

The Maybanke Lecture 2014

Early Childhood Education in Australia

Maybanke's legacy in the 21st century

Dr Susan Feez &
Professor Margaret Sims

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INVESTING IN TOMORROW

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Dr Susan Feez &
Professor Margaret Sims

6 May 2014

Glebe Town Hall

Acknowledgements

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Rosalind Maybanke Strong AM

The Maybanke Lecture

Maybanke Selfe Wolstenholme Anderson (1845 -1927) was once a household name to several generations of Australians, yet today her name is almost unknown. She was a woman who made things happen, courageously taking leadership on controversial issues when the times demanded it.

For more than 50 years, Maybanke actively promoted the rights of Sydney's women and children and was a leader in the women's suffrage movement.

On 6 May 1891, Maybanke gave her first public speech. Each year a public lecture will be held on or near this date to highlight Maybanke's life and work and to address Maybanke's causes in the context of contemporary Sydney.

Introduction

In 2010, my husband Tony and I established The Maybanke Fund within the Sydney Community Foundation to honour my great, great aunt Maybanke Selfe Wolstenholme Anderson, the women's advocate and social reformer.

I am proud that Maybanke is my middle name and that I am Maybanke's great, great niece – my grandmother and mother called her Aunty May.

Maybanke Selfe came to Australia aged nine and grew up in Sydney to become a feminist and educationist, a woman who according to one of the many obituaries on her death in 1927, “had a genius for initiating movements for education and social betterment.” Maybanke played an active role in the promotion of the rights of women and children in Australia. She was a leader in the women's suffrage movement, and worked for Federation. She established the first free kindergarten in Australia to support the children of the inner city and their working mothers. She wrote extensively, and founded a newspaper The Woman's Voice.

The Maybanke Fund supports causes across the range of Maybanke's work and, through the annual Maybanke Lecture, honours her life, and promotes public discussion of issues and areas

where she was active, and that are still current in Sydney some 100 years after her public work. Initially the Maybanke Fund is focusing on small grants, which will reduce inequalities in early childhood education. Maybanke Awards have been made in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 to mature age students who have been working as Aboriginal Teacher Aides and are now undertaking the Bachelor of Teaching in Early Childhood Education at Macquarie University's Centre for Indigenous Education.

Maybanke's great love was children, and she was proud to have founded the Kindergarten Union. The 2nd annual Maybanke Lecture focuses on Maybanke's role in early childhood education in Sydney, the story of her family connection to Maria Montessori and the history of Montessori education in Australia, and the legacy of her work in contemporary Australian early childhood education.

I am delighted that Dr Susan Feez and Professor Margaret Sims from the University of New England agreed to deliver the 2014 Maybanke Lecture. Dr Susan Feez is a member of the School of Education at UNE. She specialises in English language and literacy education and educational linguistics. Susan was commissioned to write the History of Montessori Education in Australia to celebrate its Centenary in 2013. She trained as a Montessori teacher in Sydney and Bergamo and then specialised in English as a Second Language Teaching through the NSW Adult Migrant Education Service. She and I were colleagues in the AMES.

Professor Margaret Sims is a member of the Early Childhood group within the University of New England School of Education. She is the editor of the Australasian Journal of Early Childhood and lectures and publishes widely on young children and families, parenting, community-based services for young children and families, child care and other forms of alternative care for children, difference and diversity, social justice, community work, families from CaLD backgrounds, Indigenous issues, and participation of children with a disability.

The Maybanke Fund and Sydney Community Foundation are proud to publish their speech.

Rosalind Maybanke Strong AM

Chair

Sydney Community Foundation

Early Childhood Education in Australia

- Maybanke's Montessori legacy

Dr Susan Feez

University of New England

6 May 2014

It is a great honour to be delivering this first part of The Maybanke Lecture, and especially to be invited by the Chair of the Sydney Community Foundation, Ros Strong, or Rosalind Maybanke Strong, who is named for her great great aunt, Maybanke Selfe Wolstenholme Anderson (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, pp. 368-9).

Maybanke's legacy

Maybanke Anderson initiated social reforms, which have improved the lives of countless women and children in Australia. If this were the United States, by now there would have been a Hollywood feature film about Maybanke Anderson, no doubt with Meryl Streep playing the lead role. But this is Australia, so when women vote on election day they do so without knowing that at the time of Federation Maybanke's strategic intervention opened the door for Australian women to be able to vote in the new Commonwealth, nearly three decades earlier than was possible for women in the United Kingdom, for example. But votes for women was only one of the social reforms for which we can thank Maybanke Anderson, as documented in the 1997 biography by Jan Roberts.

Maybanke's own experience as a young wife, losing four of her seven children and being deserted by her husband, led her in the early 1890s to campaign for desertion as grounds for women to divorce their husbands, and to campaign for women's property rights, but having achieved that, she continued campaigning for a raft of social reforms, including women's suffrage and family planning. The thread that weaves together the various reforms Maybanke pursued is her concern with the education of children and young people.

Before her marriage Maybanke trained on the job as a teacher, so when her husband deserted her, to support her family, she opened Maybanke College, a school in Dulwich Hill where girls were educated from Kindergarten to Matriculation, and where they were prepared for entrance to the recently established University of Sydney.

Maybanke was very close to her brothers, Norman Selfe, who was an engineer and inventor, and Harry Selfe. Norman Selfe's daughters – Rhoda and Norma – and Harry Selfe's daughter Bessie, Ros Strong's grandmother, attended Maybanke College, their Aunt May's school. Rhoda and Norma will play a leading role in the story of Maybanke's Montessori legacy – a story which represents only part of Maybanke's legacy to early childhood education in Australia today. By 1901 Rhoda and Norma lived with their parents in the second of the grand houses designed by their father. This house, Gillagaloola, still stands in the suburb named after their father – Normanhurst. Sadly their mother died in the early years of the twentieth century.

Maybanke and the Free Kindergarten Movement

The private school Maybanke opened in 1882 included a Kindergarten, that is an early childhood setting based on the ideas of the 19th century German educator, Friedrich Froebel. Maybanke, however, was committed to social reform and the welfare of all children, not just those whose parents could afford to pay for the start in life Kindergarten promised. In 1895, Maybanke, alongside Professor Francis Anderson of the University of Sydney, who would become her second husband, launched the Kindergarten Union of NSW (KUNSW), with herself as president. The aim of the KUNSW was to disseminate knowledge of kindergarten principles, to introduce those principles into every school in New South Wales, and to provide free kindergarten services to the poor. In 1896 the first free kindergarten was opened in Woolloomooloo, where harbourside wharves were surrounded by slums. Over the door of the Kindergarten was an epithet that read: 'As the twig is bent' (Brennan, 1994, p.16; Feez, 2013, p. 41).

