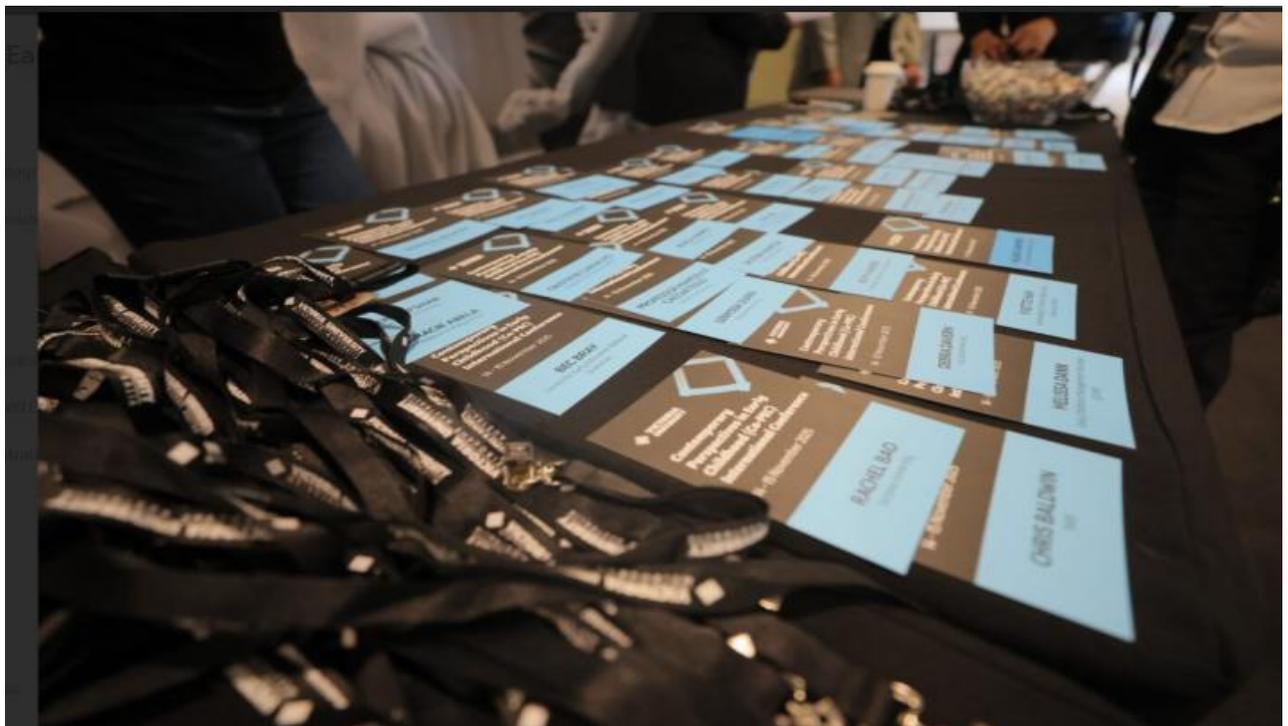




JOURNAL OF EARLY YEARS INSIGHTS (JoEYI), 1 (2), 2025



14 and 15 November 2025
Victoria University, Melbourne



Journal of Early Years Insights (JoEYI)
Volume 1, Issue 2 (2025), Co-PEC International Conference 2025 Abstracts
<https://joeyi.vu.edu.au/index.php/joeyi>

Forwarding **By Professor Mary-Rose McLaren**

This issue of JoEYI brings together some of the best thinking in the Early Childhood sector. The abstracts printed here are from Victoria University's first international conference on Contemporary Perspectives in Early Childhood (CoPEC), held at the Foostcray Park campus of VU in November, 2025. This conference brought together scholars, educators and teachers in Early Childhood settings, from around Australia as well as from Malaysia, China, Mongolia, Indonesia, Singapore and Sweden. While children are the centre of practice in each of these countries, the image of the child, and ways of engaging with children, differ considerably. By sharing stories, talking, hearing new and different ideas, and connecting with different types of evidence we enrich our own understanding as well as what we have to offer to the sector, to families and to children.

The conference had three very different keynotes, representing different ways of bringing best practice understandings to the care and education of young children. Professor Laura Bronstein from Binghampton University in the USA presented on a model of community support that embraces young children and the families. By meeting social and physical needs this program aims to better connect young children into the community and early learning settings. Ms Sonia Chin, President of the Sabah Kinder Association in Malaysia prompted thought about the challenges of change in the sector – even when we recognise those changes as valuable and important. Professor Kim Cornish, Vice Chancellor's Research Fellow at Victoria University, invited conversation about the use of digital tools in early intervention for young children and in the support of Early Childhood educators.

The two days of the conference were fruitful and exciting, offering new viewpoints, challenging some accepted views, examining the nature of early childhood education and care in the 21st century. The last afternoon was dedicated to round table discussions on a range of contemporary issues – the role of men in ECEC, whether the Grad Dip of ECE is fit for purpose, children's safety, neurodiversity and inclusion, and workforce retention and wellbeing. Everyone was invited to share opinions and ideas; it was good to see the sector questioning, exploring and critiquing in positive ways with the aim of improvement and better understanding.

For those who were able to attend, this collection of abstracts will provide the opportunity to revisit ideas and discussions. For those who did not attend, I hope that these abstracts will provide some insights into the range of rich conversations that took place. To be better as a sector, we must act together; and to act together we must listen, share ideas, and engage with curiosity in the world around us.

Professor Mary-Rose McLaren

Associate Dean, Research and Research Training
College of Arts, Business, Law, Education and IT.
Victoria University, Melbourne

University-assisted community schools: An interdisciplinary, international movement to promote equity and transform education for young children and their families

Professor Laura Bronstein¹

¹Binghamton University, USA

The groundwork for community schools began at the turn of the 20th century, modeled after settlement houses in London and the U.S., and John Dewey's argument for 'the school as social center'. Community schools provide an integrated focus on child, family and community whereby what occurs outside the classroom is understood to be as important as what occurs inside. To address this, community schools mobilize out-of-classroom support so that all youth can succeed, whatever their family's assets and/or challenges. Examples of these supports include before, after and summer school programming; physical and mental health services; family engagement; mentoring; and more. The first step is a needs assessment so that support is individually tailored to the unique needs of each school community. University-assisted community schools (UACS), a concept developed at the University of Pennsylvania, utilize institutions of higher education as lead partners in community schools, mobilizing the resources of colleges and universities to support and lead community schools.

