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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO EARLY INTERVENTION
INTO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

At Sydney on Thursday, 12 April 2001

The Committee met at 2 p.m.

PRESENT

The Hon. Janice Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans
The Hon. Amanda Fazio
The Hon. D. F. Moppett
The Hon. I. W. West

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JUNE WANGMANN, Associate Professor in Early Childhood, Director of New South Wales Office of Child Care, Department of Community Services, Locked Bag 28, Ashfield 1800, affirmed and examined:

CHAIR: You have received a summons?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: You are conversant with the terms of reference?

Professor WANGMANN: I am.

CHAIR: Have you given the Committee a submission?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: You wish that to be included as part of your sworn evidence?

Professor WANGMANN: That is right.

CHAIR: We have sent you questions to guide our discussion.

Professor WANGMANN: That is right.

CHAIR: Do you want to start by making a statement?

Professor WANGMANN: No.

CHAIR: We rarely find that we stick to our questions, but nevertheless they are a guide. The first one that we thought was really worth us trying to get straight were the respective roles of the New South Wales State Government and the Commonwealth in both the funding and regulation of child care.

Professor WANGMANN: Certainly the funding of child care and things to do with children's services are very complex. It is probably one of the most complex areas in State-Commonwealth agreements and, in very simple terms, the Commonwealth Government in relation to funding actually funds what we call long day care, work-related care basically, occasional care and family day care, and that is their main area of funding.

The bulk of our money actually goes to preschools but, as with most things in children's services, it is not as simple as that. We actually also at a State level give some funding to long day care; we fund vacation care and we fund mobiles, as well as giving total funding to preschool.

I have actually got a facts sheet here that I would like to table which explains the various roles and it outlines the funding associated with each of the particular service types at State and Commonwealth levels.

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In relation to regulations the State has responsibility for the regulations of all services, even the Commonwealth funded ones, except out of school hours care. That is funded by the Commonwealth and out of school hours care is actually not regulated in New South Wales and in fact it is only currently regulated in one State or Territory in Australia and that is the Australian Capital Territory. All the other forms of children's services the State Government has the responsibility for regulating. We have the legislative base in terms of the care and protection and education of children according to the Act and the regulations of children's services falls out of the actual Act.

In terms of the complexity of children's services I think it is important in the context of this review to highlight the Commonwealth-State funding barriers because with the Commonwealth funding

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some things and the State funding other things it is often very difficult for families to actually negotiate some of those buckets of money and some of those funding arrangements. To actually address that, through my office we have commissioned a research project, for which I have also got the terms of reference which I would like to table for the Committee, whereby we are looking at what is currently in place for many families in Australia, not just New South Wales, because it is not actually servicing their needs.

We went out to tender for a research project to look at a more flexible delivery of children's services and we have had discussions with the Commonwealth and we have the Commonwealth actually sitting on the steering committee of that particular project. It arose particularly out of a research project we commissioned last year which showed that in New South Wales we have some families who are using up to eight different forms of child care in any one week and some of these children are as young as two years old or eighteen months old and, for families actually negotiating some of these differences between what the Commonwealth funds and what the State funds, it was placing enormous pressure on families, so we were given permission to actually then undertake this flexible models research project, which concludes at the end of next month when you will still be actually sitting in this hearing and I could make that final report available to the Committee if you would like.

CHAIR: Yes, we would be very grateful, thank you.

Professor WANGMANN: These are the terms of reference of that particular research project.

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CHAIR: Still on funding, from a lay point of view in this area there seem to be announcements all the time about shortfalls and changes in Commonwealth funding and so on. What sorts of agreements exist and what sort of provision is there for funding over three years or five years, or is it all very ad hoc?

Professor WANGMANN: The other thing that is probably important to put into this context is that in the last five years we have seen an increasing privatisation of children's services in Australia. Now two-thirds of the services are actually provided by the private sector and we had the reverse of that about five or so years ago, so the actual funding that comes from Governments now, and in New South Wales we do not fund the private sector, we fund the community based sector, so from the Commonwealth there is what is now called child care benefit which is made available to families, on a fee income tested scale, who are using Commonwealth funded services and that has recently been increased. We did have quite a serious problem with affordability, but the Commonwealth has recently increased that benefit and it has made a significant difference.

In our preschools the actual Commonwealth benefit that comes into preschools is less than what actually goes into long day care and in New South Wales that is causing a problem for some of our families because if they were in a long day care centre they would be getting significantly more of a benefit than they are getting in a State funded preschool and we are having discussions with our Commonwealth colleagues on that matter.

CHAIR: Does that encourage them to keep children in long day care?

Professor WANGMANN: It has encouraged them not to use preschools, yes. We have had a quite significant erosion with preschools in New South Wales as a result of that change.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What order of magnitude is that?

Professor WANGMANN: We are in the process of getting data on that, which we may well have before your inquiry finishes, but we are constantly now getting information coming to our office that a preschool is closing and this is particularly of concern in rural areas, and again this flexible model project that we are doing we hope is going to be able to actually feed information into that.

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The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: So you will get information on what precisely? Presumably you have figures on what the financial differences are, in other words what the benefit differences are?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: The figures you need are how many people have changed their behaviours in response to that difference?

Professor WANGMANN: That is right, yes, and also the Commonwealth child care benefit is primarily for work-related reasons, but I think it is about three-quarters of the families that actually use preschools that are also using them for work-related reasons, but they are not getting the full benefits they would get if they were in a Commonwealth funded long day care centre, so we are trying to address this inequity with our Commonwealth colleagues on that matter.

CHAIR: Does any drift-away from preschools also reflect the fact that their hours and so on do not fit very well with working parents?

Professor WANGMANN: It has done, yes, it certainly has done, and the holidays, because preschools actually have the same holidays as schools and for a working family that does not suit.

CHAIR: That is one of the reasons for the inquiry into flexible models.

Professor WANGMANN: That is right, yes.

CHAIR: We had evidence from someone a couple of weeks ago who said some families are using up to seven services a week. That was the worst we had heard, but you made it eight.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But is it not a bit silly to run a preschool when most of your clients need longer hours? Is this the way it has always been done? Why is it like that? I mean a university only offers courses between 9 and 5 and after hours, if you want to do a degree, you enrol for three years and, if you do not want to get a degree like that, well, do not come to uni, but have preschools taken the same - I mean if they were going broke, you would not expect them to maintain that position, surely?

Professor WANGMANN: No, but it is not as simple as that because many families actually want preschools, they do not want long day care, and we get correspondence from families, when it looks like a community preschool may close, objecting to the closure of that preschool and wanting it to remain open.

There is also something here that I think is going to be explored later on but we may look at it now, this perception of terminology, calling something preschool and calling something long day care, and parents feel that when their child is in preschool the child is actually having an education and getting ready for school, but when the child is in child care in a long day care centre they are only being minded.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is certainly the perception one would have.

Professor WANGMANN: Exactly, and we have been, certainly in the other roles that I have, trying to lobby for a long time to actually get the terminology changed because it does not reflect the reality that is happening for children in centres, but there are many families across Australia that actually have their child in a long day care centre and take them out for two days a week to go to preschool to get educated, whereas the same program is offered in both those settings.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Do they not realise that?

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Professor WANGMANN: No.

CHAIR: Do you want to continue with that now or does it make more sense to deal with what you have prepared?

Professor WANGMANN: It might make more sense, yes. I have not prepared this at all. I am quite happy to flow, however you would like to handle it.

CHAIR: You can go on with that now. It seems a bit silly to stop that artificially and come back.

Professor WANGMANN: Okay.

CHAIR: So why do we not continue with those glitches and the difficulties they cause?

Professor WANGMANN: Right. In New South Wales our regulations cover all the service types apart from out of school hours care, but exactly the same regulation applies for the long day care as applies for preschools, and both those settings are required to have an educational program, exactly the same program, they are monitored by exactly the same process, and children, irrespective of the setting, are getting exactly the same educative program, and we insist that it is an educative program, that it is not just child minding, otherwise they would be in breach of our regulations.

Some other States do have separate regulations and this actually can lead to New South Wales at times getting misrepresented, that we only have - I think the figure sometimes is in the 30 percent of our four year olds actually participate in preschool, whereas in fact we have actually 97 per cent, because when you include the children who are in long day care, who are getting the preschool program, you actually then get the full picture.

