

The ROSE Way discusses the Rights of Children

The Rights of Children through the Eyes of Children –

Carrie Rose & Educators of Rosie's Early Learning

To build a child's self-identity we must first see and understand how the child sees themselves - in the environment and in their relationships. As children develop deeper understanding of their rights as a contributing citizenship, educators develop a clearer understanding of the critical importance of these environments and relationships. As the Educational documentation builds a strong 'Image of each child' to the educators it must be remembered that children are first and foremost a citizen in their own right. ***In Reggio Emilia, children are referred to as protagonists. The Merriam- Webster Dictionary (2013) defines a protagonist as "a leading actor, character or participant in a literary work or real event or a leader, proponent, or supporter of a cause."***

This is how we saw children in our community but the challenge was: How could we give this lens to the community?

The Rosie's way is a collaborative way. As a team of Educators delving deep into these meaningful connections and thus developing genuine partnerships with families and children was crucial. This was not only within individual groups but following on from 2015's inter-woven group engagements, connections were furthermore inter-connected. As children explored their own identity through their understandings of families, challenging their self-perception and exploring who were they 'under their skin' questions around their rights began to emerge from the documentation. *What do the children truly understand about 'their rights as an active and contributing citizen and where are they making influence?'*

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) provides people with a common ground to work together to build and strengthen their community and help shape the future and wellbeing of Australian children. The results in physical health and wellbeing and social competence was increasing. (<https://www.aedc.gov.au/communities>)

- The percentage of children vulnerable on the physical health and wellbeing domain has increased from 9.3 per cent in 2009 and 2012 to 9.7 per cent in 2015.

- The percentage of children vulnerable on the social competence domain has increased from 9.5 in 2009 to 9.9 per cent in 2015.

Advocating for children's competence is the underpinning of Rosie's Educators and as a service we have been very proud of our achievements in the Logan area. In a local community where the AEDC (2012 & 2015) results identified one in three children in Logan to be in one-two vulnerable areas, shifting a community's perception of young children's can be a struggle. The commitment to advocating that all children can be contributing citizens regardless of the demographic of the community became our agenda. Children are citizens with inherent rights too.

The United Nations Child Friendly Convention on the Rights of a Child - Article 12 in states:

Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account
(<https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycrc.pdf>)

Our intention was to find new ways of for our Pedagogy. Our pedagogy of thinking, documenting and listening so we could ensure that the children of Rosie's Early learning would not only have a voice but it was a voice that was being heard and enacted on. Although they had been voicing their thoughts for many years in the community through letters and contributions to local governments ect, it was apparent that the concept that these opinions should be taken seriously was not yet one of the community.

The Logan Together Initiative emerged in 2015 and is the first of its kind in Australia being funded by Federal, State and Local governments. Its premise is to address the AEDC results and to find better outcomes for children 0 – 8 years. (<http://loganttogether.org.au>). We knew this was an opportunity that could not be under-estimated and we forged forward to give the children a voice. We found traction and by August 2015 the children from Rosie's EL were engaged in three projects capable of influencing perceptions.

What have been the Outcomes?

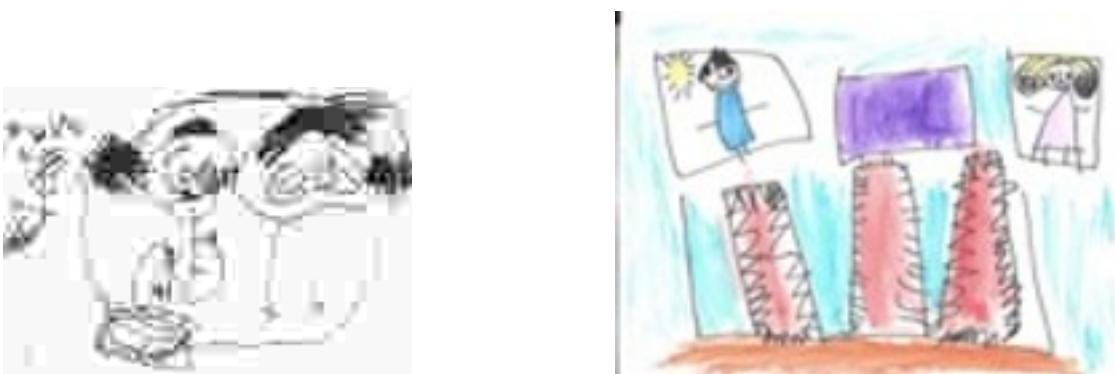
For children, we understood that if they viewed themselves as contributors capable of making a difference this would-be life-long. We hoped the overall outcome would be the long-term ripple effect on the children, parents, policy makers and community with a stigma of low achievers to see the potential to create new destinies. Our Participation in the **Child Engagement Project** with Dr Barbara Piscitelli AM gave children this space:

