

**I have an interest in what is going on
in the relationships between early
childhood staff and parents**



What the research tells us:

- **“the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievements” (Kasting, 1994 p146)**

The Reality

- **EARLY CHILDHOOD STAFF**

- “parents were difficult”
- “didn’t read notices”
- “didn’t bring everything their child needed”
- “didn’t care about their children”

- **PARENTS**

- “they felt intimidated by some staff”
- “worried staff thought they were a bad parent”
- “didn’t think staff cared about their child”
- “worried about how their child behaved”

Barriers

- **Lack of time**
- **Lack of space**
- **Difficulty in balancing parents and children's needs**

“These images include parent as consumer, parent as client, parent as resource and parent as co educator or partner”

Ref: Woodrow, C. (1995) “Exploring Parent Involvement” Rattler 35
(Spring) : 4-5

Research Question

- Does the “**images**” early childhood staff and parents have of each other contribute or become a barrier to an equitable relationship developing?

The Study

- **Three long day care centres – metropolitan Melbourne**
- **Involved 10 early childhood staff and 10 parents**

Areas of Interest

- **Communication**
- **Knowledge**
- **Role of parents in centre (Function)**

Data Collecting

- **Face – face semi structured interviews with both early childhood staff and parents**
- **Participant Little Narrative Conferences**
- **Journals**

Grounded Theory

Open coding:

Axial coding:

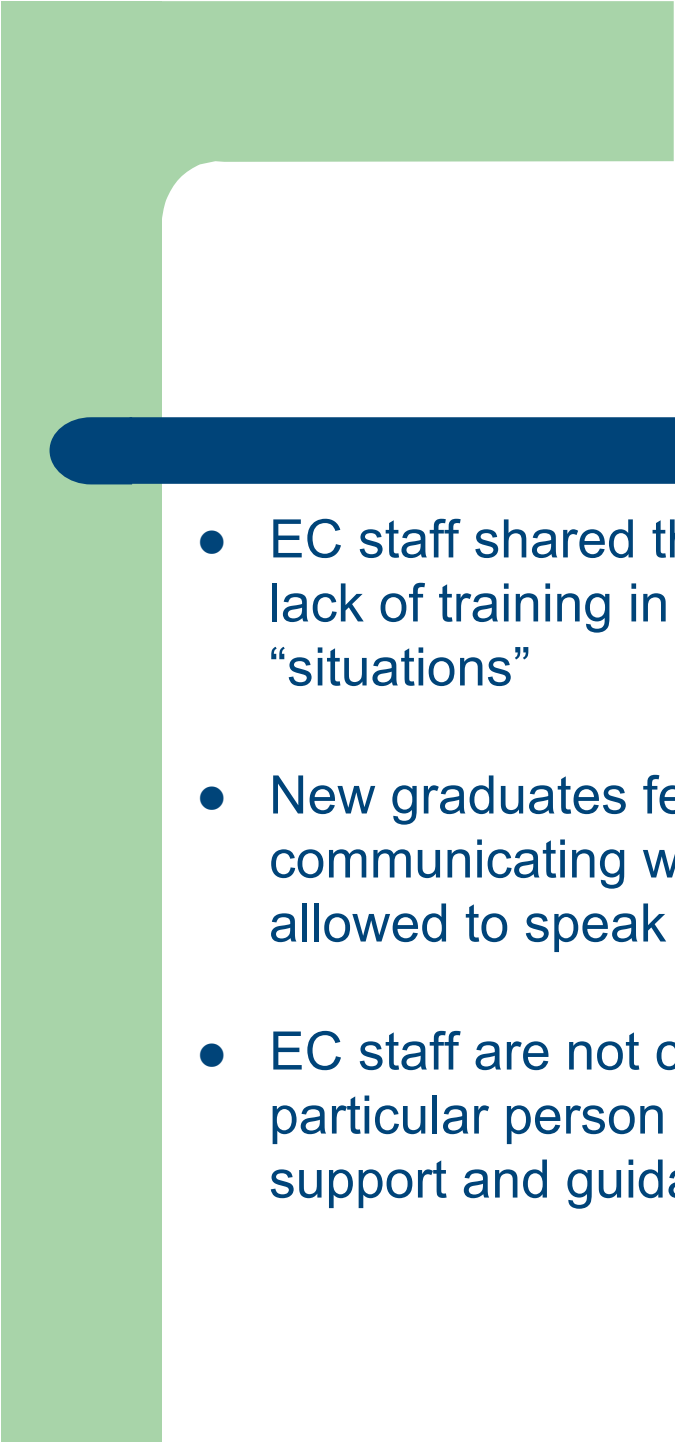

Selective coding:

- **Communication**
- **Function**
- **Attitudes**
- **Knowledge**

Power of the journals

Offered refuge to record their interactions with each other

- feelings and attitudes
- wrote honestly and brave
- shared ups and downs, raw emotions, struggles, doubt, disappointments, sadness, anger and frustration
- internal, reflective, written in the first person and very personal

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- EC staff shared their discomfort and lack of confidence and lack of training in relating to families and communicating about “situations”
 - New graduates felt they did not have enough experience communicating with parents on placement as they “Were not allowed to speak to parents on placement”
 - EC staff are not comfortable with parents, they feel they need particular person skills, specifically a level of confidence and support and guidance to be able to connect with parents

Communication

- **Match between EC staff feeling most comfortable sharing “expert” information and parents expecting to receive it.**
- **EC staff prefer to use formal processes (through insecurity and perceived lack of skills)**
- **Parents prefer the “personal touch” a personal connection that would allow them to share what they know about their child as well as receiving the “expert” knowledge.**

Knowledge

- **EC staff hide behind their “expert” knowledge, they use it as a protective barrier. They are not using their “expert” knowledge in a demonstration of power over the parents but more to deflect away from their fragile domain “expert knowledge”**
- **Parents want the opportunity to share their knowledge about their children but EC staff worry about this knowledge conflicting with their own or that they might have to “let go” some of their “expert” knowledge. As their identity generally is tied up with this “expert” knowledge letting go of some of it could be seen as an attack on their identity**

Function

- **EC staff prefer parents to be the “extra pair of hands” as this would mean the EC staff still retained the “expert” knowledge.**
- **Parents wanted to contribute to the program, centre and planning for their children.**

Findings

EC staff see themselves as qualified with “expert” knowledge on children and child development. EC staff are happy to share this knowledge as long as parents do not threaten that knowledge in any way and do not require any personal interactions for which they feel ill equipped and unskilled.

Conclusion

- **The study has enabled recognition that it is how the EC staff see themselves, their professional identity, and how secure or insecure they feel with this identity that enables an equitable relationship to form with parents or becomes a barrier to such a relationship.**
- **To allow equitable relationships between EC staff and parents to occur EC staff need to include “parents/families” in their professional identity**

Presenter details

- **Pat Jewell**
Melbourne University
Mobile: 042 9819 392
Email: patj@bigpond.net.au