Qualitative Study

Responsiveness and Demandingness in *Bluey*: Parenting Representations for Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Purpose	:	This study analyses how the parenting dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness are represented in the Heeler family interactions in the animated series *Bluey*, and identifies the parenting situations in which these representations appear.
Methodology	:	This qualitative study used directed content analysis of five episodes of *Bluey*, an Australian preschool animated series about the Heeler family of dogs, namely *Bike* (S1E11), *Daddy Putdown* (S1E51), *Sticky Gecko* (S2E12), *The Show* (S2E19), and *Baby Race* (S2E50). The unit of analysis was the scene, while the coding units were dialogue turns and actions of parent characters. Each episode was coded with every indicator in a codebook derived from the models of Baumrind and of Maccoby and Martin, including a deliberate search for negative cases.
Results	:	Responsiveness appeared most consistently across all five episodes, mainly as warmth, emotion validation, autonomy support, and parental involvement through play. Demandingness was more limited and was largely embedded in daily routines, with the clearest evidence in *Sticky Gecko*. The analysis also identified moments of parental fatigue or frustration, and a representation of reflective parenting in *Baby Race*, in which the parent learns from her own anxiety.
Conclusions	:	*Bluey* portrays warm and responsive parenting, yet the evidence for demandingness is not strong enough to classify it as a full representation of authoritative parenting. The series may be used as material for discussion with parents and early childhood educators, provided that age-appropriate screen time limits and co-viewing are observed.

Keywords: *Bluey*, authoritative parenting, parental responsiveness, directed content analysis, early childhood education

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1. Introduction

Children's television is no longer watched by children alone. In many homes, parents sit in front of the screen as well, and they quietly compare themselves with the mothers and fathers who appear in the stories. Media therefore take part in shaping what a good parent looks like. This matters for early childhood education because the early years are a period in which cognitive, language, social, and emotional development proceeds very rapidly (Black et al., 2017), while the family is the first setting in which children learn rules, values, and ways of relating to others. Parenting, which includes communication, emotional support, monitoring, and involvement, is one of the main forces that direct this development (Lestari, 2018; Bornstein, 2019).

One programme that is frequently discussed in this context is *Bluey*. Produced by Ludo Studio in Brisbane, this preschool animated series first aired on ABC Kids in October 2018 and follows a family of *blue heeler* dogs, namely Bandit, Chilli, Bluey, and Bingo. *Bluey* won the International Emmy Kids Award in the preschool category and became the most watched programme in the history of the ABC iview service (Mediaweek, 2020). Its popularity later spread worldwide through distribution by Disney and BBC Studios (Potter, 2021), even though its content remains rich in Australian culture. An analysis of the 52 episodes of Season 1 identified thousands of elements of Australian culture, ranging from lifestyles and language to the natural environment (Arigita-García et al., 2024). Unlike many children's programmes built on fantasy adventures, almost every story in *Bluey* unfolds in everyday family life, and most interactions between parents and children happen through play. Bandit and Chilli step into their daughters' pretend games, accept the roles the children assign to them, and parenting

values emerge from within that play. This pattern is close to the idea of *playful parenting*, which regards play as the main channel of connection between parent and child (Cohen, 2001).

To read such representations, this study draws on the tradition of research on parenting styles. Baumrind (1966, 1971) distinguished three prototypes, namely authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Maccoby and Martin (1983) then reorganised this typology by crossing two dimensions, responsiveness (warmth, acceptance, and sensitivity to the child's needs) and demandingness (limits, monitoring, and maturity expectations). The crossing produced four styles, including a fourth style absent from the original typology, the neglectful or uninvolved style. Within this framework, authoritative parenting is marked by high responsiveness together with high demandingness, whereas permissive parenting combines high responsiveness with low demandingness. This distinction is central to the analysis, because warmth alone is not enough to call a practice authoritative. In this article, positive parenting is used as a working term for parenting that combines warmth with age-appropriate structure, which corresponds to the high-responsiveness and high-demandingness quadrant of this framework. Recent scholarship also tends to examine parenting dimensions separately rather than assigning global style labels, since the meaning of a given practice can shift across cultural contexts (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Smetana, 2017; Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019).