Rosie's children were part of the 100 Logan children selected to share their ideas about life in Logan, and contributed those ideas as the children's voice to the Logan Together Roadmap. *"Between August and October 2015, we conducted a comprehensive community consultation so that as many people as possible had a say in our Foundation Roadmap. We spoke with parents, carers, the community services industry, government departments,*

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churches, sporting clubs, ethnic leaders, and many more. Most importantly, we asked Logan children what they think about living in Logan now, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future. " (<http://logantgether.org.au/targets-roadmap/>)

Key concepts presented themselves including family as an integral component of the community.



Holly (age 4) shared the importance of spending time together:
I'm sitting on the sofa with Mum and Dad and Nana and Papa. My brother Max is asleep but me and Mum are still awake watching a movie and eating popcorn

For educators, it was to think deeper, more critically about their own practice and that of their colleagues to create a space where challenging each other would lead to innovative pedagogy. This enhanced approach to our pedagogy would demonstrate value in children's *'interpretive theory'* as discussed by Carla Rinaldi. South Australian Re-Imaging children As part of this thinking it was to make the children *'visible'* in the community.

Our connections with local Aboriginal Elder Uncle Barry Watson gave us this opportunity at the **Logan Together Community Forum Meeting**. Logan Aboriginal Elder Uncle Barry invited the children of Rosie's to share their Acknowledgement of Country and Aboriginal Yuganbeh National Anthem to officially open the Logan Together Community Forum. This was a great honor for the children and educators. We knew this was an opportunity for the children to demonstrate their competence to an audience of 350 community members, politicians and

policy makers. The standing ovation received not only gave us and the children great pride; we knew we had impacted on how these people saw the ability of children in Logan and the strength of the connections these non-Aboriginal children were making to the culture and historical elements of Australia's First people.

For families, sharing the work in a different way would further instill confidence in the future to continue advocating for their child in any learning setting.

'Rosie's Exhibition of Work'. In September 2015 and again in July 2016 saw over 600 community members, local politicians, school teachers and family members attend the annual exhibition. Identifying the children's commitment to 'Being a Visible Citizen' projects over the two years have been shared.

Elements of self-reflection from 3 year olds:



At first I did this drawing and my brain said that it wasn't right and to try again so I scribbled it out then I did try again.

Child aged 3 years



And then it did this drawing.

Child aged 3 years

Our work is never finished, rather documented as the perfume of history – leaving a scent of culture. 2017 has taken inspiration from the AEDC results and in particular the increase over the past 6 years in the **'percentage of children vulnerable on the physical health and**



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wellbeing'. This had lead educators research into 'Landscapes of Individual Intelligence'. The focus being on the lens of *Emotional Safety* incorporating and understanding: *Emotional safety in a new environment, emotional intelligence and resilience, self-management, social awareness and social skills (relationships with others)*. Emotional Intelligence is about the connection we feel between body, mind and spirit – how we make sense of thoughts and feelings – that is the critical aspect of social and emotional learning (www.childs-encyclopedia.com). While social and emotional awareness continue to develop into adolescence, the greatest window of opportunity exists between birth to 8 years.

In conclusion we take inspiration from Professor Carla Rinaldi from the schools of Reggio Emilia and how she recalls how Loris Malaguzzi reflected on children's self-identity:

As Loris Malaguzzi wrote, it is the image of the child who, from the moment of birth, is so engaged in developing a relationship with the world, and intent on experiencing the world that he or she develops a complex system of abilities, learning strategies and ways of organizing relationships. (Re-Imaging childhood – Inspirations of Reggio Emilia Education Principle in South Australia)



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