

bedrock

issue 2 | Vol 30 | 2025

“Grandfriends”

How different generations learn from each other

Uluru Statement from the Heart

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are aliened from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. *This is the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Endorsed by:



EXECUTIVE EDITORS

Carol Matthews, Secretary
Independent Education Union of
Australia NSW/ACT Branch
Terry Burke, Secretary
Independent Education Union of
Australia - QNT Branch

MANAGING EDITORS

Monica Crouch, Andrew Taylor

CONTRIBUTORS AND

SUB EDITORS

Emily Campbell
Monica Crouch
Ella Doyle
Andrew Taylor
Tania Yardley

DESIGN

Chris Ruddle

PUBLICATION

MAILING ADDRESS

Independent Education Union
of Australia NSW/ACT Branch
GPO Box 116
Sydney NSW 2001
Tel: (02) 8202 8900
Email: ieu@ieu.asn.au
Website: www.ieu.asn.au

ADVERTISING

AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Bedrock is published three
times a year and has
a circulation of around 3000.
Intending subscribers and
advertisers are invited to direct
enquiries to Chris Ruddle at the
IEU on (02) 8202 8900 or
chrisr@ieu.asn.au

ADVERTISING DISCLAIMER

Advertising is carried in *Bedrock*
to minimise costs to members.
Members are advised that
advertising is paid at commercial
rates and does not in any way
reflect endorsement or otherwise
of the advertised products and/
or services.

BEDROCK

This is a joint publication of the
IEUA NSW/ACT and QNT branches.
Print Post number 100007356
ISSN 1326-7566

TERMINOLOGY

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

QNT – Kindergarten

NSW/ACT – Preschool/Early
childhood centre



Bright sparks

Fostering a love of learning through curiosity

18

Upfront

News from the sector

Grandfriends

The powerful benefits of
intergenerational connection

Country life

Sense of belonging is key
in regional and remote areas

Love for language

The picture book keeping
Wirangu language alive

First Nations children

Improving access to early
childhood education

Narragunnawali

Supporting early childhood
Reconciliation Action Plans

4

Four Corners exposé

Calls for action on rogue
childcare operators

6

Skilling up

New tool for teaching toddlers

8

Leading the way

Community recognition for IEU
member raises preschool profile

10

Emotional labour

Research on lightening the load

11

Your questions

You ask, our organisers answer

12

Giveaways

Three books are up for grabs

14

16

17

20

22

23

Editorial

The re-election of the federal Labor government will provide continuity of workplace relations laws and educational initiatives.

The past three years have seen the most significant improvements to rights at work in more than a decade.

As you read this edition of *Bedrock*, take the opportunity to reflect on the many improvements to working rights, especially those impacting women.

Learn about the benefits of “Grandfriends” programs, where young children and elderly people spend time socialising to build positive relationships and learn from each other (page 6).

New research highlights the importance of feeling a sense of belonging and place-connectedness for teachers working in rural, regional and remote communities (page 8).

Reconciliation with First Nations Peoples is union business, which is why our writers urge IEU members to pick up a copy of *Where's My Minya Marlu?*, a new children's picture book written in English and Wirangu language (page 10).

Has your workplace considered developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)? Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program makes the process easy and provides support at every step. Hear from IEU member Louise Greer about Uranquinty Preschool's reconciliation journey (page 12).

A news investigation by ABC TV's *Four Corners* unearthed shocking revelations of regulatory failings and abuse of children in some childcare centres. Our union calls for urgent action on rogue childcare operators, which you can read about on page 14.

Meet dedicated preschool director and IEU member Meredith Wakeman, who was nominated for Wingecaribee Shire's Citizen of the Year Award and has built connections with a preschool in Cambodia (page 17).

We hope you enjoy this edition of *Bedrock* and feel excited at the prospect of the new federal government delivering further reform and building on the positive difference it has already made to IEU members' working lives.

