



Early Childhood Council Annual Conference 2010 Presentation Paper

Turning Waste into Toddler Treasures And Ideas for Valuing Fathers

Adam Buckingham

Early childhood teacher
adam1joanne@hotmail.com
<http://reuse.schoolnet.co.nz>

This workshop is a pictorial tour of creative ideas that have been added to the outdoor environment of early childhood centres, and includes innovative equipment I have designed and made for early childhood centres. These things are predominantly made from waste materials. This presentation is about transforming someone else's rubbish into learning experiences for children, from a male practitioner's perspective. Transforming solid waste into learning experiences for children has linked people from the wider community to the preschool environment. Appreciate how it is meaningful to both children and their communities. These activities provide an opportunity for children to see how things are used in the real world. Items are incorporated from the home environment and the wider world into the curriculum; ideas to inspire and enrich children's learning. This workshop will also give you essential information, tips and practical strategies to involve fathers (or the father figure). Valuing fathers and father figures benefits the young child, and therefore the child's whole family. You will gain ideas to be effective in communicating with dads. Along with improving programme effectiveness for boys and girls, it can make a world of difference to children.

Presenter Adam Buckingham will discuss strategies and ideas to attract and involve men within the early childhood centre. He will also help you to consider the role that early childhood teachers and centres play in supporting fathers in their parenting. You will be challenged to consider attitudes, and meet the challenge of including fathers. Adam will also provide an overview of his experiences of involving fathers and share insights into the challenges men face within any early childhood centre setting.

Transforming solid waste into learning experiences for children has linked people from the wider community to the preschool environment. Through using their waste and seeing it turned into something useful I have been able to link recycling to education. And reuse solid waste in such a way that it is attractive to young children. I design and make equipment for young children that I call 'activity centres'. These activity centres are predominantly made from solid waste materials and to date over 7700 kg of solid waste has been diverted from landfill. Interest in my work recently lead me to the 24th International Conference on Solid Waste Technology and Management in Philadelphia USA. Thanks to funding from a lottery grant I gave a power point presentation and also presented a poster. I shared the culture and environment of our early childhood centres, our values and our unique early childhood curriculum (Te Whāriki). I am a kiwi bloke tinkering in my garage and doing something that has captured the imagination of the education sector and business community in New Zealand; and now overseas.

The activity centres are a cubed box standing below waist height, with one blank wall, one facing wall with the objects attached, one wall with an oval opening, and the fourth side is open. I attach a tap, door handle, mobile phone and light switch, and there is room to add more objects. It is portable and washable, made from MDF covered with melamine. The activity centres provide a link between the early childhood centre and home with familiar objects and they show people another use for the waste materials.

A popular activity centre is the 'bus' or 'car', it consists of a steering wheel on an upright piece of wood attached to a bench seat. I also make a frame which consists of steel rods standing vertically in the wooden timber frame. Each rod contains a number of objects with a hole, such as tap washers, nuts, rings, hair ties and springs. The children enjoy sliding the springs up the rods, then watching them fall and bounce up and down. These activities provide children with the opportunity to handle and manipulate real objects.

I have made a stage with the children from a discarded wide screen TV frame placed on a plywood case; we then used it for puppet shows and plays. Other examples of solid waste that I have made to inspire and enrich young children's learning include a real lawn mower engine without the blade and a letterbox. The steel case of a discarded top loader washing machine makes an ideal wall to attach magnets, and can be used for magnetic stories. I cut the washing machine case in half using an angle grinder and placed a wooden top on it to make a table at child's height.

When selecting objects for the activity centres I ask myself the question: is this safe? I have not used objects we usually encourage children not to touch, such as stove elements or power points. I have been conscientious when making all the activities to ensure that they are as safe as possible.

This work has enabled me to build a rapport with men, involving them in the children's learning through helping to obtain resources. I have acquired good resources from contacts in different trades within the community. Businesses and individuals provide me with waste timber, paint, old taps, mobile phones, wheels and so on. Also parents from the centre, my family and friends have been helpful in sourcing waste.

I have a blog <http://reuse.schoolnet.co.nz> to inform people of my work. All of this increases public awareness of recycling and reusing waste, and advertises my need for more resources. A great place to start looking for materials is www.renewwasteexchange.org.nz. Links to local waste sites around New Zealand can be found at www.wasteminz.org.nz. I have experimented through trial and error to discover what works and what does not. For example, I have learnt that some children are very strong and the objects need to be able to stand up to this sort of treatment and last in a harsh environment.

I enjoy sharing ideas with teachers and children of what you can do with solid waste. It is very rewarding for me to see the activity centres being used enthusiastically by children. I present workshops on technology at the workbench and I share with other teachers what they can do with solid waste to make equipment for their early childhood centre. I also run workshops on engaging fathers and I encourage male teachers working in early childhood through the ECMENZ network www.ecmenz.org.nz. There are groups meeting in different areas around New Zealand. Recently I was encouraged to hear that some months after I ran an engaging fathers workshop at a centre a grandfather regularly comes in to spend time with the children, and another man has enquired about becoming an early childhood teacher.

Introducing fathers helps provide a constructive environment for children to develop gender identity, where children can develop productive and positive gendered identities as girls and boys (Fletcher & Willoughby 2002). A review of five studies of the independent impact of fathers' involvement in children's learning on educational outcomes clearly shows that fathers' involvement in their children's schools is a key factor that

correlates with better educational outcomes for children (Goldman, 2005). Research also reveals that male role models being involved in reading and literacy-based activities in the early years is linked to greater school achievement for boys (Trent, & Slade, 2001).

Valuing fathers and father figures in their role as dads involves creating a father-friendly environment. Invite fathers and get them together in a group, ensuring they feel comfortable. Staff are used to planning ahead, for dads however, just turning up at the centre may be a big step. Strong informal contact will make it seem more natural. Provide written instructions setting out the task and make it clear. Avoid setting men up to look stupid. Sitting still and having to rely on language are often not so comfortable for men, so make it active, with the possibility of including their children. However it doesn't have to be frenetic activity. Tap into their strengths, men are often more comfortable talking while working together rather than sitting face to face.

Asking for their opinions of fatherhood is a great way to provoke conversations with the fathers. For example: What is great about being a dad? What, if anything, would you say is difficult? Who is a dad you admire? What would you like children to notice about you as a dad? (Fletcher, 2004) And then check your attitude. Do you welcome all men or only some kinds of men? Do they strengthen the field of early childhood or do they take away power from women?

Adam is a registered early childhood teacher, one of only 210 male early childhood teachers in New Zealand. Adam currently works as a relieving teacher at public kindergartens in Auckland, and he presents professional development workshops to teachers sharing his life skills and ideas. He enjoys creating learning activities for children from solid waste materials. He has lectured at universities and given presentations to conferences.

Thanks: Adam Buckingham

adam1joanne@hotmail.com

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www.ecmenz.org.nz

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