Growing Minds, Changing Worlds: Transforming Early Childhood Through Research

Professor Kim Cornish¹

¹Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Professorial Research Fellow at Victoria University

The early years of life lay the foundation for lifelong learning, resilience, and wellbeing. In a rapidly changing world - and particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic - understanding how children develop attention, self-regulation and social cognition is more critical than ever. Drawing on over two decades of international research in developmental science and insights from my book *The Post-Pandemic Child*, this keynote explores how evidence based approaches can transform early childhood education. I will share groundbreaking research and innovative digital interventions designed to support attention, self-regulation, and early learning, and explore how we can reimagine these programs in the preschool years. Through real-world examples and evidence-based insights, the talk will show how research can be translated into practical strategies that not only improve learning outcomes, but also build resilience, foster inclusion, and empower children to thrive - both in classrooms and across communities. Together, we'll explore how science can help us grow minds and change worlds. Attendees will gain contemporary perspectives on early cognition and practical guidance on how research can inform evidence-informed teaching and policy, and inspiration for driving societal impact through research. This session underscores the power of science to not only grow minds but also change worlds.

Changing Practices and Paradigms in Early Childhood Education: From Vision to Practice

Ms. Sonia Chin¹

¹President, Sabah Kinder Association in Malaysia

Educational practices in early childhood have evolved through various paradigms, each with unique approaches and goals. Navigating these changes requires conscious, intentional efforts involving the alignment of the three key 'P's – philosophy, policy, and practice. Successful paradigm shifts depend on collaboration among key stakeholders: educators, policymakers, families, and communities. In Malaysia, early childhood education has seen notable progress, but challenges remain, including inconsistent implementation and resource limitations. Reflecting on our current position is essential; understanding our successes and gaps helps shape a clearer vision for the future. Only by recognizing where we stand can we plan effectively for where we aim to go, ensuring that reforms are relevant, inclusive, and sustainable in shaping young learners' development.

Exploring Perspectives of Young Children and Their Parents on the Inclusion of Same-Sex Parented Families in Australian Early Childhood Education

Xinyun Meg Liang¹

¹Macquarie University

Following the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Australia and the inclusion of gender and diverse family structures in Australia's updated national framework for early childhood (EC) education, EYLF V2.0 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022), there is increasing emphasis on affirming same-sex parented families in EC settings. Despite these policy shifts, recent literature continues to suggest EC practitioners may hesitate to address the inclusion of same-sex parented families in ways that engage children and parents in their services in Australia (Liang et al., 2025). However, the perspectives of young children and their own parents on the affirmation and education about same-sex parented families in EC settings they attend remain underrepresented in the literature (Kim & Hachey, 2022; Kim et al., 2020), particularly in the Australian context.

This paper draws from a qualitative, multi-site case study conducted in metropolitan areas of New South Wales, Australia. It reports preliminary findings from individual dialogic drawing and small-group picture book reading with 14 children aged three to five years, and semi-structured phone interviews with one or both of their parents. The three participating long day care settings were rated as either Exceeding or Excellent. The participating families were couple- or sole-parent households, predominantly headed by cisgender heterosexual parents, and were not themselves from a same-sex parented family structure.

Preliminary findings point to several emerging themes, including children's recognition and expression of family diversity, children's neutral yet relational responses to same-sex parented family and LGBTQ+ representations, the extent and forms of affirmation perceived by parents, and the visibility (or lack thereof) of diverse gender, sexuality and family structures within early learning environments. Together, these findings challenge assumptions that children are uninterested, unready, or unable to engage with family diversity. This paper assists practitioners and policy planners, rather than presuming resistance or objection, to recognise the potential of children's and families' knowledge and experiences to inform anti-discriminatory practices in EC settings.

References

- Australian Government Department of Education. (2022). *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia (V2.0)*. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/media/35756>
- Kim, S. J., & Hachey, A. C. (2022). There is no one right family: Young children's discussions about family diversity. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 58(4), 166-171. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2022.2110816>
- Kim, S. J., Kwangok, S., & Carrola, P. A. (2020). Living together in a diverse world: Conversations about the stories of two mommies and daddies among Mexican-descent bilingual kindergarteners. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1240556>
- Liang, X. M., Andrews, R., & Hadley, F. (2025). Unspoken and tangled perspectives of heterosexual and LGBTQ+ practitioners and parents on inclusion for same-sex parented families in Australian early childhood settings. *Early Years*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2025.2608269>

Navigating New Cultures as Pre-Service Early Educators

Dr Scott Welsh¹, Keletso Magano-Niebling, ¹Dr. Siobhan Hannan & ¹Matthea Rudolph

¹Victoria University, Australia

International students make up approximately 33.8 percent of the VU educational cohort (Victoria University, 2024). Inclusive practice is therefore crucial in our everyday multicultural and intercultural interactions. Students are faced with a myriad of highly nuanced challenges associated with leaving family communities and consistent cultural experiences, embarking on studies in a new country and culture (Tran & Gomes, 2010). These can be further problematised when structural bias tends to marginalise students from diverse cultures (Devos, 2011). Factors contributing to a sense of alienation and exclusion can include dialect, language, food and other unfamiliar cultural practices (Marginson, 2012; Arkoudis, Baik & Richardson, 2012). These troubling experiences coincide with institutional engagements and processes that can be highly alienating and intimidating for all students (Reay et al., 2009). This presentation will utilise a participant-led, qualitative approach, providing the perspective of pre-service Early Childhood Teachers studying social justice and creative practice as a part of a post-graduate Diploma. This content can foster agency in the lived experience of international students in the higher education system, often felt as a structural threat to their sense of self (Naidoo, 2015). Ultimately, we conclude that there is a disconnect between the theory and content of students' learning and their social and cultural experiences (Leask, 2009). We propose reflective and creative practice as a method for empowering preservice Early Educators and fostering agency. A small focus group of 6 participants provide compelling reflective and testimonial data that could inform future pedagogical practice in our institutions that train Early Childhood Educators and, in turn, address issues of social and cultural bias in Early Childhood Centres (Nguyen & Balakrishnan, 2020).

Improving Education Quality in Chinese Universal Private Preschools

Dr. Li Pei¹

¹Deakin University

China updated its early learning goals to support school readiness in collaboration with UNICEF Going Global project to enhance educational quality. It also introduced a new type of universal private preschool to promote educational equity. This study investigates how these preschools implement early learning goals, an important yet under researched area for improving education quality and equity. Using activity system analysis within cultural-historical activity theory, data were gathered through document reviews and in-depth semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders. Themes were identified across six core activity system components: subject, object, tools, rules, community, and division of labor, revealing related contradictions. Supports are found in collegiality, playful learning, university collaborations for in-service training, and robust monitoring systems. The findings highlight challenges such as poor working conditions, limited professional development opportunities, and complexities in parent engagement. These findings highlight key areas for quality improvement in preschools and identify potentially globally relevant practices. Moreover, the activity system analysis methodology employed in this study offers a replicable framework for practice-based educational research.