The terminology has not worked well for a whole range of reasons, but it does not reflect all the current literature in terms of care education, and it is a distinction that should be done away with.

CHAIR: What about if you talk about family day care?

Professor WANGMANN: Family day care is different, although many family day care schemes would also argue because they put a lot of their time into professional development programs for their carers, that there is an educative component within family day care, but I think it depends on the quality of the scheme.

CHAIR: Is the scheme patchy or variable?

Professor WANGMANN: Probably no more so than some other forms of children's service.

CHAIR: I am just looking at our questions that fall into that area. Another Upper House committee, the Law and Justice Committee, in its recent report into crime prevention, actually came up with a recommendation that we should all look at the benefits of funding universal preschool places for four year olds. You have mentioned that the statistics can be misleading. Do you have any other comment on that suggestion?

Professor WANGMANN: I am not supportive of a universal preschool year for four year olds for the following reasons. All the latest brain development research, which is considerable, highlights the importance of the first three years as being critical for a whole range of things, particularly for the development of language, and particularly important for what is the focus of this Committee, children with learning difficulties, and if we were to just target and put an enormous amount of expenditure into four year olds at the expense of our children below the age of three, first of all in terms of social justice it does not make sense to me, apart from the inequities. So I do not support a targeted four year old program. If in a dream world perhaps we could put equal amounts into all of those years that would be

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good, but to put money into a program for four year olds at the expense of the children below the age of three, I would not support.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: You would argue that there is nothing wrong with four year olds getting it, it would be desirable if there were a universal program, but the practical realities are such that the opportunity for us would be targeted programs for the under fours. You would rather say leave the people who are well off to organise their own programs for four year olds, and have your department with the budget to target the at risk under threes. Am I over-stating it?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes and no. Also, I am of the view, and certainly all of the literature in early childhood supports, that the early years are intrinsically valuable, not necessarily as a preparation for anything, and unfortunately often preschools get seen as a preparation for school, and we have a focus on numeracy and literacy, which is often in a very prescriptive way, and rather than seeing these years are important in childhood for their own right and it is valued as intrinsically valuable, rather than as a preparation for anything, and the universal preschool year has come about in other States because of being seen as a preparation for school, whereas I am of a different view and certainly most early childhood educators are.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: This is somewhat idealised childhood, the play and jump as opposed to play and jump with numbers. To what extent is this a projection - I have wondered with these "let the children be children" people, "let them stay innocent, let them not know anything", the alternative Steiner type things where the literacy comes relatively late in the curricula and they spend more time in creative type things, not exam things. I do not have a view on that. I find that people take one side or another like a religion almost, and then I wonder if this is the same question that is being applied to four year olds, that literacy and numeracy cramps their creativity, you are saying, at a four year old level. I am just putting a devil's adequate position.

Professor WANGMANN: Could I just clarify? Again, the traditional views in the community about literacy and numeracy skills are very different to the early childhood educator's view, and this what you are calling "play and jump" actually has a tremendous amount of value, because the notion of play in early childhood education is very misunderstood, that the children are just playing all day, whereas it is actually playing to a purpose and it is quite carefully constructed by the early childhood educator in that particular environment and they are learning very much the literacy and numeracy skills that they need to actually get on in life, let alone that it be a preparation for school. We all need to be able to read and write and it makes life difficult if we cannot, but it is inappropriate from a child development point of view for preschool age children to actually be taught in a formal type of prescriptive way that happens in the school system, but I want to make it very clear they are learning an enormous amount of language, literacy and numeracy skills in a good early childhood setting in what you call play and jump.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: I just want to come back to the point you made that you are not in favour of having a universal four year old preschool provision. I think we have had the proposal put to us in different ways. There are two elements to that. One is the idea of it being universal; the other is the preschool for everybody. Those are two slightly different things. I think we have seen the concept develop of a compulsory appearance where there is some assessment of learning difficulties because really our inquiry is going to centre on learning difficulties, not going to a great deal of trouble in just giving definitions and knowing exactly where we are going with this, because sadly it probably is going to be at the end measured by literacy and numeracy when they leave primary school. We shear off a little bit from this more open development of children type of thing. It has been put to us that the difficulty is if you rely on the universal requirement to go to school by the legal age, that you are missing the indicators, and the trained teachers if they saw children at four years of age, some say earlier still, but at least four years of age, then early intervention could assist them with these learning difficulties. We are going to be in great difficulties if we talk about trying to solve all the social problems.

Professor WANGMANN: Sure, yes. I would support - I mean the earlier a difficulty is actually diagnosed the better. Four sometimes is too late, and I would argue that it is too late with a

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whole range of things, particularly to do with language. That is why I am again of the view that if we are going to invest a lot of money into that one year we perhaps are leaving it too late in order to do that, so I want to make it clear in my answer that I am not seeing them as an either/or. If we could actually do both of these things that would be good, but certainly before children start school, if there has been some identification of a learning difficulty, that is going to help that child much better in the adjustment to the school situation, but I would also argue that if that happens at three it is going to be a lot better for that child too.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: The difficulty with that is that obviously more manifest learning difficulties that are often taken up through Health or by friends and grandparents or whatever saying that looks like a difficulty, if you are going to say the Government has a responsibility, the Government is going to take a position in terms of the later manifestation of learning difficulties, and we are going to try to get right back to the most advantageous point, the difficulty is that there are a lot of people at the moment who do not want to and probably will not respond.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, I can see what you are saying.

CHAIR: A lot of what you have said probably leads into our second and third questions. Would it make more sense to talk about the early childhood services policy before we come back to the actual role of child care workers?

Professor WANGMANN: I think the role of child care workers follows on nicely now from what we have been talking about.

In terms of the staffing of children's services, one of the difficulties here - and again it is across the country, not unique to New South Wales - is that we have a whole diversity of skills. We have the early childhood teacher who has the four year university qualifications who will have had a lot of training in relation to special education, identification of children with learning difficulties. They may unfortunately be - in a traditional, say, long day care centre with about fifteen staff - the only one person who has a university degree, and again that is across the country. The bulk of training that actually comes into children's services comes from the TAFE sector, but there is a large percentage of people who work in children's services who do not have any training, and that is another difficulty, so when you are looking at the skills of this person who has actually done a lot of special education and a lot of identification-diagnostic stuff in their training, the centres will probably only have one of those and that person would be the director of the centre who will have a lot of administrative responsibility as well.

So that is an issue in terms of identification, but certainly from my experience, in the six years that I was head of the institute at Macquarie and also having previously worked in children's services, I believe that they serve an enormously valuable role in identification and in fact many of these children actually would not be identified until they went into the school system and for many of these children, by the time that they can go to school, and again I have noticed from experiences my students have shared with me, the difficulty is actually overcome by the time they enter school; no one would know that they actually previously had a difficulty with language and so on.

The other thing in terms of terminology is that the term "learning difficulties" is not very much favoured in early childhood and not very much supported. I know you have different people coming before you talking about different terms. It is seen as quite a negative concept and it is certainly not used. I do not know of any early childhood educators, my colleagues, who actually use the term "learning difficulties". Various statements have been in vogue in early childhood over the years and they have been "special education" and "children with special needs" has been probably the most predominant one, and now there is a new sort of movement that is talking a bit about children in general as having special rights or possibilities and children with learning difficulties or special needs as having more special rights or possibilities. I just think with that term, perhaps in talking with early childhood people, you might find they feel that is quite a negative construct.

CHAIR: You made a comment about the skill and ability of university trained early childhood

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teachers. Can you make similar comments about what you think about TAFE training, how many of those trained teachers are in a typical child care centre and how good their training is to help them identify and assist children?

Professor WANGMANN: Their training is a two or three year course, so it is not as extensive, and I have had experience with a lot of TAFE graduates coming into universities with advanced standing to do the early childhood degree and they are very skilled workers in children's services, but the main area in which they do not get a lot of training in relation to this inquiry is child development. While they study child development, it is certainly not over a four year period and not as intense as what they would get at a university, so yes, they have got skills that can assist in this, but I also want to make it clear that I do not believe that even a four year trained early childhood person has all the skills in this area, but if they have a skill to identify and if they are aware of the resources in their community whereby they can say to this family that they need to go to a speech therapist and that is going to be down the road at such and such a centre or we are going to have to get some audiologists in here or whatever, a good early childhood educator should be able to know the limits of what their knowledge is rather than think that they can actually fix it all.

