

The Independent Education Union early childhood education magazine

BEDROCK

Vol 21 #1, March 2016

**Celebrating 120 years of early
childhood education p6**

Accessing domestic violence leave:

What are workers entitled to? p10

Environment as teacher p18

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Editorial – Celebrating history of early childhood care



John Quessy
NSW ACT Secretary



Terry Burke
QLD NT Secretary

This edition of *Bedrock* celebrates the history of early childhood education and care with a focus on the Kindergarten Union (KU). The KU has played a pivotal role in the development of early childhood education in Australia and celebrates its 120th anniversary this year (p6).

The historic tensions within early childhood education are succinctly outlined by Frances Press in her article (p20). The apparent conflict has not been entirely resolved today between those advocating for long day care so they could work and advocates of quality kindergarten education who did not support long day care for children.

Access to childcare for working families is important and an emphasis on providing children with quality education is equally important.

However, the Federal Government's proposed Jobs for Families childcare package clearly indicates where the

emphasis lies at the national level. Indeed in the article on this package (p14) the Minister states childcare "is an important consideration in these reforms which will better help nearly one million families to work or work more". The IEU believes this package must be as inclusive as possible for those working families who need it most, but also should address the needs of the disadvantaged.

Encouraging sustainable practices and nature based play and helping foster children's care for the natural environment is highlighted in this issue. The great work being done by Numala Kinder (p19) in Queensland's Gold Coast region with respect to Standard 3.3 of the National Quality Standard (NQS) sets a benchmark for positive attitudes in future generations.

We hope you enjoy this first edition of *Bedrock* for 2016 and welcome your comments via email bedrock@ieu.nsw.asn.au or on Facebook/[ieunswact](https://www.facebook.com/ieunswact)



Breaking News



NSW Labor pledge

The IEU has welcomed the news that if elected a NSW Labor Government would commit to at least 15 hours of affordable preschool education per week for children in the year before school.

Currently, the NSW Government provides the lowest

support for early childhood education of any state, leading to the highest fees for childcare in Australia.

"We welcome this acknowledgment of the importance of early years education by the Labor Opposition. We call on the NSW Liberals to match the Opposition's pledge," IEU Industrial Officer Verena Heron said.

"NSW has been lagging behind the rest of Australia and indeed many OECD countries for years in its provision of early years learning. Many disadvantaged families in NSW are missing out on these crucial years of education," Verena said.

"Fees to parents in NSW are double those in Queensland and Victoria.

"The Baird Government has a history of under spending on its early childhood budget. It's time to put that right."

Goodstart pay rises

Teachers at Goodstart Early Learning will receive a 13.2% pay rise over three years, well above any pay rises being offered in the public or private sector. The pay offer came after negotiations between Goodstart and the IEU.

Verena Heron said the pay rise reflected Goodstart's recognition of the value of teachers.

Teachers will receive a 13.2% increase in their salaries over the life of the agreement: 4.5% increase from the first full pay period 23 February 2016; 4.5% increase from the first full pay period 23 February 2017 and 4.2% increase from the first full pay period 23 February 2018.

Teacher directors will also receive an increase of 13.2% increase in their allowance over the life of the agreement.

A few teachers have been receiving a nominated supervisors allowance – this will now be absorbed into the above salary increases.

Queensland Dear Sherryl



I am an assistant who works in a kindergarten in Queensland. I work with the children all day and for another hour after they leave. I don't get a break during the day and I eat my lunch when they eat as I don't get an unpaid meal break. Our agreement says I am entitled to a 30 minute paid meal break. It says that my paid meal break is taken at the end of the day when the children have left. The agreement also says that I should remain on premises. This requirement can be waived. I'm not sure what this means, can you help?

Stacey

Dear Stacey,

Most kindergartens are not able to program an uninterrupted but unpaid meal break for employees. You eat your lunch with the children and it is counted as time worked. However, the agreement acknowledges you will get a 30 minute paid meal break. Most likely it is the last 30 minutes of each work day, after the children have gone.

The agreement says you should remain on premises for the break but this requirement can be waived. When you have finished all tasks for the day and if you have permission from the committee, you can leave work for your paid meal break. We suggest that at the start of each year the committee should state in writing what is to happen at the end of the day in relation to the paid meal breaks. Specifically, they

should state clearly when your paid meal break is (eg the last 30 minutes of each day) and state whether employees are permitted to leave the premises for the paid break. Finally, there should be a statement about how long this arrangement is in place for – we suggest that it remains in place for the year.

Sherryl

Educators will receive a 8.4% increase over three years. (3%, 3% and 2.4%) The teachers' wage increases are an acknowledgement of Goodstart's commitment to teachers and the need to ensure the gap between early childhood teachers' and school teachers' pay is narrowing.

It was only through the advocacy of the teacher unions, the IEU and AEU, that we were able to achieve higher salary outcomes for teachers. United Voice indicated that their preference was for the same increase for all classifications.

If you are interested in negotiating an agreement at your centre please contact the Union on 8202 8900

ACECQA – new child-to-teacher ratios in place from 1 January 2016

Improved educator to child ratios started on 1 January 2016 in all states and territories, except Tasmania and Western Australia where they were already in place.

The changes bring national consistency to the important area of the National Quality Framework (NQF), allowing staff to give more individual attention to each child under their care.

As part of the new benchmark agreed to by education ministers across Australia, the new ratios will vary according to age group, state/territory and service.

For children between the ages of 24 months and 36 months at centre based services in NSW, Queensland and South Australia the ratio is now 1:5. Previously all three states had different educator to child ratios.

New ratios also apply in the ACT, Northern Territory and South Australia with 11 children to one teacher who are older than 36 months up to and including preschool age. For children older than 36 months up to and including preschool age for all centre based services in Queensland and Victoria, the ratio is also 1:11.

Disadvantaged schools in South Australia will also have 10 children to a teacher, slightly below the 11 children to one teacher in most kindergartens in other states and territories. South Australia is the only state to ensure preschools in disadvantaged areas would have extra teachers, although the 1:10 ratio is the standard statewide in New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia.

For more information visit the ACECQA website. Contact your regulatory authority for further information or



enquiries about the ratio requirements in your state or territory.

Prep to be compulsory from 2017

The Queensland State Government's decision to reverse changes to the prep eligibility age has been welcomed by the IEU.

The decision from Minister for Education Kate Jones affirms that children should not receive early admittance

to their prep year unless they are socially, emotionally and physically ready.

The move reverses an abrupt decision made by the former Newman LNP government in January that allowed as many as 5000 children to enrol directly into prep in 2015 and miss out on the well established benefits of a kindergarten year. This change also had the potential to create lasting negative impacts on Queensland children's schooling experiences.

IEUA QNT Secretary Terry Burke said he is pleased that the new government has sensibly restored Queensland's prep eligibility. The move follows representations from our union to Minister Jones advocating for the eligibility age to be restored.

"Kindergarten is an integral part of a child's learning experience, which provides them with the skills they need to thrive and succeed in prep and further schooling," he said.

"Our Union is pleased that the current state government understands the importance of kindergarten and has supported Queensland children in accessing a kindergarten year by sensibly restoring the prep eligibility age."