Terry Burke
Secretary
IEU-QNT Branch

Carol Matthews
Secretary
IEUA NSW/ACT Branch



Improving outcomes for First Nations children

The federal Department of Education signed formal partnership agreements with SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) in March.

The agreements aim to transform how the department works with SNAICC and NATSIEC to improve education outcomes for First Nations children and their families, from early childhood education to higher education.

Each agreement recognises the strength of First Nations Peoples and cultures, acknowledging the importance of working in partnership to reform and enrich education systems.

The partnerships build on commitments to achieve socio-economic outcomes and embed all Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

These partnerships articulate how SNAICC and NATSIEC will work in partnership with the department on matters affecting First Nations children and their families.

To read the agreements: bit.ly/3Giwpjl



G8 Education shareholders vote for gender equality

The IEU welcomes the strong support for gender equality shown by shareholders of G8 Education.

Almost 30 per cent of shareholders voted at G8's annual general meeting on 29 April for a resolution to fund paid parental leave for staff.

G8 is Australia's largest sharemarket-listed childcare provider. It employs about 10,000 people – mainly women – at more than 400 childcare centres around Australia.

The resolution asked G8 to follow the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's best practice process for creating a paid parental leave policy.

Yet the G8 board recommended a vote against the resolution to fund paid parental leave to staff.

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews said childcare providers such as G8 should fund paid parental leave to address the sector's staff shortages and high turnover rates.

"A lack of employer-paid parental leave contributes to women's economic inequality," Matthews said. "This is why we will continue to fight for better outcomes for teachers in the sector."

The union backed the campaign by shareholder lobby group Sustainable Investment Exchange (SIX) to pressure G8 to show it values early childhood educators through paid parental leave.

The IEU's petition calling for paid parental leave was handed to G8's executive at the AGM by SIX Campaigns Manager Phoebe Rountree.

Matthews said the union was disappointed by the outcome of the vote but heartened by the support shown by one-in-three shareholders for paid parental leave.

"These shareholders know it makes economic sense for G8 to fund paid parental leave for its staff," she said. "Improving pay and conditions for teachers and educators in this sector means better learning outcomes for children."



NSW/ACT: KU Children's Services EA – Vote YES

The IEU lodged a bargaining dispute with the Fair Work Commission (FWC) on 7 April, prompting KU to quickly agree to amend its draft enterprise agreement to address many of the concerns raised by the union.

In particular, the increase to a minimum of two days per week non-contact time for directors will come into effect once the EA has been approved by the FWC – a significant improvement on KU's previous position.

Unfortunately, the four hours of non-contact time for educational leaders will not come into effect until one month after the EA is approved.

The IEU endorses the KU EA and encourages our members to vote YES for:

- 4% increases to salaries and allowances in 2024, 2025 and 2026
- access to Commonwealth-funded increases for teachers and directors in long day care services
- increases in non-contact time including a minimum of two days per week plus 15 discretionary days per year for directors, five hours per week for teachers and four hours per week for educational leaders
- two child-free days per year
- five days paid leave for both declared disaster events and declared pandemics
- 20% discount on the gap fee for KU employees whose children attend KU long day care services.

The IEU has pressed KU repeatedly to finalise the agreement, to ensure our members benefit from the improvements to conditions that were hard-won during negotiations.

It was only the strength of our membership that enabled us to lodge a dispute with the FWC, which led to the satisfactory resolution of outstanding matters.

KU and the union agreed that the EA would be released to all service-based teachers to review from 28 April. The result of the vote had not been announced as *Bedrock* went to press.



QNT: Bargaining continues at C&K centres

Three key issues underpin the log of claims for members in Queensland C&K centres as bargaining continues for a replacement collective agreement.

The three issues are:

- addressing unsustainable workload and ensuring work-life balance
- contemporary conditions for all staff
- wages and classifications to recognise the contribution of all teachers and assistants.

Members strongly support the maintenance and comparability of wages for teachers in C&K centres with their colleagues in Queensland Catholic and government schools.