CHAIR: And then they put their role into pointing parents in the right direction?

Professor WANGMANN: That is right, and that is virtually part of their training that they are able to do that.

CHAIR: In the second part of that question we asked what initiatives are required to help workers to undertake this role? Do you have any suggestions about training or access to other services?

Professor WANGMANN: In terms of my work at the moment, I think we have about \$4.3 million that actually goes into provision of in-service and professional development and we fund various agencies to undertake that for us and some of that is targeted to working with staff in centres to help them in their work with children with special needs, so we do not undertake the training ourselves but we fund agencies to do that, like the Lady Gowries and those sorts of groups.

CHAIR: What about the issue of the staff and student or children ratio? Is it so high that it effectively inhibits the role of teachers in identifying children who may have a problem?

Professor WANGMANN: We are currently reviewing our regulations in New South Wales, and it is happening in other States of Australia as well. Our ratio for children below the age of three is one of the highest in Australia. We have a ratio of 1:5 and 1:8 for children below the age of three. The research recommends a ratio of 1:3 with that group rather than 1:5, so certainly when you have more children to manage and work with and less adults to do that your ability to actually work effectively with these children, and also if the child is identified as having a difficulty then the time that you can spend with that child is limited if you have other children to work with as well. Through our office we will certainly be advocating for a lowering of those ratios, but we also have to be cognisant of the fact that who is going to pay for that, given that an increase in staff means increasing the budget of the centre and invariably those things get passed on to the parents by way of an increase in fee, so you are then going to be in a situation where you might make the service unaffordable for the child who has the learning difficulty and the parents cannot use the service because they cannot pay for it. We are actually having some discussions with my counterparts in other States and Territories, we had a meeting in Melbourne a couple of weeks ago with our Commonwealth colleagues to look at ways of addressing the ratio and particularly for very young children it is inappropriate.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: When you said 1:5 or 1:8, what do they refer to? Are they age groups?

Professor WANGMANN: They refer to children across the age range nought to five. For preschoolers, which is the age range classified as three to five, the ratio is 1:10.

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The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Three to five is 1:10.

Professor WANGMANN: And for children below the age of three it is 1:5 in the one to two age range and then in the two to three it is 1:8.

CHAIR: In a large child care centre - you mentioned before if you had a staff of 15, you may typically have one formally trained early childhood teacher - to what extent is it possible to identify children who may have some sort of difficulty, to more or less withdraw them into a smaller group perhaps for closer study, in other words instead of treating all children equally if you like, is the typical larger child care centre able to pull children aside to have a closer look at them?

Professor WANGMANN: It does depend on how the staff are managed, how the group director manages that, but certainly with some of the children that need far more intense help, an outside person may be called in to actually work with that, and that is where they can access some Commonwealth and State funding, in terms of working with children with special needs. When a child has got really acute special needs, does need a one-to-one, then the centre can access the funding that comes for those children from Commonwealth and State services.

CHAIR: What about for instance you might have a couple of children where the teachers think this child is clearly having some difficulty, pre-identification -

Professor WANGMANN: Sure.

CHAIR: To what extent is it possible for a temporary diversion of staff to deal with that?

Professor WANGMANN: It is possible, but, again, it would be much more possible if the ratios were more favourable. Sometimes in a traditional long day care centre there is a sleep period in the afternoon and sometimes children who do not need that can actually be withdrawn and have some activities then, but centres are limited in what they can do in an intensive way because of the ratios. Again, that is a country problem. Well, it is an international problem actually.

CHAIR: Our next questions are about the New South Wales Government's early childhood services policy, its background, what specific initiatives have been proposed and has it been accompanied by an overall increase in funding?

Professor WANGMANN: Right. I did attach a copy of the policy to the submission but I have brought individual ones here as well.

The policy does set a new benchmark for children's services in Australia and it is the first of its kind to actually be developed in this way. It was developed by an interagency committee made up of representatives from the Department of Education and Training, the Office of Children and Young People within Cabinet, the Department of Health, the Department for Women, the Premier's Council for Women and the Ageing and Disabilities Department. This interagency committee was set up about two and half years ago to actually look at a whole range of things to do with children's services but certainly to develop a clear policy framework to actually underpin regulations and planning and funding. It is the first one that has been developed in this way.

It is also the first policy in Australia that actually says first and foremost children's services are about outcomes for children, the child being the prime client of the service, but it is also very contextually based, that it is the child in the context of the family and in the context of the community. So it is recognising the primacy of parents in relation to children as being the most important group in their life, but it is saying that first and foremost the person who experiences the service is the child, and we now know that a child can spend up to 12,500 hours in an early childhood service before they start school, so they are the main beneficiaries of that experience.

It reflects very much the recent brain development work; it reflects a lot of the recent research. It is a very large document. This was the summary that went out to all services. It has got clearly

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targeted objectives and strategies and outcomes that we would expect with the policy being implemented. It was launched in October of last year during Children's Week.

The specific initiatives that are proposed as part of it are outlined in it in relation to the objectives, strategies and outcomes. Has there been an increase in funding as a result of the policy? Not at this stage, but I remain optimistic.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: The Minister announced yesterday something about literacy programs in preschools.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, I could talk about that later. I think you have got it in this.

CHAIR: You just answered the question about funding, but just to be a little more specific, if an overall increase in funding occurred, it would presumably be reflected in the budget of all of those different departments and agencies you mentioned.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes.

CHAIR: Because it is a collaborative approach.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, and this committee which is called the Planning Advisory Group is an ongoing committee. We are continuing to meet. We have just formulated a draft policy on out of school hours care, and we have now got a particular focus on children with disabilities. Again, I have always been of the view that we cannot do things well for children in families unless we work in an interagency approach. It is a very exciting thing to be able to be part of.

What has been my personal vision since I have been in this job is starting off with getting a good policy in place that is informed by research, then you can use that to actually target your dollars better. If you do not have your policy in place first, you often cannot target the dollars as well as they could be, and you can then influence practice in relation to that. I am firmly of the view that you have to have your infrastructure policy there first.

CHAIR: Our next question is very specifically about DOCS which provides funds to 1200 preschools and long day care centres. How are they allocated and have there been any moves to change the way they are allocated? Some of what you have just said could lead onto that. Is the policy first there or is the funding first in place?

Professor WANGMANN: We have now got the policy and we have got an historical funding base that we need to review and look at. In the fact sheet that I tabled with the first set of documents it actually explains the funding in terms of what is given to what, how much money we actually allocate to the different forms of children's services, including children with special needs and children with a disability and the number of children with a disability in the last survey that we did in August 1999. So I will not elaborate on that, but just to give you a bit of background, the funds have been allocated on an historical sort of claim basis and in 1990 the funding was capped and frozen, and we now have inequities in the funding base as a result of that that we are now starting to address with this new policy. Where a preschool may have had 40 children getting funding in 1990, it may now only have 15 children, but it is still getting funding for this. This is just a hypothetical example.

CHAIR: The same funding?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, the same funding. And then we have the reverse of that, where a centre has grown since 1990 and the funding has not been addressed. It was frozen in 1990 under a Coalition Government then and various other governments have been looking at it since then, and we are certainly in the process of reviewing that and looking at ways to address those inequities.

CHAIR: What happens if a centre is opened in a new suburb for instance?

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Professor WANGMANN: The growth in areas, you could probably count on one hand the number of centres that have been community based centres since 1990. The growth has been in the private sector invariably.

CHAIR: So under this new policy this inequity that you have mentioned is being examined afresh?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, it is, and in terms of moves to change how the funds are allocated we have actually spent quite a lot of money in the last twelve months to get some good data on this. We have spent over a million dollars gathering research in the studies we have actually commissioned and I brought a copy of the summary of four of the main projects. I did not bring eight copies, they are \$30 each and I thought I could spend that better on children's services. We have gathered that in terms of looking in a much broader way. We have also increased the children's services advisers in New South Wales. The Government has just allocated another twenty positions and that will significantly impact on how we can actually work with centres to improve their quality, how we can give them advice on programming and how we can monitor more effectively with those 3,500 services. So we have gone from about 67 advisers to about 90.