Empirical evidence on these dimensions is extensive. Pinquart's (2017) meta-analysis showed that warmth, behavioural control, and authoritative parenting are associated with fewer externalising problems in children and adolescents, while psychological control and harsh parenting are associated with more. Pinquart and Kauser (2018) found that the associations of parenting styles with behaviour problems and academic achievement show more similarities than differences across cultures, although their strength can vary by region and by a country's level of individualism. Pinquart (2021) later tested specifically whether the links between harsh parenting and internalising and externalising symptoms differ across cultural regions, which makes cultural context a consideration that cannot be ignored. These findings matter for Indonesia. Riany et al. (2022) reported that Indonesian parents use an authoritarian style more often than Australian parents, yet the authoritative style was associated with better child adjustment in both cultures. Haslam et al. (2020) added that in both countries, the more importance parents placed on tradition, the weaker the positive effect of authoritative parenting on children. Parental support for autonomy is also associated with better psychosocial functioning and academic achievement in children (Vasquez et al., 2016).

Media form another channel through which models of parenting circulate. Social learning theory explains that people learn by observing models, including those presented in the media, through processes of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). The meta-analysis by Coyne et al. (2018) showed that exposure to prosocial media is associated with more prosocial behaviour and empathic concern and with less aggression, while Swider-Cios et al. (2023) emphasised that the effects of screen media on young children depend on content and on parental mediation. The family context is decisive here. A meta-analysis by Collier et al. (2016) found small but significant associations between parental mediation and child outcomes, and Rasmussen et al. (2016) found that preschoolers who watched *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* showed higher empathy, self-efficacy, and emotion recognition when their regular viewing was frequently accompanied by active mediation from parents. Children's screen time is in turn associated with their parents' own patterns of screen use (Cost et al., 2023). A programme such as *Bluey* may therefore work through two distinct pathways of social learning. Children are likely to identify with Bluey and Bingo, whereas parents who watch along have the opportunity to learn from the parenting models offered by Bandit and Chilli. Parents' online discussion of Bluey indeed revolves around parenting and family life, which suggests that adults engage with the programme as metarecipients in their own right (Dynel & Ross, 2022).

Academic work on *Bluey* itself has begun to appear. In a short commentary, Isaacs and Elliot (2022) argued that the series models effective parenting strategies without sounding preachy and gives a place to fathers' responsibility in caregiving. Balanzategui et al. (2021) discussed the educational role of *Bluey* and other Australian children's programmes for families

during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Potter (2021) examined the series from an industry perspective, showing how global distribution shapes the production of children's television that remains distinctly local. The study closest to the present one is the content analysis by Bohl et al. (2025) of all episodes of *Bluey* from Seasons 1 to 3 using Grotberg's resilience framework. That study found that almost half of the episodes (48.7%) featured resilience as a primary or secondary theme and that parent characters were the main facilitators in most of these storylines (64.4%). On the audience side, the survey by Dewhirst et al. (2026) of 1,106 caregivers in 45 countries found that caregivers valued the positive family dynamics and learning through play in *Bluey*, yet they were divided on whether the programme actually changed play behaviour at home. A mixed-methods study of the first season found that most values of the education system are present in Bluey, although justice, tolerance, inclusion, and solidarity are less represented and some stereotypes are reproduced (Gil Quintana & Gutiérrez Ortega, 2025). Taken together, existing studies have examined the resilience messages, cultural content, educational values, and audience reception of Bluey, but not the structure of the parenting it portrays.

To the authors' knowledge, however, no published study has yet mapped the interactions of the Heeler family onto the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, so the question of whether parenting in *Bluey* is closer to the authoritative or the permissive pattern remains open. The relevance of this parenting model for Indonesian families has not been examined either, even though *Bluey* is a product of a relatively individualist Australian culture. The novelty of this study lies in the use of a two-dimensional parenting codebook, complete with a search for negative cases, to test the authoritative claim in *Bluey* and to interpret its relevance for families and early childhood education settings in Indonesia.