Additionally, members are seeking an extra salary step to retain the most experienced teachers, consistent with what is available in other sectors, such as Experienced Proficient Teacher (EPT) in Queensland Catholic schools.

The ability for directors, teachers and assistants to have appropriate release time to undertake their roles in the face of increasing demands and reporting obligations is also a major issue members want addressed in this round of bargaining.

Continued member action and collective strength remain critical to achieving desired outcomes during negotiations.

Further member advice and action will be provided as negotiations continue.

“Grandfriends”

How different generations learn from each other

Young children gain immense benefits from learning with aged-care residents, writes Andrew Taylor.

When Sarah Young began studying an intergenerational program at an aged-care facility in Melbourne, she noticed how preschoolers and elderly residents became fast friends.

A senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne’s Research in Effective Education in Early Childhood (REEaCh) Centre, Dr Young says it was “absolutely joyful” watching interactions between the preschoolers and aged-care residents.

“They called them their ‘grandfriends,’” she says. “They knew their names and developed a one-on-one attachment to some of them.”

Dr Young says parents reported their children showed an understanding of difference and respect towards the elderly residents.

Parents attributed their children’s enhanced empathy to the JELLYFISH

Intergenerational Program at TLC Healthcare’s Mordialloc healthcare precinct, which has an aged-care home alongside an early learning centre.

The children were also “less scared” of older people in general, parents reported.

Social cohesion

The benefits of bringing together young and old is a burgeoning area of research that has spilled into popular culture.

The ABC TV series *Old People’s Home for 4 Year Olds* revealed how a group of preschoolers helped combat the social isolation felt by elderly people in a retirement home.

The intergenerational program featured in the show was overseen by experts including Sydney University geriatrician Professor Susan Kurrle.

Professor Kurrle described the importance of fostering relationships between different age groups to boost community wellbeing at this year’s Australian Institute for Intergenerational

Practice conference held in Sydney in February.

A 2025 Griffith University study, *Measuring the impact and influence of the ABC series on intergenerational practice in Australia* found *Old People’s Home for 4 Year Olds* and *Old People’s Home for Teenagers*, had a notable impact in fostering social cohesion by showing the social and health benefits of intergenerational practice.

In Sydney, the George Institute for Global Health is testing whether intergenerational programs in the community can improve the health of older adults alongside preschoolers’ developmental skills, such as oral language, communication and empathy.

Dr Young’s research suggests children in early learning centres benefit from a multigenerational approach to education and aged care.

Dr Young’s focus is the impact of TLC’s JELLYFISH program on children’s



emotional wellbeing, empathy development and learning outcomes.

Her ongoing research this year will examine the outcome of interactions between aged-care residents and infants and toddlers.

Dr Young also examines the teaching methods used by the early childhood educators in the program.

"We're really trying to find out what they are doing, then what is the learning," she says.

Positive impact

Many early childhood education services include intergenerational programs like the "experiment" in *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds* in which young children visit aged-care residents on a regular, perhaps weekly, basis.

In contrast, the preschoolers at TLC's Mordialloc facility met the elderly residents almost every day.

"You literally come down the stairs or the lift and the children and the adults can be together," Dr Young says.

The activities differed depending on whether the children ventured into the aged-care facility, or the adults came downstairs to the early learning centre.

"Sometimes the children would go up in the lift to the aged-care residents and they might join them in bingo or their movement sessions," Dr Young says.

In the kindergarten room, elderly residents and children might read a story, sing, make things with art materials or "walk around their community".

Dr Young's research, which will be published later this year, reveals the intergenerational program's positive impact on the development of empathy.

Preschool teachers also observed how well the children could self-regulate their behaviour, such as sitting and waiting patiently for the elderly residents.

"The teachers really noticed this – and their excitement when the residents were coming," Dr Young says.

Feeling invigorated

Dr Young's research focuses on preschoolers, but she also spoke to the facility's residents about why they chose to join the intergenerational program.

