Learning before the school years:
Benefits for life

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Abstract
How important is it for parents and childcare workers to engage in play, talking and reading with children before they reach school age?

Professor Joseph Sparling, who has spent his whole career improving educational opportunities for vulnerable children from birth to age 5, will lead this session and discussion, looking at the evidence from local and international research. The Abecedarian Approach commenced in the United States with four basic pillars: language priority, learning games, conversational reading and enriched care-giving. The long-term benefits he observed over decades have led Professor Sparling to use this approach in Australia, supporting parents and care-givers to make language the number-one priority, surrounding every event in a child’s day with words, in a playful way.

Associate Professor Susan Krieg will share findings from a South Australian research project in which the researchers tracked children attending combined pre-school/childcare centres as they made their transition to school. Children experiencing social disadvantage benefited most from quality early childhood programs and made a successful start at school.

Marion Meiers will report on the ACER Longitudinal Literacy and Numeracy Study: Transitions from Preschool to School. Using data collected during one-to-one teacher-student interviews focused on literacy activities – including responding to the narrative and ideas in a picture story book – the researchers have developed scales showing growth in literacy learning over time.