Poverty and child neglect, or worse, were rife in inner Sydney in the 1890s, a period of severe economic depression. Other Free Kindergartens were soon opened, including in Pyrmont, and in Glebe. Teachers worked with the children in the morning, and in the afternoons visited families and undertook training. An important feature of the kindergarten movement founded by Maybanke Anderson was her resolve that kindergarten teachers should be

trained. To train kindergarten teachers, the KUNSW founded the Sydney Kindergarten Training College (SKTC) (Feez 2013, p. 41).

Only the best and most up to date teacher training was good enough for Maybanke, so principals for the Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College (SKTC) were recruited from Chicago, all committed to the Froebel approach, but also influenced by Professor John Dewey and the 'learning by doing' approach used in his famous laboratory school in Chicago. The influence of these teacher trainers, and the SKTC, soon spread. By 1911 each state in Australia had a Kindergarten Union, Free Kindergartens and soon after, a kindergarten training college (Feez 2013, pp.41-2)

The Sydney Kindergarten Teachers' College (SKTC)

Just as Rhoda and Norma Selfe had attended their Aunt May's school, they also attended their Aunt May's Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College (SKTC). At the SKTC, first Rhoda, and a year later, Norma, trained to be Kindergarten teachers. During their training the Principal of the SKTC was Elizabeth Jenkins from Chicago.

We can see from Rhoda and Norma's training college exercise books, archived in the Mitchell Library, that the program of study was quite rigorous. As well as learning to teach reading, writing and number, to apply the Froebel principles and to use the Froebel blocks, called

Gifts, and engage children in the Froebel occupations, the study program included literature, science, geography, history, music and art.

When Rhoda graduated in 1908, she began teaching at the Free Kindergarten in Woolloomooloo. In the Mitchell Library archives there is a program of work prepared by Rhoda for the week ending 29th October 1909. Each day of the week was divided into five lessons. That week, as well as reading, painting and number, there was a history lesson with pictures comparing the boats the settlers came in with the boats the children could see at Woolloomooloo wharf, followed by a geography lesson on the destinations of the boats at the wharf. The children also built a model of the wharf using the Froebel blocks.

After Norma Selfe graduated, amongst other things, it appears she may have worked at the Commonwealth Kindergarten at the Children's Hospital, probably as a volunteer. This would have been typical of the era, when the Kindergarten sector depended on the philanthropy of middle class women.

In 1911 Norman Selfe died suddenly, and soon after, in 1912, Rhoda and Norma set off for England. In 1912 a trip to Europe meant travelling for several weeks by steamship. The journey that year was not for the faint-hearted. It was, according to the headlines, 'a year crowded with disasters of the sea' most notably the sinking of the Titanic in April (Feez 2013, p. 53).

In Amsterdam, their last port of call before London, Rhoda and Norma met Elizabeth Jenkins, returning home to Chicago via Europe after a decade as Principal of the SKTC. Elizabeth Jenkins had just visited Rome, where she had seen for herself a radical approach to early childhood education where children were free to choose their own work, and their companions, and to work on their chosen task as long as they wished. The approach, which had become an international sensation, was the brainchild of Dr Maria Montessori.

The Montessori method

Maria Montessori (1964 [1909/1912], p. 95) argued that ‘No one can be free unless he is independent’, so in Montessori schools, then as now, children are shown how to look after themselves, and to care for others in their small community. They are also shown how to use specially designed materials in order to learn independently. The independence children develop through these activities becomes the basis of the freedom children in Montessori schools enjoy. Maria Montessori (1982 [1949], p. 156) described children’s activities in her schools in the following way:

... in all these activities, the child may be said to be playing. But this kind of play is effortful, and it leads him to acquire the new powers which will be needed for his future.

The extraordinary social and educational gains made by the street children in Rome, in response to Dr Montessori’s methods,

astounded even her, and made her an international household name. A hundred years later the same degree of superstardom would be more typical of film stars than early childhood educators. What people of the time found so remarkable was that such unlikely children, children of the slums, could be 'liberated', yet be so self-disciplined and so academically successful.

Elizabeth Jenkins had found in the Montessori schools that 'the atmosphere of unhurried work, of plenty of time, was very delightful' and convinced Rhoda and Norma they should join the first international Montessori training course due start in Rome in January 1913.

Rhoda and Norma then went on to London, where they met up with a friend from the SKTC, Ruby Starling, who in the meantime had visited the first Montessori school in England, which had just been opened by the South Australian social reformer and philanthropist, Bertram Hawker. Bertram Hawker will appear again in this story.

Montessori training - Rome

In December 1912 Rhoda and Norma Selfe, and Ruby Starling, left the cold of England behind and went to Rome to enrol in the Montessori course. Ruby wrote in her diary:

To our surprise, they decided to take us, although they have refused others in like circumstances. But they seemed struck by the fact that we had come from Australia, so that decided them to make an exception in our favour! (Ruby Starling, cited in Petersen 1983, p. 240).

The time in Rome was a 'happy five months' for the girls, as recorded by Dr Bob Petersen of the University of Sydney.

They were kept busy with a full schedule of lectures from Montessori, in Italian with simultaneous English translation, visiting schools, socializing with the other students, going sightseeing in and out of Rome, and doing practical work in connection with the course...; it was exciting ... Montessori herself was charming ... the children in the schools were delightfully responsive, the students made a stimulating crowd, and Rome was beautiful once the spring came with flowers (Petersen 1983, pp. 240–41).

A stenographer recorded the lectures, and these were mimeographed for the students. Rhoda and Norma brought their notes back to Australia and these also are archived in the Mitchell library, carefully tied up with a blue ribbon. Only last year – a century after they were delivered - were these lectures published for the first time in English (Feez, Quade, Montessori & Verheul, 2013).