Queensland's prep eligibility age will now be restored to children born by 30 June—reversing the former Newman LNP government decision which saw the prep eligibility age change to children born by 31 July.

The Government will introduce the changes to the Education General Provisions Act later this year.

For more information visit www.qld.gov.au/education/earlychildhood/prep/pages/preparing.htm

**NSW
Dear Lisa**



I am currently working on a temporary contract. I have been offered a new contract extending my employment as a teacher at the same centre. I thought I would not be working so I booked a holiday at the end of my current contract. Should I cancel my holiday (I will not be able to get a refund on the airfare) or ask to have the new contract commence after my holiday as I don't have enough leave to cover it?

Danielle.

Dear Danielle,

If you do not have enough annual leave to cover your holiday you could request leave without pay if you do not want to delay the

start date for your new contract. I advise that you tell your employer that you have booked a holiday and ask if they will allow you to take leave without pay and if not, request that your new contract

commences after you return from your holiday.

Lisa

Celebrating 120 years of early childhood education



College staff
circa 1900

In 2015, KU Children's Services celebrated 120 years since the organisation was founded and early education in Australia was born. Since its establishment in 1895, KU has gone on to become one of Australia's leading community based, not for profit providers of early education, enriching the lives of more than 14,500 children and families each year, through over 140 early education services and programs.

From humble beginnings

In 1895 education for young children was virtually non-existent in Australia. In response to community need, a group of kindergarten enthusiasts led by feminist reformer Maybanke Anderson, established the Kindergarten Union of NSW, an organisation aimed at providing education to the community's most disadvantaged children.

At its establishment, the objectives of the Kindergarten Union were:

1. To set forth kindergarten principles.
2. To endeavour to get those principles introduced into every school in NSW.
3. To open free kindergartens wherever possible in poor neighbourhoods.

In 1896, with only £50 to its name, the Kindergarten Union successfully opened the first free kindergarten in Australia in the Sussex Street Mission Hall, Sydney with only three children attending.

With few families in the area, and the poor conditions of the property severely hindering enrolments, the centre closed its doors shortly after, relocating to Charles Street, Woolloomooloo. Although enrolments amplified, the conditions of the new premises were also deemed inadequate, and the kindergarten finally moved to Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo, where it remained for 21 years.

By 1911, the Kindergarten Union had successfully opened eight free kindergartens across Sydney.

While the era signified a time of much adversity, ridicule and a general lack of funding for the fledgling Kindergarten Union, the founders' continued persistence, courage and determination saw the birth of early education in Australia.

The Kindergarten Training College

From its inception, the Kindergarten Union "cherished the idea of training teachers", a notion that soon became a reality, with staff at the Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten attending training three afternoons a week

in a makeshift classroom above the centre, often drawing on Fröbelian methods, and educational practices based on leading information and research coming out of America, Europe and the United Kingdom at the time.

Attracting students was initially a difficult task. Free tuition in exchange for assistance in the Kindergarten was offered in a bid to attract students, however, such an incentive did not have the positive effect on enrolments as hoped.

“To most people a kindergartener was merely a glorified nursemaid, because as everyone knows, or at least knew then, ‘anybody can mind a baby’” (Anderson, M., *The story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds Sydney*: Kindergarten Union of NSW, circa 1912)

In 1899, the Training College moved to 17 Roslyn Gardens, Elizabeth Bay and a three year course of training for kindergarten teachers was instituted, with a focus on child development, supporting an increase in enrolments. Teachers were encouraged to step back, carefully observe children and use their observations to plan timely interventions to encourage and support children to become successful at their tasks.

By 1902, the name ‘Sydney Kindergarten Training College’ (SKTC) was adopted. The SKTC relocated to a larger premises in 1904, again in 1913, and finally in 1925 to Waverley in an effort to manage the ever expanding number of students.

The college was renamed the Sydney Kindergarten Teachers’ College in 1969 and under Federal Government educational reforms, became a College of Advanced Education in 1976. Eventually amalgamating with the Nursery School Teachers’ College, the College later became the Institute of Early Childhood, moving to Macquarie University in 1990.

Growth and adaption

In 1938, the Commonwealth Government began investing heavily in early childhood services for the first time. As the only national body representing early childhood, the fledgling Australian Association for Preschool Child Development (AAPSCD), of which the Kindergarten Union was a founding member, was the recipient of those funds.

One of the major achievements of the increased funding was the establishment of ‘Model Child Development Centres’, including the Lady Gowrie Child Centre in Erskineville, opened by the Kindergarten Union in the 1940s.



“Staff remain the very heart of KU – their expertise, continued commitment and passion towards providing the best early education experiences for young children and their families have remained a hallmark of the organisation since its inception”

With the advent of the Second World War, the Kindergarten Union was faced with significant challenges, as many women for the first time were required to enter the workforce. In response, the Kindergarten Union extended kindergarten hours to accommodate working mothers.

1945 signalled the end of the Second World War, but challenges remained for the Kindergarten Union, with the baby boom and post war European immigration boosting the Australian population. To meet the needs of the changing communities, the Kindergarten Union introduced Mobile Preschool vans, to service the newly developed Sydney suburbs of Concord, Yagoona, Chullora and Merrylands.

Each solution however, seemed to come with new challenges, this time being staffing concerns.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, the Kindergarten Union struggled to retain and support staff in the face of limited funding and declines in real wages. After several unsuccessful approaches to the government to increase funding, things took a turn for the better when the NSW Industrial Court handed down a new award, ensuring that the Kindergarten Union trained teachers were paid the equivalent of two year trained primary school teachers employed by the Department of Education in the early 1970s.

Diversity and inclusion

The Kindergarten Union continued to face adversity

head on as the Women’s Liberation Movement gained momentum in the early 1970s. Many women began to agitate for long day care, rather than preschools, to support mothers’ participation in the paid workforce. In response, the Kindergarten Union opened their first long day care service, Union Child Care in Darlington, Sydney.

Shortly after, the Commonwealth Government changed the policy landscape, with the introduction of the *Child Care Act* in 1972, providing government operational funding for community based long day care centres, which was withdrawn in 1997.

Recognising the increasing need for the inclusion of children with additional needs within mainstream early education services, the Kindergarten Union introduced the sector’s first Special Education Advisory team in the early 1980s. This was soon followed by the first Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) centre in 1984, providing on site childcare, while new migrant parents attended English language classes.

Renamed as KU Children’s Services in 1991, KU continued to respond to the ongoing need for inclusion based



Sydney Kindergarten Training College 1913-14 (top left), KU Centre no details available (top right), KU Wickham 1946 (bottom left), Alexandria, 1900s (bottom right).

services through the establishment of the Families First Program in Airds in 1992 (later renamed KU Starting Points Macarthur), a service offering home visits and a group program for families with children aged from birth to five years with high support additional needs.

The late 1980s saw the Kindergarten Union introduce work based childcare, focused on providing child care for the children of large scale organisation's employees. Work based child care continued to grow as the Kindergarten Union entered a new decade, with a second centre, for St George Building Society, opening in 1991, with many more following suit, including KU's first Victorian centre, Emerald Hill.

The new millennium

The birth of a new millennium saw KU continue to be a dynamic and progressive organisation with the introduction of a number of inclusive services, as well as expansion into ACT, regional NSW and Victoria.