"Their response was 'Well, why wouldn't I?'" she says. "They talked about feeling invigorated being in the program, seeing the joy on the children's faces and how that made them feel."

Intergenerational programs can bring great benefits to participants young and old, but they also present some challenges.

"How do you get walkers into a kindergarten room so it's safe for everyone?" Dr Young says. "How do you make sure furniture is appropriate for the aged-care residents as well as children?"

However, Dr Young says teachers and aged-care staff showed great agility in dealing with issues such as health and safety.

Director of REEaCh Professor Tricia Eadie says the research reveals compelling evidence of the intergenerational program's "transformative potential" for participants of all ages.

"The findings highlight the profound impact of intergenerational programs like JELLYFISH, particularly in bridging generational divides when children and residents may lack access to familial relationships such as grandparents or grandchildren," she says.

Young and old: Key findings

Emotional wellbeing

Intergenerational activities facilitate emotional connections, improving engagement and wellbeing for both children and aged-care residents.

Empathy and respect

Families observe notable growth in children's empathy and respect for older generations, as meaningful relationships develop through the program.

Positive impact on children's learning and development

Teachers report enriched learning experiences for children, supported by intentional planning and purposeful interactions during the program.



"Preschool teachers observed how well the children could self-regulate their behaviour."



Country life: **Keys to success in rural and remote areas**

A sense of belonging is vital for teachers in regional and remote communities, writes Emily Campbell.

A new study highlights the benefits of supporting teachers to develop skills including place consciousness and racial literacy to prepare them for successful, fulfilling teaching careers in regional Australia.

Sense of belonging

Researchers spoke to 21 teachers, including early childhood educators, in a remote town in Western Australia to find out how they developed a sense of belonging.

The teachers interviewed for *Finding their place: How teachers can become part of their rural communities* had various levels of experience, came from diverse education sectors and taught various age groups.

Those who felt they belonged described a sense of place-connectedness and had successfully integrated into their communities.

Report co-author Dr Mary-anne Macdonald says that while one-third of Australian teachers work in regional and remote schools, initial teacher education (ITE) programs are not required to address the skills needed for regional and rural teaching.

“We need a lot of teachers in regional, rural and remote schools, because approximately 45 per cent of Australia’s schools are located in these areas,” says Macdonald, who is a researcher at Kurungkurl Katitjin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research at Edith Cowan University.

She says better systems are needed to equip teachers for these experiences.

“The onus is on systems, including government policy, ITE, graduate induction and rural teacher support programs, to increase teachers’ capacity to value and enjoy rural life so they can contribute effectively,” she says.

“Successful rural teachers value the social capital in their communities and connect to the community social space.”

Skills for success

Study co-author Dr Christina Gray from Edith Cowan University’s School of Education identifies two major differences between teaching in regional Australia compared with urban areas.

“Many rural and regional areas have relatively larger populations of First Nations communities and less of the multicultural diversity of urban centres,” Gray says.

“It becomes even more important that educators take time to understand the local Indigenous nations, their languages, families and Country because this will be a big part of life for the community.”

Although there have been improvements in ITE over recent decades, the researchers say the best preparation for improving racial literacy, cultural competence and reconciliation is time spent on Country, with First Nations Australians.

The other important skill is building relationships inside and outside schools, given the close-knit nature of smaller, sometimes isolated rural and regional communities.

“Educators who make an effort to become part of the community and embrace new experiences will find themselves rewarded with strong student-teacher relationships and fantastic opportunities to make a real difference,” Gray says.



“Class sizes are often smaller, nature and the outdoors are easily accessible, and the community will support you.”

Place-connectedness and belonging

Teachers with previous experience living in rural and regional areas tend to feel a sense of place-connectedness, demonstrating an understanding of the social capital present within such spaces.

The report describes one teacher from a small Irish village who easily adapted to a red-dust outback mining town.

“She felt comfortable with the visibility and connection of small-town life, and was open to trying new hobbies,” the report says.

Macdonald says experience in these communities certainly helps, but so can meaningful preparation.

