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issue 3 | Vol 25 | 2020

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

Why laughter helps learning P12



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BEDROCK

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TERMINOLOGY

*The union acknowledges regional
differences in some terms. Please
bear these in mind as you read.*

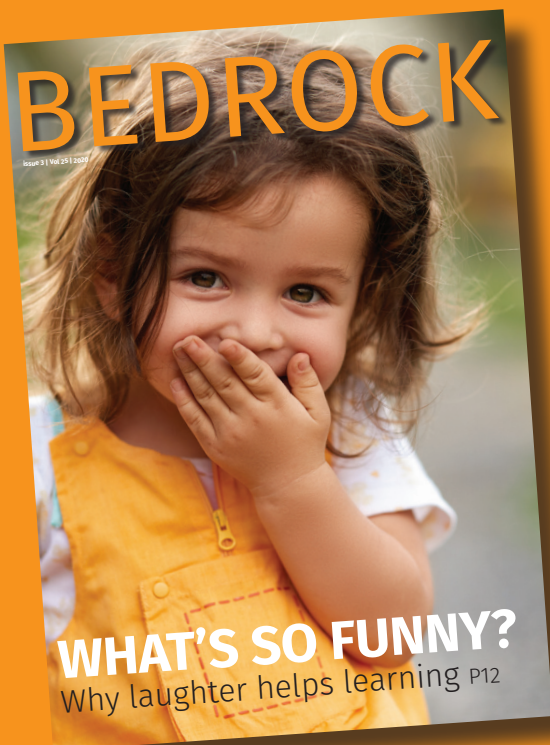
QNT

Kindergarten

NSW/ACT

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childhood centre





Unions stand strong in turbulent times

This last edition of *Bedrock* for 2020 is a testament to the ongoing professionalism and resilience of our early childhood education teachers and assistants.

The critical support members in the sector have provided their communities throughout this year, despite the significant challenges, has redefined what it means to be a frontline and essential worker.

What has not changed and what members can be assured of, is that our union will be there for you every step of the way.

Early childhood education commentator and journalist Lisa Bryant (page 11) and IEU Organiser Lisa James (pages 20-21) examine how COVID-19 has impacted early childhood education in Australia (and around the world) and how unions are providing essential representation for members during the crisis.

The New National Agreement on Closing the Gap was signed in July 2020 which has a significant impact for the early childhood education sector (Upfront, page 5). As a collective, we are responsible for making space for and listening to our First Nations' voices. I highly recommend members read IEU member and Wakka Wakka woman Deb Mann's piece on the responsibilities we have as we work towards closing the gap (page 8).

As always, our *Bedrock* journalists have investigated interesting professional issues and current research notably, "Stuck in the middle" (pages 6-7), our cover story "What's so funny?" (pages 12-13) and "How to treat troubled children" (pages 14-15).

I commend this edition of *Bedrock* to you and reassure you that our union is always here with you.

Terry Burke
IEUA-QNT Secretary

Mark Northam
IEUA NSW/ACT Secretary

BEDROCK

UPFRONT



Wearing masks – time to reframe our thinking?

Is it time to reframe our thinking on wearing masks in early childhood? Many early childhood teachers have felt nervous about wearing masks in their centres as they wonder about the impact it will have on the children.

If we continue to focus on protecting children's innocence by sheltering them from the pandemic, we silence difficult emotions and experiences, says Pedagogical Leader Karla Wintle in an article for Community Early Learning Australia (CELA). What's more, we may be missing crucial learning opportunities.

When the Victorian Government made wearing masks mandatory – but optional with small children – researchers and teachers could tune in to how children thought and felt.

The way young children have reacted has been very open and honest, opening up conversations about their favourite superheroes and how we can stay safe. For young babies and toddlers, seeing people in masks may take time to get used to, as they are so reliant on facial gestures and signals for language development and to feel safe.

As relationships are at the core of early childhood teachers' work, how does wearing masks change pedagogical practices to ensure every child feels safe and secure? It is reasonable to be concerned about children's wellbeing, however, there is also the argument that if we shield children from sadness, grief, fear and disappointment, we could be denying them the opportunity to learn about resilience.

Visit CELA for more information: cela.org.au



NSW early childhood teachers – accreditation update

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, NESAs has temporarily extended the time for Provisionally Accredited early childhood teachers to become Proficient (normally three years if employed full time or five years if employed part-time).

The IEU is aware that a number of members have been unable to have their Accreditation Supervisor observe their practice. There is also some inconsistency in the timing of allocating an Accreditation Supervisor to a Provisionally Accredited Teacher.

If you are experiencing delays to the finalisation of your Proficient Teacher Accreditation or have any questions about the process, we recommend you contact the union for assistance.

The IEU is aware that a considerable number of Proficient Teachers in early childhood, whose first maintenance period finishes in July 2021, have not completed the required 100 hours of professional development. According to NESAs Maintenance of Teacher Accreditation Policy clause 6.1, a teacher will fail to maintain their accreditation if:

- their practice does not meet the applicable Standards and/or
- they fail to complete the professional development requirements by the end of the maintenance period.

If a teacher fails to meet the professional development requirements at the end of their maintenance period, NESAs can revoke or suspend the teacher's accreditation 14 days after the end of their maintenance period.

In 2020, the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch is offering early childhood teacher members free access to more than 70 hours of NESAs Registered professional development. We invite you to explore these options to maintain your accreditation. (See "Maintaining teacher accreditation", p 22)

Queensland Lutheran Kindergarten members secure some of the highest wages in the sector

Teachers and assistants employed by Queensland Lutheran Early Childhood Services (QLECS) Sessional Kindergartens will be paid more than many of their sector counterparts under their new collective agreement.

The new agreement, approved by the Fair Work Commission, contains several other wins for QLECS employees, including retention of an adjusted Senior Teacher allowance and the introduction of paid domestic and family violence leave.

The collective action and strength shown by members was essential to achieving improved wages and conditions in QLECS centres.

QLECS employees will benefit from wages that are above the going rate in the Queensland community kindergarten sector.

The new agreement contains a 2 per cent wage increase for 2020 and 2021, with a 2.25 per cent increase in 2022.

This means at 1 July 2020, the commencing salary for teachers under the new agreement would be \$72,165 per annum, compared with \$68,029 at C&K.

At Band 3 Step 4, the QLECS rate would be \$100,292 compared with \$93,817 at C&K.



New Closing the Gap National Agreement targets early childhood education

A new National Agreement on Closing the Gap will focus on strengthening the early childhood education sector. It includes a Priority Reform to build First Nations community controlled services.

More than 4000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 50 community controlled peak bodies participated in engagements to help guide negotiations on what should be included in the new National Agreement.

The Chair of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), Muriel Bamblett, said the Closing the Gap New Agreement took positive steps towards improving outcomes for First Nations children and families.

"The Priority Reforms in the Agreement focus on partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, building the capacity of our community controlled services and improving data to make sure we are capturing a true picture of the lives and wellbeing of our children," Bamblett said.

Although the importance of achieving 95 per cent enrolment of four year olds in preschool is to be commended, she said, it is essential to focus on improving outcomes for children aged zero to three years in order to close the gap.

"As we work together on policies and programs that impact the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, we are reminded of how far we have come, and how the future of our children rests on us moving forward together," Bamblett said.

