

Topic – from Head to Head or Heads Together?
Cultivating information literacy in early childhood

The ability to use online information effectively is a critical skill needed in the 21st century, so that children are better equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of our interconnected world (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). One of the main assumptions made about children today is that by virtue of being born in the digital world they will be savvy users of technology (Geck, 2006). However, being able to access digital technologies and online resources does not mean they are able to find and apply information effectively (Zammit, 2013). Having the dispositions to evaluate, apply and transfer information is how people turn information into knowledge. A knowledge economy requires critical and creative thinkers, starting from an early age. Low information literacy may manifest in poorer outcomes across a range of areas, from educational outcomes through to health and wellbeing, affecting life trajectories (McFadden & Smeaton 2016).

The 2015 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data identified that 22.9% of children were developmentally vulnerable in the geographic area that this project took place. Provision of a Department of Education and Training research grant facilitated a place-based response from university researchers, a local early childhood centre, two primary schools and library services to develop a scalable and transferrable model of transdisciplinary practice designed with a specific focus on the information literacy of young children. Outcomes of this research included a co-designed relational information literacy (IL) pedagogical model for embedding IL in early childhood.

Our research highlights that teachers of young children view IL as having the technical skills and language to source information and construct knowledge. Common themes that emerged from the data revealed that teachers were unsure of how to foster ‘evaluativist’ thinking in young children and the challenge of aligning their pedagogical practice to curriculum demands, particularly in relation to the use of digital tools was evident. This was the catalyst for designing a suite of professional learning materials incorporating a ‘4-C Model’ which approaches IL through a relational lens. The model encapsulates an inquiry process; *CONNECT*, *CREATE*, *CONTEST* and *CHANGE* through an epistemic view of learners and teachers by expanding their repertoire of competencies.

The conceptual framework of the research design was cyclical and iterative which is consistent with the processes used in Community Based Participatory Research (Israel, 1990; Stringer, 2007). This approach drew on the capacity of all team members to address an area of collective interest, in this case, enhancing the information literacy of young children to offer a positive cycle of advantage and effect change in individual children’s lives, their families and their communities (Carbone, 2004).

Research findings are shared through an interactive workshop and PowerPoint presentation, outlining the ‘4-C Model’. We pose the challenge to shift 21st century pedagogy away from the dominant paradigm of artificially pre-packaged information to an epistemic landscape that facilitates active learning using real world information resources (Breivik, 1998), information processes, practices and meaningful reflection (Bruce, 2004). The presentation focuses on how this research can be translated into practice through reflection, critical thinking and professional dialogue. Professional learning materials including a set of keys serve to unpack the model and pedagogical approach.