Early childhood educator perceptions of their own ‘risk willingness’: supporting young children’s risky play

Rose Major¹

¹Victoria University, Australia

Research on young children’s risky play in the early childhood education (ECE) context has tended to seek either the benefits of, or reasons for, such play. This presentation discusses the outcome of research that explores what prompts ‘risk willingness’ (Kleppe et al., 2024) in ECE teachers. The research investigated four teachers’ thinking processes around risky play, away from a restrictive approach and towards supporting young children’s risk-taking. Part of a Victoria University Integrated PhD Year 1 thesis project undertaken during 2025, this qualitative research involved interviews with four ECE teachers working on Bush/ Beach Kinder programs. It aimed to explore the extent to which teachers’ ‘risk willingness’ is mediated through their experiences and learning and how these may have contributed to transformational practice through praxis. Analysis identified shared perspectives across the participants on how and why teachers who support young children’s risky play come to privilege this in their work. This exploratory research project formed part of a wider study into how ECE teachers’ understanding of their own roles contributes to practice change in supporting young children to take risks.

Reference

- Garvis, S., Phillipson, S., & Phillipson, S. N. (2021). Australian Research in Early Childhood Education and Care: Insights into the Actual; Imagining the Possible. Review of *Research in Education*, 45(1), 291–310.
- Hoveid, M. H. (2021). Sensing Feeling Alive: Attentiveness to Movements in/with Embodied Teaching. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 40(3), 303–315.
- Kleppe, R., Sandseter, E. B. H., Sando, O. J., & Brussoni, M. (2024). Children’s dynamic risk management – a comprehensive approach to children’s risk willingness, risk assessment, and risk handling. *International Journal of Play*, 13(4), 395–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21594937.2024.2425539>

Rethinking planning for children's learning

Rachel Foster¹

¹Deakin University

This presentation includes a discussion of partnering with and collaborating with children when planning for their learning. The importance of responsiveness to children's interests and capabilities is emphasised throughout this presentation. Participants will be encouraged to think beyond the surface and consider what it truly means to involve children as active participants and what being intentional really means. This presentation is designed to support teachers and educators to be thoughtful, reflective, and considered when developing programs for children. Key questions that will be explored in this presentation include: Where is the opportunity for children to have input? What is your view of children? How are children represented in the program? Who makes the program decisions? What are the benefits of uninterrupted play? This session will encourage participants to move beyond one-off activities towards connected learning experiences that involve thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, and revisiting and building on prior learning. Included will be some conversation about how individual children's interests can be included within a group and how group planning can support and extend children's individual interests. Discussion of and links to the VEYLDF will be included in this presentation. Examples from practice will support and encourage attendees to critically rethink and reimagine planning for children's learning.

Space as pedagogy

Dr. Bin Wu¹ & Dr. Sweta Patel¹

¹RMIT University, Australia

This presentation offers a critical conceptualisation of newly refurbished simulated early childhood learning environment within an Australian teacher education programme: RMIT Early Childhood Connect (RECC). The simulation is framed as a deliberately curated pedagogical space, designed to enact, disrupt, and provoke new forms of professional learning. Reimagining Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) framework, the discussion positions the simulation not as a passive backdrop but as an active pedagogical agent – a 'third teacher' in the Reggio Emilia tradition. The material design and spatial intentionality of the environment are understood as co-constitutive of learning, shaping professional identities, relationships, and possibilities for action. The presentation examines how such environments can support inclusive, multi-directional engagement, inviting pre-service teachers, experienced practitioners, children, and academics into collaborative inquiry. This approach challenges linear models of teacher development and static notions of 'community', instead framing the simulation as a site of relational, material, and political complexity. By extending the CoP framework to incorporate designed affordances and the agency of non-human actors, the argument advances a shift in how teacher education institutions conceptualise professional formation. The simulation is not a substitute for 'real' practice, but a provocation: a dynamic space where roles are fluid, knowledge is co-produced, and boundaries between theory and practice are continually reconfigured. In doing so, the presentation invites the ECEC sector to rethink not only where teacher learning happens, but how space participates in it, with implications for the design of teacher education environments, partnerships, and pedagogies.

Taking One Step Back - Creativity in Learning by Doing

Dr. Elnaz Sheshgelani¹ & Prawer Michelle¹

¹Victoria University

Imagine standing before a landscape full of possibilities: a journey toward discovering new ways to communicate and connect. This workshop invites you to explore how creativity can transform teaching and learning, opening every door on the path to understanding. We'll look at creativity not as a luxury, but as the heart of education, a natural human drive that brings joy, curiosity and pride to learning. Through art, drama, poetry, music, play and visual storytelling, we can make knowledge accessible to everyone, everywhere. "Learning by Doing" is at the core of this approach: a holistic, hands-on way of teaching that values process over product. By Taking One Step Back, we create space for genuine exploration – a safe, conscious environment where both teachers and learners can experiment and grow. Drawing inspiration from drama-based education, we'll explore practical techniques such as Mantle of the Expert, which empowers students to take ownership of knowledge and engage deeply with learning. This session is an invitation to rediscover creativity as the engine of communication and the soul of teaching.

What am I weaving, and who am I weaving with? A leadership story.

Sarah Louise Nelson¹

¹Melbourne Polytechnic

This presentation explores the personal and professional transformation of an early childhood leader through an AGECS Fellowship for Leadership and Change. Undertaken in partnership with Gomeri woman and early childhood leader, Rachael Phillips, this practitioner project set out to reimagine the concept of professional love in the context of regional, Aboriginal community-controlled early childhood education and care setting. What emerged was not simply an inquiry into a pedagogical theory and a reimagining of practice, but a powerful shift in leadership practice, grounded in relationship, cultural humility, and deep listening. This project journey challenged Western models of love, care and leadership. Through shared, reciprocal dialogue, and reflective immersion, the project reshaped my understanding of leadership: from directing change to being changed. Through a metaphor of weaving, this presentation seeks to share the key moments, tensions, and learnings that expanded my leadership practice into something more relational, more ethical, and more attuned to community and Country. I'll argue that authentic leadership in early childhood requires not only strategic and pedagogical skill, but also emotional presence, cultural responsiveness, and the willingness to be transformed by the people and places we serve.