- **For more information:** snaicc.org.au
- see also "Opening up about Closing the Gap", p8

STUCK in the

When parents separate, teachers can become collateral damage. IEU journalist Emily Campbell explores how working with separated parents can impact on teachers' wellbeing.

Separation and divorce can be messy, complex, costly and emotionally taxing territory to navigate.

At best, former partners can be civil, amicable and agreeable. At worst, they can become embroiled in expensive and lengthy legal proceedings, bitter custody battles and devastating family breakdowns.

Although most adults in this situation try to shield children from conflict and prioritise the child's needs, it is often the sad reality that children involved in such situations suffer adverse effects.

Revelatory research

While there has already been extensive research exploring the emotional, behavioural and

developmental impacts of separation on parents and children, very little has focused on how teachers are affected, particularly those working in early childhood education.

A recent study (Levkovich and Eyal, 2020) investigated this topic to examine the difficulties early childhood and kindergarten teachers face.

The researchers conducted interviews with 15 early childhood and kindergarten teachers in Israel to examine their perceptions of working with divorced and separated parents, and how this impacted their professional and emotional wellbeing. Three major findings emerged:

- Kindergarten teachers reported devoting twice as much time to communicating with separated parents than with parents who remained together.
- When separated parents are in an acute state of conflict, teachers must bridge the gap between them and sometimes act as mediator, which can cause emotional distress for the teacher.
- Despite this major emotional load and feelings of confusion and helplessness, kindergarten teachers receive very little support – and if they do, it is mostly informal.

Complex roles

Early childhood and kindergarten teachers have a varied and complex role, taking on responsibility for the centre's pedagogic program, the educational environment and striving for teamwork and positive relationships with the parents of the children they teach.

Strong relationships between these teachers and parents are shown to be highly beneficial for the learning, development and wellbeing of children and are crucial to building a sense of trust and continuity for children between home and preschool.

The teachers interviewed said they saw parental separation and conflict

as difficult and traumatic for children, whose worlds can be turned upside down in an instant, their routines disrupted, sense of security broken and family unit destroyed.

Respondents reported witnessing a variety of behavioural and emotional consequences, both short term and long term, in children whose parents were going through separation.

Teachers expressed sorrow, compassion and empathy for children in this situation who exhibited behavioural changes or emotional distress; some children shut down, others expressed fear, were overly clingy, desperate for attention and showed sadness or hostility, especially during the period leading up to separation.

Interview participants saw preschool or kindergarten as being a permanent, safe place for children, a source of stability and consistency during the tumultuous times they experienced at home.

Toll on teachers

It is not just the behavioural changes in children of separated parents that affect the work of kindergarten and early childhood teachers; the actions of feuding parents contribute to work related stress too.

One of the burdens experienced by teachers working with conflicting parents was a significant increase in workload: respondents reported spending double the time communicating with separated parents than with parents who are together.

Many teachers said they had to provide detailed and accurate feedback separately to parents and even organise separate parent/teacher interviews to accommodate each parent, in cases where they refused to attend a meeting together.

Teachers said this was emotionally draining, repetitive and added to an already heavy workload.



ne middle

Some teachers reported situations in which one parent complained about the other to them or tried to prevent the teacher from including the other parent in their child's education. In extreme cases, teachers were put in stressful situations with potential legal implications.

Teachers are sometimes required to comply with court orders, making sure to hand over the child to the right parent for pick up, depending on the custody arrangement.

When restraining orders or domestic violence orders are in place, a parent may be legally prohibited from meeting with the child or attending the kindergarten or preschool, although this doesn't necessarily stop them from attempting to contravene the orders.

Situations in which this occurs can be dangerous for children and teachers, adding fuel to the fire of family breakdown and causing extreme distress for teachers.

Role of employers

IEUA-QNT Industrial Officer Danielle Wilson said employers should have counselling available to staff so they can obtain quick access to support when necessary.

"Employers should also provide any assistance necessary to help manage and control the relationship between staff and parents who are in conflict," Wilson said.

"There should be a clear path of communication through a parental management policy at the centre, so staff know what to do in the event of parental conflict.

"This might differ depending on the family and the relationships the family has with management – the most suitable person for that family should be identified as a point of reference."

Employers should also provide early childhood education staff with professional development to equip

them to deal with these issues.

"Conflict resolution training, resilience training and access to psychologists and counselling for support should be mandatory," Wilson said.

Clear boundaries

It is important for teachers to set clear boundaries with parents, to maintain professional relationships and include both parents in a child's education. "Boundaries should be negotiated with each parent at an introductory meeting with the teacher," Wilson said.

"The meeting should facilitate open and accessible channels of communication and determine how both parents can be involved in the child's education.

"It's best to have a member of the leadership team included in those conversations and a formal agreement put in place, similar to those agreements reached between parents and centres when their child may have specific medical, social or program needs," Wilson said.

"Provide both parents with a written summary outlining their involvement and convey the information verbally, so everyone is clear.

"Where this isn't possible, each parent should be invited to attend separately.

"It's better if matters are transparent so that, where possible, each parent should know what the arrangements are for the other," she said.

However, there may be legal reasons or even personal 'relationship management' reasons which make this impossible.

Wilson said kindergartens must recognise any court orders and keep copies on file. Parents are obliged to report should these circumstances change.

"Advice about the management of parents in conflict should be obtained by referring to the centre's family engagement (or similar) policy, and leadership should use this as a base to support staff and provide directions for management of particular family situations or difficult parents," Wilson said.

References

Inbar Levkovich & Gali Eyal (2020): 'I'm caught in the middle': preschool teachers' perspectives on their work with divorced parents, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, DOI: 10.1080/09669760.2020.1779041

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09669760.2020.1779041>



Opening up about Closing the Gap





Early childhood teacher and Wakka Wakka woman Deb Mann has lived in many places throughout Australia. She writes for *Bedrock* about the responsibilities we have as we work towards Closing the Gap.

I want to acknowledge the wisdom and strength of our Elders, leaders and teachers in continuing the fight to position Aboriginal children's cultural education as a right to be determined and guided by family and communities.

I would like to point out that my reflections are my own, and do not represent any organisation or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I have been asked to share my thoughts on two issues:

What does Closing the Gap mean for early childhood education and what responsibilities do educators have? and The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2020 the NAIDOC theme reminded us that it "was and always will be" the sovereign right of Aboriginal peoples to determine their futures and this includes truth telling of the ways history and colonisation have damaged our cultures.

Teachers must ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not forgotten or assimilated into their dominant worldviews and ways of being. They must accept that unless they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, they will never have the lived experiences, cultural expertise or permission to share our stories. Political leaders from the time of colonisation have never wanted the truth to be known.

One of the challenges for teachers is to avoid "ticking the box" of what they think they ought to do in their practices with children and recognise that they need to dedicate a lifetime to listening and facilitating Aboriginal voices in the teaching of culture. If educational teams cannot make this commitment, they should critically reflect and reconsider what they are doing in their services.

Meaning and responsibilities

If we reflect on the 2020 Closing the Gap report, the early childhood education target (page 23) aims for "95 per cent of all Indigenous four year olds to be enrolled in early

childhood education by 2025. In 2018, the figure was 86.4 per cent (for non-Indigenous children it is 91.3 per cent)". It stands to reason we should question what is missing.

