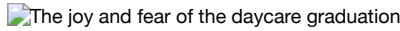


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The joy and fear of the daycare graduation

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It seemed like only yesterday she started her education and that's because it was writes Caroline Berdon, AAP.

After weeks of song rehearsals, hours trawling the shops for pretty shoes and even some soul searching on the direction of her future career, my daughter is ready for her graduation ceremony.

On her special day, my husband and I walk the red carpet in black tie with the other parents before finding a spot in the shade, camera at the ready.

We wait for Emmeline to take the stage with her peers.

Oh, and did I mention she's four?

In the new year she will don her checked school dress and hoist one of those back-breaking school bags onto her tiny frame. She will be off to big school.

But today, it's about celebrating her achievements at preschool. What these are, it's hard to fathom.

But in what is normally such a carefree environment, these preschoolers look like deer in headlights as they stand in their smart clothes on stage, stumbling awkwardly through Advance Australia Fair.

They look much more at home when the songsheet moves on to *Have You Ever Had A Penguin Round For Tea* – for which parents are invited to join in the dance moves.

After the concert we move inside the preschool room for the ceremony. Behind the junk models made of egg cartons and toilet rolls are strings of glittery stars and Oscars statuettes.

And there's a podium – with a microphone – up the front of the room.

The little boys and girls, now dressed in cloaks and mortarboards, each get their chance to get up and say what they want to be when they grow up.

There are the honest answers (a mermaid, superman, a Socceroo player), the endearing answers (a mummy, a doctor) and the answers that likely involved some parental intervention (the little girl who has to be prompted three times into saying she wants to be a dentist). Emmeline, meanwhile, dreams of being a princess.

When it's finally over, each graduate poses with their certificate and smile.

For parents, the event provides some priceless photos and video footage that we can share with **grandparents** – and replay to our child's humiliation when he or she turns 21.

But I'm not sure how much the kids are enjoying the day. I saw the fear in Emmeline's face until her eyes found mine and she broke into a smile.

I couldn't help wondering whether a preschool graduation ceremony makes an overwhelming moment in a little child's life even more intimidating than it need be?

But I needn't have worried too much about Emmeline. Any apprehension quickly turned to delight when given a goodie bag containing a glittery Christmas snowglobe and a superimposed picture of herself as a future princess.

Childhood is all about dreaming after all.

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