Three questions guided the study. Accordingly, the study aims to analyse how responsiveness and demandingness are represented in the interactions of the Heeler family and to interpret their relevance for early childhood education in Indonesia. First, how are the responsiveness and demandingness dimensions of parenting represented in the interactions of the Heeler family? Second, in which parenting situations do these representations appear, including situations in which parenting does not go smoothly? Third, how can these representations be interpreted for parents and early childhood educators in Indonesia in light of existing research on Indonesian families? The first two questions are answered from the episode data, whereas the third is addressed interpretively in the Discussion. The implications of this study are addressed to parents and early childhood educators, not to children as viewers. The findings are therefore read as material for reflection on parenting rather than as evidence of the programme's effects on children.

2. Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach with a directed content analysis design. In this design, initial coding categories are derived from theory and can be extended when the data reveal categories that the theory does not cover (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The process followed the stages of deductive content analysis, namely preparation, organisation of data through a categorisation matrix, and reporting (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), on the principle that every inference must be traceable to the source material (Krippendorff, 2019).

The object of the study was the series *Bluey* (Brumm, 2018), produced by Ludo Studio for ABC Kids and BBC Studios. Episodes were analysed in the original English audio with Australian accents, accessed through the series' official distribution channels. The original version was chosen because the analysis relies on dialogue, while dubbing and translated subtitles can shift the meaning of utterances. All quotations are presented in their original wording.

The population consisted of the regular episodes of *Bluey* Seasons 1 and 2, excluding specials. Screening took place in two stages. The first stage excluded episodes that do not feature direct interaction between parent and child characters as a main part of the plot. The second stage selected episodes purposively through a maximum variation strategy based on the type of parenting situation rather than on the parenting themes expected to appear. The

five situations were a child learning a new skill in a public space, a bedtime routine while one parent is away, time pressure before leaving the house, a special family day disrupted by a child's mistake, and a parent's memories of the child's infancy. For each situation, the episode richest in parent and child interaction was selected (Table 1). Because this criterion favours episodes with dense parent and child interaction, the sample may over-represent responsive moments, and this possibility is taken into account when the balance between the two dimensions is interpreted. The restriction to the first two seasons is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

Because the selection criteria were based on situations rather than themes, the categories of findings were not fixed in advance. Every episode was analysed with all indicators in the codebook, so a single episode could contain several indicators at once or, conversely, none of a particular indicator. Demandingness indicators were judged not applicable to scenes involving an infant, so in practice only four of the five episodes could provide evidence of demandingness.

Table 1. Episodes Analysed and Their Parenting Situations

Episode	Code	Parenting situation	Parent characters
Bike	S1E11	Bluey learns to ride a bicycle in the park and nearly gives up	Bandit
Daddy Putdown	S1E51	Evening bedtime routine while Chilli attends a *baby shower*	Bandit
Sticky Gecko	S2E12	Getting ready to go out to play with Judo, while the children wait for a sticky rubber gecko to fall from the ceiling	Chilli
The Show	S2E19	Mother's Day, Bingo drops Chilli's breakfast and the children put on a show	Chilli and Bandit
Baby Race	S2E50	Chilli's flashback to Bluey's infancy, compared with Judo	Chilli, Bandit, and other mothers

The unit of analysis was the scene, defined as a continuous segment with the same setting and the same set of characters. The coding unit was a dialogue turn or an action by a parent character within the scene, together with the child's subsequent response. Besides dialogue, the first author recorded accompanying visual and audio elements such as facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, background music, and camera framing. These elements were not coded as separate categories but served as context for interpretation, for instance when slowing music marked a moment of soothing.

Each episode was viewed at least three times. The first viewing served to understand the plot as a whole, the second to transcribe relevant dialogue, and the third to complete a coding sheet based on the codebook in Table 2. The coding results were then arranged in an episode by indicator matrix (Table 3) to show which indicators co-occurred and which rarely appeared.