The three Australian women must have felt at home in the presence of Maria Montessori and in the atmosphere of the Montessori training course and the Montessori Children's Houses in Rome. Maria Montessori's charismatic personality and the drive, intensity and commitment that powered her advocacy for educational and social reform must have had a familiar ring, echoing in so many ways the character, determination and activism of Maybanke Anderson back home in Australia. Moreover, the detailed and precise training in the use of the Froebel gifts and occupations the three kindergarteners had received at the SKTC would have

prepared them for the precision demanded when learning how to present the Montessori didactic apparatus. Their work in the Sydney free kindergartens, such as the one in the shadow of the Woolloomooloo wharves, would also have prepared them for practice teaching with children in the Casa dei Bambini in the Roman slums.

The Australian women, and in fact all those who attended that first international Montessori training course, must have looked back on those months in Rome as halcyon days of idealism, hope and promise. Memories of that glorious time in 1913 would have glowed even more brightly, and perhaps taken on a mythic quality, during the years that followed, blighted as they were by a world war, a worldwide influenza epidemic and a global economic depression. Nevertheless, these disasters were still in the future when the course finished and the students were awarded their beautifully decorated diplomas illuminated in gold (Feez, 2013, p. 65).

Returning to Australia

Ruby Starling returned to Australia via the United States, before opening an experimental Montessori classroom for the Kindergarten Union in Pyrmont. Meanwhile Rhoda and Norma Selfe returned to London, and from Southampton they travelled home on the steamship, the SS Malwa, which in the years to follow was destined to transport many more young Australians to Europe, this time as soldiers, airmen and nurses.

Back in Sydney the adventures of the 'Kindergarten girls' were being reported in The Sydney Morning Herald. While they had been in Rome, Dorothea Mackellar visited with her father, Sir Charles Mackellar, who hoped to use the Montessori approach in Special

Education in New South Wales. Articles describing the Montessori schools in Rome written by Dorothea Mackellar were also appearing in the Australian press. Just before the sisters disembarked in Sydney in July 1913, an article written by Norma Selfe describing a morning in the Montessori class in the Via Trionfale in an impoverished quarter of Rome had appeared in the Australian Kindergarten Magazine.

There were two other Australians at the course – both older than Rhoda, Norma and Ruby – Harriet Barton from Queensland, and Martha Simpson from Sydney. Space does not allow the telling of Harriet's story, but Martha Simpson is part of our story of Maybanke Anderson's Montessori legacy.

Montessori education in Sydney

Martha Simpson was the Principal of Blackfriars Practising School in Chippendale, a disadvantaged area of Sydney at the time, and she had begun implementing the Montessori Method at the school in 1912. She was able to replicate Maria Montessori's success. Martha Simpson wasn't enrolled as a student in the Montessori course in Rome, but attended lectures and also lectured herself on the exemplary work she had been doing in Sydney. As Martha Simpson rose through the ranks of the NSW Department of Public Instruction, she hoped to introduce the Montessori method into every public school in NSW.

As Martha Simpson pointed out in a report to the department, it is hardly surprising that an educational approach based on liberty and independence, promising to educate self-reliant, resourceful individuals, would resonate in the Australia of 1913.

Based as it is on liberty, the Montessori system is particularly well suited to the educational needs of a free, democratic country like Australia, where self-reliance, individuality, resource, originality, and freshness of thought are qualities much desired in future citizens (Simpson 1914, p. 45).

In her report, Martha Simpson described how successful the Montessori approach proved in teaching such young and disadvantaged children to write and read.

One little fellow of 5 years and 9 months took a bundle of [sentences written on cardboard strips] into a corner of the room by himself and kept at them the whole day until he could read each one. I consider the child taught himself to read in one day (Simpson 1914, p. 26).

Martha Simpson's arguments were irresistible in the Australia of the day, and in the years 1912, 1913 and 1914, Ministers of Education, senior educational bureaucrats and leading educational reformers became convinced that Montessori education was the right approach for Australian schools. Mr Ambrose Carmichael, the NSW Minister of Education, visited Dr Montessori and attended some of the 2nd International Montessori course in Rome in August 1914. He even invited Dr Montessori to Sydney in order, over two years, to assist in implementing the Montessori approach in all NSW schools. But this was not to be because, as Bob Petersen reminds us, at the same

time as Mr Carmichael was visiting Rome and issuing his invitation to Dr Montessori, people in Sarajevo were stitching flags for the Archduke's visit. Nevertheless, despite the outbreak of war, over the next few years there were to be hundreds of children in Montessori classes at Blackfriars, North Newton, Australia Street and other public schools in the inner city of Sydney. In 1917 Miss Simpson was appointed the first female Inspector of Schools in NSW, and her role at Blackfriars was taken over by Rachel Stephens, who continued the Montessori program there into the 1930s.

During these years, teachers from all over Australia and New Zealand trained in Montessori methods at Blackfriars, and many of these teachers went on to forge very successful careers and to wield considerable influence over the direction of early years education in Australia.

The Montessori vision in a hostile world

When the Selfe sisters returned to Sydney in 1913, Rhoda began teaching in Martha Simpson's Montessori classrooms at the Blackfriars Practising School, and Norma began teaching in the Montessori classrooms at North Newton Public School. Unfortunately, however, it seems that Rhoda and Norma were not comfortable with Martha Simpson's adaptation of Montessori methods for public schools, so in 1915 they opened their own school in Ashfield, which they called Warwick Montessori School. There they were able to implement their vision of what Montessori

education should be based on what they had seen and learned in Rome.

They ran the school very successfully for about six years, when they seem to have handed it over to teachers who had been trained at the Montessori Kindergarten Training College set up in Adelaide by Lillian de Lissa, whom we will hear about in a minute. The school became the Croydon Montessori School – and appears also to have remained as a Montessori school into the 1930s.

Meanwhile, Ruby Starling worked from 1915 to 1918 for the Kindergarten Union, very successfully directing a Montessori class called The Little Brown House in Pymont. Miss Simpson attended the opening of this school and endorsed the program there. The following description of Ruby's classroom, as reported in the Daily Telegraph in October 1915, suggests she was able to fulfil the Montessori vision Montessori teachers still strive to achieve in 2014.