CHAIR: Is it possible for you to make any forecast of when these funding inequities might be overcome or the system might be changed?

Professor WANGMANN: We are constantly addressing that. One of the things that we have here to look at later is the special needs funding, the inequities there that we are in the process of addressing right now.

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CHAIR: The next series of questions are about funding programs for children with additional needs.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, this funding has the same history as children without the special needs and it is \$10 million that actually goes in this budget item and 75 percent of that goes to children with a disability. The children with special needs include children with a disability, non-English speaking background children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children with challenging behaviours, so that comes under that particular bucket of money, but in relation to this inquiry your interest would be in the 75 percent of that that goes to children with a disability.

We piloted in Orange over a period of two years, I think it was, a brokerage model to actually deliver special needs money in a brokerage system so that the funds actually get distributed at the local level and they get targeted to the child, though our centres cannot automatically get special needs money, they can only get money for children with special needs when they have a child enrolled there. This was evaluated last year very positively and we have employed consultants to actually look at rolling this type of approach out across New South Wales. It may be that some areas do not favour a brokerage model, but what we are committed to is pooling of funds at a local level, getting the local knowledge to actually assist in allocating those fundings and targeting the funding to the child with special needs, so if Jack and Jill centre has no special needs children enrolled there is no funding that automatically goes to that centre, but if they have five or six special needs children then the pooling at the local level would make sure that those children get that and this is a significant initiative to actually address the inequities in special needs funding in New South Wales.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: We always have this terrible difficulty with the use of the word "disability". When you say 75 percent, that would include "Difficulties" as well as "Disabilities"?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes. I do not like the term either, I quite agree with you, but it is a term that is in the department document and that is how it is sort of spelt out. It would include all of that group of people, yes.

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CHAIR: I suppose I was going to come at the question from the point of view that it has been put to us that a child diagnosed with a manifest disability is more likely to be diagnosed to be funded and children with a less serious problem or less obvious problem can slip through the cracks and not be eligible for funding like this. Can you tell us how does it work?

Professor WANGMANN: It should not work like that. The mildly diagnosed child or whatever has a right to the same funding, it should not be working like that, but a profound disability, for want of a better term, is obviously much more easy to recognise.

In children's services, children with these particular learning difficulties come in two ways: They come there because they are diagnosed prior to entry and then there is advice that it would be good if the child went to preschool, it would help, so they come that way, but a tremendous amount of children actually come into the preschools and long day care centres without any diagnosis and that is the very important prevention role that children's services can play because that child would not get identified until they entered the school system, so this pooling at the local level would enable, rather than capping funding and saying you are only getting this amount of money now, the centre will be able to contact at the local level and say we have just identified Jimmy, who has a language delay, a developmental delay, and we are seeking some funding for that child.

CHAIR: And if the bucket only has a certain amount of funding in it, how will the funds be distributed? Will Jimmy miss out?

Professor WANGMANN: That will be something that certainly in the consultation process that is happening that we have outside people doing for us will be canvassed at a local level. They are going to have face to face focus group discussions in thirty locations in New South Wales talking with families, staff and government and non-government agencies as they come back to put a report in to us at the end of this year.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: When you did the pilot in Orange was it simply the centres identifying children that they thought required special needs funding or was there any other definite diagnosis that needed to be made for them to access the money?

Professor WANGMANN: It came from a variety of sources. It could have come from an early intervention centre, for example; it could have come from a department, Health, Education, DOCS or whatever, or from the centre itself. The aim is that, wherever the diagnosis comes from, those children and families should have access to that, but the evaluation of this project, we actually did not do the evaluation, the brokerage firm itself did, and Professor Ailsa Burns from Macquarie University undertook the evaluation, so if this Committee is interested in getting a copy of that it could.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: What was the name of the professor?

Professor WANGMANN: Ailsa Burns at Macquarie University School of Behavioural Sciences.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: That is private information, is it?

Professor WANGMANN: No, it is just that it is not our government document. It was actually contracted by the brokerage firm, so it is not my privilege to give it to you. It is not a public document at this stage, but I know that it is widely available; if you were to ask for it I am sure you could get it.

CHAIR: I am sorry, I got distracted there: I was wondering about the role of the Health Department early childhood centres and so on, following Amanda's question, where the children who have been looked at in Orange have come from; how they have been identified. How much cooperation with Health Department services is there?

Professor WANGMANN: There is a project that I was going to talk about a bit later on, the Drug Summit project which you have listed here that you would like me to talk about. It does happen at

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the moment, but we are hoping to be able to integrate and certainly work more closely across the agencies, particularly Health and the Department of Education, and I will talk about that perhaps when we come to that project.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Why would the Health Department be involved in early childhood centres? Are you talking about the old baby health centres?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, those types of things, yes, so the child goes in for its six monthly check-up or whatever--

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Yes. You are not talking about preschools?

Professor WANGMANN: No. Actually this is interesting: When I took up this job I wanted to call this office the Office of Early Childhood and I was told no, you can't, because that is what Health uses, and I actually do not, as both the Director General and Minister know quite well, like the term "child care" again because we are about education and again it is this perception of care and education.

CHAIR: Yes, the Committee has the same trouble finding different variants of the term. I guess we are up to the question about the joint research between Macquarie, Western Sydney and Newcastle Universities.

Professor WANGMANN: There was a launch here in Parliament House yesterday of the second stage of this project. The project involves those universities and two government departments and has been going on now for nearly three years. The first part of it actually was a mapping exercise looking at what was happening in early childhood literacy and it included in its sample children from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal children, and there was a lot of involvement with parents and with staff.

The main findings that came out of that indicated that, while there was a lot of support for early childhood literacy in the centres and there was a very sort of positive approach to it, in quite a lot of instances there was a lack of congruence between what the centre was actually doing in this regard and what the parents may have wanted and/or their particular child rearing patterns and cultural backgrounds. Also the staff knowledge of the impact of the information technology in relation to literacy and popular culture and so on was an area that was identified for professional development.

So the researchers came to the two departments and asked for more money, as researchers are wont to do, and we funded the second stage of it that was launched yesterday, which is the kit. As a result of that work, we now have an early childhood literacy kit which will go through to all children's services in New South Wales. There will be 3,500 of them sent out next week and it also includes a video.

The aim of this obviously, which has relevance for this Committee, will be to assist people working in children's services in New South Wales with children's literacy development. It is a very big thing, so I was not going to bring eight copies of it with me, but this is the recommendations of the first phase of that project that I would table.

[Recommendations tabled]

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Is there a lot of IT development for preschool aged children? There are a lot of IT possibilities, are there not?

Professor WANGMANN: Well, there are, but not many preschools and long day care centres can afford this. Again, it is something that I think is a serious concern to us as a society actually, the impact of information technology and how the more disadvantaged families and groups in our society cannot access the information that you and I can access on information technology, and what impact that is going to have on us in the long-term as a society is something that is probably outside the terms of this Committee, but there would be a lot of families who are using preschools and long day care

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centres who would not have access to the net and things like that.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But in terms of the development of the children, are you saying that the teachers are not trained by the internet themselves, teachers are not accessing information technology or they are not applying the information technology?

Professor WANGMANN: Both.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We try as a parent to keep him away from computers, so that he actually jumps on trampolines, rather than fiddles with Nintendo games. I do not know if it is the right thing to do or not, but it does seem to me that if - is IT a huge problem in kids that are getting socialised by interacting with each other? I know you do not like my terminology of playing with each other.

Professor WANGMANN: No.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But they interact with each other in a little society there, do they not, they learn their life skills, but is the lack of IT at that level important?

Professor WANGMANN: No, I understand. I think they are better to play and jump, to use your term. But I think as children get older, these are becoming increasingly important skills. We had the same interest when television first came in. There was a lot of interest in children accessing television programs and now we are seeing this with IT. But in terms of literacy, if you look at literacy in its broader sense, which these researchers have been, the information technology is part of the literacy skills because a lot of children and families are accessing that, so children get familiar with road signs and so on, so they get familiar with things that they actually see in a more interactive way.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: A minute ago you did not want us involved in education of four year olds because there was too much emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Now you are saying that IT is important for literacy and numeracy.