The codebook was built on the two dimensions proposed by Maccoby and Martin (1983), with indicator details drawn from Baumrind (1966, 1971), the concept of emotion coaching from Gottman et al. (1996), the concept of autonomy support from Vasquez et al. (2016), and the idea of playful parenting from Cohen (2001). A negative case category was added to capture moments in which parenting did not go smoothly. The actor of each action, whether father, mother, sibling, or another character, was recorded as an attribute. In this way, father involvement was analysed across indicators instead of being treated as a separate theme.

Table 2. Analytical Codebook

Code	Category	Operational definition	Example behaviour or dialogue	Reference
	Responsiveness			
R1	Warmth and affection	Verbal or physical expressions of affection towards the child	Hugging, praising effort, gentle tone of voice	Maccoby & Martin (1983)

Code	Category	Operational definition	Example behaviour or dialogue	Reference
R2	Emotion validation and coaching	The parent recognises, labels, and accepts the child's emotion and then helps the child manage it	Responding to crying without belittling it, offering ways to calm down	Gottman et al. (1996)
R3	Autonomy support	Giving the child opportunities to try, choose, and solve problems independently	Holding back from helping immediately, offering choices	Vasquez et al. (2016)
R4	Involvement through play	The parent enters the child's play and accepts roles given by the child	Joining pretend play, following rules invented by the child	Cohen (2001)
	Demandingness			
T1	Limits and rules	Setting or enforcing behavioural limits	Asserting bedtime, refusing a request	Baumrind (1966)
T2	Maturity expectations	Asking the child to carry out age-appropriate responsibilities	Asking the child to brush her teeth or find her own hat	Baumrind (1971)
T3	Explanation of reasons	Explaining the reasons behind a rule or request	Explaining why they need to leave soon	Baumrind (1966); Darling & Steinberg (1993)
T4	Consistency and consequences	Maintaining stated rules or applying logical consequences	Not changing a decision when the child whines	Baumrind (1971)
	Negative cases			
N1	Fatigue or frustration	The parent shows tiredness, annoyance, or loss of patience	Complaining, raising one's voice	Lincoln & Guba (1985)
N2	Loosened limits	Stated limits are relaxed or not enforced	Routines shift because of play	Maccoby & Martin (1983)
N3	Less sensitive response	The parent misses the child's emotional needs	Ignoring or dismissing the child's feelings	Gottman et al. (1996)
	Inductive category			
I1	Parental self-reflection	The parent recognises and corrects her or his own emotions or expectations	Realising anxiety caused by comparing children	Emerged from the data

The trustworthiness of the analysis was maintained through four steps. Theory triangulation was carried out by reading the findings through the lenses of parenting styles, emotion coaching, and autonomy support. A deliberate search for negative cases was conducted in every episode (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because coding was performed by a single researcher, consistency was maintained by viewing each episode repeatedly and rechecking every code against the operational definitions in the codebook. An audit trail consisting of transcripts, coding sheets, and the matrix was kept and is available as supplementary material.

This study did not involve human participants. Quotations of dialogue and descriptions of scenes were used only for academic analysis with their sources acknowledged, in line with the principle of fair use.

3. Results

The results are presented by parenting dimension rather than by episode, so that the distribution of each indicator across the five episodes becomes visible. A summary of this distribution is shown in Table 3.

3.1. The Responsiveness Dimension

Responsiveness was the most consistent dimension. In *Bike*, Bluey is learning to ride her bicycle in the park with Bandit, finds it too hard, and is about to give up. Bandit offers to help, but Bluey refuses. Instead of forcing his help or letting her quit, Bandit sits with Bluey and watches the other children in the park who are struggling with challenges of their own,

including Bingo, who is trying to drink from a water fountain that is too high for her. The two of them cheer the children on, and when Bluey wants to rush over and help Bingo, Bandit holds her back so that Bingo can find her own way. In their conversation, Bandit conveys that many things simply do not work on the first try. After watching her friends succeed in their own ways, Bluey decides to try again. Autonomy support in this episode is therefore not a passive stance. Bandit is present, offers help, and then gives space while reframing failure as a normal part of learning.