Having established a strong reputation for inclusive educational practice, KU continued this focus through both mainstream centre based programs, as well as dedicated early intervention and outreach initiatives, such as Supported Playgroups and Family Programs

In 2001, KU appointed an Indigenous Consultant to coordinate and encourage greater participation of Aboriginal children and families in KU and in 2006, became a provider of seven Inclusion Support Agencies in NSW. Shortly after, KU was selected to broker Commonwealth Government funding as the National Inclusion Support Subsidy Provider, providing support to every eligible long day care service in the country.

In 2002, KU took the bold step of being the first early childhood organisation to appoint a dedicated Child Protection Officer, continuing a proactive approach to the wellbeing and protection of children within its services.

KU today

Today, KU remains at the forefront of early education, proving to be an innovator in curriculum and drawing on contemporary methods and research from around the world.

Much has changed in Australian early education over the past 120 years, however many things have not changed at all. From the beginning, KU has believed in the value of play for young children and the importance of having specialised early childhood teachers and educators working with children and their families in the context of their communities.

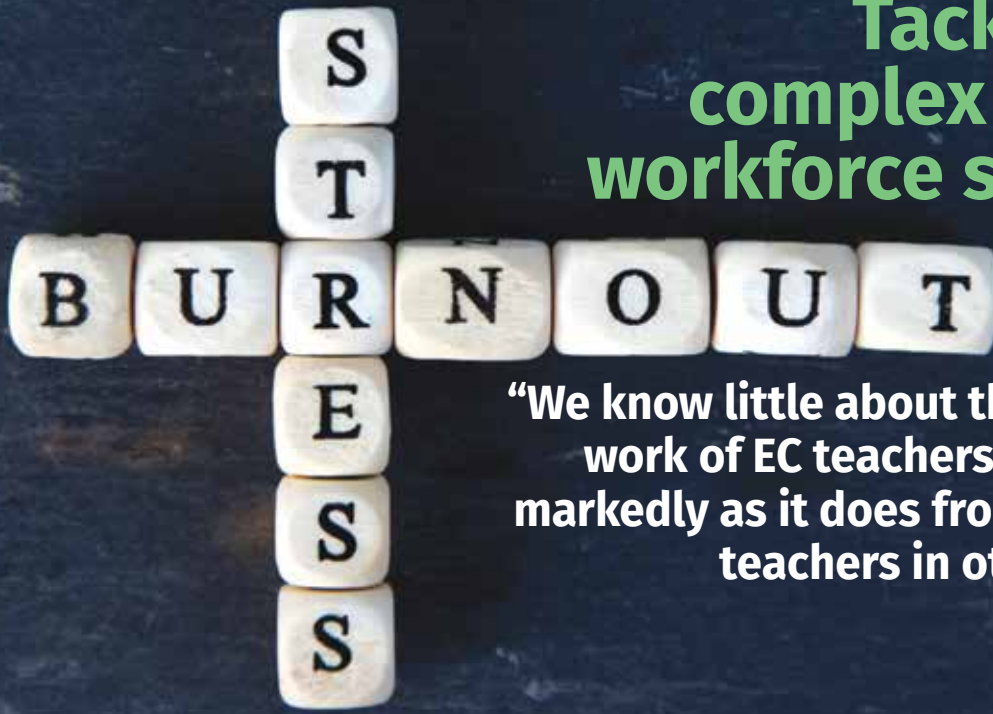
KU staff remain the very heart of KU – their expertise, continued commitment and passion towards providing the best early education experiences for young children and their families have remained a hallmark of the organisation since its inception.

The KU of today is built on a great legacy, and stands proudly on the shoulders of the educators and innovators who have come before us, paving the way for those who will come after us.

To find out more about the history of KU Children's Services and early education in Australia, visit www.ku120.com.au

Content adapted from 'As the Twig Bends: 120 Years of Early Education' researched and written by Frances Press and Sandie Wong.

Tackling the complex issue of workforce shortage



“We know little about the day-to-day work of EC teachers – differing so markedly as it does from the work of teachers in other settings.”

If Australia is to reap the considerable benefits that access to quality early childhood education (ECE) promises for a diverse range of child, family and social outcomes, then the chronic shortage of qualified early childhood staff is an area requiring urgent policy attention, Dr Sandie Wong writes.

Suitably qualified and stable staff, with appropriate numbers of staff to children, is critical to the provision of quality EC. If policy is to effectively address the EC workforce shortage, it needs to be informed about the reasons why there is a shortage in the first place.

Reasons for Australia's EC workforce shortage are complex. In part, it is due to recent legislative changes requiring all staff in Australian EC services to have an EC qualification. This has placed increased demands on the workforce and some educators have left the field rather than upgrade qualifications.

Also to blame is the public perception of the work of the EC teacher. It is difficult to attract new recruits with realistic expectations about the demands of the work when public discourse about the profession construes it as akin to babysitting or playing with children.

Similarly, it is challenging to sustain teachers through costly and on going professional development when there is little public awareness of the specific skills and professional knowledge base required for quality EC provision, and little recognition of the professional status of EC teachers.



Burnout risk

Commensurate with these images, is the long history of poor wages and conditions in the EC field relative to similar professions, a well documented cause of attrition of EC staff. Further, the stress and demands of catering to the needs of the nation's most vulnerable citizens – children in the most formative period of their life and their families, many of whom face complex and challenging circumstances – can lead to burnout and attrition, especially when the complexity of the work goes unrecognised and unacknowledged.

Indeed, we know little about the day to day work of EC teachers – differing so markedly as it does from the work of teachers in other settings. We also still have much to learn about why EC teachers are attracted to the field,

why they stay and why they leave. Current large scale data sources, such as the National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census, provide some information, but lack detail and fail to capture nuanced understandings.

If the complex issue of EC workforce shortage is to be addressed, then policy initiatives will likewise need to be multifaceted. They will require attention to pay and conditions. But they will also require ongoing attention to reconfiguring public images: of young children as citizens with rights to quality educational environments; of ECE as a profession requiring specialist knowledge and skills; and of EC teachers as highly skilled professionals.

To shift these images we need detailed evidence about the work of the teacher. A key focus for future research then is the identification and articulation of the nature and complexity of early childhood pedagogies, including the skills, knowledge and dispositions of the teacher that underpin excellence in ECE, as well as the social/cultural and organisational factors that impact on this work (Press, Harrison, Wong, Gibson, & Ryan, 2015). Only when we understand the complexity of the work can effective workforce policy be developed.

Dr Sandie Wong is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Teacher Education, Charles Sturt University, and a member of the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education.



Accessing domestic violence leave:

What are workers entitled to?

How does the inclusion of domestic violence leave provisions in early childhood centres' collective agreements address the problem and terrible impact it has on families, workplaces and society as a whole, Bedrock Journalist Alex Leggett asks.

The union movement has fought hard to establish universal domestic violence leave in all workplaces, including early learning centres, as it is an industrial issue with detrimental, wide ranging effects.

The statistics have reached epidemic levels. Research suggests more than 65% of people who are affected by domestic violence (DV) are in the workforce.

In Australia, approximately one woman is killed by her current or former partner every week, often after a history of domestic and family violence.