A morning spent with the Montessori babies, of whom there are already 20 ranging in age from 2 1/2 to 6 years, is full of interest, and the effect of the training on the baby minds is remarkable. They evince the greatest intelligence and interest in the different lessons. The underlying principle of the system is the freedom of the children and the development of independence. The youngest babies at the school are taught to dress and undress themselves, to wash their hands and faces, to brush their hair, and to rely on themselves for those personal offices. Their early lessons consist of learning to button, hook, clasp, snap, and lace the various articles of a child's dress, and to tie bows and knots. ... The 'silence game' is one of the prettiest imaginable. Marching, running, skipping are all taught and entered into with enthusiasm. At their meals the babies 'behave themselves' beautifully, singing a little grace before they begin, laying the table, and 'clearing away' afterwards. Yet through all the work, which is made to be like play, the individuality of each child is allowed full scope.

In 1918 at the end of the war, Ruby's sister, a military nurse, was lost in the Irish Sea when her ship was torpedoed by a U-boat, and the Starling family like thousands of other Australian families, were in mourning for a lost son or daughter. Gradually, as those who had survived the carnage of the war began to return home, new spectres began to haunt the country – physically and psychologically damaged men, social disharmony and an influenza epidemic that took 10 000 Australian lives, mostly young adults including one of the teachers working for the Kindergarten Union in South Australia.

At the same time the leading SKTC trainer for Kindergarten Union in NSW was reasserting Froebel's methods, by 1924 Ruby had been replaced in Pymont with a teacher following the SKTC program, and the school was named the Maybanke Free Kindergarten to honour the Kindergarten Union founder. Ruby remained honorary secretary until 1939

Lillian de Lissa

In the early twentieth century Lillian de Lissa influence on early childhood education in Australia and the United Kingdom was considerable. Her philosophy is summarised in the phrase: 'Teachers are the makers of society'.

As a very young woman still in her teens, Lillian de Lissa trained at the SKTC, one or two years ahead of Rhoda and Norma Selfe, whom she would have known. Lillian de Lissa too began work at the Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten, suggesting a connection

between her family and Maybanke Anderson, who founded the Kindergarten Union in NSW, established the Sydney Kindergarten Training College and employed the College Principals from Chicago who became Lillian de Lissa's trainers and mentors. De Lissa's close association with the Kindergartners of Chicago would eventually open doors for her on her later study tours of America.

In 1905, the South Australian philanthropist and social reformer, Bertram Hawker, had been so inspired by a visit to the Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten that he convinced the then Principal of the SKTC, Frances Newton, to travel to Adelaide with her star graduate, Lillian de Lissa, then only 20 years old, to hold demonstration Kindergarten classes there. Soon Lillian de Lissa, using Maybanke Anderson's model, had established Free Kindergartens and a Kindergarten Teachers College in Adelaide. One of Lillian de Lissa's mentors in Adelaide, Catherine Helen Spence, would have known Maybanke Anderson well because of their shared commitment to enshrining women's suffrage in the newly federated Australia.

Just as the Woolloomooloo Kindergarten had inspired Bertram Hawker on his visit to Sydney, when he visited Rome in 1912, he was equally inspired by Dr Montessori's method, which led him to open a Montessori school on his father-in-law's estate in England. He also sent Lillian de Lissa a copy of Maria Montessori's book, and she began experimenting with Montessori techniques in her schools in Adelaide. She also travelled to Sydney to visit Blackfriars.

Then in 1914, in the footsteps of the Selfe sisters, Lillian de Lissa travelled to Rome to take part in the second International Montessori training course with Maria Montessori herself. At the end of the course she was a keynote speaker at the first Montessori conference in the United Kingdom. Her paper was subsequently published in Kindergarten journals in the UK and Australia, and remains to this day one of the best reviews of Montessori education ever written.

There is no bigger agency in social regeneration than education – for what can be more scientific than that correct formation which education seeks to bring about? It is more psychological and more economical than reformation and far more humane. The world is but slowly awakening to this; and nations spend enormous sums compulsorily on patching up, on trying to put right, wrong that never should have been (de Lissa, 1914, p. 3).

When Lillian de Lissa returned to Adelaide in 1915, the Free Kindergartens became Montessori schools, and the Kindergarten Training College became the Montessori Kindergarten Training College (Burgess & Keeves 1975: 15). Colleagues in Adelaide shared her enthusiasm, and many travelled to Sydney to be trained at Blackfriars. When Lillian de Lissa travelled to Sydney to talk about the Montessori experiments in Adelaide, Rhoda and Norma Selfe were in the audience.

In 1917 Lillian de Lissa was invited to England to establish the Gipsy Hill Training College, with the aim of transforming nursery school teacher education in the United Kingdom. From Gipsy Hill Lillian

de Lissa's influence spread throughout the United Kingdom and internationally (Whitehead 2009, 2010). Meanwhile Kindergarten teachers in Adelaide continued to be trained in Montessori methods until the Second World War. Teachers trained in Montessori methods at the Montessori Kindergarten Training College in Adelaide were often recruited to work in private Montessori schools in Sydney. Thus, Lillian de Lissa's contribution and lifetime achievement can also be understood as part of Maybanke's legacy.

The nature of this legacy is brought home most graphically by comparing two photographs, taken ten years apart in the same 'Infants' classroom at the South Australian Observation School. The first picture was taken in 1909, before Montessori methods were introduced to Infant Schools in South Australia, and the second ten years later in 1919, after the introduction of Montessori methods. The contrast between these two pictures illustrates the Montessori legacy in Australia in the early 20th century, not least of all for liberating children from being forcibly seated in 'galleries' forever.

But the story of Montessori education in Australia was far from over.

Norma Selfe at Havilah

After the leaving 'Warwick' and 'The Little Brown House', it appears that neither Rhoda Selfe nor Ruby Starling ever taught Montessori again. For Norma Selfe, however, it could be said that her Montessori career had only just begun.

By the early 1920s Rhoda and Norma Selfe had returned to the family home, Gilligooloa, in Normanhurst, and had begun working as volunteers at the nearby Havilah Church of England Children's Home, a home for neglected and orphaned children, of whom there were many in the post war and depression years. By 1924 Norma was employed at the home as the Leader of the Kindergarten, a post she held for at least 23 years, possibly longer. She persuaded the Children's Home to buy a set of the Montessori apparatus and she used the Montessori method in the kindergarten class until she retired in December 1948 (Petersen 1983, p. 241). The Montessori Kindergarten class at the Havilah Children's Home appears to have been one of the most stable and long lasting of any Montessori classes run by the same teacher in the whole centenary of Montessori education in Australia.