Emotion validation appeared most clearly in *Daddy Putdown*. Chilli goes out in the evening to a friend's *baby shower*, and Bandit is left to put Bluey and Bingo to bed. The heart of the episode is Bluey's anxiety about missing her mother. Bandit does not dismiss this feeling. He comes up with a series of games to ease Bluey's longing, and from them a pretend *baby shower* emerges that turns the longing into a shared activity. The episode also honestly shows that distraction through play has its limits, since Bluey's longing for her mother never fully disappears. Two indicators meet in this episode, namely emotion validation and involvement through play. The father does not merely attend to physical needs at bedtime but also becomes an emotional anchor while the mother is away.

The Show portrays warmth and emotion coaching in a situation where a child makes a mistake. On the morning of Mother's Day, Bingo drops the breakfast she and Bluey have prepared for Chilli and feels that she has ruined her mother's special day. Chilli responds calmly. She reassures Bingo that a small mistake will not ruin her day and then offers a sequence for handling disappointment, "Have a little cry. Then, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep going!" Bluey then proposes a show about how Chilli and Bandit met. When Bingo again feels that she has spoiled everything because the balloon playing the baby pops, it is Bluey who lifts her up, "We can't do the show without you! You're mum!" Bingo gets up again and carries on with the show, this time with Bandit playing the baby. The response to Bingo thus does not come from Chilli alone. The mother's advice is passed on by the older sister, and the father takes part in the performance.

3.2. The Demandingness Dimension

The demandingness dimension was far more limited. The most explicit evidence appears in *Sticky Gecko*. Chilli is trying to get Bluey and Bingo out of the house to play with Judo at the park, but their departure keeps being delayed. Bluey cannot find her hat, Bingo has not brushed her teeth, and both refuse to leave until a sticky rubber gecko stuck to the ceiling falls down. Chilli holds on to the plan to leave and asks the children to complete their small responsibilities, while explaining why they need to go soon. The episode also shows a more human side. Chilli is visibly frustrated and even steps painfully on a *pin*. Towards the end, Bluey remembers her grandfather's saying, "hurry up and wait," and the phrase becomes the key to resolving the tension between the parent's plan and the children's game.

In the other episodes, demandingness tended to be embedded in routines and expressed gently. In *Daddy Putdown*, the bedtime routine is a structure that Bandit maintains, but the structure is carried out through play, so the boundary between playtime and bedtime becomes flexible. In *Bike*, the expectation that the child should try on her own is implied by Bandit's stance but is never stated as a rule. In *The Show* and *Baby Race*, almost no indicators of demands on the child were found. For *Baby Race*, this is understandable because the child in the story is still a baby. Nevertheless, it means that the evidence for demandingness in this sample rests mainly on a single episode among the four in which it could be observed.

3.3. Negative Cases and Reflective Parenting

The search for negative cases produced a picture of imperfect parents. Besides Chilli's frustration in *Sticky Gecko*, negative cases appeared in *Baby Race*, when Chilli feels she is failing as a new mother and withdraws from her mothers' group, and in *Daddy Putdown*, when Bandit's attempts to distract the children through play do not fully ease Bluey's longing. This finding matters because it shows that warmth in *Bluey* is not built on the absence of negative emotions in parents but on how those emotions are handled.

Baby Race revealed a category not covered by the initial codebook, namely parental self-reflection. The episode is Chilli's flashback to Bluey's infancy. When baby Judo learns to sit up and then to crawl first, Chilli is drawn without realising it into a "baby race" and becomes determined that Bluey will walk first, until she ends up feeling that she is failing as a mother. Support comes from Bella, Coco's mother, who has raised nine children, through a simple sentence, "You're doing great." Chilli then stops comparing, and at the end of the flashback Bluey takes her first steps towards her mother. The one who learns in this episode is not the child but the mother herself. Chilli realises that her anxiety arose from social comparison and lets go of a race that she alone had been running. This representation is better described as reflective parenting than as mere acceptance of the child's development.