Unions have campaigned through their members to establish equality in the workplace by eliminating the scourge of DV, bullying and harassment. DV affects workplaces, not just at a high financial cost, but also through increased absenteeism due to injury, sickness, stress, court attendance and other factors. It can also limit a worker's ability to perform their work effectively, resulting in poor performance, terminations and resignations.

Early childhood services play an important role in responding to the problem when it comes to work as affected employees are more likely to spend most of their time away from the perpetrator at work. Here they can access support, find out about community services, earn their own money in a secure position so they can provide for themselves and their children, and determine a new path free of DV. There is an onus on employers to continue paid work to DV victims as research has shown it is much cheaper to allow DV victims short periods of leave rather than rehire and retrain new staff.

C&K policies and appropriate leave

Under its Workplace Health and Safety Policy Statement, the Creche and Kindergarten Association Ltd (C&K) states that it is committed to the "health and safety of all people who work or attend our workplaces". It also mentions C&K's commitment to "providing return to work programs to facilitate safe and durable return to work for employees, where possible, for both work related and non-work related health conditions".

The C&K Branch Kindergartens new collective agreement was recently approved by the Fair Work Commission, enhancing many industrial provisions since the last

agreement, but the document makes no specific mention of DV or family violence leave.

Since this is a short agreement that was quickly implemented to support a wage increase and back pay for employees, it will expire in June 2016. Though it does not come under the title of Domestic Violence Leave or Family Leave per se, the provision for Paid Personal Leave allows for such things as court appearances, medical appointments, relocating and other tasks associated with people protecting themselves from DV.

With around 97% of C&K's Early Childhood Development (ECD) workforce being female it is therefore essential for staff to have access to appropriate leave if they are experiencing violence at home. Members in C&K early childhood centres are urged to campaign for this by speaking with their organiser ahead of the next round of bargaining.

According to the National Employment Standards (NES), employees who have worked with the same employer for at least 12 months can request flexible working arrangements if they are "experiencing family or domestic violence, or provide care or support to a member of their household or immediate family who requires care and support because of family or domestic violence."

Various early childhood centres have single site agreements that provide for personal/carer's leave or other leave as per the NES. All employees in the national workplace relations system are covered by the NES entitlements regardless of their award, agreement or work contract.

Case study

A positive example of employees accessing domestic violence leave at early childhood centres is Borilla Community Kindergarten in Emerald, Queensland.

IEU Member and Director Jenny Finlay said in their recently negotiated agreement last year, employees who are experiencing DV have access to five days per year non cumulative paid special leave. The leave can be taken to address activities including attending medical/counselling appointments, accessing legal advice or attending legal proceedings, sourcing alternative accommodation and alternative education arrangements for their children.

Ms Finlay said employees can also access existing leave entitlements for these purposes without being required to give notice.

"An employee who supports a person experiencing domestic violence may use their existing carer's leave to accompany the person to related activities or for minding their children for example," she said.

She encourages other early learning centres and kindergartens to seek similar provisions in negotiating their agreements.

"I would encourage all services to consider this provision when finalising your service agreement," she said.

"This practical support is one way that the early childhood sector can help remove the stigma and shame that many families encounter when experiencing domestic violence.

"It is crucial for employees to have access to such leave in case of a personal crisis such as experiencing domestic violence," she said.

Ms Finlay also said she believes that children who witness, have been subject to and are traumatised by DV should be eligible for additional funding.

"Our service has experienced this first hand where children need extensive support and no funding is available anywhere," she said.

"To truly support young children and families in their recovery from domestic violence this must become a priority."

"This practical support is one way that the early childhood sector can help remove the stigma and shame that many families encounter when experiencing domestic violence."



What can be done at work to improve the situation?

Through their collective agreements or awards, workplaces can provide dedicated paid leave for women experiencing violence. An important first step is for workplaces to have a conversation about providing support to those who are affected and reiterate that they are not alone and should feel confident to disclose a violent situation. From there, policies and procedures can be developed for safe workplaces that can provide adequate support.

Workers in the Queensland public sector now have access to a minimum of 10 days paid domestic violence leave in measures announced by Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk on White Ribbon Day last year (25 November). The move has been echoed by various organisations across the country in a bid to provide access to flexible working arrangements for those experiencing DV. As of 2013, employees experiencing DV can request flexible working arrangements under the *Fair Work Act 2009*, to support those affected safely and keep them in employment.

More than 1.6 million Australian workers now have access to domestic violence leave through union negotiated workplace agreements. However, there is still a long way to

go for all employers must commit to universally tackling the problem through establishing domestic violence leave provisions in their agreements. It is no longer acceptable to dismiss the issue as not being an industrial one, with dire financial impacts on organisations. Every worker should be able to get to work safely to do their job without living in fear of violence.

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<http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/education-workforce-early-childhood/submissions/sub052.pdf>

Register for accreditation in NSW now

Early childhood teachers in NSW should register for accreditation now – the deadline is 18 July

BOSTES recently sent information kits to all approved early childhood education and care services in NSW as well as teacher information kits containing advice about how to register for accreditation.

Register by creating an account: <http://www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/current-teachers/early-childhood-teachers/>

To be eligible for Proficient accreditation, teachers must:

- be currently employed as a teacher in an approved service/centre (full time, part time or casual), or have been employed in the five years up to 18 July 2016
- hold a current ACECQA approved or recognised early childhood teaching qualification, and
- deliver and assess against the Early Years Learning Framework.

Documents needed (JP certified)

- copy of your teaching qualification
- two forms of ID from this list: driver's licence, passport or birth certificate
- current Working with Children Check clearance, and
- Statement of Service on employer letterhead to confirm you are/were employed as a teacher in five years up to 18 July 2016.

Casual teachers

When using online BOSTES registration, indicate that you are employed by one 'specific school' and choose the service/centre on your Statement of Service.

Beginning teachers

Try to get one day's casual teaching at an approved service or centre by 30 September 2016. You will be able to access Proficient accreditation as well. If you start on 1 October 2016 onwards, you will be provisionally accredited.

Questions

If you have questions, contact IEU. Email accreditation@ieu.asn.au



NSW Quality Teaching Council **A voice at the table**

This year NSW early childhood teachers will have their own representative on the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) Quality Teaching Council (QTC).

Late last year IEU Early Childhood Vice President and Albury Preschool Director Gabe Connell was elected as the IEU Rep to the QTC to represent early childhood members of the IEU.

IEU Assistant Secretary Mark Northam also sits on the QTC, representing the interests of all IEU members.

The representation of early childhood teachers on the QTC comes after years of lobbying by the IEU to have early childhood teachers recognised and accredited in the same way as school teachers, so it's important for early childhood teachers to be members of the IEU and have a say on the QTC.

The QTC meets about six times a year and its sphere of influence includes the requirements for teacher training courses at university, the standards for teacher accreditation and professional development necessary to maintain accreditation.

BOSTES is largely driven by NSW government legislation. It has input from employers as well as unions.

"The role of the IEU is to hold BOSTES to account, hold them to their charter, and if we believe legislation needs refining, to lobby to have it reviewed," Mark said.

It is not involved in setting wages or salaries.

"In a perfect world you would see a connection between industrial agreements and accreditation standards, and this is what the IEU strives to achieve," Mark said.

Gabe Connell will bring issues of concern raised by early childhood teachers to the table.