Apart from a few photographs found among Norma Selfe's papers, it has not been possible to access any records that reveal more about Norma Selfe's class at Havilah. We can only assume that during her long years of service at Havilah Norma Selfe kept alive her commitment to Montessori education as a means of ameliorating the lives of disadvantaged children, as she had witnessed firsthand in the Montessori schools in Rome in 1913.

Towards the end of her life, in the late 1960s, Dr R. C. Petersen of the University of Sydney interviewed Norma Selfe about her Montessori training and work. These interviews are the basis of

much of what we know about the Selfe sisters, and Ruby Starling, as pioneers of Montessori education in Australia.

One of the legacies of Maybanke Selfe Wolstenholme Anderson, through her nieces, Rhoda and Norma Selfe, pioneers of Montessori education in Australia, whose education and training owed so much to Maybanke, is the century of Montessori education in Australia celebrated in 2013. Despite the challenges, Montessori education continues to flourish in Australia at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

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Rhoda Jane Selfe 1884 - 1954

Maybanke Anderson's niece, who trained with Maria Montessori in Rome in 1913 and were among the pioneers of Montessori method in Australia



Norma Catherine Selfe 1888 - 1978

Maybanke Anderson's niece, who trained with Maria Montessori in Rome in 1913 and were among the pioneers of Montessori method in Australia

Early Childhood Education in Australia

- Maybanke's legacy in the 21st Century

Professor Margaret Sims

University of New England

6 May 2014

Many of the beliefs and values that drove Maybanke's work in early childhood still influence the provision of services today. In this section of our presentation I will discuss some of the key beliefs Maybanke demonstrated in her early childhood work and reflect on those beliefs in the world of today.

Early childhood years are important

Maybanke believed the early childhood years were important because she saw these years as providing the foundation for growth and development. The early years shape the future adult:

A state system of education which neglects the care of infants, common as it is, has never existed without a warning from the thinkers of its era. Aristotle told his disciples that State education should begin in early childhood and that the playthings of the child should have a bearing upon the life and work of the man. Plato insisted on bringing children together from three to seven so that good habits might be implanted. Juvenal said that the character is made at seven. To come to later times, Kant said that the first seven years of a child's life are the decisive years in his history and to many a wise man has been attributed the saying 'Give me the first seven years of the child and I care not who shall have the rest' (November 1895 Editorial in Women's Voice, cited in Roberts, 1993, p110-11)

Research since that time has clearly supported Maybanke's position. We now know that experiences in the early years of life shape children's neurobiology and physiology (Sims, 2013). There is now considerable consensus that:

... of all the experiences throughout the life of an individual, the organising experiences of early childhood have the most powerful and enduring effects on brain organisation and functioning ... early childhood trauma or maltreatment has a disproportionate capacity to cause significant dysfunction, in comparison with similar trauma or maltreatment later in life (Perry & Hambrick, 2008, p. 40).

The study of the impact of the environment on the genome is called epigenetics (Palkhivala, 2010). Epigenetic research has now identified that the key chemical pathways involved in transferring the influence of the environment into the genome are those associated with the stress response (Hertzman & Boyce, 2010; Sweatt, 2009). Stress (caused for example through fear, anxiety, hunger, thirst, pain, pollutants, drugs/alcohol) activates biochemical stress response systems. When these systems are activated much of the time the system adjusts so that high levels of stress response become the biological 'norm'. Unfortunately this new biological 'norm' results in a range of undesirable outcomes. Children who are chronically highly stressed are much more likely to have behaviour problems which ultimately lead to juvenile delinquency, teenage parenthood, poor educational achievement and/or drug/alcohol addictions. They are more likely to be physically and mentally unhealthy as adults and have a shorter life span (Marshall & Kenney, 2009).

These chronically high levels of stress can be moderated if children experience secure and nurturing relationships (Sims & Hutchins, 2011). These relationships cause a reaction in the body resulting in particular chemicals attaching to the part of the DNA coding for stress reactivity. This prompts the DNA to produce more ‘stress catching’ chemicals so that children with this form of genome experience less extreme stress reactions (because the chemicals that cause stress are ‘caught’ and thus unable to create the stress response) (Meaney, 2001, 2010). Of course, parents who are themselves stressed are less able to moderate the stress experienced by their children (Meaney, 2001). Thus families living in conditions of high stress (for example, families who are disadvantaged through poverty, drug/alcohol addiction, minority status) are likely to be limited in the extent to which they can buffer their children from the impacts of chronic stress, ensuring that the children themselves will grow up biologically primed for poor outcomes which they will transmit to future generations. Maybanke’s argument that the early years provide the foundation for life-long outcomes has now been demonstrated to be sound: early years experiences not only contribute to life-long outcomes for children, but for their descendants.

Early childhood services are needed to provide alternative care for mothers who are working.

Early childhood services are important because they address a range of issues. When parents are unable to care for their children, early

childhood services can provide substitute care. In Sydney in the late 1800s many women needed to work and there was no-one to look after their children. Maybanke, in her story of the Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, reports an incident that she saw as illustrative of the great need for alternative care for children:

On a doorstep near, stood a woman who said she went out to work. "Every day?" "Yes'm, mostly every day. Either washin' or cleanin'. What do I do with the children? Well, yer see, it's like this. The lidies where I go won't 'ave no youngsters about the place, so I 'ave to leave 'em here." "Outside?" "Well, you know, I couldn't leave the door open, so I 'ave just to lock 'em out." And there they were, three grubby mites, sitting on the narrow curb, with their feet in the gutter. They were amongst our first children" (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, p. 215)

This motivation appeared based on a concern for the well-being of the children:

There is no doubt that in an Ideal city, under an ideal government, there would be a free Kindergarten, within the reach of every child likely to be neglected. It is neither kind nor economical to allow children to become larrikins and criminals... (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, p. 216)

In our modern times, whilst there is certainly a belief that early childhood services should be provided for children so that parents may work, such a belief is centered on the need for parental employment in order to facilitate the well-being of the nation and the national economy. The inquiry currently being undertaken on behalf of the Coalition government by the Productivity Commission (<http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/childcare>) has as its first term of reference a focus on childcare as a contributor to

workforce participation before identifying its contribution to child development and the transition to schooling. The introduction of the 2013 Coalition's Policy for better childcare and early learning begins with the point that:

The Coalition understands that many families are struggling to find high quality child care that is flexible and affordable enough to meet their needs. According to ABS data, nearly 120,000 Australian parents say they can't access employment because they can't find suitable child care (Liberal National Party of Australia, 2013, p. 3)

And concludes with the statement that:

Australian families need a system that is not only affordable, but ensures people can work flexible hours whilst knowing that their children are receiving high quality child care (p. 3).