Early Language Development is Enhanced through Learning in Natural Outdoor Environments

Bianca Jackson¹

¹Victoria University, Australia

Outdoor learning is well recognised for promoting physical, emotional, and social development in early childhood, yet its role in language development is less clearly understood. As inclusive models of early education expand to embrace forest school and bush kinder, it is important to examine how these environments support communicative growth for all children, across diverse learning needs. This scoping review followed the Joanna Briggs Institute methodology and PRISMA-ScR guidelines. Inclusion criteria targeted studies involving children aged 3–6 years in outdoor, nature-based learning environments, with a focus on language development or use. Studies were excluded if they did not explicitly address language outcomes or involved children outside the early years age range. Systematic searches of databases and grey literature identified 28 English-language sources. Data were charted using a thematic matrix and analysed qualitatively. Common patterns related to the nature of children’s interactions, the types of communication observed, the role of the environment in supporting language, and the influence of adult guidance were identified. Some studies also noted broader developmental features that relate to language growth. Nature-based environments offer communication rich and socially inclusive opportunities for language development. This review reframes language learning as a natural, social, and embodied process that flourishes when children are free to move, explore, connect, and express themselves. The findings offer practical implications for educators, speech language pathologists, and policymakers. However, more linguistically diverse and methodologically rigorous research is needed to guide practice and inform future policy.

Stories from the Road: A Collective Autoethnography of Pre-Service Teachers' Being and Becoming through Placement Mentorship

**Theresa Evans¹, Anna Munari¹, Gracie Munari¹, Lenyssa Dunn¹, Dr Eugenia Koh-Chua¹
& Prof Mary-Rose McLaren¹**

¹Victoria University

In 2024 Victoria University received funding from the Department of Education, Victoria, to focus on additional placement supports for pre-service teachers in the graduate Diploma and the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. This two-year initiative responds to sector-wide challenges in workforce diversity and retention, bringing domestic and international students together to create networks and mutual respect. At the heart of this project is a team of four Teaching Focused Academics (TFAs) who serve as university mentors, travelling across Victoria to conduct placement visits, facilitate coaching sessions, and lead learning circles. Their work bridges the university and sector; in doing so, the TFAs become a hybrid space, supporting pre-service teachers to feel seen, guided, and better prepared to enter the profession more confidently and successfully.

Over the past year, these TFAs have become field researchers, gathering rich, relational data through mentorship interactions with students, in-service mentors, and service leaders. The project has since expanded to include two academic research leads. Together, the team engages in collective autoethnography (CAE) to document, unpack, present, and re-present these human stories, which are often messy, non-linear, and deeply situated in place and practice. This presentation offers a glimpse of this CAE process, exploring what effective mentorship looks like in early childhood professional experiences, the challenges faced by both mentors and mentees, and the conditions that enable meaningful, transformative mentorship. Through layered narratives and shared reflection, this presentation offers insights into how mentorship can shape not only professional readiness, but also the being and becoming of early childhood teachers.

The ethical considerations, benefits, and challenges of the ECE students who completed their placement in the workplace in Victoria, Australia

Dr. Dunia El-Badaoui¹, Dr Nathalie Nehma¹ & Prof Mary-Rose McLaren¹

¹Victoria University, Melbourne

This research investigates the ethical considerations, implications, benefits, and challenges faced by Early Childhood Education (ECE) pre-service teachers in Victoria who complete professional placements within their workplaces. Drawing on data from diverse stakeholders, including pre-service teachers, mentor educators, service providers, practicing ECE professionals, and government representatives, the study offers valuable feedback to inform and enhance the ECE teaching program and contribute to broader improvements across Australian educational institutions. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates inductive (qualitative) and deductive (quantitative) methodologies through surveys and focus groups. Survey data provides quantitative insights across diverse backgrounds, while focus groups provide space for participants to share nuanced perspectives, attitudes, and reasoning in more intimate settings. These methods offer a holistic understanding of participants' views, preferences, and experiences related to workplace-based professional placements. All surveys are conducted ethically via Qualtrics, a platform endorsed by Victoria University for its capacity to support diverse question formats and robust data collection. In addition, the study incorporates two to three illustrative case studies to enrich findings. Adopting an exploratory framework without a predefined hypothesis, the research seeks to interpret participants' perspectives and uncover deeper insights into the lived realities of preservice teachers and their mentors navigating workplace placements. It evaluates placements in the workplace, aligning them with broader educational and policy goals by examining performance outcomes, unintended consequences, and avenues for strategic improvement. Insights gathered will guide future development of students' placement strategies and professional learning practices across Victoria's ECE landscape.

Innovating Professional Development in Early Childhood Education: The Integration of Generative AI and Gamification

Dr. Yuwen Ma¹, Professor Garry Falloon & Adam Young

¹Federation University Australia

Gamification and artificial intelligence (AI) have been increasingly employed to support teacher education and professional learning. This study investigates the combined use of gamification and generative AI in the design of online professional development modules for early childhood teachers and educators in regional and rural Victoria (The Sandbox Project). Specifically, in this study, gamification strategies incorporated points, leaderboards, badges, and game-based content, while AI features provided personalised feedback, interactive dialogue, and reflective prompts. Data were collected and analysed from more than 300 participants, to examine the learning, engagement and motivational effectiveness of the gamified module design and AI features. A mixed-methods approach was employed, comprising a baseline survey (n = 314), postmodule evaluations (n = 19-33 across six modules), an end-of-program evaluation survey (n = 79), and semi-structured interviews (n = 25). Findings demonstrated consistently high satisfaction with the relevance, quality, and usability of the modules. AI features were particularly well received, with positive perceptions of AI realism, trustworthiness, and usefulness. However, gamification outcomes were more mixed. Although participants acknowledged the motivational potential of the gamified content, their engagement with competitive features was relatively limited. Despite this, participants' overall positive views of their experience in Sandbox were associated with higher professional satisfaction and workforce commitment, which were key goals of the project. While gamification is new to early childhood education professional development, evidence suggests that when combined with carefully trained AI support, the approach may offer a scalable and flexible model that addresses workforce development priorities while promoting personalised and engaging learning.

But why? Thinking deeply in practice

Ruth Harper¹ & Dr. Siobhan Hannan²

¹East West Childcare Association Inc

²Victoria University

No rule, policy or practice is allowed to stand ‘just cause’. For each restriction on children, the question is ‘why?’, and if a sound answer is not identified, a new approach is tried. Innovation has also been driven by necessity, as a small inner-city service responds to changes in what is required of them. For example, children in their preschool year participate in an Out and About kindergarten program that takes them all over the city, walking their neighbourhood, hopping on trams to visit galleries, or trekking along the Birrarung to the sea over a period of weeks.