Professor WANGMANN: No. I clarified, if you recall, that they are learning lots of literacy and numeracy. It may not be in a way that a traditional school would perhaps see it.

CHAIR: You cannot use a computer without -

Professor WANGMANN: No, exactly.

CHAIR: It is the chicken and the egg in terms of where you start, pressing the button and then you learn it or you learn it first.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: At the preschool that my children went to they had a computer room and they had half an hour each in the afternoon and all they did was paint with computers. I would have rather they actually finger painted or used brushes. The new management thought this was very innovative.

Professor WANGMANN: Well, some of the best child's play actually happens in mum's kitchen with the pots and saucepans and pans and pegs out on the clothes line. You do not need sophisticated materials, you just need good quality interaction.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: That might be an appropriate time for me to introduce one of my anxieties in all this. There are obviously some people in an urban setting who would choose not to send to their children to preschool and other child care facilities, but there are also some people in rural areas who even if they wanted to could not. This concept that it should be universal, getting at the kids earlier and earlier, has this fundamental flaw, that it is never going to reach to everybody, and, indeed, I think we have acknowledged that some of the children that most need help, perhaps not only for themselves but for their families, are the most least likely to access these facilities, particularly in some rural

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communities. What is your reaction to that? Is this setting up an elite in our society, where those who, because of their proximity to these services, will utilise them and will be advantaged by them and others will be second class?

Professor WANGMANN: I will say something that my early childhood colleagues might disagree with. I do not think you need to go to preschool necessarily to be able to succeed in life, and, certainly, I was also born in a rural community and never had access to preschool, because there was just none there.

The access to quality preschool environments, as you have indicated, is particularly important. The more disadvantaged you are in society, the more important it is that you have access to that, because you can break some of that cycle. Invariably, children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds are disadvantaged when they start school. They are labelled as soon as they get into the school system and their cycle of disadvantage continues. Whereas if you can break that cycle in the early years, and the longitudinal work has shown that for every dollar you invest in those early years for disadvantaged families you will actually save seven dollars, There will be less social welfare dependency, less remedial education, a whole range of social welfare dependency does not happen in the juvenile years, but that research is only applicable to really disadvantaged groups, and when you have got real disadvantaged groups in your rural areas, and they have not got access to some of those particular types of services, that is an issue that we all need to address.

In terms of children services, we do have operating in New South Wales some 70 mobile services that are like a caravan really, where the service will go around to different locations, and that has assisted in rural communities.

But back to what I was alluding to earlier, the good quality parental care and good quality child care, all those sorts of things are good; it is the poor quality child care, poor quality parental care, poor care with grandma, is not good for any child.

I do not know if that has answered your question but I understand the dilemma you are raising.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: It may have. Perhaps it leads to a third point that I raise. Distant education is now accepted as a very good alternative, and what we try to do is empower the parent who wants to give their children the same advantage. Is there envisaged a program that would assist parents to provide those sort of stimulations to their young child, where they could not access an expert or a professional or a formal group?

Professor WANGMANN: Certainly, the Families First initiative in New South Wales is a way of looking at that. I am particularly interested in that. One of the things that I would like to see is, and there have been some discussions about this, is having more parenting type centres.

In Canada they have launched what I see as a bit of a hallmark. They have got what they call early childhood development and parenting centres, located across rural areas as well as urban, and these are virtually in a way a one stop shop where a parent can go prenatally as well as post-natally, they can get advice on looking after themselves before a child is born, prenatal advice, but they can also access in that same locality preschool, long day care, special education if the child has got a difficulty, and I think that is something that we should certainly be looking at more closely in this country, particularly in the rural areas.

In the area where you come from, Doug, there is a project that I launched on behalf of the Minister last year, called Connect 5. I do not know if you are aware of that. It goes around five different communities, Coonamble being one of them, and it works only with children with learning difficulties and it actually tries to go out to the woman on the farm and so on who has got a child and give them some skills to work with that child.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: In terms of the mobile services that you fund, you gave us a facts sheet which says you have 49 mobile preschools and 16 mobile child care services. Has there been

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much expansion in that in recent years or have they basically been there for quite a while?

Professor WANGMANN: There has not been much expansion. Some States do not have them at all and in the United States, for example, they are unheard of. When I go over there they say: What on earth are you talking about? What is this mobile? Just off the top of my head, I cannot recall that there has been much expansion.

CHAIR: Are they in that list that you mentioned before that have been essentially closing since 1990?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes.

CHAIR: Not only the numbers of the children that you give a little bit further down that column, but also 49 mobile preschools, that is what was there in 1990 and that is what is still there?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes. Well, I am not sure exactly, but roughly I would say it is similar. The mobiles serve a very important function in rural communities. For many of these children it is the only access they will have to anything before they start school.

CHAIR: So really, getting back to an earlier answer, we have not only frozen our funding in terms of, for instance, equity between something in the eastern suburbs and something somewhere else, but we have also frozen our range of provisions so that, for instance, if you decided that a really good initiative would be more mobile preschools, you cannot do it because it is still in that frozen category?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes. We need to also be reminded that the Commonwealth Government is the main funder of children's services. We have 100.1 million that goes in and I think they have 400 million and this is again some of the difficulties we have and we try and actually address some of these things because of those barriers. We do not put funding into family day care, those sorts of services, the Commonwealth is the sole funder.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: So does the Commonwealth provide any of the funding for mobile preschools?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, they do. Some of the mobiles are solely Commonwealth funded.

CHAIR: Is it Connect 5, the one at Coonamble?

Professor WANGMANN: Connect 5, yes. That is State funding.

CHAIR: Is that a trial of some sort?

Professor WANGMANN: Well, no, it is not a trial now. It has been very, very successful and I have just had a letter from them recently wanting more money.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: Coonamble is a very innovative place.

Professor WANGMANN: Well, yes, it is a very exciting project. It is the only one of its kind in the State at the moment, but I think once there is some evaluation done of it it will start off. They are not expensive to run really, they take everything around in the back of a station wagon virtually and they visit face to face with families.

CHAIR: For what age group?

Professor WANGMANN: Before school.

CHAIR: So right up to five and six?

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Professor WANGMANN: Yes.

CHAIR: One of the things we are very conscious of is the way children can get put in boxes, you can have a school box, a preschool box and a child box, and we have been talking about that one way or another all afternoon, but a project like that which goes right across that age range would solve a lot of those interagency cooperation issues.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: There is an organisation out there called TUFF, Together for Under Five Families--

Professor WANGMANN: That is right.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: They are great at coordinating all these things from the whole spectrum of early learning to juvenile justice type problems. They are very good.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, good things happen in the country.

CHAIR: In some instances it is probably easier to coordinate across age groups when you have fewer children to deal with.

Professor WANGMANN: I suppose so, yes.

CHAIR: You can be more innovative with your structures because there are few. Now where were we? We are still in research projects, the trial of the new curriculum.

Professor WANGMANN: I would like to table this. This is particularly important for your terms of reference. It is a curriculum framework actually and it is currently being piloted. What I have just tabled is the overview of the rationale for developing it and an indication of the theoretical basis for it, the different educational theories that have influenced it. We do not have a curriculum framework for early childhood in New South Wales and there are only two others in Australia. We decided to put this submission up to look at our responsibility in terms of improving the quality of children's services. While we fund and we regulate, we also have a responsibility for improving quality. This pilot will finish in June and we will then be developing the full document and distributing it free to all early childhood services across New South Wales.

The actual curriculum itself is quite a thick document and it is divided into traditional areas that you would expect and it has language and literacy and numeracy and all those sorts of things in it as well as working with families and parents' transition to school. What I have tabled here is the theoretical rationale for the development of it, not the actual content of the curriculum itself, and we feel it is a very exciting project. We have had a tremendous amount of interest in it and the pilot that is currently being undertaken in sixteen centres in New South Wales includes an Aboriginal service, non-English speaking background service, it includes children who are enrolled in services with special needs and it also includes the Montessori and Steiner scheme, so it will be interesting with that particular theoretical perspective that comes from Rudolf Steiner and Montessori how this curriculum actually works. It was developed under the direction of the steering committee, which was a cast of thousands. There were 27 people on that steering committee. We had to make sure all the interests in children's services were on that committee. It included the Department of Education and Training and also the Board of Studies and I presented to the Board of Studies on two occasions because my idea behind it was to have a curriculum that would link in with the years at school as well and we could look at a continuous learning thing and perhaps influence some of the early years at school.