“Teachers who were place-connected or place-willing saw themselves as having a potential future in their regional location,” she says.

“This meant they made an effort to get to know the community and understood that doing so would strengthen their sense of belonging and wellbeing, in addition to benefiting their students.”

Challenges and barriers

Macdonald says most teachers who left urban life to work in remote schools left behind their support network.

“The tyranny of distance is often perceived as the greatest challenge for teacher retention in rural and regional areas,” she says.

“Perhaps, more accurately, it is the tyranny of placelessness.”

Attracting and retaining staff in regional locations are still perennial problems impacting local students.

“The flipside of this is that communities greatly value teachers who commit to staying,” Gray says.

“When teachers are embedded in the community and experience a heightened sense of belonging and validation, it directly improves students’ academic and social outcomes.”

Incentives such as reduced HECS/HELP debt and subsidised housing make a difference in attracting teachers to regional jobs. However, there is much more to be done.

Obtaining childcare in remote areas is a barrier for many teachers with young children.

“We spoke to several teachers who wanted to work more but couldn’t because there was no space at day care for their children,” Macdonald says.

“Lack of childcare availability was one of the major obstacles and a main reason cited for leaving rural and regional teaching positions – along with feelings of isolation and trauma from violence within the community.

“They said a silver lining is that there are many opportunities for early childhood education professionals who want to work regionally.”

More information

“Finding their place: How teachers can become part of their rural communities”, Mary-anne Macdonald, Sarah Booth, Kirsten Lambert, Christina Gray, Terry Ngarritjan Kessar, Takeia Beard, *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, March 2025, bit.ly/4iDomLv

Regional voice: Meet an IEU member

Early Childhood Branch representative to IEU-QNT Council Jenny Finlay (in group photo below, second from left) is the director of Borilla Community Kindergarten in Emerald, central Queensland.

Her experiences and observations as a long-term early childhood teacher echo the researchers’ findings.

Jenny says feeling connected to the local community is important for teachers working in regional and remote areas.

“Unless there is a sense of belonging, teachers will not stay in rural areas,” she says.

Jenny agrees the lack of childcare availability in regional and remote areas impacted the ability of some teachers who are parents to work as much as they want.

“There is poor availability in rural areas for parents of young children to access childcare,” she says.

“Some teachers with young children job-share and care for each other’s children on their non-working days.”



Dr Christina Gray.



Dr Mary-anne Macdonald.

“Communities greatly value teachers who commit to staying.”



IEU members attend the Emerald Early Childhood Education networking breakfast.

Love for language



School Principal Sandra Spencer, left, with author Mia Speed.

A children's picture book written in English and Wirangu is an excellent resource for IEU members, writes Emily Campbell.

Where's my Minya Marlu? is the debut story written and illustrated by young First Nations author Mia Speed, featuring words from her Wirangu language.

The language is traditionally spoken by the Wirangu people living on the west coast of South Australia.

Published by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF), *Where's my Minya Marlu?* is about a mother marlu (kangaroo) searching for her minya marlu (little kangaroo/joey) with the help of animal friends including garliya (emu), wardu (wombat), and dylga-marda (echidna).

It was published last year as a language resource for young children in the Port Lincoln, South Australia community, located on traditional Wirangu lands.

Inspired by her young nieces and nephews who wanted to learn about their family's language and culture, Speed created the book at age 16 as a secondary student, as part of a school project.

Passing on precious knowledge

Speed says writing a book in her traditional language was meaningful for many reasons, including passing knowledge on to the next generation of young readers.

"These include cultural preservation to help my community and younger children to preserve part of their language," she says.

"As an educational resource to be used in schools to teach both the Wirangu language itself and the cultural context and promoting bilingual education that values Indigenous knowledge."

Now 18 and studying at university in Adelaide, Mia hopes to create more books in Wirangu language to help revitalise language for future generations.

The book launch was held at Lincoln Gardens Primary School in Port Lincoln, South Australia, which Speed attended as a student.