An Investigation of the Influence of a Wakeful Prone and Vestibular Activity Program on Early Infancy Motor Development

Dr. Bren Lovell¹

¹Victoria University

Even though infants have the propensity to naturally move through rudimentary motor milestones over their first 12 months post birth, time spent in awake prone positions is significant to naturally acquiring these movement proficiencies. ‘As Early Years educators, we are keen to assist a natural progression through these motor milestones: namely, tummy time (head and neck control), rolling over, commando (or tummy) crawling, to achieve hands and knees crawling.’ This positive statement has morphed into the creation of the Baby Activity Chart – Program (BAC-Program) where educators and families are encouraged to interact with tummy time and also vestibular stimulating activities, within four designated and progressive milestone focused divisions. How effective was this program to support young infants to naturally move through the rudimentary motor milestones?? The efficacy of the Baby Activity Chart – Program (BAC-Program) with families, was the theme of a recent PhD study. In this study, twenty-nine families agreed to interact within the prepared BAC-program with their 10–12-week old infants, over a 4-5 month period. The activity program was initially reviewed in a previous Study one and was subsequently endorsed by 15 experts (93%) from within the early childhood and the allied health professions. Subsequently, several minor changes were added due to various expert’s recommendations, thereby contributing to edition two: the BAC-P(2). Subsequently, the results from Study two indicated that those infants interacting with the activities within the BAC-P/2, collectively produced higher AIMS total percentage mean scores jointly across prone, supine, sitting, standing sections. This was compared to infants (thirty-four infants in the control group) not participating in this prone and vestibular activity program. The difference was significant at .023 alpha level when the study infant group was compared to the control group. Study two highlights how the early exposure of young infants to daily prone (30-60 minutes of tummy time) actions together with daily selected vestibular activities (gentle movements of an infant’s body in different horizontal and vertical planes) can contribute to infant achieving important rudimentary motor skills. This two-way (tummy time and vestibular activities) approach to early infant motor development proposes to encourage parents, educators and their infants to explore prone activities together with vestibular actions to assist in the development of the infant’s motor skills including balance, mobility and oculomotor functions.

There is always time for tea: Staying in relationship by applying Circle of Security in the kindergarten room

Melissa Dann¹ & Rebecca Waingold¹

¹Early Childhood Management Services (ECMS)

This presentation explores the transformative impact of applying the Circle of Security framework to consider educator needs. We share insights from practice into how educators have learned to see and respond to children's emotional needs with greater attunement, fostering deeper connections and supporting emotional regulation. We explore ways educators can navigate their own emotional responses. We discuss strategies for recognising and meeting our own needs without withdrawing from the relational space, even during moments of heightened emotion. By the end of this session, participants will be invited to reflect on how they can remain in relationship with children during challenging times, and how this commitment can nurture a culture of emotional safety and mutual support in early childhood environments.

From Icebergs to Warm Waters: Embracing Trauma Informed Practice with Penguin Pedagogy

Amandah Taylor¹

¹Yuille Park Children's Centre

Trauma-informed practice is an ongoing journey and 'Penguin Pedagogy' offers a thoughtful and comprehensive framework for working with children who have experienced trauma. The use of the word Penguin as an acronym is a memorable way to encapsulate key trauma-informed principles and this presentation will highlight the multifaceted nature of supporting these children, moving beyond just behavioural management to encompass holistic well-being and systemic understanding. Penguin Pedagogy was developed through lived experience as a guide for educators and provides practical examples of how each principle translates into daily practice.

Leading ECE - Swedish policy change and support for ECE teachers in educational leadership: Research method and literature

Prof Valerie Margrain¹, Kristin Ungeberg¹, Lovisa Skånfors¹, Anita Eriksson¹ & Catarina Player-Koro¹

¹Karlstad University

Sweden and Australia are both countries that with differing levels of qualifications amongst ECE work teams. Until 2018, the Swedish tradition was for ECE work teams of mixed professional categories to lead educational together. However, in 2018 policy changed and now ECE teachers (degree qualified) have specific responsibility and mission to lead ECE work teams' educational work, in order to increase the pedagogical quality of ECE. This presentation describes research methodology of a project funded by the Swedish Research Council 2024-2026. Firstly, a national survey has been conducted in order to map and identify ECE teachers' and principals' perceptions of ECE teachers' mission to lead the work team's joint work in practice. The survey also explores principals' organisation of conditions which support ECE teachers in their educational leadership. Secondly, a series of field observations of ECE team meetings analyses how ECE teachers interpret, negotiate and exercise their mission to lead the work team's joint work in practice. How principals interpret and implement this assignment is also examined in field data. Key international literature relating to ECE teachers' leadership of and within teams, and their support from higher organisational levels will be shared. Ultimately, the project aims to contribute knowledge about how the Swedish policy change has been put into practice and how ECE leadership is supported. We also invite interested partners to join us in developing joint workshops and information-sharing.

Beyond Academics: Chinese Immigrant Families' Expectations and Attitudes Towards Play-Based Learning in Australia

Huiqi Wang¹

¹University of Melbourne

This research project investigated the reflections of a new generation of Australian Chinese immigrant parents, specifically those born between 1980 and 1990, a period shaped by the People's Republic of China's significant economic reforms and the early implementation of the One-Child Policy. The study aimed to understand how these parents' early childhood experiences have influenced their views on play-based learning and their educational expectations for their own children growing up in Australia. As part of a qualitative research design, semi structured interviews were conducted with participants, and the data were analysed using thematic coding. Findings highlighted the interplay between parents' childhood experiences, traditional Confucian values, and their new experiences in Australia. They revealed views on play that had evolved over time and represented a shift from traditional Chinese parenting practices to more holistic, child-centred approaches. The study also highlighted the need for professional support in helping parents engage in play-based learning at home. In examining parenting in the context of changing socio-political and migratory contexts, this research informs early childhood education, cultural studies, and family support policies.

Beyond Definitions: Conceptualising Responsiveness in Early Childhood Education

Matthea Rudolph¹

¹Victoria University, Melbourne

There is no singular definition of ‘responsiveness’ in early childhood education in Australia. Instead, the use of the term in literature reflects the diverse theoretical perspectives within the Australian National Quality Framework and the pedagogical approaches it enables. This paper explores how responsiveness is conceptualised in literature and policy. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) notion of assemblages and multiplicities, responsiveness is considered not as a fixed term, but as an evolving set of definitions, practices, and understandings. Such an approach foregrounds the coexistence of multiple truths and possibilities for practice, rather than the search for one definitive meaning.

Conceptualisations of teaching practice are often shaped by political forces. Sims (2017) argues that neoliberal agendas in early childhood education have led to a narrowing of definitions, privileging standardised measures of ‘quality’ to achieve economic outcomes. This framing risks reducing complex and relational teaching practices to compliance and efficiency, marginalising diverse and situated ways of working. In contrast, Moss (2019) calls for recognising ‘multiple truths’ in early childhood education, challenging one-size-fits-all approaches and creating space for alternative narratives and multiple perspectives. These insights guide the study’s approach. By mapping responsiveness in this way, this paper traces the concept through literature and establishes a foundation for further research. The scoping review will directly inform a study into how early childhood educators themselves construct and experience responsiveness in their practice, contributing to ongoing conversations about pedagogy, policy, power, and professional learning.