Thus over time we appear to have a shift from alternative care for the benefit of children to alternative care to support parental employment. Both positions have at their basis a concern for the wellbeing of the nation.

Early childhood services help mothers improve their parenting

In her commemorative address in 1913, Maybanke said:

There is widespread superstition that to take care of a child is to undermine the inborn love of the mother, and to hinder or destroy her maternal responsibility. No pagan superstition has less foundation. The poor uneducated mother who has been, before her marriage, and sometimes even up until the birth of her child, a factory girl or shop hand,

has often substantial reason for looking on her baby as a burden, to be got rid of as soon as he can run about. Of course she loves her offspring, and the more she loves it, the more she feels her ignorance, and the heavier grows her burden. To take care of her child, not only helps her materially, but also teaches her by example to love it wisely and to treat it better. No working mother ever cared less for her little ones because of the Free Kindergarten. On the contrary, many an ignorant or careless one has there learned her first lesson in homely wisdom (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, pp. 229 - 230).

Families have a greater impact on child outcomes than any other environment the child experiences (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). Early childhood services are now expected to build trusting and warm partnerships with families in order to support children's development. One of five key principles in the Early Years Learning Framework which guides high quality early childhood practice in Australia is a requirement that educators prioritise the development of secure, reciprocal and respectful relationships with children and their families (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009).

This arises from a recognition that children's achievements are influenced not only by the learning opportunities provided in the early childhood setting, but much more by the learning opportunities provided in the home environment (arising from Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory - Bronfenbrenner, 2005). However, parents who are experiencing high levels of stress are less effective in their role of parenting (Tough, Siever, Benzies, Leew, & Johnston, 2010; Wachs, 2009).

One of the key roles that early childhood services can undertake is that of supporting parents (Sims, 2002). The combination of face-to-face work amongst children with parental support is recognised as a key element in integrated early childhood services. Such integrated services are beginning in Australia with the development of place-based approaches to service delivery (Centre for Community Child Health, 2011), actioned through integrated early childhood/family centres (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2013; Grace, Bowes, McMaugh, & Gibson, 2009; Izmir, Katz, & Bruce, 2009), collaborative partnerships between different agencies (Gibson, 2011; Mitchell, 2012; Press, 2012; Wong, Press, Sumsion, & Hard, 2012) and family-centred practice (Rouse, 2012). This move towards an integrated approach to the delivery of early childhood services takes Maybanke's ideas of parent education to a new level: parental education combined with parent support and community development (Sims, 2002). This new focus aims at not only improving the quality of parenting through increasing parental knowledge, but on improving the conditions in which adults parent so that parenting itself becomes easier, more highly valued and more widely supported.

Early childhood services are needed to prevent children growing up uneducated, illiterate and unable to improve their lot in life

Maybanke argued that learning needed to be based on a firm foundation and that kindergartens played a very important role in

establishing this foundation. On 15 February 1907 she wrote, in *The Poor Man's Child: How are we training him for citizenship?*:

Every kindergarten is managed by a director, who, with many assistants, tries to lay a foundation for character in the children by training them in habits of truthfulness and courtesy. They help them to love cleanliness and order. They teach them to observe accurately, to express themselves with precision, and by manual training of many kinds they develop deft fingers and a desire for useful work (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, p. 212)

There were many who disagreed: not with the idea that early education provided a better foundation for learning, but rather that it might provide TOO strong a foundation, and that children from the slums might be educated beyond their place in life. Maybanke quoted one speaker from a meeting held in the Sydney Town Hall not long after the 23 August 1895 as saying:

“Education,” one speaker urged, “unfits people to become servants. You will give these children grand ideas, and do more harm than good.”
(Roberts & Kingston, 2001, p. 214)

Some many years later Freire (1973) was to make the same point but from a different perspective. Freire argued that education was a cultural action that could be liberatory, but most often was not. Instead it was used as a way to oppress, to shape children to fit their role in society. In many ways the early kindergarten movement illustrated Freire's concerns. In 1912 Maybanke wrote in *The Story of Free Kindergartens*:

But a little girl who washes a doll and her clothes, and learns to love the sweet air of purity, may carry into her home a hitherto unrecognised ideal (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, p. 226)

As is common for her time, Maybanke expressed the role of early education as preparing young people for their appropriate roles in society: in this example preparing young girls to be mothers. We now know that experiences in the early years have a significant impact on later outcomes and very much shape children's future potential. We see this particularly in relation to social class (which we now identify as social disadvantage). For example, children from high socioeconomic backgrounds and children from neighbourhoods that are more affluent (irrespective of their socioeconomic status) perform better academically when they begin school (Melhuish, 2010). Children from homes with more literacy materials available to them do better in literacy and vocabulary level at age 5 (Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). Mothers' education levels are found to impact on children's mathematic and English achievement at age 11 (Melhuish, 2010).

The more disadvantage children experience in their early years the greater the impact on their outcomes. This is reflected in social gradients which are now recognised across a range of health, wellbeing and developmental outcomes. We now know, for example, that children who are exposed to 7 or more stressful life events (events such as poverty, parental unemployment, dysfunctional relationships, being a member of a minority group) are actually

experiencing stress equivalent to that of living in a war zone (Silburn et al., 2006). These children are much more likely to grow to experience coronary heart disease or chronic pulmonary disease, addictions, depression, cancer and mental health problems. Where stressful life events are experienced in utero as well as in the early childhood years the risk for poor adult outcomes doubles. For example children whose mothers smoked whilst they were in utero are much more likely to abuse substances themselves in adulthood (Tremblay, 2010). Children who were in utero at the time of the World Trade Centre collapse and whose mothers were directly exposed to this event were found to be at a greater risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder by age 1 (Yehuda et al., 2005). Foetuses whose mothers gained excessive weight in pregnancy are more likely to become obese as adults, however if mothers had anti-obesity surgery prior to the pregnancy their children were more likely to become adults with normal weights (Paul, 2010).

