**Lady Gowrie Child Centre**

**Building relationships, attachment and trust**

**Summary**
Primary caregivers are helping babies achieve SACSA Outcomes through constructivist principles.

**Band**
Early years

**Context**
Kurrajong Room: 11 infants aged 3½ – 18 months

**Learning Area**
All

**Timeline**
Continuous

**School**
Lady Gowrie Child Centre

**Educators**
Cecelia Ebert
Camrun Brown
Nikki Edwards

**The Vision**

The Kurrajong Room at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre aims to provide a safe, caring and nurturing environment, with one of the most important aspects of the program being the quality of attachment relationships between children and caregivers. Attachments provide a secure base, allowing children to engage in exploration and learning.

The Scope Key Ideas and Developmental Learning Outcomes of SACSA match this philosophy of relationships, attachment and trust.

Instead of providing a set of activities that the children, regardless of their interests and dispositions, need to use to occupy themselves, constructivism is implemented by seeing each infant as an individual, with specific needs to be met and interests to be respected.

Infants develop secure attachments with their caregivers, which provide a learning environment where their progress and development are fostered at their own pace.

The goals of the program are:
- to provide appropriate opportunities for the children to develop and practice their self-help skills
- to offer opportunities for the children to practice and extend their physical skills
- for primary caregivers to encourage and foster secure attachments and trusting relationships with the children
- to support parents in their attachment relationships with children
- for the children to develop and extend their thinking and communicating skills
- for the children to experience positive, nurturing, responsive and consistent care.

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Lady Gowrie Child Centre.
SACSA gives one a sense of confidence, being included and regarded as professionals, providing good programs for children.

For the children it means having someone who is giving the best quality time and care for their development.

The Journey
The SACSA Framework has been wholeheartedly embraced by staff at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre. Major changes have been made over recent years to their child care program, supported by both the Foundations of Learning and the SACSA Framework. Both documents were timely, as staff had begun to recognise that there were better ways to implement their program.

The necessity for change
In the past, the program at the centre had been structured around a timetable. For example, each day the staff would create a list of activities, such as painting, playing with boxes, or listening to a particular story, with each activity being allocated a set time within the timetable.

The staff began to consider how other care giving activities fitted into the program, such as nappy changes and mealtimes, which they considered to be equally valid as learning experiences and which should receive equal recognition.

They concluded that developing secure attachments was their most significant aim. This would build children’s confidence, encouraging them to develop other skills. This then became the foundation of the program. Complemented by the SACSA Framework, the program could now be extended and understandings, of caregivers and parents, could be broadened.

SACSA provides new ideas and flexibility to provide good programs for babies and to extend things that we knew before.

Introducing flexibility into the program and freeing up the notion of a rigid timetable has meant that staff are looking at evidence in a much wider sense than just a single skill. Child care has been given a greater validity—that one is already, as a young infant, learning for life by building relationships, trust and learning dispositions.

Unpacking the SACSA Framework
Lady Gowrie Child Centre began working with the SACSA Framework by dividing it into sections to make it more manageable for staff. They created folders, with different sections for the Key Ideas, Essential Learnings and Developmental Learning Outcomes, and indexed them all to the Early Years Birth–Age 3 Learning Areas.

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Lady Gowrie Child Centre.
**Taking small steps**
The process of familiarisation started with learning the names of the three Learning Areas, and discussing the terminology. For example, they determined that the observations relating to Psychosocial Self were:
- attachment,
- temperament
- self-help skills and
- emotional awareness.

Similarly, they determined Physical Self would entail observing gross and fine motor skills and sensory awareness.

They then introduced the Developmental Learning Outcomes and explored how each of the Outcomes related to the different areas. From there they addressed the Scope Key Ideas and explored how they relate to each of the Developmental Learning Outcomes. Next they looked at the Essential Learnings and discussed how they could integrate them into the program.

For example, they mapped Developmental Learning Outcomes to Key Ideas, as the following example, from the psychosocial self Learning Area, demonstrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Idea:</th>
<th>Developmental Learning Outcomes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Children form secure attachments developing close bonds with one and then more educators (Id. In) | - Children develop trust and confidence (F. Id)
- Children develop a positive sense of self and a confident personal and group identity (Id. In)
- Children develop a sense of being connected with others and their worlds (F. Id. In) |

Breaking down Key Ideas and analysing the different elements made it easier to understand how to create and complete observation forms and how to program for Developmental Learning Outcomes. Working together with increasing confidence, they took small steps, making sure they had a good understanding of each new element and how it integrated with the whole before moving on to the next. This, they felt, was considerably more successful than attempting to integrate everything at once, which might have led to confusion.

