeping the floor with dustpans and brushes. A generous morning tea of fresh bread, healthy fruit and delicious savoury dips were popular with parents and children. The diet combined with drinking water instead of sugary drinks led to improvements in behaviour.



The role of music to help children realise their full potential

Pestalozzi and Froebel stressed the value of music in early childhood. They believed that music helped "harmonise" the character and helped the child to realise its full potential.

Social - sharing, turn-taking, co-operation, respect, tolerance, self-discipline, sensitivity

Emotional - relieve internal tensions, restore emotional balance, increases positive self-esteem, variety of moods generated, self-awareness

Physical - co-ordination, body awareness, motor skills - crawling, stimulation and relaxation

Cognitive - memory, concentration, recognition, discrimination between sounds, organisation

Spiritual/Aesthetic - silence, stillness, reflection, peace and joy

- **Bread making and shared morning tea**
Angela Rivas

- *R.... was reluctant to have his hands washed but by week 6 he was coming back for a second time because he found it so enjoyable.*

- *A few parents tried the mildly spiced homemade coriander dip and other food whereas in the first few weeks they were very reluctant to have anything they hadn't tried before.*

- *E....., mother of I..... aged 2 reported that she found the group beneficial in finding healthy foods that the children enjoy eating and learning to cook new healthy foods.*

- *J.... the mother learnt new ways of getting her two boys attention to help them stay at the table, eat the healthy food and to participate in the other activities.*

- *H.....loved the bread we baked and purchased 5kg of the wholemeal spelt flour and took the recipe home and cooked it for her family for dinner and said that they all loved it.*

**Glen Brak,
Engadine Youth
Centre
Coordinator**

**"I have seen
massive changes
in the parents and
children
over the seven
weeks..."**

Increased creative play - Increased self esteem and enjoyment

Summary

The success of the program was built on the foundations established by Jann Gibson, Playgroup NSW and Glenn Brak, Engadine Youth Centre Coordinator. Their strong rapport with the mothers enabled a smooth transition into the more structured and focused nature of the Inspir=Ed sessions.

Over the eight weeks there was an observable strengthening of the parent-child bonds, with an increase in parent-child self-esteem and confidence, improved parenting knowledge, increased creative and imaginative play, improved health and nutrition of parents and children and increased readiness for school.

The focused and specially designed nature of each activity resulted in more cohesion in the group, with an increase in parenting skills and improvement in bonding and attachment between parents and children. The children adapted and found enjoyment in having structure, with the craft, breadmaking, songs, games and story time being very popular with both parents and children. Other positive changes included improved health and nutritional knowledge of parents with parents trying new healthy food and the children enjoying their handbaked wholemeal bread.

The experiential nature of the program enabled parents to become aware of the importance of calm environments, simple natural toys, shared meals, healthy eating along with creative and imaginative play. All these elements are central to helping parents build and consolidate loving and strong relationships with their children. These are gifts that will last a lifetime.

With great thanks to the mothers and children of the Sutherland Playgroup, Jann Gibson, Glen Brak, Engadine Youth Centre Angela Rivas, Deb Ryan, CEO Playgroup NSW, Sandy Kervin, Programs Manager, Playgroup NSW and Families NSW.

Jane Hanckel & Deb Ryan

Inspir=Ed Playgroup NSW December 09
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Parent's Comments.... Most significant pieces of knowledge or understanding gained from the workshops...

- Different ways to play with the kids
- Healthy eating and making own bread
- To be calm when playing and interacting with my children
- Working natural toys and food into boys play
- Food education found interesting
- More creative way to play with my kids
- The wooden toys were really good

Most significant changes in behaviour....

- They have improved their concentration during group time and attend to it better
- N..... has improved in group time eg listening more etc.
- I found that H..... really likes to sing and listen to stories
- The structure and the creative nature of the play really suits I..... and I find she is more relaxed and less clingy to me

Glenn Brak
Engadine Co/tor
"I would recommend it to other parents. It has been great for the parents.."