Table 3. Matrix of Episodes and Parenting Indicators

Episode	Responsiveness	Demandingness	Negative cases	Parental reflection
Bike	R3 Bandit offers help, then gives space; R3 holds Bluey back so that Bingo can try on her own; R1 cheers the children on	T2 implicit, the child is expected to try on her own	Not prominent	Not found
Daddy Putdown	R2 responds to Bluey missing her mother; R4 pretend *baby shower* game	T1 bedtime routine as a structure, applied gently	N2 the line between playtime and bedtime becomes flexible; distraction does not fully ease the longing	Not found
Sticky Gecko	R2 Chilli tries to understand the children's interest in their game	T2 brushing teeth and finding the hat; T3 explaining why they must leave; T4 holding on to the plan	N1 frustration, stepping on a *pin*	Not found
The Show	R1 and R2 Chilli calms Bingo; R4 parents join the performance	Not found	Not prominent	Not found
Baby Race	R1 warmth of Chilli and Bandit towards baby Bluey	Not relevant because the child is still a baby	N1 Chilli's anxiety and sense of failure, withdrawing from the mothers' group	I1 Chilli recognises and lets go of the "baby race" after Bella's support

Note. Codes refer to Table 2.

4. Discussion

4.1. Prominent Warmth, Implicit Demands

The main finding of this study is the imbalance between the two parenting dimensions. Responsiveness appeared in all five episodes in various forms, whereas demandingness was explicit only in *Sticky Gecko*. Within the framework of Maccoby and Martin (1983), a combination of high responsiveness and low demandingness describes permissive rather than authoritative parenting. The demands in Bluey, however, are not absent but implicit, embedded in routines and play, so the sample does not fit neatly into either category. The claim that *Bluey* represents authoritative parenting should therefore be made with caution. What can be said on the basis of this sample is that *Bluey* foregrounds warmth and responsiveness, while demands remain largely implicit in routines and play. This reading is consistent with Gil Quintana and Gutiérrez Ortega (2025), who found that Bluey conveys values such as discipline alongside some less desirable attitudes, which suggests that the educational value of the programme lies in guided discussion rather than in direct imitation.

This reading does not mean that the programme depicts parents who neglect limits. *Sticky Gecko* shows a fairly classic form of authoritative parenting, in which the parent holds on to the plan and to the child's responsibilities while still explaining her reasons, consistent with

Baumrind's (1966) description of rational, issue-oriented control. In the other episodes, limits are more often negotiated through play, and Bandit appears to guide the children towards sleep through play more than through direct instruction. Such a pattern may work well in a seven-minute story. The short format also compresses everyday routines, so the low visibility of demands may partly reflect the narrative conventions of the programme rather than the parenting it portrays. Readers should bear in mind, however, that the benefits reported in Pinquart's (2017) meta-analysis relate to the combination of warmth and behavioural control, not to warmth alone.

On the responsiveness side, Chilli's response in *The Show* and Bandit's response in *Daddy Putdown* are consistent with the idea of emotion coaching. Gottman et al. (1996) describe emotion-coaching parents as those who are aware of the child's emotions, see them as an opportunity for closeness, help the child label feelings, and guide the child towards solutions. Chilli's advice to Bingo contains this sequence in very simple language, permission to be sad followed by steps to get up again. When the same advice is later repeated by Bluey to her sister, the programme also depicts emotion socialisation passing from parent to child. This pattern is in line with the meta-analysis by Zinsser et al. (2021), which showed that parents' modelling of, responding to, and instructing about emotions are positively correlated with preschoolers' emotion skills, although the effects are small. These skills can also be trained. The meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials by England-Mason et al. (2023) found that emotion socialisation interventions for parents of young children improved emotion-related parenting practices as well as children's emotional competence.