The intent of "closing the gap" in early childhood education was to increase access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with the underlying assumption that access would improve attendance and academic success.

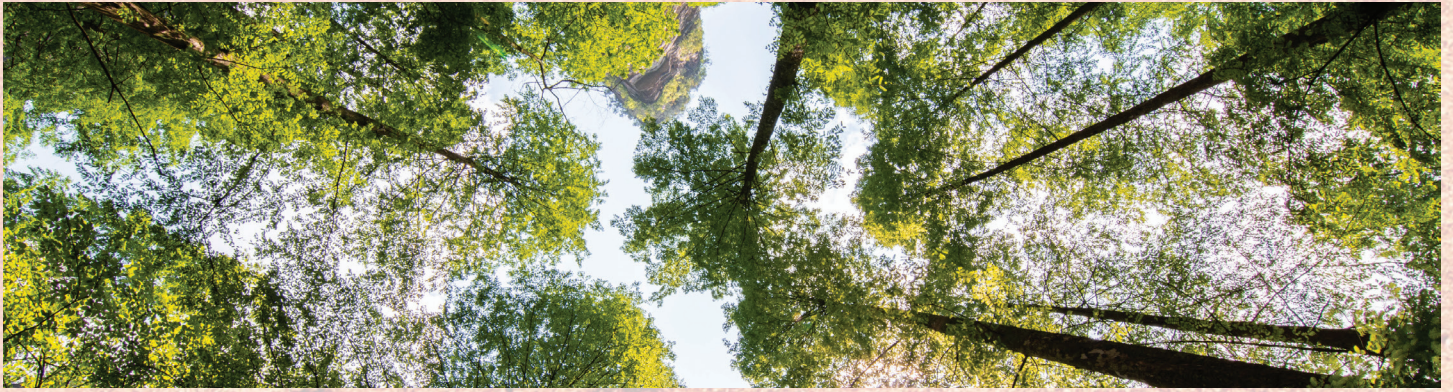
Within this report is the hidden assumption that early childhood teachers, regardless of their background or knowledge of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander history and culture, know best how to "teach" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Australian political and educational systems have been slow to address the fact that "teaching" does not usually align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expectations for their children's education and ignores the resilience and commitment families have in supporting their children to navigate two vastly different worldviews.

Our children work twice as hard as other children to overcome systemic racism and maintain their sense of identity and belonging. It is the responsibility of teachers and educators to work twice as hard and commit to recognising their unconscious bias. They should focus on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities to determine what is the best approach for educating their children.

I would argue that insufficient funding of Aboriginal specific services has widened the gap in appropriate cultural early childhood programs and the "gap" that needs closing is the inadequate time, funding and resourcing for Aboriginal governance, evaluation and recommendations on what will work for their children.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children do not learn in isolation from their social and cultural relationships."



Culture, connection and contribution

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) advocates strongly for children's belonging, being and becoming. Outcome 2 states "Children are connected with and contribute to their world". This raises important questions for all involved in the early education of Aboriginal children. Who determines what the pathway is for this belonging and becoming for an Aboriginal child? How can their pathway be best built and who travels with them on this pathway?

The answers to these questions lie in the contested fields of assumed expertise and advocacy for human rights. Teachers, policy and practice influencers urgently need to critically reflect on their professional practice, as this assumed expertise is directly eroding the right to self-determination for Aboriginal families and their children.

The EYLF implies that early years educators need to "teach" children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, Aboriginal perspectives and culture.

There are many different ways of knowing and incorporating learning, but far too often it's business as usual when it comes to early childhood teaching and promoting a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being. The unconscious messaging here endorses the protectionist and saviourism approaches that have always been embedded in the education systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

What the current "white" systems and educators do not appreciate is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children do not learn in isolation from their social and cultural relationships. An educator's work is complex, and navigating the many pathways to align policy, curriculum, practice, resources, funding, training, law and Aboriginal lore and pedagogy requires deep thinking, research, and evidence of processes that promote and sustain Aboriginal identities, wellbeing and systemic success.

There is so much to unlearn and relearn. We have all been invaded either subconsciously or wilfully by the racist underpinnings of white privilege and power. It is hard to confront, challenge and accept that Australia has neglected to respect and uphold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultural integrity as a standalone human and legitimate right.

I wonder how this framework has been interpreted in teaching, when policy and practice continue to allow the dominant decision makers to determine and implement systems from a deficit approach. I fear early learning teachers and educators are confused, compliant and potentially complicit in supporting models that position Aboriginal children as "vulnerable" and in need of intervention to succeed in later life.

Who is advantaged when teachers work in this way? Who is disadvantaged? Is this a strength-based approach or an assimilationist approach?

I can hear some saying: "What is the way forward then? What do we do now?"

I would say simply stop, listen, think and follow your Local Peoples' leadership. Walk behind not in front, and make room for Aboriginal voices.

Personally, I was lucky to participate in the Study Tour to Reggio Emilia in 2018, to listen and learn how the historical and ongoing success of the educational project in Reggio Emilia is in part because it was founded on a rights platform.

It is timely that Australian teachers and educators listen to the global call for respectful relationships and consider the fact that First Nation Peoples do not enjoy the same rights as others. It is time for everyone to face up to the fact that what has been delivered in educational settings needs rethinking, change and new ways of teaching that truly respects and represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, priorities and knowledges if outcomes are to be improved.

I believe Australian early childhood needs a revolution to challenge the status quo and make way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to design, determine and implement early education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children themselves.

Deb Mann is a Wakka Wakka woman, daughter, mother grandmother, sister, aunt, union member and early childhood educator who has lived and worked on Gadigal land for over 40 years. Deb advocates for local solutions that are designed and driven by Traditional Custodians and Knowledge Holders as a way to self-determination.

"I would say simply stop, listen, think and follow your Local Peoples' leadership. Walk behind not in front, and make room for Aboriginal voices."

Free PD on demand: Online workshop

Completing Deb Mann and Wendy Jopson's online workshop covering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, culture and early childhood education will contribute two hours of NESA Registered PD addressing 1.4.2 and 2.4.2 from the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers towards maintaining Proficient Teacher Accreditation in NSW. See: TheIEUZone.org.au

Opinion

Representation really matters



Lisa Bryant, early childhood commentator and journalist, writes about what we learn looking back at the management of the COVID pandemic in the early childhood sector. We need vigilance, she says, and we need to make our voices strongly heard through our union.

The lessons we need to take from lockdowns across Australia are multiple. By the time you read this NSW and Queensland may well be in another lockdown. Or it may not be far off. Or we may be safe. Regardless, there are things we need to learn.

When Melbourne went into Stage 3 lockdown, it once again exposed that despite clearly being an essential service, there was no way the education and care system could survive without special support.

But unlike the earlier Australian-wide lockdown, early childhood teachers (and educators) were not allowed for in that special support. The first lockdown brought JobKeeper, a payment that, although made to the employer, had to be passed on in full to staff.

This rescue package was different. The Transitional Grants and the Additional Viability Supplementary Payments that services received went directly to services – the employers.

So what happened?

Good employers, like always, did their best to hang on to all their staff and to ensure their staff took the least financial hit possible.

Others did not.