Embedding Social Justice and Agency in Early Childhood Education through Paulo Freire's Lenses

Dr. Cristiene Carvalho¹

¹Federation University, Australia

This paper explores how Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy provides a powerful foundation for advancing equity, agency, and social justice in early childhood education. Grounded in Freire's view of education as a practice of liberation, it invites reflection on teaching practices that promote children's agency through dialogue and critical engagement. In alignment with the Australian Early Years Learning Framework, which emphasises diversity and children's voices, this paper presents a Freirean approach as dialogical, inclusive, and emancipatory from the earliest years.

While critical theory is often considered too complex for young learners, this study argues that children are capable of engaging critically with their world when educators are supported with pedagogical tools that honour their voice, context, and potential. Central to this approach is Freire's Culture Circle methodology, which fosters collective dialogue and reflection. In early childhood contexts, this method can be reimagined to include families, communities, and educators in co-constructing understandings of childhood, identity, and justice.

The Culture Circle model also serves as a transformative tool for teacher professional development, enabling educators to reflect on their practices, challenge dominant assumptions, and embrace inclusive, culturally responsive pedagogies. Drawing on examples from rural schools shaped by Brazilian agrarian reform movements, the paper illustrates how Freirean pedagogy can inspire early childhood teachers to design learning environments that empower children, engage families, and respond to diverse social realities. By embracing Freire's legacy, early childhood education can become a site of equity, inclusion, and transformation - planting the seeds for a more just and democratic future.

References

- Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Westview Press.
- Freire, P. (1976). *Education: The practice of freedom* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogia da autonomia: Saberes necessários à prática educativa* [Pedagogy of autonomy: Necessary knowledge for educational practice]. Paz e Terra.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*. Westview Press.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th ed.). The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc. (Original work published 1970).

Hybrid Spaces in Transition: Career-Changer ECTs and the Reconstruction of Professional Identity in ITE

Dr Eugenia Koh-Chua¹ & Xiangyu Lu¹

¹Victoria University, Melbourne

The Australian government's recent initiative to promote graduate diploma pathways into early childhood teaching has led to an increase in career changers entering Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. Policy recommendations such as the Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (Department of Education, 2021), the Supporting Mid-Career Pathways Report (Dandolo Partners, 2023), and the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (Department of Education, 2023) consistently highlight the strategic importance of attracting mid-career professionals into teaching. While these candidates bring valuable prior professional experience to the education sector, they also face the challenge of reconstructing their professional identities as they transition into early-career teaching roles. This presentation explores the role of university ITE programmes in the transformative process of professional identity reconstruction for early-career ECTS. Specifically, it examines how ITE programmes can serve as hybrid spaces (Lynch, 2016), or nonhierarchical environments where academic, practical, and community knowledge intersect, supporting the transition of career-changer ECTs into teaching through graduate diploma programmes. Hybrid spaces offer a valuable perspective for examining the opportunities and challenges within graduate diploma ITE courses in integrating the past identities of career-changer ECTs with their new pedagogical roles. Drawing on literature about the professional identity formation of early years educators and teacher preparation, this presentation aims to evoke a meaningful discussion on how we, as teaching academics in early childhood education, can more intentionally design and facilitate hybrid learning environments that recognise, honour, and build upon the prior professional selves of career-changer ECTs.

References:

- Dandolo Partners. (2023). Supporting mid-career pathways: Final report. Australian Government Department of Education. <https://www.education.gov.au/download/17493/dandolo-partners-supporting-midcareer-pathways/35510/document/pdf>
- Department of Education. (2023). National teacher workforce action plan. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/national-teacher-workforce-actionplan/priority-area-2-strengthening-initial-teacher-education>
- Department of Education. (2021). Next steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review. Australian Government. <https://www.education.gov.au/download/13191/next-steps-report-quality-initialteacher-education-review/25446/next-steps-report-page/pdf>
- Lynch, T. (2016). The future of health, wellbeing and physical education: Optimising children's health through local and global community partnerships. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31667-3>

Talking About Art With Kids

Trudy Moore¹

¹East West Childcare & Kindergarten

Art and visual literacy are critical skills. It is essential for children to learn how to talk about artworks and images from a technical perspective and discuss ideas and concepts being communicated through the work; to understand that interpretation is influenced by personal, lived experience, thereby encouraging empathy and awareness of others. Sharing an understanding of art literacy with young children can build on their existing language skills, foster critical thinking, and potentially advance their growth in other areas of learning, such as reading, writing and storytelling. This presentation will cover some basic language that educators can use to talk about art and visual imagery with children (or anyone for that matter). The language will be clear, concise and include a fun mnemonic system for remembering key words.

We will explore a selection of images, including children's artworks and creations-through-play, illustrations from children's books, artworks by contemporary and C20th artists, and images found online – both human and AI generated.

- ◆ What is art literacy and why is it important?
- ◆ How can educators expand their existing skills in language and analysis as a way of modelling art literacy to children?
- ◆ How can developing art and visual literacy in early years education celebrate creativity, develop critical thinking skills and empower children in their exposure to digital imagery?

Reigniting the Spark in Early Childhood Educators: An Autoethnographic Journey Across Singapore and Indonesia

Cheryl Ng¹

¹Scissors Stone Montessori Kindergarten Singapore

This presentation takes an autoethnographic approach to explore how early childhood educators can sustain their passion for teaching amidst the daily challenges of the profession. Drawing on over two decades of experience as an educator and service leader in Singapore, and more recently as a cross-cultural trainer in Indonesia, I reflect on the lived realities of educators who often struggle to maintain their ‘spark’ or sense of ‘soul work’ in the demanding context of early childhood education. Using a case study approach grounded in professional practice, the presentation begins by examining the challenges faced by educators in Singapore, where parental emphasis on academic outcomes and administrative demands can overshadow the deeper pedagogical work of nurturing children. Similar themes have emerged in my current work in Indonesia, where educators also grapple with sustaining motivation and commitment in the face of systemic pressures. The second half of the presentation shares insights into effective practices that I have found to be successful in sustaining educator passion and engagement. These include strategies for maintaining strong teamwork, aligning families with centre philosophy, and supporting educators through professional development that affirms their identity and values. By weaving together personal reflection, cross-cultural experiences, and practical strategies, the presentation highlights how service leaders and professional learning initiatives can play a crucial role in workforce development and retention. The presentation concludes with an open invitation for participants to engage with me and with one another, drawing out diverse international perspectives on how we might sustain educators’ passion across contexts.