4.2. A Present Father and the Sharing of Parenting Roles

Father involvement was no longer treated as a separate theme, yet it remained prominent once the actor of each action was recorded. Bandit was the main actor for responsiveness indicators in *Bike* and *Daddy Putdown*, and he also joined the performance in *The Show*. This picture is consistent with Isaacs and Elliot's (2022) view that *Bluey* encourages fathers' responsibility in caregiving. The representation is empirically relevant. The meta-analysis by Zheng et al. (2026) of 65 studies found that father involvement is correlated with young children's social and emotional competence, with paternal warmth and responsiveness among the most strongly related aspects. Deneault et al. (2021) also showed that insecure child and father attachment is associated with externalising behaviour problems, with magnitudes comparable to those found for child and mother attachment. For Indonesian readers, this representation touches on public debate about the *fatherless* phenomenon, that is, the physical or psychological absence of fathers from parenting. Indonesian research shows that father involvement is related to gender ideology and the availability of time (Dannisworo & Amalia, 2019). In dual-earner families, the responsibility for raising children still falls more heavily on mothers (Fajrin & Purwastuti, 2022), although fathers who place their children in *daycare* can still be involved through positive activities, warmth, and responsibility in the caregiving process (Sairah & Chandra, 2022). Systematic reviews of father involvement in early childhood remain dominated by white middle-class families, so father involvement in other cultures is still poorly understood (Diniz et al., 2021). Qualitative evidence further shows that intergenerational values shape the way fathers become involved in caregiving (Diniz et al., 2023), which is relevant for Indonesian families who often live with or near grandparents.

It should be noted that the emotional burden in this sample is not carried by the father alone. Chilli is in fact the character who most often faces difficult situations, from time pressure in *Sticky Gecko* to anxiety in *Baby Race*. This pattern agrees with the finding of Bohl et al. (2025) that Bluey's mother is the most frequent facilitator of resilience. What *Bluey* offers, then, is not a father who replaces the mother but a more equal sharing of parenting between the two.

4.3. Cross-Cultural Relevance for Indonesian Families

Bluey is a product of Australian culture, and the Heeler family has rather specific features, namely a two-parent nuclear family, a spacious house, and enough leisure time to play with the children. Many Indonesian families live in different arrangements, for example with both parents working full time or with extended family members who share in caregiving. This local

character is also deeply embedded in the programme itself, as shown by the many elements of Australian culture identified across *Bluey* episodes (Arigita-García et al., 2024). The Heeler model of parenting therefore cannot simply be transplanted. Pinquart and Kauser (2018) showed that the benefits of authoritative parenting are fairly consistent across cultures, but the strength of the associations may differ by region and level of individualism. Cross-cultural studies of Australia and Indonesia paint a similar picture. The authoritative style is associated with better child adjustment in both countries even though Indonesian parents use an authoritarian style more often (Riany et al., 2022), and traditional values can weaken the positive effect of the authoritative style (Haslam et al., 2020). Parenting authority in Indonesian families is not static either. Sapendi and Suratman (2024) found that millennial parents in Pontianak practised a mixed form of parenting in response to both traditional and modern practices.

The elements most likely to be adopted by Indonesian families are the ways of responding to children's emotions and the willingness to join in play, rather than the family form or lifestyle. The element that needs adaptation is the way limits are communicated. In a culture that values obedience to parents, limits that are negotiated entirely through play may feel unfamiliar. On the other hand, *Baby Race* touches on a habit that is close to the experience of many Indonesian parents, namely the question of what a child can already do, asked within the extended family as well as on social media. Chilli's reflection can open a discussion about the pressure to compare children.

4.4. Implications for Early Childhood Education

A question worth asking is who the parenting models in *Bluey* are actually intended for. The series is designed to be watched together by children and parents (Bohl et al., 2025). Parents also discuss its depictions of parenting and family life among themselves (Dynel & Ross, 2022). Within Bandura's (1977) framework, observational learning requires attention, retention, the ability to reproduce behaviour, and motivation. Parents who watch have both the capacity and the opportunity to reproduce the behaviour of Bandit and Chilli, whereas children are more likely to imitate characters of their own age, for example the way Bluey encourages her sister in *The Show*. The two pathways need to be distinguished so that the implications of this study are not overstated.