Despite the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, and the Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, promising the package would work for services, parents and teachers and educators, it clearly didn't. Yes, services have had to sign a guarantee that they would continue the employment of their employees. So, what's the issue? The employees had to be kept on, right? Yes, the agreement was clear, employees had to be kept on and

employers had to offer them more than one shift over the shutdown period. In other words an early childhood teacher could be offered just two shifts in a two month period and that counts as having their employment continued!

The fact is that this government will never view teachers as important as businesses. Sam Page, the CEO of Early Childhood Australia, put it this way: "Early childhood teachers are using leave and losing income because the Federal Government cut a deal with business operators to remove JobKeeper and reinstate childcare fees."

"We need to learn that who represents early childhood teachers really matters."

Unions are crucial – always

We need to relearn the lesson and spread the word that our union is crucial. In lockdown early childhood education and care unions are not just protecting and fighting for their members' jobs, they are also the ones clarifying the complex funding packages and the complex eligibility to work and access early education and care during the pandemic. They are the ones that members go to when their shifts are halved, when they are told to present to work rather than work at home even when no children are present, or when they are forced to take every bit of long service leave they have before they can get usual pay.

And we need to relearn the message that unions are only as strong as their membership. If you work with people who aren't members of the union, get

them to join. Now is the time we need a strong advocacy voice.

We also need to learn the importance of a good workplace agreement. Things might be fine and dandy in your workplace now but when the fear of a pandemic hits service owners and management committees anything can happen.

We need to learn that who represents early childhood teachers really matters.

The day after the Victorian package was announced, despite the fact that it was being widely condemned – by unions, the ACTU, ECA, commentators like me, and loads of Victorian teachers – the Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, made three 'thank you' tweets. He thanked the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA – the lobby group for large education and care providers such as G8), the Australian Childcare Alliance (lobby group for small for-profit providers) and Goodstart (largest not-for-profit provider). He linked to these organisations' media releases saying what a great package it was. Goodstart appear to be doing the right thing by their employees. Others are not.

And this is what happens when you have a government that talks to providers only. The Minister used the words "the sector" when he announced his new package repeatedly. He spoke about how much consultation he had had with the sector.

The sector is not just providers, also known as business. The sector consists of providers, families, children and teachers and educators.

And what is good for providers is sometimes a long way away from what is good for the teachers that enable the providers to make their money.

Let's never forget this lesson.

Call for comment: Share your views on early childhood funding throughout this pandemic, write to bedrock@ieu.asn.au



WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

Why laughter helps learning

Teaching is serious business, but teachers don't always have to be serious to excel. IEU journalist Emily Campbell recaps the key findings of a recent study into the use of humour in classrooms.

A room full of laughing children might appear chaotic, but it's indicative of a skilled teacher who can captivate children with creative content and help their young minds absorb information.

Educational research recognises that humour is one of the most desirable traits in teachers, given the positive effects it has on physiology, psycho-emotional states and human relationships.

When teachers utilise humour effectively and appropriately, it can improve communication, strengthen relationships between teachers and students and result in improved educational outcomes.

According to a recent literature review and study performed by Chaniotakis and Papazoglou (2019) there is a consensus among researchers that humour is a complex term that is difficult to define, given its subjectivity. It also involves moral dimensions.

Despite this complexity, researchers have made many attempts to categorise and define different forms and types of humour.

Social dimensions

Contemporary research seeks to explore the social and emotional functions of humour, rather than its development.

As a child's vocabulary and abstract thinking develop, experiences of humour are enhanced and children progress from performing humorous physical actions to using their words and language to convey humour.

Linguistic development influences a child's sense of humour, which becomes more social as young children experiment with new words and develop a sense of self.

Research generally indicates factors such as age and gender play a part in influencing a person's sense of humour, with surveys confirming children laugh more frequently than adults and for very different reasons.

Considering the ability to distinguish and produce verbal humour increases with age, it is somewhat paradoxical that adults, who have improved their sense of humour with age, tend to laugh much less than children.

Some of the main forms of humour used by children in the age bracket of two to seven years include puns, funny songs and lyrics. Physical gestures such as awkward body postures or exaggerated poses and paradoxology are highly amusing to children this age.

Benefits for all

There are numerous benefits associated with using humour in a classroom context, including bringing teachers and children closer and improving student learning outcomes.

Research findings show that when teachers use positive humour, children are better motivated, more cheerful, less anxious and demonstrate greater engagement and participation with course content and subject matter.

Rapport between teachers and children can improve when humour is used, as it creates a pleasant atmosphere and encourages positive feelings about teaching and learning.

In many instances, including humour during teaching is shown to lead to greater information recall and retention in some children, especially those who have low motivation levels and struggle to pay attention.

Some teachers have even agreed that humour can be an effective classroom management tool when used properly, helping to capture students' attention and encourage participation in class.

Teachers reportedly use humour for a variety of reasons, including as a way to relax and maintain an interest in their work. However, some teachers have also reported being reluctant to use humour in the classroom and actively discourage it.

Bergen's (1992) research explored why some teachers are opposed to using humour. Some believe it will undermine their authority and lead to students not taking their education seriously. Others say they believe it to be a waste of time when there is so much curriculum content to get through.

A few cited they were apprehensive about including humour when teaching because they were not trained in how to use it appropriately or considered themselves to be lacking a decent sense of humour.

Researchers note it is important to distinguish between instances of positive and negative humour. Positive humour contributes to a productive atmosphere and improved relationships, while negative humour intends to embarrass, ridicule, offend or provoke anger or sadness, and has the opposite effect.

Positive influence

Researchers observed 124 hours of teaching across 105 classes in Greece, noting the frequency and type of humorous instances that occurred. The classes observed



“Research shows that when teachers use positive humour, students are better motivated, more cheerful, less anxious and demonstrate greater engagement and participation.”

were an assortment of primary year level groups and subjects, with male and female teachers in different age brackets.

Humorous instances averaged two per hour and jokes produced by teachers happened twice as frequently as those made by students, with half of the humour relevant to course content.

Humorous instances produced by both teachers and students were overwhelmingly positive (91 per cent) with fewer instances of negative humour occurring (9 per cent).

There was no direct correlation found between the amount of humour and the class and grade, nor was there any relationship between the age or gender of the teacher and frequency or type of humour produced.

Finding a balance

During the study by Chaniotakis and Papazoglou, the use of humour by teachers varied; some did not use humour at all, others used it on occasion and a handful of teachers deployed it many times during a teaching hour.

It is very difficult to determine the exact or ideal amount of humour that should be used in a classroom, given there are so many factors at play.

A classroom with a total lack of humour may contribute to an atmosphere considered boring, rigid and less engaging than a class whose teacher successfully integrates amusement into their lessons.

However, if teachers use too much humour, children may focus on the jokes more than the lesson content and not take their work or their teacher's authority seriously.

When used cleverly and appropriately, humour can be a great tool for captivating students' attention, reducing anxiety, ensuring lesson content is interesting and creating a happy and healthy learning atmosphere.

Free PD on demand: Dr Georgie Fleming's online workshop

Dr Fleming's workshop, *Behaviour Management Strategies for Early Childhood Settings*, offers an in-depth understanding of the science underlying different developmental pathways to disruptive behaviour problems, as well as practical behaviour management strategies, complete with examples drawn from real life. Completing this session will contribute two hours of NESA Registered PD addressing 6.2.2; 4.3.2; from the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers towards maintaining Proficient Teacher Accreditation in NSW. See: TheIEUZone.org.au

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How to treat troubled children

Every early childhood teacher knows a child who is hard work. Dr Georgie Fleming's research focuses on them, and here she offers a few practical management strategies – and hope.