Staying or switching? Understanding early childhood teachers' transitions to primary school teaching

Eloise Thomson¹, Gracie Abela¹ & Sarah Louise Nelson¹

¹Melbourne Polytechnic

Across Australia, growing numbers of early childhood teachers are moving into primary school teaching. This shift raises urgent questions about the sustainability of the early years workforce. This presentation shares insights from early childhood teachers who have made that move, exploring why they left, what they've found in their new roles, and what this means for the future of the profession. Participants described six key factors driving their decision to switch: the contrast between professional isolation in early childhood education and care and strong collegial support in primary schools; ongoing struggles for professional recognition; heavy administrative and compliance burdens; systemic and structural issues in a market-driven sector; better working conditions and work–life balance in schools; and limited career progression in the early childhood field. Many shared feelings of being undervalued in early childhood roles, describing the experience of being labelled as 'babysitters' despite years of training and expertise. In primary schools, they experienced greater respect, stronger team support, clearer career pathways, and better pay; leading to a 20% increase in reported job satisfaction.

These stories suggest that movement between sectors is less about personal preference and more about systemic push and pull factors. For the early childhood sector, this means retention strategies must go beyond salary to address workload, career pathways, and professional respect. Future research should explore how to replicate the positive support structures of schools within ECE, and how policy can create conditions that keep highly skilled educators in the early years.

Storying (In)equity in the Early Childhood Education Workforce

Maya Starr¹

¹University of Melbourne

Early childhood educators are required to compartmentalise their personal and professional identities, which negatively impacts their wellbeing. The detrimental effects of a fractured sense of identity in the workplace are made evident through high levels of burnout and attrition, which continue to escalate despite reforms. This post qualitative inquiry explored how an increased understanding of an early childhood teacher's identity could support her wellbeing. By dis-mantling my own situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), I uncovered differing possibilities for experiencing an authentic sense of agency as a newly qualified early childhood teacher in a colonised society. With materials as my co-conspirators, I considered four societal stereotypes of the educator – substitute mother, expert, custodian and technician (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 68) – and responsively re/situated my Self through a creative inquiry that engaged with feminist new materialist concepts as method (Lenz Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017).

References

- Haraway, D. J. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Lenz Taguchi, H. & St. Pierre, E. A. (2017). Using concept as method in educational and social science inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(9), 643–648. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417732634>
- Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Nxumalo, F., Kocher, L., Elliot, E. & Sanchez, A. (2015). *Journeys: Reconceptualising early childhood practices through pedagogical narration*. University of Toronto Press.

A Comparative Study of Traditional Parenting Practices of Mongolian Families and Contemporary Early Childhood Education Approaches

Jugdernamjil Khurelkhuu¹

¹Mongolian National University of Education

The traditional child-rearing philosophy of nomadic Mongolian families is grounded in values that foster children's moral development, social relationships, and character formation. Specifically, these traditional parenting practices emphasize both the direct engagement of children in nature, family, and community life, and learning through observation of parental activities, following the principle of 'learning by doing.' The aim of this study is to examine how the traditional child-rearing methods and daily life practices of Mongolian nomadic herders influence the foundational development of young children, and to explore how these practices align with contemporary educational trends and sustainable development principles. A total of 120 herder households across Mongolia were included in the study. A mixed methods approach was employed, combining structured parental questionnaires, direct household observations, and qualitative interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using 'SPSS 28', while qualitative findings enriched the understanding of practical, lived experiences. Preliminary results indicate that traditional Mongolian child-rearing practices significantly support children's independent problem-solving, social understanding, communication, collaboration, environmental awareness, and socio-emotional development. Moreover, these practices closely align with contemporary early childhood education approaches, including child-centered learning, equity, competency-based education, sustainable development, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating how traditional knowledge can be integrated with modern early childhood education frameworks, offering novel insights for theory and practice in early childhood development.

What teachers (need to) know

Dr Siobhan Hannan¹, Christina McInerney¹, Nicole Bourke¹, Sarah Jobson¹, Matthea Rudolph¹, Sophia Stirling¹ & Jessica Grimes¹

¹Victoria University, Melbourne

A VU team is involved in a collective research project on early childhood teaching skills, examining what the professional skillset of teachers consists of. The study aims to revisit previous work on school teaching (Loughran 2012) reimagining this concept for a preschool context. The first part of this project has been to ask experienced teachers what they think beginning teachers need to know as they start their careers. In this presentation, we look at responses to this question. We analyse what these responses may tell us about what the skills of a teacher should be, and how those skills may be acquired. Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that experienced teachers believe:

- ◆ it is crucial to know children
- ◆ it just as important to know why we do something as it is to know what to do
- ◆ there are some key skills we can identify
- ◆ teacher decision-making is complex
- ◆ much key learning can only occur in a practice context
- ◆ the knowledge of an experience teacher is significantly different from a beginning teacher

A next step will be to compare what practising teachers have said teachers need to learn with ACECQA requirements for initial teacher education courses. We also plan to reflect on how well teacher education courses align with what the teaching workforce expects.

Loose Parts: A Possible Pedagogical Bridge between Montessori and Reggio Emilia

Arjunvir Singh Rode¹

¹Victoria University

In early childhood education, increasing attention is being given to how environments and materials foster children's creativity, independence, and collaboration. This paper presents a comparative theoretical analysis of Montessori's concept of the prepared environment, Reggio Emilia's idea of the environment as the third teacher, and Nicholson's theory of loose parts. The objective of this paper is to briefly illuminate these frameworks for the reader, showing how environment is a common factor while highlighting the direct connection to loose parts. The analysis contrasts the structured, material-specific nature of Montessori practice with the open-ended, flexible creativity of Reggio Emilia, arguing that a stronger emphasis on loose parts could enable Montessori environments to evolve while maintaining their core values of order and independence. Finally, the paper discusses the pedagogical implications by considering how both approaches might be implemented through the integration of loose parts. By situating loose parts as a bridge between Montessori and Reggio Emilia, the paper proposes hybrid learning environments that balance structure with open-ended exploration, offering a blend of approaches while preserving the distinctive features of each, thereby enabling educators to create more dynamic, engaging, and responsive spaces.

Exploring Teachers' Practice Regarding Mother's Involvement in Early Childhood Education in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Mona Ali Rufidi

Despite recent calls for increased parental involvement in Saudi policies, little is known about how it works in practice. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (KSA, 2016) outlines ambitious economic and social reforms, including efforts to strengthen the education sector. One key objective is to increase parental engagement in early childhood education (ECE), aiming for 80% participation by 2030. This qualitative study explores teachers' practices regarding mothers' involvement in ECE in Riyadh. Data were collected through classroom observations of teacher–mother–child interactions and semi-structured interviews with two teachers, two focus mothers, and the preschool principal. Using the theory of practice architectures, findings reveal that while cultural and religious values shape positive attitudes, logistical, institutional, and policy barriers limit actual involvement. The study offers insights into bridging the gap between policy goals and real-world practices in Saudi preschools.