Thus in our times the role of education in 'sorting' children, albeit not intentionally, still exists. Children who are disadvantaged remain so throughout their school years and into adulthood as illustrated by the ongoing existence of social gradients (Li, McMurray, & Stanley, 2008; McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007; McCain & Mustard, 1999). Early childhood services are crucial in preventing, and ameliorating this disadvantage, but only if children who are most disadvantaged are able to participate in high quality programmes. Such

participation is still not equal across Australian society as discussed in the following section.

Early childhood services are needed to address inequity in society

Maybanke followed the theosophical ideas of education as a means of social regeneration. Theosophists value truth and aim to “... form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour” (Theosophical Society of Australia, <http://www.austheos.org.au/>). Children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances were likely to become adults who were unemployable, drunkards and criminals according to Maybanke. In *The Poor Man’s Child: How are we training him for citizenship*, 1907, Maybanke wrote:

The children of the drunken and the dissolute, of the deserted wife, who earns a bare living while they play in the street; the children of the incapable, and of those who by birth or training are useless and utterly irresponsible, the coming citizens – they gather in the gutters of the narrow byways, and even in their chatter and their play, one who knows how to listen may hear a menace for the future (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, p. 212).

The early intervention movement, begun in a significant way in the 1960s, is based on the understanding that intervening early makes the biggest difference in children’s lives (Hertzman, 2002; Sims, 2013). From the 1960s a number of early intervention programmes were developed, implemented and evaluated, adding substantially to our understanding of what makes ‘good’ intervention and what impacts this can have. The Perry HighScope intervention

(Schweinhart et al., 2005) offered children living in poverty access to a full-time, high quality, centre-based early childhood programme in the year before they began school. Children graduating from the programme were, by the time they were 40 years of age more likely to:

- be employed,
- have remained in school longer and achieved post-school qualifications
- be healthy
- own their own homes.

They were less likely to:

- be on welfare,
- have committed criminal offenses,
- have required special education support,
- become pregnant as teenagers
- have used illegal drugs.

Other programmes, such as the Chicago Child-Parent Centres (Reynolds & Ou, 2011; Reynolds, Temple, White, Ou, & Robertson, 2011) and David Olds' nurse home visiting programme (Olds, Hill, & Rumsey, 1998) demonstrated similar positive results (although the Perry HighScope evaluation has followed graduates for longer periods of time than any other study so demonstrates longer-term impact). Longitudinal studies in countries other than the USA also indicate similar outcomes (for example the EPPE study in the UK:

Sylva et al., 2010). Positive early childhood experiences enhance capacity to succeed in school, long term health and wellbeing, and employment opportunities.

Interestingly, the impact of disadvantage appears to cross generations so that intervention today may change outcomes not just for the targeted children, but for their descendants. One study showed that socioeconomic status of grandfathers impacts on the cognitive development of their grandchildren (Najman et al., 2004). In Australia, grandchildren of Indigenous ‘Stolen Children’ were less likely to be as healthy as other Indigenous children who did not have a ‘Stolen Child’ in their ancestry (Silburn et al., 2006). The recent epigenetic work discussed above has demonstrated the underpinning biology that explains how experiences modify the genome and are thus transmitted across generations (Hertzman & Boyce, 2010; Palkhivala, 2010).

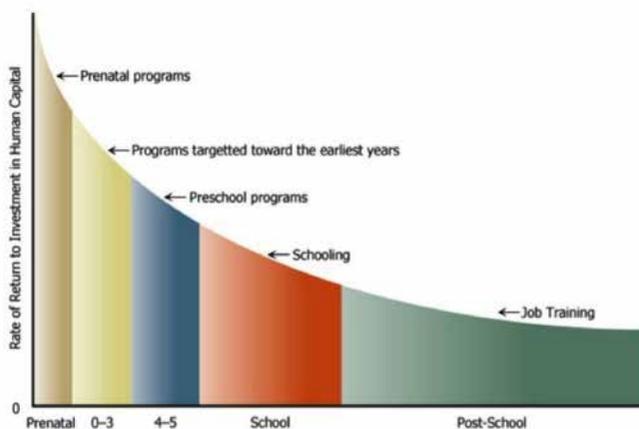
The long term consequences of NOT addressing inequities in society are thus significant as inequality today translates into increased inequality in the future. As a nation, Australia is demonstrating increasingly poorer outcomes for many of its children and, in comparison to other OECD countries, Australia’s children are not doing very well in a number of areas (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2013). Australia rates in the bottom third of OECD countries for a range of indicators:

- the number of children living in families with no employment (22nd of 25)
- levels of income inequality (26th of 34)
- infant mortality rates (22nd of 31)
- percentage of children aged 3-5 years of age in an early childhood programme (30th of 34).

This disadvantage today indicates bigger problems tomorrow. Not the least is that social inequality costs money. Those who are disadvantaged require more government support in areas such as welfare benefits, they incur increased health costs, and costs associated with criminal behaviour. These costs are reduced when children attend quality early childhood programmes. Heckman, a Nobel Prize winning economist, calculated the cost-benefit ratios of various forms of intervention across the childhood years and produced his now famous graph illustrating this. This graph (see Figure 1) can be found in many of Heckman's works (Heckman, 2006, 2008; Heckman & Masterov, 2007). The graph demonstrates visually the return on investment for early education compared to the return on investment in programmes targeted at other age groups across childhood.

Early childhood development is a smart investment

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: James Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics

Figure 1: Heckman's graph illustrating the cost-benefit ratios of investment in children. Reproduced under Creative Commons Licence CC BY-NC-ND www.heckmanequation.org

Appropriate investment in the early years in the long term reduces social inequity and saves the nation money. Maybanke's argument over 100 years ago positioned children who were disadvantaged as a potential menace. Today's economic argument presents these children as future costs to society. In both cases, we know that appropriate early childhood services can go a long way towards preventing the menace and the cost.

Early childhood services need well trained, highly qualified staff

Maybanke was a pioneer in arguing for training for her early childhood teachers. At a time when primary teachers learned through an apprentice model (Roberts, 1993), Maybanke argued that early childhood teachers needed special, pre-service preparation.