CHAIR: Has the trial that is going on been associated in any way with neighbourhood schools?

Professor WANGMANN: We have a departmental preschool participating in the trial, yes.

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CHAIR: As you mentioned before, we asked you a question about the research projects that came out of the Drug Summit.

Professor WANGMANN: That is right. The Drug Summit is 1.15 million and I was asked to manage this project basically because of my background I think, not because of the Office of Child Care, and I put up to Cabinet that I would like to first of all do this, what I see as a major scoping exercise, and as you will see there are three projects in this, all of which are directly related to the work of this Committee. What I feel we need to know is what is actually happening, what is the level of activity across the State in terms of children and families, in terms of children with a disability, Aboriginal children, non-English speaking background children and also the level of activity in terms of community education and parenting campaigns. We know that there is Families First, but there is a range of other things as well and, when we have this exercise finished, which will be in August this year, I believe we will then have the first really good picture that we have had in New South Wales of the level of activity across all the departments with a key interest in this area.

The steering committee for this project is the Office of Children and Young People in Cabinet, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Training, ADD and the Department of Community Services with areas that convene under the project. We have set up a reference group made up of a whole range of people and interests from government and non-government agencies that the researchers are meeting with. Again I think this is something that we really need at a national level. We often go ahead and spend money and set up projects without really knowing what is on the ground first, where are the gaps, where is the overlap, the possible duplication, which this mapping exercise will show us, and then they will make recommendations to us on the expenditure of the million dollars, so there is still \$1 million of the Drug Summit money for the early years sitting there and we will look at the recommendations of that report to decide how we will spend that money, but certainly in terms of children with a disability I could probably, if you were wanting it for this Committee, make available the draft report to you later on, if that was of interest to the Committee.

CHAIR: Yes, thank you very much, and that will be after August this year?

Professor WANGMANN: Well, we will have a draft report before then and if I could get approval to give it to this Committee and you wanted it, when does the work of this Committee finish?

CHAIR: Well, we do not have a particular deadline, since the Minister asked us to do this inquiry we can look at our own timetable. If most of what you have talked to us about today is still ongoing, we would probably prefer to wait and be able to use it rather than hasten to a report without the use of it.

Professor WANGMANN: I think this will be particularly useful because we are going to get a State picture of what is happening in the area of disability as well as for Aboriginal children. They actually developed for us a set of indicators on children's wellbeing. Some researchers have tried to do this over the years but have not been terribly successful, and a communication strategy as well to give advice to families.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: When is this likely to be available?

Professor WANGMANN: The project has to be completed in August. That is their timeframe that they are funding. We would have their draft report probably six weeks or so before that, but they have undertaken a contract to complete it by the end of August for us. I again see it as being particularly useful to this Committee.

CHAIR: Much earlier on we got into that series of questions about the role of that sort of thing.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, we have probably done most of that.

CHAIR: Where we stopped was before we got to the question about your view of the

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effectiveness of current transition programs for children to start school. What we have not so far talked about at all this afternoon is what happens once the child actually goes to school from preschool, and we have obviously heard a number of comments about difficulties in the transition, as well as those issues of a child fairly obviously having some difficulty which either has not been identified earlier or, if identified, has not been addressed.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes. It is also obviously a serious issue for non-English speaking background families and Aboriginal families and so on. We are involved in funding a project that is being undertaken by the University of Western Sydney on transition to school and they will come up with models on appropriate transition programs. Their research - and this is the last thing I am tabling - gives you some background to that project which is quite unique.

[Research from transition program by the University of Western Sydney tabled]

Professor WANGMANN: One of the things that they are doing in the project is actually talking to children who started school, and they are finding out from children what children actually have difficulty with and they talk to children before they start school and when they have started school, so they are following this cohort of children through and it has come up with some very interesting things about what kids think. You have got to know the rules, and you have got to do this, and lots of things that we think are important in the transition process children do not actually see as important.

Along with that, they have also developed guidelines, which are included in what I have tabled there, as to what they see as effective transition to school programs and they have identified ten guidelines there. This is their preliminary thinking before they start to develop models of what they think should be actually in a transition program.

They talk about establishing positive relationships between the children, the parents, the educators, differentiating, orientation to school and a transition to school program. Some families think when the child goes and has the orientation program, they will be effectively transitioned, if there is such a word, and in fact they are not. Transition to school is a quite a critical thing.

Where I was saying earlier that I consider early childhood services as important in their own right, and I do, I also appreciate the difficulties the child has when they do not fit into the school system and they sometimes can be labelled a failure from day one. So we do have to have effective transition to school programs.

I would also like to see some of our schools in those early years actually having some more developmentally appropriate programs. Children in terms of child development - what is called early childhood is birth to eight years, and those first three years at school, the child is still in what the international literature classifies as the early childhood period, and some periods in the early years at school are perhaps more prescriptive and rigid than the traditional sort of early childhood program. Again, this is not saying all schools are like this, but some schools we could perhaps have more appropriate early childhood type programs in those early years to help these kids do the transition. If a child has been used to being in an environment in a preschool for three years or so with this play based learning curriculum and then has to go and sit at desks with a whole set of different parameters and rules attached to it, that can be very developmentally inappropriate for that child and also quite daunting for that child.

They are some of the things I think we need to take on out of this transition to school project. The Department of Education is also involved in this project and sits on the steering committee.

CHAIR: We have actually begun making contact with the academics involved and we are hoping late in May to perhaps go and talk to them and perhaps visit one of the schools.

Professor WANGMANN: Then tell them they do not need to bring you all their stuff, that I have brought it.

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CHAIR: What you just said then about programs that may be inappropriate. When you say program, do you mean the curriculum, do you mean the practices of some teachers in the way they have an inflexible or regimental approach? I suppose what I am getting at is what you are being critical of within the power of teachers in the school to change and therefore it varies from school to school -

Professor WANGMANN: Yes.

CHAIR: - or are you talking about a systemic difficulty?

Professor WANGMANN: There has always been a concern with what we refer to as a "push down curriculum", and I suppose this curriculum project that we have been engaged in here that we are piloting, we would like to see more a "push up curriculum" and that is why I involved the Board of Studies and the Department of Education and Training in the process.

CHAIR: Preparing for the HSC?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, no, no, and given that early childhood in the child development language is the birth to eight period, we have some teachers in our school system who has as part of their training may not have necessarily done that. From my previous life when I was head of the institute at Macquarie, we had a lot of graduates go into the early years of school, because the graduates from the Institute of Early Childhood are trained to teach in both locations. So many of our graduates will be what they call targeted grads and they would want them to go and teach, particularly in those first three years of school, kindergarten, first and second class, and the private school system would just lap them up. Everyone would go there, which caused another problem because none of them were wanting to go into preschools. But it this understanding of the child development of that particular period that some teachers have in the school system and some do not.

CHAIR: Is that problem increasing?

Professor WANGMANN: No, I think it is decreasing actually.

CHAIR: And what is being done? We obviously have a very large government school system. What is being done?

Professor WANGMANN: The Department of Education and Training have an early childhood reference group that I sit on that provides advice on development of curricula, so anything that is being developed now in the Department of Education and Training comes before that early childhood reference group, which is made up of early childhood academics and parent groups and so on. I think that has been a very positive initiative.

CHAIR: And is there an undersupply of teachers who have at least some training in the developmental stages and so on?

Professor WANGMANN: There is a critical undersupply, and this is across Australia. We have had various meetings with the Commonwealth on this matter. There has never been such a serious shortage of teachers, and particularly early childhood teachers. I use the word crisis, which is not a word I like, I do not like crisis people, but we are actually facing a crisis because we have got increasing numbers of young children from very early ages coming into centres and we are without staff to care for them and look after them. Major organisations, like the Kindergarten Union and so on, will put an ad in the paper for a top city location perhaps and they are lucky if they get one applicant for it. So there is an undersupply, it is a very serious undersupply, but what has happened, while there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of early childhood services, particularly with the increasing private involvement, there has not been a corresponding funding from DETYA to actually train more early childhood people in the universities. We have increased our numbers of children services from two thirds in the last eight years, but we have not increased the number of people we are training in any way near that.