Pay parity

"One of the biggest issues facing early childhood teachers is pay parity. The recognition we have worked so long for has led to accreditation and is a great platform for teachers to continue to

press for pay parity," Gabe said.

"It is also an opportunity to further impress on the wider community the importance of early childhood education and the role early childhood teachers play in this," she said.

"This is another step towards lifting the profile of early childhood and early childhood teachers. Having a representative on the QTC means that issues directly affecting the sector can be discussed through a wider field.

"We can represent early childhood teachers and we can also educate teachers in other sectors as to our role and it's relevance in a broad education system.

"Accreditation also means recognition of the professionals we are and have always been. We have been a long forgotten sector in NSW and if not for the strong lobbying of the sector and IEU we may still be left behind."

Mark said: "Teacher accreditation is a licence to teach in NSW so it's crucial the Union works with BOSTES to make sure the profession is respected and union values considered.

"BOSTES is a vehicle by which teachers can shape their future within the constraints of legislation."

Teachers should contact Gabe Connell, email info@alburypreschool.com.au or their local IEU organiser if they have issues they wish to raise regarding the QTC.

Q&A

Bedrock conducted a Q&A with Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham to find out more about his Government's policies and attitude to the early childhood sector. Our questions and his answers are below:

1. Can you outline the major changes to the sector proposed in the Jobs for Families childcare package?

The Turnbull Government's childcare package has a clear goal – to improve Australia's child care system and to encourage workforce participation.

We are investing around \$40 billion in childcare support over the next four years to benefit around one million families, including an increase of more than \$3 billion to support the implementation of the package.

The reforms will support parents as they balance work and family, while protecting those most vulnerable, and continuing to ensure a high quality learning experience in our childcare centres. For some, access to childcare can mean the difference between working and not working – more affordable access to quality child care puts the opportunity of work within reach for more families.

The key elements of the package are:

- A new, simpler Child Care Subsidy, which will be better targeted and provide more assistance for low and middle income families.

- The Child Care Safety Net, which will provide targeted assistance to disadvantaged or vulnerable families and children to address barriers in accessing child care, while encouraging parents to enter and return to the workforce, and
- The Nanny Pilot Program for parents who want to work or work more, designed to help eligible families who earn less than \$250,000 per annum and are experiencing difficulties accessing mainstream child care.

The Turnbull Government stands by the principle that child care support, heavily subsidised by the taxpayer, must give preference to those who are working, training, studying or volunteering, while being complemented by universal access to preschool education and extensive early education support for disadvantaged children.

2. What is your view on the importance of university qualified teachers in the 0-5 setting?

We know the early years of a child's life have a profound impact on their future cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. That's why our goal is to provide the best early learning outcomes and why we have supported improvement in the quality of early childhood and childcare and national consistency in service quality.





**Federal Education Minister
Simon Birmingham**

3. We understand another review into the sector is to be undertaken. There have been many reviews and investigations into this sector recently – why is a further review necessary?

Reviews and evaluations are important for good policy development. They provide the evidence base for policies and programs.

The new childcare legislation was introduced into the Parliament in December last year and referred to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 17 March 2016.

Consideration of legislative reforms by Parliamentary Committees is a well established practice to assist the Parliament to assess and understand the proposed legislation.

4. One proposal in the Jobs for Families package is to allow childcare centres to charge parents by the hour rather than a daily fee. This could see fees increase and shut many families out of services. It could also lead to a casualised workforce and therefore impact on quality education and teaching. How do you respond to this?

In simplifying the childcare system, the Turnbull Government will reduce the current regulatory requirements, including the hours per day and days per week a service must open.

Services will only be required to operate for a minimum of 48 weeks per year, or seven weeks per year if the service only provides outside school hours care, with the number of hours per day a matter for the provider to determine. Removing these restrictions will not require any provider or service to change their charging practices or delivery of sessions of care.

While the new legislation will not require services

The National Quality Framework requires centre based services to have access to an early childhood teacher and larger services must have a university qualified early childhood teacher in attendance. It also requires centre based services to employ an educational leader with a university qualification to lead the development of the curriculum.

to change their charging practices, I would like to see providers consider how they can maximise the delivery of flexible and cost effective child care and early learning. Some services already offer shorter sessions or casual places where there is demand. Regulatory changes will make these alternatives easier for services to offer.

If alternatives can be provided it is unacceptable that families who only need a few hours of care are charged for 10 or 12 hours.

5. Preschool funding differs from state to state. NSW has the lowest rates of funding per child. Is there anything your government can do to address this inequity?

The Turnbull Government supports the states and territories to increase participation in preschool through the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (National Partnership).

Since 2008, the Government has provided more than \$2.8 billion through a series of National Partnership arrangements. States and territories are responsible for how they use funding to best meet the needs of their jurisdiction. Many states provide free or low cost programs.

I hope that we can ensure considered and uniform application of funding, and opportunities to access preschool can be developed as part of any agreements that go beyond the current Universal Access agreement.

6. The title of this package sounds like the emphasis is on enabling parents to participate in the workforce, rather than providing a quality education for 0-5s. What's your view on the importance of education for this age group? Does this proposal affect a child's right to 15 hours of early childhood education per week under the Universal Access Agreement?

Early childhood education is absolutely a focus of the Turnbull Government and is an important consideration in these reforms which will better help nearly one million families to work or work more and also access early education opportunities.

We have also provided \$840 million to extend the Universal Access National Partnership which supports children to attend preschool for 15 hours a week, or 600 hours a year, in the year before school, delivered by an early childhood teacher who meets National Quality Framework requirements. This entitlement is additional to any support available under the new Child Care Subsidy.



Teaching on country crucial in remote communities

There are many Indigenous community leaders around Australia who work tirelessly to put their experience into early childhood education in remote areas. Coraleen Shipton, a proud Kuku Yalanji woman, is one of these people working as director of Wujal Wujal C&K community kindergarten in far north Queensland. Here she shares her story with *Bedrock* journalist Alex Leggett.

Wujal Wujal is a small community about 30km north of Cape Tribulation and 70km south of Cooktown, where rainforest meets coral reefs. During the wet season, road access to the community is cut off by flood water - a fitting name as Wujal Wujal means “place of many waterfalls”, with water playing a significant part in everyday life. There are three main tribal clans in the area: the Kuku Yalanji, Kuku Nyungkal and Jalunji-Warra.

An ardent IEU member since 2009, Coraleen believes living on country is important in order to teach children

how staying within your community brings about positive change at a grassroots level. However, when decisions are made at a national level about early childhood curriculum she said it can be difficult to convey in small communities with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Part of the National Quality Standard, a key aspect of the National Quality Framework (NQF), refers to “enhancing a child’s learning and development” through “connection to community” and “each child’s identity and culture is a foundation to the program.”

“What frustrates me at times is that under the NQF there are some issues in the area of how to teach culture,” Coraleen said.

“In Wujal Wujal, we use our language and the children speak the language back to us as we live our culture here every day.”

She said there is also the physical barrier of being isolated during the monsoon season.

“We are remote so we can’t go to the

local shops when we want to build on children’s learning resources and tools.

“We are limited to what we can access and the government doesn’t take into consideration that we are cut off during the wet season nor the diversity of cultures in one area.”

