

**NEWSLETTER FOR NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES,
KINDERGARTENS, PLAYGROUPS AND INTERESTED PARTIES
MAY 2015**

GREETINGS

Tēnā koutou katoa, malo e lelei, talofa lava, ni sa bula vinaka, talohani, kia orana, fakalofa lahi atu and blessings and warm greetings to you all.

Me mihi ki te Runga Rawa nāna nei ngā mea katoa.

HOW GOOD IS OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION?

In recent weeks there has been some public debate in newspapers about early childhood education, and how good it is or isn't for children. The research is quite clear – good quality early childhood education has a lasting effect on children's learning, and correlates with success later in life. New Zealand early childhood education is by and large of excellent quality. Peter Hughes, Secretary for Education, in an article in the New Zealand Herald on Thursday 23 April, said that we consistently rank in the top three countries in the world on teacher qualifications and the numbers of staff to children. In centres reviewed by ERO since mid-2013 88% ranked at the top rating or second top of quality measures. Less than 1% of all services give rise to serious concerns, such that they require more frequent checks, or a provisional or suspended licence.

I was fortunate to be present at a seminar given recently in Wellington by Professor Iram Siraj, Professor of Education at the UCL Institute of Education at University College London. She is one of Britain's leading researchers and governmental advisors in early childhood education, and was here in New Zealand working with the Ministry of Education. She quoted the following, from the OECD's report on PISA results 2011. (PISA is a three-yearly report on educational quality around the world.)

“The bottom line: widening access to pre-primary education can improve both overall performance and equity by reducing socio-economic disparities among students, if extending coverage does not compromise quality.”

She also quoted Ben Bernanke, Head of the US Federal Reserve, 2011:

“Research increasingly has shown the benefits of early childhood education and efforts to promote the lifelong acquisition of skills for both individuals and the economy as a whole. The payoffs of early childhood programs can be especially high.”

Prof Siraj has conducted major research on the effects of pre-school experience, aimed at establishing the characteristics of pre-school education that are most effective. She has found that the best services have the following characteristics: detailed, focused planning; lead practitioners who allocate effective roles for other adults whilst planning together for children's learning; guided and supported play activities with higher levels of adult-child interaction that support children's thinking; clear and dynamic vision and leadership. She has seen best practice move away from over-formal practice in the basics towards: a more experiential, child-centred and adult-guided, play-based practice; staff with a good understanding of child development and pedagogy actively supporting other staff in working with children. In research published in 2002 she said “... effective pedagogues model appropriate language, values and practices, encourage socio-dramatic play, praise, encourage, ask question, and interact verbally with children. Excellent settings tended to achieve an equal balance between teacher-led and child-initiated interactions, play and activities.” (*International Pedagogy, Curriculum and*

Progression in Playful Learning, Siraj, 2002) She stressed playful learning and active exploration, building on the child's interest, which motivates children to try more challenging learning.

This all reinforces what we consider to be best practice here in New Zealand, and listening to Professor Siraj I felt proud of the wonderful work I know NZ's early childhood educators are doing. Your parents might like to be reminded about how NZ practice is ranked highly internationally.

INTERNET RESOURCES

You might like to take a look at www.osvparish.com. This is the website of [Our Sunday Visitor](#), an American Catholic not-for-profit organisation, which includes preschool resources in its shop. While you might not want to buy, the resources might stimulate you when you create or update your own resources.

www.pinterest.com/explore/teacher-prayer/ provides colourful ideas, which might be stimulating.

If you have discovered better resources (and there are better ones out there, just not coming up for me today) do please email me, so I can share them with others.

FINALLY

Reminder: share this newsletter around, and send us news of your service, to share in the next newsletter.

If you know anyone that wants to receive this newsletter, please get them to email me (see below), and I will add them to the list. Alternatively, the newsletter goes up on the website, (address below), at about the same time as it goes out to you by post.

Mā te Atua e manaaki
God bless

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