Whenever I run a workshop for early childhood teachers, I describe the kind of child who is the focus of my psychological research and clinical practice. I give examples such as “the child who always says ‘no’ or asks ‘why?’ when you give an instruction” or “the child who annoys other people on purpose”. I describe a child who is quick to anger, starts fights, breaks things. The liar and the thief. The rule breaker.

During this introduction, I invariably notice my audience begin stealing glances with their colleagues. They start mouthing names to one another and get fervent nods in return. When I ask if anyone has worked with children like that, the chorus of affirmations is resounding. This lets me know I’m in the right place. If understanding and managing this kind of child were easy, there wouldn’t be a need for a workshop.

Here’s the thing: anyone who works with children knows this child. The easiest way to describe them? They are hard work.

In clinical psychology research, we describe the difficult children as having disruptive behaviour problems. I am working to understand and help this group of children and the people around them. Which begs the question: what’s the key to working effectively with hard children?

Recognise complexity

The first key to working with children with disruptive behaviour problems is to recognise that not all disruptive children are created equal. Although professionals

use labels such as “oppositional defiant disorder” and “attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder”, it is unhelpful, not to mention unscientific, to assume that two children with a single label experience the same difficulties for the same reasons. In fact, we know that children with disruptive behaviour problems are a mixed bag.

A considerable portion of my research is dedicated to understanding how some disruptive children differ from others. Scientists have tried various methods of dividing a group of disruptive children into smaller, more homogenous subgroups. This is essentially taking the mixed bag and separating it into smaller bags filled with the same kind of stuff.

I’m most interested in a subgroup of disruptive children who not only show the defiance and rule breaking typical of disruptive behaviour problems, but who also have limitations in their ability to experience “moral emotions”.

Moral emotions are the feelings we typically experience as accompanying our conscience. Guilt – that aversive feeling we get when we break a rule or hurt someone – is a moral emotion. Empathy is another – recognising and taking on the feelings of someone else. We start seeing evidence of moral emotions early in child development, often as young as two years. These emotions are important because they motivate moral behaviour. They function as an internal ‘stop gap’ against breaking rules and can motivate reparative behaviours when rules get broken.

The moral emotions of many disruptive children are fully intact. In response to their angry outbursts or aggressive behaviour, they often feel shame and remorse. They can be kind and caring to others. However, the development of moral emotions can sometimes go awry. When disruptive behaviour co-occurs with underdeveloped moral emotions,

the disruptive behaviour problems are often more severe and longer lasting than for other children. This makes sense: if I don't feel guilty after punching you and I don't empathise with your distress, I'm unlikely to care about doing it again.

The upshot is that this subgroup of disruptive children is at the greatest risk of long term problems and thus is most in need of intervention. However, some research shows

that children with disruptive behaviour and underdeveloped moral emotions gain significantly less benefit from interventions than others. We think this is because interventions don't usually address the unique characteristics of this subgroup.

Tailor your solutions

We need to tailor our behaviour management approaches to the individual characteristics of children whose moral emotions are underdeveloped. Children with disruptive behaviour problems have different difficulties for different reasons, so it makes sense that we need to support them

in different ways. We need a mixed bag of strategies.

The team at the UNSW Parent-Child Research Clinic developed and tested an intervention aimed to help parents and early childhood teachers manage the disruptive behaviour of children with underdeveloped moral emotions.

Here are my top three tips

Use reward-focused behaviour management strategies rather than consequence-focused strategies. Research shows that children with underdeveloped moral emotions don't learn from consequences as well as typical children. On the flip side, they are very motivated by rewards. This may mean prioritising strategies such as token economy systems over the "thinking chair" or removing privileges. (In a token economy system, children earn tokens for doing specific behaviours such as complying or sharing and can trade their tokens for personalised rewards such as making slime or going out first to play.)

As difficult as these children can be to like sometimes, try to show them warmth and affection. The science is fairly clear that warm and affectionate caregiving is protective for children with underdeveloped moral emotions: when they experience warm and affectionate caregiving, they are less likely to develop severe and long lasting disruptive behaviour problems.

Increase the amount of feelings talk. Some theories suggest that moral emotion development goes awry because some children pay less attention to others'

feelings and, even when they do, are less able to identify the feeling. Prompt children to pay attention to others' feelings and help them identify the facial and bodily expressions that correspond with sadness and fear. Reward children for doing this 'emotion work', especially if they do something kind in response to others' distress.

Consistency is key. These practical strategies are the tip of the iceberg for tailoring behaviour management approaches. However, regardless of your approach, there is one thing that will increase the likelihood of success: consistency – over time, among people, and between settings.

Holistic approach

Working on school grounds, our research is trying to provide tailored behaviour management support for disruptive children that is used every day by parents and teachers, both at home and at preschool.

We anticipate that this holistic approach will result in improvements in child behaviour that occur more rapidly and are longer lasting than traditional avenues of support. Not only that, we expect to see improvement in family and school outcomes, too.

We intend for this holistic approach to become the standard model of care for children with disruptive behaviour problems. Ultimately, we hope the children who are hard work become much, much easier.

Dr Georgie Fleming is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of NSW. She completed her combined PhD/Master of Psychology (Clinical) at UNSW, and she is a registered psychologist. Georgie's research is concerned with treatment for young children with clinically significant conduct problems. She is also interested in the role of callous-unemotional traits in the development of conduct problems, and exploring how callous-unemotional traits impact the efficacy of treatment for childhood conduct problems.



SCREEN TEST

Evidence is mounting that digital devices can inhibit language development in young children. But teachers can help guide positive engagement with technology, writes journalist Jessica Willis.

Teachers in early childhood settings widely acknowledge that the number of children needing help with speech and language is growing, and many believe this is due to excessive 'screen time' from a young age.

Smart devices have become an integral aspect of life and communication for most of the world and, from an early age, children are exposed to screens via phones, tablets, computers and televisions.

As such, early childhood teachers are well placed to work in partnership with families to help make decisions around smart devices and cognitive development that are in the best interests of children.

This is why qualified teachers are essential to early childhood education – they are experts at ensuring young children are supported in their development while introducing them to tools and technologies that will assist them in their lifelong learning.

Time takes a toll

In a national survey, 80 per cent of parents indicated they were worried their children spend too much time on screens (Huber, 2019).

This may reflect a fear that screen time is displacing other aspects of childhood, such as social interactions with other children and nature play, which are critical to cognitive development.

This is referred to as Displacement Theory and has been a major focus of research since the introduction of television sets into households during the 20th century (Huber, 2019). While there are criticisms of this theory, research over the years has found:

- Higher levels of screen time at 24 and 36 months are significantly associated with poorer performance in developmental tests at 36 and 60 months (Madigan et al., 2019).
- Children exposed to screens in the morning before school are three times more likely to develop primary language disorders. When combined with rarely or never discussing screen content with parents, they were six times more likely to have language problems (Collet et al., 2018).
- Among children aged eight to 16 months, each hour per day of viewing DVDs/videos was



associated with a 16.99-point decrease in an index of development known as the Communicative Development Inventory (Zimmerman, Christakis and Meltzoff, 2007).