Practising Diversity and Addressing Challenges in Early Childhood Education Across Melbourne.

Lila (Leila) Afshar¹

¹Victoria University

As a migrant to Australia with extensive experience as a mother, teacher, and lecturer, I have witnessed the vital role of inclusive education in valuing and respecting diversity. Australia's multicultural landscape offers children exposure to a rich variety of cultures, languages, and traditions from an early age, creating both opportunities and challenges for educators. This study explored how early childhood educators practise diversity in their settings and how they address challenges when embedding cultural responsiveness into curriculum planning, daily routines, and family engagement. A survey containing ten multiple-choice questions was distributed to early childhood educators across Melbourne. Findings indicated that most educators take a holistic view of cultural diversity, recognising the importance of incorporating differences in language, traditions, and values. Many educators embed cultural backgrounds daily, most commonly through family knowledge sharing, multicultural resources, and celebrating cultural events. Strategies such as using visual aids and learning key words in a child's home language were frequently reported. However, significant challenges emerged, particularly language barriers with families, limited resources, and a lack of time within program schedules. Educators expressed a strong need for more multicultural materials, additional professional development, and increased planning time. While family engagement and inclusive curriculum practices are already present in many programs, these challenges hinder their consistent and effective implementation. The findings highlight the importance of sustained access to high-quality resources, targeted training, and strengthened partnerships with families. Addressing these needs will support equitable representation of all cultures, promote respect and belonging among children, and contribute to building a more inclusive society from the earliest years.

Strength and Fragility as Pedagogical Lenses: Rethinking Complexity and Relationality through Reggio Emilia Approaches

Rebecca Drysdale¹ & Samantha Morris¹

¹Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar School

This study explores how principles from Reggio Emilia Educational Project (Rinaldi, 2021; Malaguzzi, 1998) can help us better understand children's experiences of both strength and fragility in early learning contexts, including a school setting and a Bush Kinder program. Recognising children as capable, creative, and resilient, the research considers how collaborative and co-constructed pedagogical practices support children as they navigate challenges, risks, and vulnerabilities. Through sustained observation and documentation, the study traces how agency, empathy, and resilience emerge as children engage with peers, educators, and their environments. Drawing on the idea of the environment as the 'third teacher' (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007), the inquiry highlights how thoughtfully prepared spaces – both indoors and in nature – shape opportunities for exploration, care, and courageous risk-taking. Vignettes illustrate how Reggio-inspired practices, such as project-based inquiry and the valuing of multiple 'languages' of expression (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2011), enable children to embrace uncertainty while building personal confidence and collective belonging. Findings emphasise the importance of responsive educator facilitation, documentation as reflective practice, and a strong commitment to children's rights and voices in shaping educational environments (United Nations, 1989; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013). In affirming curriculum approaches that embrace complexity and relationality, the study argues that early childhood pedagogy plays a crucial role in fostering resilience, empathy, and ecological belonging. Within contemporary education, cultivating strength through vulnerability becomes essential for developing ethical and sustainable learning communities.

Implementing High Quality Inclusive Pyramid Model Practices in Early Childhood Education and Care

Sara Stockman & Jennifer Urbano

The Pyramid Model is an evidence-based, early educational framework designed to promote all young children's social-emotional-behavioural learning. The model aligns naturally with our Australian Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standards. The Pyramid Model uses evidence-based services and supports to foster children's development (cognitive, language, communication, physical, behavioural, and social emotional), friendships with peers, and sense of belonging. In addition, Pyramid Model practices support families with their parenting and enhance individual educator practices and educators' teamwork. Australian evidence supports Pyramid Model practices as having positive impacts on outcomes for children, educators, educator teams and families. The Pyramid Model holds high expectations for every child and intentionally promotes participation in all learning and social activities for all children, facilitated by individualised accommodations. Pyramid Model practices increase the social-emotional competencies of all children, of the group as a whole, and of children with behavioural challenges. A series of nine indicators detail the key elements believed to be necessary for implementing high quality inclusive practices in early childhood settings. Detailed below, we recognise the following throughout the Pyramid Model framework.

- ◆ Promotion and Affirmation of Individual Differences
- ◆ Family Partnerships
- ◆ Social Emotional Learning and Development
- ◆ Meaningful Interactions with Peers
- ◆ Curriculum
- ◆ Instruction – using child-led, culturally responsive, embedded, evidence-based and data-driven instruction during naturally occurring routines
- ◆ Collaborative Teaming
- ◆ Assessment
- ◆ Culturally Responsive and Identity Affirming Practices

Our journey to Multi age kindergarten continues

Shelli Giosis¹

¹Delta Road Preschool

Multi-age kindergarten, where 3 and 4 year old kindergarten is offered within the one group, is becoming more and more prevalent in Early Years Education. At Delta Road Preschool we have been offering Multi-age for the past 2 years and have embraced this way of teaching and being. Last year we explored what we had learnt so far; the hurdles and the opportunities. This deep dive into our program evoked many discussions, ideas and thoughts from other professionals and our community.

As a team we are passionate about offering each child the kindergarten experience that caters to them and their family. This year we will further explore how our journey continues to support our growth and refinement of the kindergarten that we offer families.

Exploring the Experiences of International Pre-service Teachers in Early Childhood Education

Saman Bakhtawar¹

¹Victoria University

International pre-service teachers bring rich perspectives and cultural diversity to the field of early childhood education, yet their experiences are often overlooked in research and practice. This paper reflects on the journey of international students in teacher education programs, particularly in Australia, and the opportunities and challenges that shape their learning. These students must navigate studying in English, adapting to unfamiliar pedagogical traditions, and finding a sense of identity and belonging while balancing their cultural backgrounds with professional expectations. Drawing on theories of identity formation, intercultural pedagogy, and the theory–practice divide, this study highlights both the barriers and the contributions of international pre-service teachers. Challenges such as language demands, assessment pressures, and the limited recognition of prior experiences often sit alongside the strengths they bring – global perspectives, cultural insights, and an ability to enrich early learning environments in unique ways. By centering the voices and lived realities of international pre-service teachers, this paper adds to broader conversations about equity, inclusion, and global citizenship in early childhood education. It argues for the need to create stronger support systems within universities and placement settings, so that international students are not only able to thrive but also to shape the profession with the diverse perspectives they carry