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It is a very serious problem, and in rural areas they cannot get anyone out there at all, and invariably we have to give exemptions, because according to the regulations they must have a trained early childhood person, they cannot get them, so we have to recommend to the Minister to give exemptions.

CHAIR: Are the universities or any other group doing anything to address this undersupply?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes. Certainly there have been meetings with the universities and DETYA. Not all the universities train teachers though. Some of the old sandstones do not, for example, where perhaps a lot more of the political clout is, but there certainly have been inroads into it.

One of the things that Macquarie has done, my alma mater I suppose, is that this year we will have the first cohort of Aboriginal trained early childhood teachers. We got funding from DETYA three and half years ago to have a designated Aboriginal program only. So we will now have coming out at the end of this year our first cohort of Aboriginal early childhood teachers who have a four year degree, and that will be great.

CHAIR: Are they bonded in any way to go and teach?

Professor WANGMANN: No, but most of them have done this by external studies and most of them are working in services, but they will be able to go back into the Aboriginal communities in the rural areas where most of them live and actually be able to run some good early childhood programs there now that we were not able to do before.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: Are any of the mobile services targeted specifically to Aboriginal communities?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, they are, but most of them are inclusive and do have quite a lot of Aboriginal children as part of their other group as well, but we do have some that are specifically targeted to Aboriginal communities.

CHAIR: Was there anything else you wanted to say about the appropriateness of the actual curriculum in school? We talked about programs in general and the approach of teachers. What about the curriculum?

Professor WANGMANN: Well, as I mentioned, through this early childhood reference group we are examining the curriculum before it actually gets into publication stage and we are certainly seeing more developmentally appropriate materials actually come out.

CHAIR: So is that rolling through different subject areas or will there in fact be a whole new curriculum?

Professor WANGMANN: No, it is just different things that are happening in different ways.

CHAIR: Our next group of questions is about fragmentation and coordination. I think in one way or another we have mentioned a lot of them already.

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, we have.

CHAIR: We came back to the lack of collaboration which you commented on in your submission in relation to Commonwealth-State programs and unsuccessful attempts by the State to foster greater integration with the Commonwealth over the past six years. Are there any other comments you want to make about that or about the initiatives to try to reduce that fragmentation?

Professor WANGMANN: As I did mention earlier, when we are trying to get more integrated services for families and children in whatever State it may be, the actual Commonwealth-State barriers

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have to be addressed and we must do that at all levels because children who have learning difficulties, whatever you want to call them, are incredibly disadvantaged because the families have already got what is often a grief process that they are going through because they did not have the birth of a perfect child, so often it is associated with a lot of that; then they have to negotiate this Commonwealth-State maze - and it really is a maze - of different people doing this, different people doing that, and the barriers there in relation to the funding present enormous difficulties for these families and many of them get fed up and often just do not worry about it. There has been some talk over the years that the special needs funding should all either be State or Commonwealth rather than have this mix of different things, but we do need to - and I would be surprised if you do not hear this from a lot of people in this inquiry - really try and get some way of addressing those barriers between State and Commonwealth roles and responsibilities to make it easier for families to negotiate.

CHAIR: Does the one-stop shop provide the way of doing that or should the Governments actually decide that it will be all one level or all the other level?

Professor WANGMANN: I have had my visions of these things over the years and how I thought they would go. One of the things we do not have in Australia is national goals for early childhood. We have national things for lots of other things, but there have been groups lobbying now for a couple of decades trying to get national goals for early childhood and if you had agreed national goals you could then contract different things to the States in terms of meeting objectives and one of them may well be the special education parts that would be contracted out, but according to meeting national goals, that there is some accountability. Certainly the one-stop shop has worked remarkably well in parts of Canada, but you cannot get one model that is going to suit all communities and in this flexible models project that we are doing at the moment what will come out of that, even though I am pre-empting the researchers' work, but I am not blind Freddy either, I know what will come out of that will be: You need this model for this rural area and this model for Marrickville and different models for different locations. To think a one-stop shop can be implemented across the State is unrealistic.

CHAIR: Does the increasing trend to private services that you mentioned create new difficulties with getting coordination and collaboration?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, it does, it actually can pose some quite serious difficulties because if you are in a business, whether it be a proprietor of a child care centre or the corner deli, you can run it how you want to run it and if you wanted to try and get more integration and say, well, it would be really good in this service if you actually provided a family support program as well as your long day care centre as well as did some prenatal stuff with some of these families, you have the facilities to do that, you cannot require it because it is a business and in this flexible models project I have involved the private sector very much in the steering committee in the work of that, but I have indicated I have noticed a reluctance to actually be involved in a more integrative range of family and children's services, and this is just off the top of my head but you probably can only do that when you attach government dollars to it and when you do not fund the private sector you can probably only do some of these things when you actually attach government money. I do not know.

CHAIR: What impact, if any, has the Families First program had on the coordination of the early childhood services?

Professor WANGMANN: Because it is only just in the process of being rolled out, and it certainly has had some impact, we are on the Statewide steering committee of that particular program and we are looking now more intensively at ways that children's services can be more integrated in that strategy, so it has started to have some impact but we can certainly work now on making it have more impact. Again because, as I think I have mentioned, I see children's services as a major preventative program and we should be investing more in prevention, not coming in later once the abuse has occurred or whatever, so I think there will be more integration with that project.

CHAIR: The coordination of that is going to move into DOCS under the new arrangements.

Professor WANGMANN: I read those words too, yes.

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CHAIR: If I ask when, you would say "I do not know".

Professor WANGMANN: I just read the words.

CHAIR: Our last question is whether there are any initiatives overseas, and you mentioned the Canadian project. Is there anything else?

Professor WANGMANN: I think we mention some in our submission, but also I suppose there are two ways of looking at this, whether you have mainstream programs or targeted programs, and unless the child has a very severe and incredibly acute disability, I am in favour of the integration approach for all children. I think all children benefit with that particular model.

The Canadian model is a particularly successful one. It is in the process of being evaluated now. Again, that will be finished also in August. So if this Committee is interested, I am in contact with those people. I can provide you with a report. To date it has been very successful with a whole range of families, and certainly families with disabilities.

The Sure Start program that the Blair Government has set up in England has also been very successful, again for families with a whole range of issues and concerns. The Head Start program of course that has been in operation in the States for some time has been particularly successful with children from disadvantaged backgrounds, some of those children with disabilities. Across the spectrum, there are very little clearly targeted programs, but my view is unless the child is really acutely disabled, I think the mainstream programs are much better for that child.

Rather than going overseas, we have got an incredibly successful program operating at Campbelltown, that is the Macarthur - it was actually called the Families First program and it has been incredibly successful with children with quite serious developmental delays. It received some State dollars and some Commonwealth dollars. I do not know if they are coming before this Committee. That is a program that is operating in Australia. That is one of the best I have seen.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: It is being extended though, is it not?

Professor WANGMANN: It is being extended, yes.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: How much, will it be widespread or just have three or four more centres?

Professor WANGMANN: I am not sure. It is well worth a visit. What they are doing there is quite magic with those families and children, and they have just changed. I was involved in a program for about six years because at the university we provided some of the teachers in the program. I noticed the change in the self-esteem and the empowerment of those parents over that period, apart from the change that was happening in the children, because lots of parents who have a severely disabled child bare a lot of that guilt and shame and just how we saw those parents grow in that period was quite inspiring.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: There was one thing. We heard earlier on about a questionnaire approach to helping families identify children who appear to have developmental delays or learning difficulties. I think that was in America somewhere. Do you know about that? Do you think that is of any value?

Professor WANGMANN: Questionnaires are incredibly limited in what information they can give you. Any diagnosis of a child with learning difficulties should come from a range of sources. Just one source will give you very limited information. What gives you the best information is direct observation, and you have to have a skilled, informed mind to do that. But giving a parent a

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questionnaire, tick this, you tend to pick up a pencil, tick yes, no, gives you some information but it is incredibly limited, and to use that as a basis for diagnosis I would not think would be in the best interests of that child, but it can be used as other sources and then all linked in and then you can sit and have a wider picture of that child from a whole range of sources, but nothing, absolutely nothing beats direct observation.