Despite the frustrations, Coraleen believes teaching local culture and language is the key to continuing communities like Wujal Wujal and preserving heritage.

“For me personally, teaching our local culture to our children is important because we are telling them where we really come from,” she said.

“We show them that if you care for your environment then country will care for you, by providing things such as food and fresh water.

“We also teach them about where their ancestors came from and how they came to be in this classroom, in this community.

“There are three main clans in Wujal Wujal so I try to explain to the children how their families came to

the area and what their grandparents' and great-grandparents' stories are."

Community spirit

Coraleen says that everyone knows each other in the community and it is good when there are changes within the education system, that parents can talk to her directly about how it affects their children's learning.

"They put their trust in me and trust my opinion about changes to the curriculum and how it will affect things." She said closing the gap is achievable if all Australian people and cultures understand one another.

"It is important to teach children about equality from a young age and help them grow in learning to respect each other's different backgrounds and cultures."

"It is about creating a sense of identity and connecting them from our landscape, cultural heritage and people to the rest of our nation and its many peoples."

Coraleen said it is important to live and teach on country and have a sense of giving back to her community. She was a kindergarten student in the same building she now finds herself teaching in.

After working her way up from a Certificate 3 she went on to complete a bachelor degree at Deakin University in Melbourne.

"I first went to high school in Brisbane and then to Cairns to do my Cert 3 and diploma in children's services," she said.

"Afterwards I went to Melbourne to study a bachelor degree in early childhood education. At first, it was a culture shock for me after growing up in Wujal Wujal all my life."

She said she did a few different jobs before becoming an early childhood educator.

"I explored different areas and back in those days there was a program called the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) where I was working 16 hours per week."

The program was developed by the Federal Government to encourage Indigenous people to find work in regional and remote communities through training and education.

"I came to the kindy when my last son turned three, so I started doing some voluntary work and further work through the CDEP for two days per week," she said.

"Then it went from filling in for people and doing extra days to becoming full time.

"Every day is a new day for me and there are many opportunities to teach our local culture, language and history from an early age."

Challenges of teaching remote

She said there had been a high turnover of staff coming to the community to teach at the kindy, and for many teachers, working in a remote area is a challenge.

teachers, some of whom have been here for 20 years and have been welcomed into local families as one of their own."

Coraleen said a lot has changed in the years since she went through the kindy.

"I think it's changed a lot in terms of curriculum and teaching style. Today there are a lot more educational resources available but



"In Wujal Wujal, we use our language and the children speak the language back to us as we live our culture here every day."

"We see different people coming and going from the centre but not staying for very long periods of time," she said.

"Just when you start getting used to someone they leave and you have to begin all over again."

Coraleen said it is about building trust with everyone in the community, no matter what their background is, as this helps young Wujal Wujal children to grow into respectful adults.

"It is often hard for families to make connections with people who are originally from outside the community," she said.

"But there are some families who have close relationships with the

documentation takes up more time and we spend more hours on this after kindy finishes," she said.

"There has been a lot of positive feedback from the local school who said that if the kindergarten was not here there wouldn't be a lot of children who are school ready.

"At the end of the day my passion is to look after children and their wellbeing, their families and generally support the community.

"It is important to support our children in the early learning years, which are essential to their educational journey."

Environment as teacher



Standard 3.3 of the National Quality Framework asks “how do our policies and practices promote children’s understanding about their responsibility and care for the environment”?

Bedrock Journalists Sue Osborne and Alex Leggett look at two preschools where this Standard has been put into practice in a deep and visible way to benefit the preschool communities at large.

Nestled in the Gold Coast hinterland is an early learning centre at one with nature – Numala Kinder. Director Jennifer McCormack said nature based play is helping children grow with a focus on caring for the world we live in.

“I am careful about the resources I use. I don’t believe children need many ‘toys’ to enhance their play experiences: a cloth, for example, can be a sail for a boat,” Jennifer said.

Mindful of mass production

“I am mindful of mass produced products so I ensure renewable resources can be used in various ways.

“I prefer projects that allow children to develop a skill over time such as sewing and woodworking. These projects use materials I already have or were bought second hand. I am not fond of art that requires one use items like straws and paper plates. If they come our way and need to be recycled we will find a use for them.

“The practices of recycling, composting, gardening,

and managing waste, energy and water are essential, but comprise only one part of a program that supports sustainability. For me, sustainability is about our attitude towards our community, our connections to our local place, and searching for ways to ensure there is enough for us all: humans, animals and plants alike.”

Jennifer said the children learn through imitation of adults and other children.

Learning by imitation

“We often discuss personal and ecological care, reflecting on how we do things. When we play in nature, these skills are developed through daily interaction with habitats.

“Caring for our environment is the same thing as caring for ourselves and others. The connections children make through these interactions in the natural environment are further explored through story, song and journaling.

“We also practice ‘ecological storytelling’ – telling stories which connect us to our local space, plants and animals. This draws together children’s own emotional and social experiences and places it in context to their local environment.”

Jennifer said her biggest goal is for children to feel a sense of belonging.

“Through learning these valuable experiences from an early age, children develop into environmentally responsible adults, with an understanding of the critical role everyone plays in

“Gardening has no financial or social barriers, no language barriers, and no educational barriers.”

sustainable living and ultimately how their actions impact the world we live in."

Revitalisation in Leeton

Leeton Preschool in the Riverina area of NSW was recently awarded a Proud and Deadly Award by Leeton Aboriginal Education Consultative Group for its work with the local Aboriginal community, including some environmental revitalisation not only of its own gardens but adjoining underused council parklands.

The gardens are only just beginning, but the aim is for a continued use of this native garden area by all members of the community, with the pre schoolers being like 'custodians' of the area. As well as enjoying the area and learning about nature in so many ways, it is also hoped people learn more about the local Wiradjuri Culture, with language experiences, dreamtime stories and talks about the plants (and hopefully animals including insects and birdlife) that these plants will attract.

Director Marie Jacobsen said the two year journey to create this community garden began when she was attended an event in Sydney, where by chance a Danish Forest School symposium was being held.

Marie decided to go along and was impressed by the philosophy on offer. Danish Forest Schools advocate for children to be immersed in nature.

Less conflict

Marie said research has shown children who spend more time in a natural setting experience less conflict, have better social skills, improved language development and are more attentive.

As well as her interest in Danish Forest School, her upbringing on a farm influenced Marie.

"We were taught water was liquid gold. We had to conserve everything. But in town with town water supplies no one seems overly careful with water. I get shocked at how much water gets wasted. The park area where the gardens have been established was hardly ever used but lots of watering was done to keep the large grass area green. I want the children to get an appreciation of why water is so important and to understand it is a resource we must value and conserve."

As well as developing a dry riverbed play area in the grounds of the preschool (built with the help of funds from Indigenous Advancement Strategy grant), Marie decided to revitalise the council park next door.

"They had trees and a lot of grass which they were using gallons of water to keep green, but no one used it," she said.

The idea for Gurnang Ngurang Community Gardens (meaning native plant place in Wiradjuri) gradually evolved, with the help of the council, the Aboriginal community, various community groups, Riverina Wildflowers and the preschool's parents, staff and children.