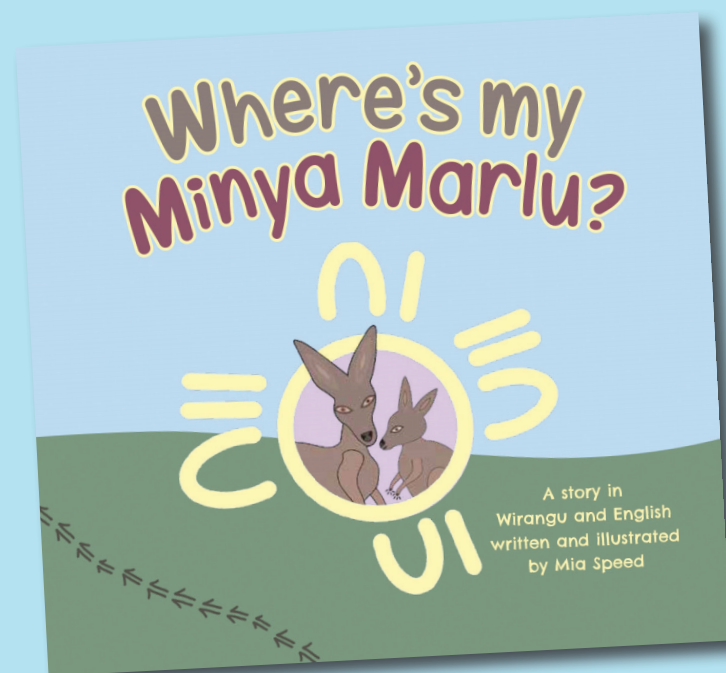
ILF ambassador and proud Yankunytjatjara and Wirangu woman Shelley Ware was present, along with teachers, students and community members.

Ware says hearing Speed share Wirangu language as she read her book was very special, and the children watching were hanging on every word.

"Congratulations Mia on sharing our beautiful culture and Wirangu language in this stunning children's book – we are so proud of you," Ware says.

"Every adult in the room was bursting with pride and tears flowed with every Wirangu word spoken aloud."

Where's my Minya Marlu? is the first book to emerge from ILF's partnership with the Far West Language Centre.



Support the ILF

The ILF is an Australian charity working with remote communities of First Nations Peoples across the country.

The foundation provides life-changing opportunities for First Nations children in remote communities in Australia, often without infrastructure such as libraries and bookstores.

Its mission is to raise funds to improve literacy outcomes in remote parts of Australia.

Since 2011, the ILF has worked with more than 400 communities, gifted almost 800,000 books, supplied 100 playgroups with early literacy resources and published 109 books reflecting 31 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

ILF's three programs – Book Supply, Book Buzz and Community Publishing – focus on ensuring access to age-appropriate resources, including books in First Languages, publishing community stories and supporting communities and families to ensure leadership, ownership and authenticity are held with community Elders and residents.

Purchase a copy of *Where's my Minya Marlu?* or find out more about the ILF at: indigenousliteracyfoundation.org.au



Connected Beginnings

Improving access for First Nations children

The federal government is improving early education outcomes for First Nations children, writes Ella Doyle.

The \$2.4 million investment in the Binari-binya yarrowoo Aboriginal Corporation Limited (BBY) in Kununurra, Western Australia, signifies the 50th site in the Connected Beginnings program.

Established in 2016, Connected Beginnings links First Nations children aged zero to five with a range of early childhood education, health and family support services to assist them to achieve learning and developmental milestones necessary for a positive transition to school.

Community consultation a necessity

The partnership between the federal government, SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) works by injecting funding into community-controlled organisations like BBY.

These groups form teams that consult with community members to design culturally and geographically appropriate solutions to support children in each location.

Grants are given to provide children and families with culturally appropriate support services, including maternal and child health, early childhood education, family support, preschools and schools.

SNAICC chief executive Catherine Liddle says allowing communities to tailor services to their unique needs creates pathways for the long-term success of children and families.