For early childhood education settings, the parent pathway can be used through parenting classes. Teachers can screen short clips, such as Chilli calming Bingo in *The Show* or Chilli's flashback in *Baby Race*, and invite parents to discuss how they usually respond to children's mistakes or to the urge to compare children. The child pathway can be used through co-viewing activities followed by conversations about the characters' feelings. Simple questions such as "How did Bingo feel when the breakfast fell?" or "What do you do when you feel sad like Bingo?" are in line with the finding that active mediation strengthens the benefits of prosocial programmes (Rasmussen et al., 2016). The meta-analysis by Madigan et al. (2020) also showed that co-viewing and exposure to educational programmes are associated with better child language skills, while longer screen time is associated with poorer language skills. Jing et al. (2023) found a similar pattern, in which everyday media exposure in general was not related to children's vocabulary, except for exposure to educational media. The quality of content and the presence of an adult thus matter more than the mere presence or absence of a screen (Swider-Cios et al., 2023).

Such use still requires clear limits. The WHO (2019) recommends that sedentary screen time for children aged two to four years should not exceed one hour per day, with less being better, while sedentary screen time is not recommended for children under two. A single episode of *Bluey* lasts about seven minutes, so a short screening followed by discussion is far more appropriate than back-to-back viewing. Children's screen time is also associated with their parents' own patterns of screen use (Cost et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, Pratiwi et al. (2022) found that during the pandemic parents gave children more freedom and time with smartphones, while busy work schedules and limited time for interaction made it harder for them to adjust their digital parenting. The finding by Dewhirst et al. (2026) that the influence

of *Bluey* on family play is not uniform likewise reminds us that a programme is no substitute for adult guidance. This message needs to be conveyed in parenting classes so that the use of *Bluey* is not read as an encouragement to add screen time, whether at home or at school.

4.5. Limitations

This study has several limitations. The analysis covered only five episodes from Seasons 1 and 2, so the findings cannot be generalised to the whole series. The selection of the episodes richest in parent and child interaction may also have favoured responsive moments over moments of limit setting. Coding was performed by a single researcher, so interpretation remains shaped by the coder's perspective despite the trustworthiness procedures. Future studies should involve at least a second coder for a subset of episodes and report intercoder agreement, for example with Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 2019). The analysis also relied on a single language version, the original English version, and therefore does not capture possible shifts of meaning in dubbed versions. Negative cases were searched for, but the small number of episodes limited the variety of negative cases found. Finally, content analysis can only describe what a programme shows. Representation on screen is not the same as its effect on viewers, so this study cannot conclude that *Bluey* influences parents' caregiving or children's development.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of five episodes of *Bluey* shows that the interactions of the Heeler family most consistently represent the responsiveness dimension of parenting, namely warmth, emotion validation, autonomy support, and involvement through play. The demandingness dimension is also present but more limited, mostly implicit in routines, and explicit mainly in *Sticky Gecko*. These representations appear in everyday situations such as learning a new skill, bedtime routines, and time pressure, including moments when parents are tired or anxious. On the basis of this evidence, *Bluey* is better described as portraying warm and responsive parenting than as a full representation of authoritative parenting. By separating the two parenting dimensions and searching deliberately for negative cases, the study shows that describing Bluey as a model of authoritative parenting rests mostly on its warmth, while its structure remains largely implicit.

These findings show that children's programmes can contain parenting models that may serve as material for discussion with parents and educators. For parents, the most relevant elements are the ways of responding to children's emotions, the willingness to join in play, and the ability to reflect on one's own anxieties. For early childhood educators, short clips from *Bluey* can be used in parenting classes or in co-viewing activities followed by conversations about feelings, while respecting age-appropriate screen time limits.

Future research should address questions that content analysis cannot answer, for example through reception studies of how Indonesian parents interpret parenting in *Bluey*, co-viewing studies in early childhood education settings, or comparisons of parenting representations in *Bluey* with children's programmes produced in Indonesia.

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