

EDITORIAL

## Special Section: Capacity Building in Early Childhood Intervention

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The articles included in this special section are based on the authors' presentations at the *International Society on Early Intervention Conference: Research to Practice in Early Intervention* held in Sydney in June 2019. Of note, all six articles reflect a collaboration between researchers and practitioners, with the data and discussions presented having implications for the work of families, early childhood educators, and specialist practitioners. All articles detail approaches designed to support the inclusion of young children with disabilities/delays in home and early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. The important contributions of family members, carers, and early educators are recognised and strategies are proposed for supporting them in their critical roles through capacity building.

In the first article, Fulcher et al. detail an investigation into the effect of a locally developed social skills program for young children with hearing loss. The authors are able to demonstrate changes in measures of *theory of mind* following implementation of the program but suggest that this may not be sufficient to ensure that young children with hearing loss will develop social skills at the same rate as their typically hearing peers. They suggest strategies for addressing this developmental gap.

In the next three articles, researchers evaluated professional development programs designed to develop the capacity of early childhood educators to implement evidence-based early childhood inclusion models. These models were designed to assist children with additional needs to engage and participate in inclusive ECEC settings, and can also support a quality general early childhood program. Swalwell and McLean detail an evaluation of a professional development program designed to build the capacity of early childhood educators to implement the *Pyramid Model* in early education and care settings. This model was originally developed and researched by Hemmeter and her colleagues in the United States (Hemmeter, Hardy, Schnitz, Adams, & Kinder, 2015).

Another model that has had considerable exposure in the research literature is the *Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)* developed by Rogers and Dawson (2010). Aylward and Neilsen-Hewett trialed this model and, in their article in the special section of this issue, they report educator perceptions of the impact of the ESDM professional development program on successful inclusion in ECEC settings.

The impact of *Way to Play*, a program designed to assist adults to engage in play with young children with autism, is reported in the article by Beaumont, Blakey, Stuart, and Woodward. This capacity-building training and coaching approach, developed in New Zealand, involves teaching early interventionists to work with family members and educators to implement a relationship-building program with the young children with autism in their care.

In the next paper, Quick, Flatley, Sellwood, Alam, and Vukovich used the barriers to inclusion identified by early childhood practitioners to propose a model of inclusion that incorporates capacity building in the early childhood sector. This model has been developed and funded for operation in community preschools by the New South Wales Department of Education. Core elements of this capacity-building model include training, coaching, and mentoring by specialist staff and are key to successful inclusion, as identified by early childhood educators and researchers in the field.

As more children with complex additional needs access ECEC services, it is important that early childhood educators are provided with the skills and additional support needed to ensure that all children in their centres are able to engage and participate in the full range of centre activities. The goals for children, including children with additional needs, must be determined by the skills needed to thrive in the ECEC setting, with a specific focus on the social and communication skills needed to negotiate the next educational environment. In their article, Warren, Soukakou, Forster, Ng, and Nteropoulou-Nterou compared early childhood inclusion practices across three countries — Australia, Greece, and Malaysia — using best practice research to identify facilitators and barriers to inclusion in each country. They explore enabling components of effective early childhood inclusion, including contexts, the adoption of research-based practices, and support for reliable implementation of these practices. They also provide recommendations for supporting early educators to adopt inclusive practice.

### Tribute to Janene Swalwell

There are many professionals, researchers and practitioners, who contribute much more to their field than might be expected of a paid employee. Janene Swalwell was one such researcher practitioner. Janene was generous in her sharing of knowledge and expertise. She will be missed by all who worked with her. Janene presented some of her work relating to the Pyramid Model, in particular the professional training component of the model, at the 2019 International Society on Early Intervention Conference in Sydney. In the last year of her life, Janene worked with her colleague, Louise McLean, to produce a paper based on the research presented at the conference. The following tribute to Janene was provided by colleagues from Monash University.

*Through her discipline of early childhood intervention, Janene Swalwell worked tirelessly to improve the lives of all around her, particularly the youngest members of our community.*

*Janene started her psychology career with the Psychology and Guidance Branch of the Education Department as a guidance officer working in schools. While doing this, she completed a master's degree, set up several new services, and became a specialist educational and developmental psychologist working with children with disabilities and their families. Then followed 20 years as manager of Illoura Early Childhood Intervention Program in Ferntree Gully, applying her specialist skills to helping young children with disabilities and their families. She soon became involved in the activities of Early Childhood Intervention Australia; she was a member of the Committee of Management for 16 years in all, serving as president for several years.*

*From 2008 onwards, she worked at the Krongold Clinic at Monash University, providing education, research, and supervision support for fourth- to sixth-year psychology students.*

*More recently, Janene championed another important intervention, the Pyramid Model, which blends early childhood educational practice and positive behaviour support. Working with one of the model's developers, Mary Louise Hemmeter, Janene established yet another organisation — Pyramid Model Australia — to support training and dissemination of the model.*

*Many, many psychologists and other practitioners can testify to the significant impact she had on their personal and professional development. One of Janene's great qualities is what we in psychology call unconditional positive regard. This refers to the way in which one person relates and views others, with a positive, warm, and caring manner and mindset. Janene was the embodiment of this practice, and it is what made her such an excellent mentor, supervisor, and colleague.*

*Everyone hopes that they add value, that their lives create meaning for others, and that this meaning provides greater opportunity for all, lifting community beyond its current collective imaginations. This hope has never been so passionately well embodied in any one person.*

## References

- Hemmeter, M. L., Hardy, J. K., Schnitz, A. G., Adams, J. M., & Kinder, K. A. (2015). Effects of training and coaching with performance feedback on teachers' use of *Pyramid Model* practices. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 35, 144–156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121415594924>
- Rogers S. J., & Dawson, G. (2010). *Early Start Denver Model for young children with autism: Promoting language, learning, and engagement*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.