Yarning circle

The gardens are a natural space where native shrubs, flowers and vegetation can be grown, with logs, rocks, stepping stones for adventurous play and a yarning circle for the sharing of dreamtime stories and Wiradjuri language.

Aboriginal high schools students will be involved in painting murals for the fence area and totem poles. An Aboriginal Elder, who works at the council, will show the children the various plants, teach them the Wiradjuri name and explain their uses in Aboriginal culture to the children, including the use of plants for medicines and food and their connection to country.

In future Marie hopes elderly hostel residents will be able to come and picnic with the children, or do some gardening, and she hopes members of a refugee group in the area will get involved.

"Gardening has no financial or social barriers, no language barriers, and no educational barriers," she said.



"An 80 year old can garden with a three year old. Everyone can plant together and build relationships."

Marie hopes the garden will encourage controlled risk taking among the children, and give them more responsibility.

"I bought them all orange high visibility vests so that they're easy to see when they are among the trees.

"We give them boundaries, such as 'you cannot go pass this tree or that garden bed' and they can move around in that space.

"The children can enjoy walking and balancing along the log bridges and stepping stones.

"It develops their sense of their own limits and abilities, as well as their appreciation of the importance of their environment."

The impact of feminisation, feminism and fragmentation

In a recent chapter on the Australian early childhood workforce (Press, 2015), I described its character as having been influenced by feminism, feminisation and fragmentation, Charles Sturt University Associate Professor at the School Of Teacher Education Frances Press writes.

These three factors have had an impact upon the workforce in complex ways, in some cases working against the achievement of pay equity for early childhood teachers. In the following article I briefly outline some of these impacts, starting with feminisation.

Feminisation

The Australian early childhood workforce is, and always has been, predominantly female. The numbers of men working in early childhood settings are extremely low comprising approximately only 3% of the contemporary early childhood workforce. Unfortunately, there is no doubt that the highly feminised nature of the workforce has been a key factor in suppressing wages. Initially the wages for women working as kindergarten teachers were low, in keeping with the lower wage rates

of women comparative to men until the introduction of equal pay in 1969. Further, the origins of early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision in philanthropy resonated with widespread views about the caring nature of women. Take for instance, the observation of a commissioner in a 1969 NSW industrial hearing, who noted that early childhood staff were “motivated by a desire to make some contribution to community service” and thus not reliant on wages (cited in Smith and Lyons, 2006).

Although subsequent pay equity cases have resulted in some improvements to wages and conditions, the specialist nature of early childhood education has been obscured by a popular belief that the care and education of young children is somehow instinctual for its predominantly female workforce, requiring only a caring and maternal disposition. Consequently, there have been times when qualification requirements have come under attack. A former federal government finance minister (from 1984-1990), Peter Walsh asserted that advocacy for teachers in early childhood programs was intended “to make even softer the

nests of bachelors of early childhood education and their middle-class well-feathered friends” and that childcare workers were crippling the system with “creeping credentialism” (cited in Brennan, 2008). More recently, the 2014 draft issues paper of the Productivity Commission into Childcare and Early Learning recommended the winding back of reforms designed to raise the qualifications of the early childhood workforce, asserting especially that only minimal qualifications were required for work with the youngest children (Productivity Commission, 2014).

Feminism

In the face of such pervading beliefs, it is worth reflecting on the role of feminism in the development of the early childhood sector. Australian early childhood education had its origins in the kindergarten movement of the late 19th century. Many of the early proponents of this movement were suffragettes as well as educational reformers and philanthropists – a “formidable network of women working in support of feminist causes” (Huntsman, 2005). Among the founding members of the Kindergarten Union of New South



Wales in 1895 – the first kindergarten association formed in Australia – were women such as Margaret Windeyer and Maybanke Anderson. Both women were active in the Women's Suffrage League and were well known public speakers and advocates for social and educational reform.

Kindergarten proponents were firm in their belief that teachers of young children required specialist knowledge and skills. In the early 20th century, kindergarten associations established kindergarten teachers' colleges independent of state teacher training institutions. On the one hand, kindergarten teaching expanded opportunities for young women's further education and employment, but on the other hand, it was poorly paid. The philanthropic objective of the early kindergarten associations to provide free kindergartens in poor neighbourhoods, coupled with their limited resources, served to dampen teachers' wages. The tension between channelling resources into establishing and maintaining kindergartens, and increasing teachers pay, was evident in the earliest days of the movement and continued for decades to come. It is perhaps not surprising then that teacher shortages have been documented since the inception of kindergartens in Australia.

While kindergarten advocates were primarily focused on providing preschool education to children over three, the plight of the children of working mothers was largely left unaddressed until the formation of the Sydney Day Nursery Association in 1905, "an institution started by fellow women, who fully realise the difficulties that beset the paths of working mothers" (cited in Huntsman 2005, p.9). However, kindergarten training colleges were not amenable to addressing the needs of children under three in their courses, arguing that their students were "to be trained as teachers not nurses" (Brennan, 1998). Hence specific nursery school teacher education emerged in the 1930s, and for many years kindergarten teacher training and nursery school teacher training followed distinct paths.

Feminism's renewed impact was evident again when, in the 1970s feminists fought for the expansion of childcare as part of a platform designed to achieve women's social, economic and political equality. This wave of feminists often clashed with the proponents of early

childhood education exemplified by kindergarten advocates. The latter believed, by and large, that childcare was not good for children. They did not approve of the mothers of babies and young children entering the paid workforce, and felt that the long days of attendance that childcare offered were too long. The division between childcare advocates and preschool advocates resonated for many years pulling early childhood policy and practice in different directions. One result of this division was reflected in the education and preparation of the early childhood workforce. In the mid 1970s a new early childhood qualification emerged – the two year Child Care Certificate. This precursor to today's diploma was taught through vocational training, not through the established kindergarten teachers colleges (and later, universities). Like the Nursery Teacher's College had done some years before, this qualification attempted to address the needs of children under three and the long day care experience for children overall.

"This wave of feminists often clashed with the proponents of early childhood education exemplified by kindergarten advocates."

Fragmentation

As is evident, a consequence of the historical development of ECEC in Australia, has been fragmentation of the field. ECEC services can be home based or centre based, run by not for profit entities, government departments or commercial organisations. Different policy frameworks for child care and preschool, different education and training pathways and different qualification requirements have abounded. It is only in this century that governments have worked with some success toward policy coherence for child care and preschool through the Early Childhood Reform Agenda. Prior to these important reforms it was common to find policy for ECEC split between health, welfare and education

portfolios. And despite the advances of the Reform Agenda, its somewhat precarious nature is exemplified by the fact that the child care portfolio has still found itself shifted from education, to social security, and back to education once more.

Conclusion

Over time, there have been a number of initiatives that have aimed to make explicit the professionalism of the early childhood workforce: Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics and the national Early Years Learning Framework, have successfully garnered strong support within the early childhood field. In a number of cases, the philanthropic bodies that once sought to keep wages low, have supported improvements to wages and conditions in order to sustain a knowledgeable and stable early childhood profession. Nevertheless, factors continue to compound relatively poor pay and conditions.

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Early education key to closing the gaps

This year's Closing the Gap report delivers a result that has become all too familiar in comparing outcomes between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians: not enough progress is being made, Dr Nicholas Biddle writes. There is improvement in some areas, but stagnation in others.