*Sometimes people just reject things, thinking it is too difficult and they are put off by the terminology, but when you look at it you find that you are doing it already.*

The next stage was to adapt Key Ideas to their own environment. Using the example above, they adapted this to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Idea:</th>
<th>Developmental Learning Outcomes:</th>
<th>Adapted to Lady Gowrie Child Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Children form secure attachments developing close bonds with one and | - Children develop trust and confidence (F. Id)
- Children develop a positive sense of self and a confident personal and group | *Children are being supported to feel a sense of belonging in the* |

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Lady Gowrie Child Centre.
Then more educators (Id. In)  identity (Id. In)  Children develop a sense of being connected with others and their worlds (F. Id. In)  Kurrajong environment.

Looking at this further, they questioned how this might be demonstrated by the cohort in their environment, for example:
- What do the Outcomes mean?
- What do they mean to us?

They determined that the Outcomes could be demonstrated in ways such as:
- being aware of ourselves and our environment, for example, by playing 'peek-a-boo'
- talking about the spaces and objects that 'belong' to us, such as beds, cups, lockers
- taking our comforters into new and familiar environments.

In the Kurrajong Room, they had therefore determined 'best practice' demonstrations of Outcomes for their unique environment.

Educators were reassured that they were working towards the Key Ideas and Outcomes which they had made very explicit for their environment. They were thus easier to observe and report on. Furthermore, they felt they had to come to terms with and further analysed Developmental Learning Outcomes, such as 'Children develop trust and confidence', which in their original form were too large to be measurable. Additionally, by looking beyond single skills when observing evidence, educators felt better suited to equipping children with life skills.

**Building bridges of communication**
By making SACSA friendly and positive, they were then able to familiarise others with the concepts of the SACSA Framework, thus building bridges of understanding for relievers and parents. To assist this process, they created two folders; one for parents and another for relievers or students working in the room.

Both books describe the centre's philosophy, program and goals. The parent booklet also explains the importance of attachment and how this connects with the Birth–Age 3 Scope Key Ideas for psychosocial self and provides opportunities for parents to inform the centre of anything they may wish to have included in the program for their child.

In providing bridges for parents to constructivism and the SACSA Framework Learning Areas, there is no expectation that parents should have an understanding of the SACSA Framework discourse—rather that they become familiar with the concepts and the advantages to their children. Parents then also have a greater understanding of what underpins programming, observation and reporting for their child. Furthermore, partnerships are forged and the benefits to their child become more explicit.

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Lady Gowrie Child Centre.
Another major change implemented by Lady Gowrie Child Centre was the introduction of primary caregivers. Instead of all staff observing and being responsible for all the children in the room, they now have a system of primary caregivers, each of whom has the primary responsibility for attending to the needs of a small number of children. This allows staff to observe and report on a smaller number of children, to forge stronger attachments with them, and to establish partnerships with parents of the children for whom they are the primary carers.

Benefits

Embracing SACSA Early Years, including constructivism, has resulted in children who are now much more settled and consequently have the confidence to be more exploratory. Because relationships between staff, parents and children are better, the children are more trusting, having a stronger internal locus of control and more self-determination. Staff, too, have a greater sense of satisfaction.

In the days when we were working with lists of activities for the day, I used to go home at night feeling exhausted, but as if I had done nothing. Now it is different—I feel I have contributed and I feel more satisfied with my job and in the work I am doing with the children and their families.

By looking beyond the traditional routines in earlier programs, children, parents and staff can be more relaxed whilst providing a better program for children. For example, earlier programs, which included playing with paint and play doh, created a strain for staff, children and parents alike. Setting up and clearing away paints was time consuming and babies would put paint and play doh into their mouths. This created tension and discipline problems, and parents would complain when their children returned home with paint on their clothes.

In considering what was the purpose of providing sensory experiences, the staff decided paint and play doh were not the most suitable media, as children were restricted in how they might explore, touch and play with them. They now use natural materials, such as leaves, flowers, plants, sand and water, as well as food, music and stained glass windows. Everyone is happier and the program is enriched!!!