The young women who do all this need special preparation. It is not light work, and few indeed, if any, are born kindergarteners. Two years of training are necessary, and the K.U. maintains a college where young women over eighteen are received and prepared to take charge of children, wither in a home or in a kindergarten (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, p. 212).

We recognise today that improving staff qualifications are an essential component in improving the quality of early childhood service delivery (Elliott, 2006; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2011). Prior to the introduction of the national standards for early childhood, a range of qualifications were accepted in different states and territories of Australia as appropriate for working with young children. It is interesting that Maybanke's early childhood training course was a 2 year course. In Australia today the TAFE Diploma remains nominally a 2 year course and this remains an acceptable qualification for working with young children. The Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations specify that from 1 January 2014, in all States and Territories of Australia "50 per cent of educators required to meet the relevant ratios in the service must have, or be actively working towards, at least an approved diploma

level education and care qualification” (from <http://www.acecqa.gov.au/Diploma-level-education-and-care-qualifications>).

Staff with higher levels of training are also required, but in lower numbers. The Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations (<http://www.acecqa.gov.au/Early-childhood-teaching-qualifications>) specify that from 1 January 2014, in all States and Territories of Australia, an early childhood teacher (that is someone with a 4 year Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood or a qualification deemed equivalent) is required at least 20% of the time the service operates if there are fewer than 25 places for children at the service. If there are 25 to 59 children the early childhood teacher needs to be in attendance for at least 60% of the operating hours of the service. For larger services more than one early childhood teacher needs to be available for some of the time the service operates.

Research in the UK demonstrates that highly trained early childhood staff are able to take on a leadership role, mentoring and supporting other staff in a service to improve service delivery (Sylva et al., 2010). The research showed that, in centres where staff were trained to a lesser degree, child outcomes were not as good with lower levels of peer sociability, cooperation, and conformity, and higher levels of antisocial or worried behaviours in children.

There are some transition arrangements in place that identify some of the equivalencies – see <http://www.acecqa.gov.au/Early-childhood-teaching-qualifications>

An Australian study (Degotardi, 2010) showed that over a third of the variability in play stimulation by staff was explained by the qualification level alone. Greater levels of variability in sensitivity in routines (44%) and in using routines to provide stimulation (55%) were explained by staff qualification levels.

Maybanke's early childhood training has set a model that is still clearly evident today. Her two-year Diploma, translated into the modern Diploma, is required for at least 50% of early childhood staff. A smaller number of staff are required to take additional training and this training positions them as educational or pedagogical leaders with a mandate to drive quality improvement.

Early childhood services should be funded by the government

There is no doubt that private services often have the flexibility that government-funded services do not. Maybanke began her kindergartens with private funding because there was no government support for the work at the time.

We are occasionally told, when we ask for support, that our work, being a part of education, ought not to be dependent at all on private subscriptions. ... But a State School Kindergarten with an inspection always demanding progress in actual knowledge, and teachers anxious for promotion, can never have quite the same general influence on surrounding homes, as a Free Kindergarten (Roberts & Kingston, 2001, pp. 231 - 232)

Today there still remains a tension between the provision of services by government and the provision of services by the private sector.

As far back as 2006, the OECD identified the growing neoliberal positioning of the market as a way of limiting public expenditure and increasing parental choice in liberal democratic nations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). The use of the market to drive early childhood services was based on assumptions that competition was the best tool to impel service improvement, inequality is necessary to force competition and that public services are inherently inefficient and that therefore, private services are better (Moss, 2009). The result of these beliefs in Australia led to increasing privatisation and corporatisation of child care in particular (less so for kindergartens); to the point where ABC Early Learning became the largest corporate child care chain in the world before its collapse. However, international research indicates market philosophy has not resulted in improvements in quality in early childhood services (McCain et al., 2011). For many parents, access to services for their children is extremely difficult and they are forced to accept any place they can get: the option of rejecting a place because they do not like the service is not one available to them. In fact, a "... commercial presence does not increase the number of child care spaces since chains are more likely to buy out independent operators than establish new programs" (McCain et al., 2011, p. 86).

Thus the increase in the private/corporate sector in service provision has had the counter effect of creating a lobby arguing vehemently against legislative changes aimed at improving quality

because such changes increase costs and reduce profits. For example Gwynn Bridge, President of the Child Care Alliance said in 2010:

... the increases in quality determined by the National Quality Agenda will absolutely adversely affect affordability for our families ... The government will be forcing a large number of families currently struggling with their child care fees to “fall between the cracks” and remove their children from a formal early learning setting and themselves from the workforce. (<http://www.careforkids.com.au/childcarenews/2010/july/direction.html>)

However, despite this there is still a feeling that governments around the world are unlikely to make the legislative changes necessary to create universally accessible, high quality early childhood systems that offer families genuine choices. One of the great leaders in early childhood, Dr Fraser Mustard, was reported to feel “... genuinely wretched as the needs of young children were put on hold as governments decided—once again—that this year’s budget had other priorities” (A tribute to Fraser Mustard, <http://earlyyearsstudy.ca/en/tribute-fraser-mustard/>). In his final work, published posthumously, Mustard and colleagues wrote a complaint that reads much like that made by Maybanke over 100 years earlier:

The early childhood programs the federal government directly oversees are often mired in legislative duplication, over-regulation and blurred responsibility for delivery. Governance ambiguity spills over to complicate funding effectiveness and to compromise program access, quality and accountability. These same challenges are found at the provincial level ... But with little public support, child care services are unresponsive, fragmented, unaccountable and vulnerable (McCain et al., 2011, p. 80 and 82).

The report goes on to argue:

Creating an early childhood education system out of a service patchwork is tough work. It takes new legislative and regulatory oversight, the amalgamation of agencies and changes to funding arrangements, position descriptions and recruitment and training practices. Integrating education and care is not an incremental process. On their own, partnership protocols and stakeholders tables intended to better coordinate services often entrench the status quo. System-making requires a paradigm shift in our understanding of the real circumstances in which young children live and actions to match. There is room for improvement in every jurisdiction (McCain et al., 2011, pp. 83 - 84).

In Australia such changes have barely begun but change is a slow process and subject to changes in political ideology. One of the most significant contributions we can make to early childhood today is to lobby for bipartisan support and understanding of the importance of the early childhood years and a bipartisan commitment to funding high quality, flexible and accessible early childhood services so that EVERY child in Australia can experience good beginnings.

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