Viewing versus engagement

A caveat in some of the critical analysis of the literature suggests that much of the evidence for negative impacts is still derived from studies of TV viewing, rather than engagement with smart devices.

Children under three learn better from live interactions than devices so they have little to gain from screens in the absence of a parent, peer or teacher (Huber, 2019).

“Not all screen time is detrimental to learning – the right combination of content, time and engagement can have positive effects on speech-language development.”

Television viewing was found to reduce the quality and quantity of children's play and child-parent interactions. It is associated with hyperactive behaviours, language delay, and lower executive functions, at least in the short term (Kostyrka-Allchorne, Cooper and Simpson, 2017).

Even if it is on only in the background, TV can make parents less responsive to children, and the same is true of digital devices.

It is important to be mindful of when and how these limited interactions directly contribute to language learning and skills.

Content and strategy counts

Many educational experts agree that not all screen time is detrimental to learning. The right combination of content, time and engagement can have positive effects on speech-language development. And with the right pedagogical strategy, smart devices such as tablets have a place within the early years' classroom.

Apps can provide fast feedback and many ways to learn and communicate with the world (Neumann, Merchant and Burnett, 2018).

While the benefits of using tablets for language development need more research, they have been found to facilitate positive social interactions; improve the foundations of word writing and story comprehension skills; and foster vocabulary acquisition and foundations of print knowledge (Neumann and Neumann, 2015).

Young children like using tablets because they are easy to use, touch-based, mobile, have engaging modalities and many different functions for example games, books, videos (Neumann and Neumann, 2015). However, there are three key factors to consider when using tablets and apps for language development:

App quality. Is it age-appropriate, interactive and have intuitive features such as tap, swipe and trace? Does it have clear instructions? Is it overwhelming or distracting? Is it culturally sensitive? Does it demonstrate positive social norms? (Neumann and Neumann, 2015)

Engagement quality. Is there good scaffolding by teachers or parents? Is there cognitive support? (for example, asking questions, discussing themes, pointing out and discussing words). Is there encouragement and technical support? (Neumann and Neumann, 2015)

Time quality. Time on devices should not be one size fits all, but depend on the child's sociocultural, familial and behavioural context (Neumann and Neumann, 2015).

If screen time is strategically implemented in both home and classroom, smart devices can be beneficial to speech and language development and should be further explored by researchers as device uptake increases.

Early childhood education employers should ensure teachers have access to professional development and training in the best way to embed new technologies into early childhood education. When teachers are supported in their profession, it benefits every young child's education and learning.

Tips for teachers

Neumann and Neumann (2015) offer a few ideas for integrating technology in learning:

- Introduce the target literacy skill using non-digital resources and activities; for example, letter

knowledge using letter magnets.

- Model and explain the literacy content of an app, emphasising the link to the target literacy skill.
- Actively guide students through the app's functions, referencing the target literacy skill.
- Encourage students to practise the skill with the app.
- Share the activity with parents, explaining why and how to use the app and the target literacy skill.

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It all STEMs from early childhood



Teaching science, technology, engineering and maths in early childhood is one challenge. Then there are gender issues. Professor Marilyn Flee tells journalist Monica Crouch how she's solving both with one unique concept.

When Marilyn Flee – Professor (Research) Early Childhood at Monash University – started school, she couldn't speak English. "I come from a migrant family and we had no children's books in the house," she said. She struggled to learn to read, and to read as fast as her peers. She found herself drawn to science text, as it was shorter and she could catch the meaning faster. Consequently, "my personal experience of STEM was a great joy, while reading was sheer pain".

No one is more aware than Professor Flee (pictured, left) that too few women pursue careers in science, technology, engineering or mathematics – and that this issue reaches right back into their early childhoods. "A love of STEM is important, but early childhood teachers have had the wrong tools for years," she said. "I wanted to change this so that teachers could draw on a model they can enjoy, that's relevant, and so they can experience the joy of STEM with their children."

Professor Flee is a big fan of early childhood teachers. "I wanted to change the discourse of blaming early childhood educators for not teaching enough STEM," she said. And she's doing this through an Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowship – the first ever awarded for early childhood research.

By following infants as they become toddlers and preschoolers and on into school, Professor Flee hopes to find out how their interest in STEM changes over time, and to measure the impact of her unique PlayWorld concept. And she is keeping a close eye on the girls.

Creating a PlayWorld

The model involves five characteristics: choosing a story; developing an imaginary situation; entering and exiting the PlayWorld; a problem arises; and the role of the teacher in introducing STEM concepts.

Professor Flee has worked with groups using all kinds of stories, from *Rosie's Walk* to *Alice in Wonderland*, *Charlotte's Web* and *The Secret Garden*. For a group working with *Alice in Wonderland*, the first challenge was to create a "rabbit hole" to go down.

The children built a tall tower with blocks, then discovered they couldn't climb into it. This presented their first engineering challenge: create a workable means of entering their PlayWorld. The students came up with a hoop and a tunnel to simulate the idea of a rabbit hole. And they learned concepts of vertical and horizontal in the process.

Once they'd entered their 'Wonderland', the teachers and children assumed characters, and were free to create more characters so everyone had a role. Professor Flee noticed an interesting effect here. "The relationship between the teacher and the children changes," she said.

"The teacher now plays a role, so there is a change in the way the children interact with the teacher. And when there are two teachers, together they can create a lot of excitement and drama."

In this new imaginary world, the STEM possibilities are endless. For example, going down the rabbit hole requires "imagining yourself shrinking", which introduces concepts of the microscopic.



“It’s not as traditional as the block corner, the construction area or the science table activities – and we’re finding that the girls are just as engaged as the boys.”

So ‘Wonderland’ becomes ‘Microbeland’. “These are big concepts for young children,” Professor Fleer said. “And very, very relevant in COVID-19 times.”

Back in the real world

When emerging from the PlayWorld, the teachers and children bring the scientific concepts with them. “They can start to do little experiments,” Professor Fleer said. “Like going out and collecting some pond water and putting it under the microscope. So they’re starting to consider things you can’t see with the naked eye by using some sort of technology.”

Inspired by Microbeland, one class used an iPad to take time lapse photography of bread going mouldy. “They could see how it changed over time,” Professor Fleer said. “Then they can talk about good microbes and dangerous microbes. It means that rather than seeing it all as magic, the children are exploring sophisticated scientific concepts.”

Girls take their place

Professor Fleer has also noticed a curious difference about the way girls and boys interact in the PlayWorlds. In free play situations, the two tend to separate, and boys are often more adept at monopolising resources. “Boys just assume they have the right to take the blocks,” Professor Fleer said. She has also noticed a “wall of boys” forming around anything science oriented, and the girls are inclined to drift away.

But this is all transformed in the PlayWorld. “It’s not as traditional as the block corner, the construction area or the science table activities,” Professor Fleer said. “Suddenly all those spaces are a bit mixed up, and we’re finding that the girls are just as engaged as the boys. Both girls and

boys are imagining the situation, so while the blocks may have afforded a particular way of interacting before, now they don’t – they’re resources to make the rabbit hole.” What she notices is that boys and girls become much better at working together.