All we could think about was play doh and paint for sensory experience. We hadn't even thought about substitutes; we hadn't even seen them!
Furthermore, a program free of rigid timetable restrictions has invited greater inclusivity and flexibility. Whilst in the past the program was dictated by routine, with all babies sleeping and eating at the same time, individual routines now allow children to bring in home schedules. As primary carers have responsibility for just a few infants, some of whom may be sleeping whilst others are playing or feeding, any behavioural issues which might arise can be more easily and compassionately addressed because primary carers have more time and energy to do so.

*Primary care giving allows us to address behaviours and other issues in the context of relationships.*

Problems have significantly decreased since adopting the primary caregiver program. Working in a one-to-one situation or with a small group, each caregiver can more easily develop a trusting relationship with individual children and their families. Behaviour problems, such as biting and pushing, are more easily overcome by discussing with parents the reasons for the behaviour and jointly developing strategies to modify it.

Thus rapport and partnership with parents has strengthened, with parents showing interest in discussions revolving around the concept of learning for life. For example, one aspect that has come under discussion is the notion of 'play' and its role in lifelong learning. For many parents and carers 'play' is something done with expensive equipment in the remaining time after one has achieved the more important things, such as feeding, nappy changing, etc.

*We point out to them that for us and their children's time here, everything is play and it is a significant start on their journey of lifelong learning.*

**The Program**

In the Kurrajong Room at the Lady Gowrie Child Centre, staff provide a program to match the needs of each individual child in their care.

**Creating secure attachments**

Children are allocated a primary caregiver who is responsible, in consultation with other staff, for their program and observation. Not all children attend on a daily basis, so this might mean that staff have just a small number of children in their particular care at any one time. This allows them to develop attachments with each child, building up relationships of trust and security. Attachment is an essential basic component of the program. Attachment issues are discussed with parents.

**Constructivism**

Parents are asked to complete a Cultural Diversity questionnaire when enrolling their children. This provides staff with details about home routines, language spoken at home, sleeping habits and any other significant information which might influence the way each child's day is programmed. Parents also keep staff informed about their child's preferences, such as a favourite song.

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Lady Gowrie Child Centre.
game or toy, or how they like to be held, which can then also be included in the program.

**The programming cycle**
Programming is informed by close observation of children for demonstrations of selected Outcomes. Observations are recorded and evaluated in order to individually program and select subsequent Outcomes.

**Adapting Key Ideas and Outcomes to the environment**
Observations are based on 'best practice' demonstrations of Outcomes for the unique environment of the Kurrajong Room and are linked to Key Ideas which have been adapted to suit this environment.

**Observing and reporting on focus groups**
Children are observed in focus groups, of which there are currently 6. Each group has a membership of 3–4 children, with groups being identified by the letters A–F. For observation and reporting processes, each child is allocated a number, for example A3. This allows educators to discuss, design and display the program in the room, whilst preserving anonymity for anyone other than staff and parents/caregivers.

Each focus group is observed on a rotational basis for demonstration of suitable Outcomes for one week in every six week cycle. For some children, especially those who only attend for one day a week, educators may be observing and reporting on one Outcome only.

Best practices are designed according to observation and Outcomes. Observations are interpreted to determine suitable programs for each individual child, which are then implemented and evaluated. Because groups are small, educators, particularly the primary caregivers, can spend a lot of time observing in detail each child.

This method of reporting is not only for parents, but also to inform program planning. The program is rigorously checked against the philosophy of the room, accreditation requirements and the SACSA Framework and, after review, may be adapted and rewritten.

**Communicating with parents**
Communication occurs regularly with parents; they are informed by letter when their child will be in the focus group, together with the code which will be allocated to them, so that they can also see which observations are being recorded on the class chart. They also receive a report at the end of each reporting cycle of their child's progress, as well as the strategies and programs planned for their child. Simultaneously, educators are seeking feedback from parents on their own observations at home and whether they have noticed any difference in their child's behaviour, interests or routines.

This material forms part of the Working with Outcomes website, which can be accessed through [http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/). The material is provided with permission of Lady Gowrie Child Centre.
All reports are collated into one folder for each child which they can take with them through their schooling as a record of their individual journey.

The website provides a PowerPoint presentation which demonstrates the reporting process graphically.