The government is right to highlight progress reducing infant mortality (which is on track to meet its target) and the fact that Indigenous children are more likely to have been immunised than non Indigenous children by the age of five. Make no mistake: if sustained, these are massive achievements.

But other areas such as early childhood education, school attendance, literacy and numeracy, employment and life expectancy are not on target. This is a policy failure and a societal failure.

It is tempting when looking at the year on year progress to become despondent, to feel that nothing works, or to assume it must be the fault of Indigenous Australians that the gaps aren't closing.

To consider perhaps starting again on policy. But, as argued by Mick Gooda, that would ignore that there has been positive change, especially in the long run. It would also be a terrible disservice to the fantastic work that thousands of Indigenous Australians are doing for their people at the community, regional, state/territory and national level.

One example of this is early childhood education (ECE). In an analysis that I co-authored with Lilia Arcos-Holzinger, we undertook the first investigation (that we know of) to document the effects of early education on a range of cognitive and developmental outcomes of Indigenous children.

A significant investment

This work utilised a rich set of data from the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC), also known as Footprints in Time. If you aren't aware of the dataset, then it is worth looking into, as it is another

example of thousands of Indigenous carers (and interviewers) making a significant investment in time to provide information to "improve the understanding of, and policy response to, the diverse circumstances faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and communities".

Our study, while not reaching the 'gold standard' of a policy trial, yields insights into the effect of early childhood education over the short term (two years after ECE participation) and over the longer term (three to five years after ECE participation).

The results indicate that preschool attendance has a strong positive association with reading and literacy outcomes in the short term.

In the longer term, we find evidence that both preschool and childcare participation were positively associated with reading and literacy, as well as maths and abstract reasoning. Both preschool and childcare participation also had a positive association with developmental outcomes, especially in terms of children demonstrating fewer behavioural difficulties.

But Indigenous children still attend preschool at much lower rates than non Indigenous children.

Our current early education system is widening, not narrowing, gaps later in life. We know some of the reasons for this. These include income constraints, location, curriculum that isn't always relevant, and experiences of discrimination. Without closing this gap, there is no hope that other gaps will be closed, regardless of how much money we spend.

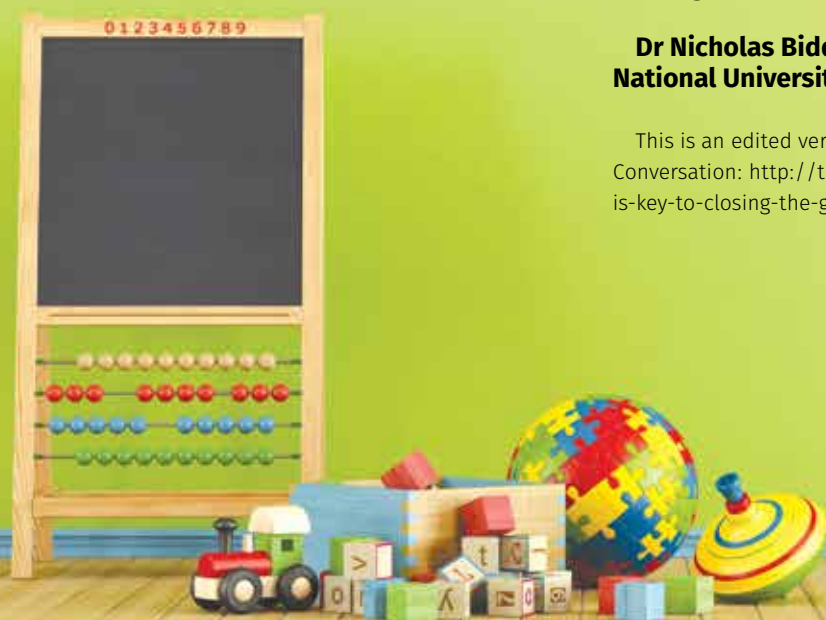
It is heartening, therefore, that a new target of 95% early childhood education attendance for all Indigenous four year olds was announced in the latest report.

It is time to rethink our approach to Indigenous affairs. It has been said many times before that this starts with listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's own goals, aspirations and priorities. It also involves building on the best available evidence and rigorously trialling and evaluating programs.

Dr Nicholas Biddle is Research Fellow, Australian National University.

This is an edited version of an article that originally appeared in The Conversation: <http://theconversation.com/early-childhood-education-is-key-to-closing-the-gaps-54322>

"Without closing this gap, there is no hope that other gaps will be closed, regardless of how much money we spend."



BEDROCK GIVEAWAYS

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Publisher: A&A Publishing
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A love of adventure and the Australian wilderness has led Tasmanian teacher Peter d'Plesse to write his debut novel *Fire Eye*. Tasmanian Peter d'Plesse is an educator, adventurer, pilot and now, with his debut novel arriving this April, an author.

Fire Eye, which further expands the swelling ranks of adventure fiction novels from Australian authors, combines elements of d'Plesse's favourite subjects: the Australian outdoors, aviation and war history.

The female protagonist, Alexander Dulaine hires Jed, an adventurer cum private detective, to help discover the lost resting place of her grandfather's plane that disappeared during WWII. Dulaine's interest isn't purely academic, however. The aircraft is implicated in a Torres Strait legend of a ruby named *Fire Eye*.



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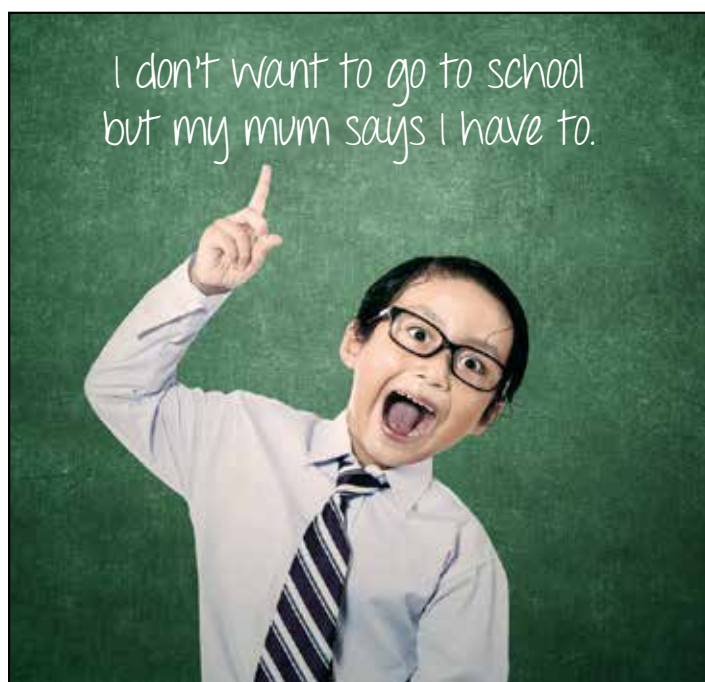
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Author: Dr Rich
Publisher: Xlibris
Three copies to give away

Not to be confused with The Wiggles vehicle of the same name, this big red car comes from US author Dr Rich. The big red car takes children on a journey where he happens to be in the right place at the right time to help those in need. By doing so he finds that he provides happiness to others, all by just being himself.



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