The PlayWorlds afford teachers a way of seeing if the children adopt a gendered way of playing that they may not spot during free play. “In a *Robin Hood* PlayWorld, if the boys say, ‘oh, Maid Marian can’t do that, she can’t be an engineer’ the teachers can say ‘of course she can, Maid Marian’s our lead engineer, today she’s going to take you through the castle and we’re going to look at simple drawbridges’. Like a spot fire, the teachers can put it out as soon as it starts.”

So the PlayWorlds can address social issues along with STEM concepts. “They can give a very strong agentic role to girls. And similarly, if the boys are exhibiting an inability to be nurturing, for instance, then they can be assigned the caring Friar Tuck role and look after everyone.”

It’s a new world, and everyone wins.

Professor Fleer invites teachers to take part in free PD (via Zoom) on how to set up a Conceptual PlayWorld in your centre.

Visit monash.edu/conceptual-playworld/early-childhood-educators

or email conceptualplaylab@monash.edu

Professor Fleer and her team will tailor the session for you – just select a few of your favourite books so the workshop reflects the stories your children love.

Find out more: monash.edu/conceptual-playworld



GLOBAL PANDEMIC

COVID-19's impact on early childhood education

IEU Organiser Lisa James was invited to join a webinar hosted by Education International, "Assessing and responding to the impact of COVID-19 on early childhood education". She shares how teachers and unions around the world have risen to the challenge.

On 28 May this year, 459 participants from 50 countries took part in a webinar facilitated by Education International (EI) to enable education unions to discuss how early learning around the world has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and to explore options regarding the reopening of early childhood education services.

EI President Susan Hopgood said more than 1.5 billion students and 63 million teachers have been affected worldwide, with early childhood education services and schools closed in many countries, causing a significant transition to distance learning.

Unfortunately, this disadvantaged children without reliable access to the internet or devices and those with additional learning needs.

Australia

In Australia, the sector stayed open throughout the pandemic (including during periods of lockdown) and both government policy and rhetoric encouraged children's attendance to support essential workers, allow parents to keep working, and to maintain sector viability.

With women comprising more than 96 per cent of the sector's workforce and many earning some \$30,000 a year less than teachers in primary schools, it is concerning that private

providers and some not for profits stood down teachers and educators, or reduced their hours of work in response to falling attendance.

NSW Early Learning Centres: The Federal Government's Child Care Relief Package included a subsidy of 50 per cent of daily fees up to \$60 a day on condition that childcare fees were waived for all families. CCS centres demonstrating decreased turnover could also access the JobKeeper subsidy to assist in retaining employees.

This enabled employers to reduce the hours of work and direct employees receiving the subsidy to take their accrued annual leave, providing they retained a balance of two weeks. Some teachers reported having their hours reduced from full time to as few as eight hours per week, with others stating their employer had reduced their hours to equate to the \$1500 per fortnight JobKeeper payment.

Free long daycare led to a resurgence in attendance concerns for vulnerable employees and the impossibility of social distancing, shortages in cleaning supplies and a lack of clear procedures for dealing with several families arriving to collect children at the same time. It was left to directors and providers to sort out these details in individual centres.

NSW Preschools: The NSW Government provided additional funding for preschools and announced attendance at preschool would be free to parents from Term 2 until the end of Term 4, prompting an increase in new enrolments and days of attendance for previously enrolled children.

Queensland and Northern Territory Kindergartens: Senior Industrial Officer John Spriggs reports that members were concerned about their personal safety, with social distancing impossible to enforce; added to this, some early childhood education employees are in a high risk category. In the initial stages of the crisis the IEU advised members of employer obligations to provide a safe working environment. The Queensland Government initially said that where a kindergarten was required to close due to the virus, funding would be maintained to assist in retaining employees. It subsequently provided a funding subsidy, so children could attend a community kindergarten at no cost for Term 2. This funding greatly benefited all kindergartens, their staff and the children they teach.

New Zealand

The sector closed during lockdown and introduced remote learning, providing children with resource packs including books and other educational materials. It reopened in stages and regulations were changed to increase the amount of space required per child, to limit access to some resources, and adults were required to physical distance.

The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) provided online professional development and the union grew its membership in corporate for profit services. NZEI secured a salary increase of up to 9.6 per cent for early childhood teachers from July this year as a first step towards pay parity. More than 70 per cent of children had returned to the sector at time of the webinar.



Canada

In most provinces, the early childhood education and care sector was closed. The Standard Economic Health and Safety at Work Commission recommended physical distancing, enhanced hygiene practices and masks for teachers and educators. In provinces where the sector had reopened, there were concerns over lack of personal protection equipment for teachers.

At the time of the webinar, centres were operating with a reduced number of employees and teachers and educators were experiencing financial difficulty as a result.

Denmark

Early childhood centres were closed for several weeks. Government and the union discussed reopening centres safely after ongoing advocacy from the union. Upon reopening, centres employed additional staff, reduced group sizes, introduced restrictions regarding parents entering the centre, and enhanced hygiene measures, including additional cleaning and hand washing. Positive outcomes included more employees dedicated to working with disadvantaged and vulnerable children.

Chile

Infection rates were high as the Chilean Government failed to heed World Health Organization guidelines. The early childhood education and care sector is highly privatised, leading to inequity of access, particularly for disadvantaged families. The government imposed eLearning on all sectors of education, which disproportionately affected children living in poverty without reliable access to the internet.

More countries

In Italy, Kosovo, Bahrain, Kurdistan, Benin, Gambia and Nigeria concerns included lack of access to devices and the internet, and teachers experiencing financial hardship as their workplaces closed for an extended period with limited or no government support available.

“We continue to engage with our governments to make sure the interests of our members and children are taken into account when they come out with policies on COVID-19.”

On reflection

Did the Australian Government do enough early enough? Did it provide adequate guidance to safeguard the health and safety of children, teachers and educators, particularly those with pre-existing conditions? Did it provide cleaning materials such as soap, hand sanitiser and disinfectant? Or was it just really fortunate that Australia's geographical isolation and small population prevented an uncontrolled spread of the virus?

Australia will be dealing with the coronavirus fallout for a long time to come. Will the preschool sector remain viable when fee relief finishes at the end of Term 4? According to the Mitchell Institute, about 1.6 million

Australians lost their jobs in the first week of April. The number of children in families experiencing employment stress has risen dramatically. Will families with reduced work hours require the same number of early childhood education and care hours as the economy recovers? Can these families still afford to pay fees? What will happen in 2021 when Activity Test requirements for early learning centres are reinstated?

Unions play a crucial role in assisting members to navigate this unprecedented situation. “The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious negative impact on countries, communities, and education systems around the world and the ECE sector,” EI President Susan Hopgood said.

“Education International and all our member organisations, the unions and educators, have and continue to respond to this challenge.

“We continue to engage with our governments, with the authorities, to make sure the interests of our members and children are taken into account when they come out with policies on COVID-19. We should continue to speak up, to push our governments, to push the United Nations and intergovernmental organisations and education institutions to ensure the safety, health, and wellbeing of children and early childhood personnel and for a full recovery of this important sector when the crisis is over.”

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Download the Education International webinar report: bit.ly/2EB7fwy

NSW: Maintaining teacher accreditation

Teacher accreditation is a structure through which teachers meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards). Teacher accreditation ensures the integrity and accountability of the teaching profession in NSW.

Teachers maintain their accreditation by continually developing their knowledge and practice against the Standards. Reflecting critically on teaching practice informs ongoing professional development that supports teachers' practice.