CHAIR: It was the speech therapists that mentioned it.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: The actual research services that are available, I assume there would have to be a final list in which there are speech therapists, there are speech pathologists. Is there something available?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, there are lots of lists, and that is another difficulty as well, how parents access some of these lists and how they find out about their information. A lot of the stuff comes through local governments, the local Penrith area there will have a list of what is available in that area.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: I meant the specialties.

Professor WANGMANN: The specialties as well I think you would find. If you want a definitive list of what is available in specialties in New South Wales, I am not aware of it. It may well be there, but it has not come across my desk.

CHAIR: The poor parent who is saying, "Help", where can they go?

Professor WANGMANN: As I say, the local councils have provided that, but often if the child has actually gone to a child care centre, then that centre director can say, "Here is where the speech therapist is" and so on, because they will plug into those community networks. What you have raised is something that we probably should have. We should have some definitive list that is readily available.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: This difficulty you have touched on a couple of times that comes out of this huge area of child care services, that comes out of learning difficulties, disabilities, difficulties, all this really has suggested to us so far has been that there are problems with speech, which are co-ordinated with other physiological things, but there is hearing and sight, never much beyond that. Once you get beyond that, you may be dealing with disabilities. Is it as simple as that?

CHAIR: And behaviour.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: And motor skills too, some kids have not had the development to actually pick up a pen and paper.

Professor WANGMANN: It is interesting. That is the general sort of generic list, but the group that is left out of that is the child who has emotional social problems, the kid who cannot interact socially and has no interaction/peer skills. Unless something is done to assist those children, they never get on at school if they actually cannot develop and some children have incredibly poor social skill development and they are not included in the generic list like that, but if you do not have a good concept of self-esteem you do not get very far in life. If you have a good concept of self-esteem and you are disabled, you can do lots and lots of other things, but if you do not feel good about how you feel and look, it is very, very difficult.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: In many cases, which comes first, self-esteem or the learning difficulty?

Professor WANGMANN: Well, you can be born with both. I mean your self-esteem is acquired.

The Hon. I. W. WEST: What would be the percentage of children with special needs who go

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on to develop, because of those special needs and difficulties with interaction with their peers, social difficulties and self-esteem difficulties?

Professor WANGMANN: What would be the percentage of them that have learning difficulties as well as self-esteem? I would not know. I do not know that anyone would have that answer, but I know from my own work with children that the child who does have a disability but has a positive self-esteem will advance a lot quicker than the child with a disability who does not and I think we often forget about social skills when we start to work with children with learning difficulties.

The Hon. D. F. MOPPETT: The difficulty with these terms is that they tend to be overworked and people invoke lack of self-esteem. You could use the analogy of a car factory where there is a quality control bloke ticking things off who says: There is not enough self-esteem, send it back to the paint shop and give it another coat. I guess that is what we are being very careful of. Is it an intrinsic factor of self-esteem, or lack thereof, or is it because of a series of other factors that are yet not identified that manifest themselves in things, including low self-esteem? They are very difficult questions.

Professor WANGMANN: They are and there are no black and white answers to those either. There is a lot of grey area.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: In terms of self-esteem and the issues that you have been talking about, you often see it if you are in rural areas where children do hide if someone comes to the door, they do not know how to say hello to somebody, and if you go to those very small schools where they only have one or two teachers you will see kids who will not talk to you or look at you. Those children often come from families who live too far away for there to be any casual social interaction with other children and I just think the idea of mobile preschools and playgroups where you get them to have that social interaction actually gives them such a boost when they enter the school system. The role that those mobile services play for children who are geographically socially isolated - I mean it is a different problem when you have children socially isolated in the city, but I think if you are looking at the fair provision of children's services across the State, that is one thing that has to stay. Not every country town needs the bricks and mortar preschool, but most of them could do with some sort of travelling service, mobile service, whatever.

CHAIR: Could I ask one other thing: Obviously different witnesses who we have had come before us reflect their own experience and so on. If you talk to people working in schools, some of them will say, focusing on a program like reading recovery or something like that, everything we are talking about in early intervention prior to three or prior to four focuses on disadvantage of various kinds, manifest disability and so on. If you are talking - as this Committee is expected to - about overcoming learning difficulties for children for whom fairly average school outcomes are expected, you should focus on the diagnosis and assessment and provision of programs for children basically who are older than six. In other words, there are learning difficulties which a program like reading recovery will hopefully address and cure, so we are dealing with learning difficulties that may be, in a sense, as minor and as specific as that, and we have one lot of people saying to us, well, to focus on learning difficulties we really focus on the first three years at school, and I suppose we have another group that says, well, if you really want to know the difference for a large number of kids, you need to focus on children from nought right through.

Professor WANGMANN: All the research, there has been considerable stuff now over about fifty years, says school can in fact be too late for some of these children. While if you can put them some intensive stuff into those early years of school, these children may catch up, but they may not catch up as much as they would have done had they had intervention earlier. I am not saying that that will not make a difference. It will make a difference, but it might not make as much difference as if you had started programs when the child was three.

CHAIR: That is if you could identify the problem?

Professor WANGMANN: If you could identify the problem, but a child of three has got an

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enormous repertoire of skills. Some people think they have not got enough cognitive skills together to be able to identify much before five. I would say that is rubbish. You can easily identify them. There is a whole wad of diagnostic testing, for want of a better word, that you can use with young children to identify these problems that are developmentally appropriate to the age group, not the testing that you would use in the early years of school, but appropriate to their age group. I am not saying you cannot make a difference in the early years of school, but I believe we should be trying much earlier than that.

CHAIR: Is there a problem with labelling? That is the other side of that coin, that you have to watch that you do not label.

Professor WANGMANN: Certainly in early childhood labelling is a no/no, and you do not do that. You tend to talk more about their skills, prime motor skills need further development or whatever, but children do not get labelled. This is the Down Syndrome child, this is the this child, is not used in early childhood so much. I am totally opposed to labelling, but it is useful at times to attract money. You have to label children sometimes to actually attract money.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Can I ask a question that has been asked of a number of people about whether kids should be screened at a certain age. Coming from a medical background, you look at vaccination and you use that model. If you screen children at two and you picked up difficulties in, say, five percent of the population, would the difference you could make by intervention programs targeting that five percent justify the cost for the 100 percent?

Professor WANGMANN: This is something that has been looked at. I do not know if anyone who has appeared before the Committee has talked about longitudinal study of Australia's children.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: We keep wondering about that. It seems there is a shortage of research there.

Professor WANGMANN: There is none virtually in Australia.

The Hon. Amanda FAZIO: Do you know the temperament?

Professor WANGMANN: No, the temperament one, there is now a major longitudinal study that will start to happen. It has not started yet. What you are saying, they will be following a cohort of children through, and yes, there will be some assessment at two and at three and so on. You really do have to look at that over time.

This Drug Summit money, what we are doing is a major mapping exercise first, the million dollars that is left there, our thoughts on that are to do a longitudinal study over three years where we would follow a cohort from probably from about two, 18 months or whatever, and follow them through and so there would be then some time type of assessment done at various periods, various points within that longitudinal program.

What you are saying is useful. Testing is frowned upon in early childhood a lot, but it depends on what type of test you are using, and, as I say, there are ways that you can assess things with very young children that can be very effective.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: But you have already got your early childhood centres that weigh them -

Professor WANGMANN: That is right.

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: - and tell the mothers how to change nappies or whatever. I do not know what they tell them, what to do for nappy rash or whatever. Could that not be extended in some fashion as universal?

Professor WANGMANN: It could be, and certainly the Commonwealth under one of its

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programs had testing of all Aboriginal children, for example, who were in programs to assess their readiness for school. Now I have some difficulties with that but--

The Hon. Dr A. CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: Presumably as part of that longitudinal methodology, though, you would have to have matched pairs that were not picked up, because it is not only what you did in those ones that you measured, it is the ones that have not been measured or picked up, so you would have to have a demographic--

Professor WANGMANN: That is right, that is why longitudinal studies are incredibly expensive. That is one of the reasons probably we have not done many in Australia. They are incredibly expensive.

CHAIR: We are going to Perth early in May and we are going to be talking to some people there.

(The witness withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 4.00 p.m.)