

# Gloves for foxes

– playtime at SAHETI

BY TERRI OHANNESSIAN

I always thought of my childhood as eccentric, but never knew its true value.



Terri Ohannessian and young SAHETI pupils

I was the only child at school to live in a chocolate brown house with an artist for a mother and a father who was a keen organic farmer. I remember with fondness playing for hours at the river and only coming home after the sun went down. What I have come to realise is that my parents were not eccentric; they were merely ahead of their time. They realised the importance of play for my physical, emotional and intellectual development.

What is now in my imagination was once real to me. Foxgloves were simply that – gloves for foxes. Every living thing, every glinting light meant the world to me. I can remember countless hours exploring this world, in which children at SAHETI's playschool still live. People who do not understand – mainly adults – call it 'playtime' but, at SAHETI, it is more important than that.

### Growing demand for superior, stimulating centre

A relatively new addition to SAHETI, the playschool opened its doors in 2006, catering for three age groups: 15–18 months, 18–24 months and 24–36 months. The development was the result of comprehensive research into the

changing needs of parents regarding early childcare. Findings confirmed a growing demand for a quality facility providing superior care and stimulation for young children. Every aspect of the facilities reflects these priorities.

Buildings are designed to stimulate discovery and communication, as this kind of play affects general intellectual development. The layout of the various areas provides the capacity to approach problems creatively and to solve them. All rooms are built around an enormous 'perception room', which houses gross motor skills development apparatus and musical instruments. Here, children are encouraged to develop coordination, strength, stamina, suppleness and spacial awareness through physical play.

### Developing relationships

All equipment, including sensory and sand play equipment, is available for learners to use on an on-demand basis outside of adult-guided times. Supervision is always present, but unobtrusive. Children are encouraged to use play equipment individually, or as a part of a group to encourage relationship-building.

As relationships are essential to understanding a child's development,

educators at the school see the child in relation to others who play an essential role in their lives. Relationships with family, peers, teaching staff and the community are valued as essential contributors to a child's education.

### Playful imaginings to last a lifetime

The environment at school is regarded as a teaching tool in the learning process. Learning is also expressed through the arts. Painting, drawing, moulding, music, movement, dance and fantasy play are some of the ways our children show us their development. We encourage freeplay and expression. Educators provide materials, give directions, advice and encouragement to open doors to new discoveries and learning.

At SAHETI's playschool, the aim is to have every child look back on their pre-school years and reflect – as I do – that this is where, in the world of playful imaginings, their life began. ❁

**Terri Ohannessian is Principal of SAHETI'S playschool and pre-school. Contact her at [tohannessian@saheti.co.za](mailto:tohannessian@saheti.co.za) Let us know about your early childhood development centre.**