In July 2021 many NSW early childhood teachers are due to finalise their first maintenance of accreditation period. This article looks at how they can ensure they are ready to finalise their maintenance by their due date.

Professional development

Professional development (PD) helps teachers enhance their practice to improve the learning outcomes of children. It provides opportunities to extend teachers' learning and supports professional growth in line with the Standards.

Accredited teachers must complete 100 hours of professional development (PD) to meet requirements in each maintenance period.

As part of their PD requirements, most early childhood teachers accredited at Proficient Teacher, who are due to finalise in July 2021, need to complete 20 hours of NESA Registered PD in their first maintenance period. (Note: Teachers accredited at Proficient Teacher after July 2018 are required to complete 50 hours of NESA Registered PD as part of their 100 hours of PD.)

There are several types of PD:

NESA Registered PD is designed and delivered by an endorsed provider.

Teacher Identified PD is any professional learning activity that enhances and strengthens a teacher's practice and aligns to the Standards. This includes courses, networking, workshops, professional reflections on teaching practice and attending conferences.

Further Study as PD must be at diploma level or above.

Teachers manage PD in their NESA online account by:

- checking their PD Progress Report to track their PD hours
- evaluating NESA Registered PD
- logging Teacher Identified PD
- applying for any Further Study as PD.

Keeping details updated

Changes to teachers' circumstances may have a bearing on accreditation timeframes.

Teachers can update their details (address, employment and contact details), add their Working With Children

Check clearance and pay their annual fee in their NESA online account (eTAMS).

They can also apply for any future leave (for 6 months or longer) in their NESA online account or apply for past leave by completing the form on the NESA website. A Leave of Absence puts a teacher's accreditation on hold for periods they are not teaching.

If you have worked part-time or casual at any time during your maintenance period, you can request to change your maintenance period to seven years by sending evidence of your employment status to NESA. Evidence can include an employment contract, pay slip or letter from your employer.

Finalising maintenance

Teachers can finalise in the final three months of their maintenance period. Once they have completed all requirements, including their PD, they:

- log in to their NESA online account
- ensure their employment details are correct
- declare they have met their maintenance requirements and submit.

Once submitted, a nominated person will attest whether the teacher has continued to maintain their practice against the Standards. Their Teacher Accreditation Authority will then make the accreditation decision.

eTAMS Help has useful resources on completing online accreditation tasks. This includes instructions on evaluating and logging PD, updating employment details and submitting maintenance of accreditation.

Visit educationstandards.nsw.gov.au for more information on teacher accreditation.

Get in touch with NESA on 1300 739 338 or email ptenquiry@nesa.nsw.edu.au

Working towards Proficient Teacher accreditation?

Provisionally accredited teachers achieve Proficient Teacher accreditation with the support of a supervisor. The Proficient Teacher Accreditation Policy and NESA's Proficient Teacher web pages explain the processes for achieving accreditation.

Visit educationstandards.nsw.gov.au for more information.



Merise Bickley

NESA - Head, Early Childhood Teaching Standards and Accreditation, Accredited Teacher, Proficient

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED FAQ

Lisa James is an organiser for the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch. Danielle Wilson is an industrial officer for IEUA-QNT. They answer your industrial and legal questions as they relate to state laws and regulations.

Dear Danielle

I have had an extended absence from my work as an early childhood education assistant since 2019 due to a chronic medical condition. I have kept our centre well informed of how I am tracking and they have been getting regular medical updates each time I have a medical review.

I am now well again, have a fitness certificate and able to resume duty, but my centre is claiming they have received advice that they can't return me until I undergo a medical assessment with a doctor of their choosing. Can they do this?

Julie



Danielle Wilson
IEUA-QNT

Dear Julie

We see this more and more where employers try to force an employee to attend a medical assessment. We often have employers telling us they are obligated to do this so that they can

discharge their duty of care to the person and to others in the workplace.

When an employee is absent on medical grounds, the employer can require medical certification to authorise the absence. Where this absence is extended for a longer period, for the purposes of planning, the employer can ask the employee for information about the prognosis of their condition.

However, an employer cannot direct an employee to a medical assessment and claim that it is reasonable for them to do so, unless they can show two things: that they have a reasonable suspicion the employee is not fit for duty; and that they have not received any information to satisfy them that the employee is fit for duty.

It is our view that before making any attempt to direct an employee to a medical assessment, the employer should in the first instance seek the information it wants from the employee.

There is no one more qualified to offer opinion on your fitness for duty than your ongoing treating medical practitioner and they can provide all the necessary information to satisfy any duty of care or workplace health and safety obligation the employer may have. This information does not need to disclose personal information about your condition, but it should include information about your capacity to undertake your usual duties and outline any adjustments that might be needed to ensure you can return to work safely and continue to work safely. Your employer should accept this advice at face value.

Under anti-discrimination legislation, employers are obliged to accommodate reasonable adjustments for employees who need them at work for medical reasons.

If your employer has been provided with the necessary information to permit you to return to work and they still refuse, or if they refuse to make the necessary reasonable adjustments, please contact our union office for further advice and assistance.

Danielle

Dear Lisa

I am retiring after 35 years of teaching. I want to be available to do casual work at my current preschool but this is likely to be not as a teacher as we have more than we need on most days. I might also do casual work elsewhere.

Is it possible to be engaged as a 'Diploma' employee even though I am actually a teacher? Is this always the case or are there different rules around this in different circumstances?

If I am engaged as a Diploma employee how will this affect my responsibilities/daily tasks? Should I program and/or write observations of children's learning?

Do I need to maintain my accreditation if I am only working as a casual? Is there anything else to consider?

Catherine

you are employed as an educator instead of a teacher.

However, some areas are not clear cut. Even if you are following the Preschool's Diploma job description there are certain responsibilities that you will naturally use your teaching qualifications to fulfill. The knowledge you acquired as a teacher would be utilised if you were to program activities for a group of children, record observations of children and analyse their learning within the context of the Early Years Learning Framework outcomes and developmental theorists, for example.

Would you do this differently given your qualifications and years of experience if you were employed as a 'Diploma' as opposed to a teacher or would your strong knowledge of child development influence your interpretations and planning? I suspect the latter and encourage you to consider whether agreeing to be paid a lower rate as a Diploma qualified educator is the best outcome after all.

In addition, centres in NSW need one teacher for 25-39 places, two teachers for 40-59 places, three teachers for 60-79 and four teachers in centres with 80 places or more. If a teacher is absent on that day, you can only be counted a teacher if you have been employed (and are paid) as a teacher on those days.

If you are not working as a teacher you could put your accreditation on hold with NESA for up to five years, but it is probably best not to do this because whilst your accreditation is on hold you cannot legally be employed as a teacher, effectively preventing you from casual work as a qualified teacher.

As you can maintain your accreditation if you are employed as a casual teacher during your maintenance period, I recommend you advise NESA that you are working casually so your maintenance period is increased from five to seven years.

Lisa



Lisa James
IEUA NSW/ACT Branch

Dear Catherine

Congratulations on 35 years in the early childhood sector.

If you apply for a job specifically as a 'Diploma' then you can be engaged as such. If this is the case, you should only perform duties at that level/job description, and you cannot be counted towards the mandatory number of teachers required at the centre when

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