“As we celebrate 50 sites, we’re not just acknowledging a successful program, we’re seeing a movement that’s impacting the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by offering culturally safe, integrated services driving positive developmental outcomes,” she says.

With the recent expansion into Kununurra, about 20 per cent of all First Nations children are covered by a Connected Beginnings site.

Former Early Childhood Education Minister Dr Anne Aly says the new site completes the Connected Beginnings expansion six months ahead of schedule.

“Connected Beginnings is delivering significant positive results for First Nations children across the country, helping to Close the Gap by improving developmental outcomes,” Dr Aly says.

Closing the early childhood gap

The community-led and owned initiative sits within the national context of Closing the Gap policy with a specific focus on the following targets:

- 1 Everyone enjoys long and healthy lives.
- 2 Children are born healthy and strong.
- 3 Children are engaged in high-quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.
- 4 Children thrive in their early years.

Early data reveals Connected Beginnings is on track to make long-term contributions to these goals by supporting parents, children and early years providers such as kindergartens.

In communities with established Connected Beginnings sites, the program

is driving increases in preschool enrolments and improvements to developmental outcomes.



SNAICC chief executive Catherine Liddle.

Between 2019 and 2022, the program saw an increase in centre-based day care enrolment from 3210 First Nations children to 3690 children.

Additionally, Connected Beginnings contributed a 9.6 per cent increase in the year before full-time schooling (YBFS) preschool arrangements between 2018 and 2019.

The success of programs like Connected Beginnings follows national trends for First Nations early childhood education outcomes.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Closing the Gap target three is on track to meet its goal of 95 per cent of First Nations children enrolled in YBFS early childhood education by 2025.



Narragunnawali

Supporting reconciliation in early learning

A Reconciliation Action Plan is an effective way for IEU members who work in early childhood education and care to support Australia's national reconciliation movement, writes Emily Campbell.

Reconciliation promotes and facilitates respect, trust and positive relationships between First Nations Peoples and the wider Australian community.

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program focuses on supporting early childhood education centres and schools to develop and implement an individualised Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). It's a powerful and formal commitment to meaningful reconciliation.

The program aims to foster a high level of knowledge and pride in First Nations histories, cultures and contributions.

What is a RAP?

A RAP is a declaration of commitment and action to promote reconciliation between the wider Australian community and First Nations Peoples.

RAPs provide a framework for organisations to implement so they may take practical, actionable steps towards reconciliation.

The key steps for developing a RAP include:

- establish a RAP working group
- complete the reflection survey
- write a vision for reconciliation
- add RAP actions
- submit the RAP
- refresh the RAP.

RAPS should include specific actions around relationships, respect and opportunities within the early childhood education centre and the community.

Early childhood education centres looking to complete their first RAP may choose to start at the "Reflect" level.

Reconciliation Australia states:

"A Reflect RAP clearly sets out the steps you should take to prepare your organisation for reconciliation initiatives in successive RAPs. Committing to a Reflect RAP allows your organisation to spend time scoping and developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, deciding on your vision for reconciliation and exploring your sphere of influence, before committing to specific actions or initiatives."

IEU member experience

Many IEU members in early childhood education centres and schools have used the free Narragunnawali platform to create a RAP.

About 13,000 early learning services and schools throughout Australia are currently developing or have an active RAP.

Long-time IEU member Louise Greer is the Director of Uranquinty Preschool, located on Wiradjuri land in Uranquinty, near Wagga Wagga in regional NSW.

In 2017, Uranquinty Preschool was a finalist in the biennial Narragunnawali Awards early learning category for its outstanding reconciliation initiatives.

Greer says she worked with a First Nations colleague to use the Narragunnawali program to write the centre's first RAP.

"The program is easy to use, with plenty of examples and resources," Greer says.

"At Uranquinty, we started small to allow us time to achieve our goals and educate ourselves about the history of First Nations Peoples in our area."

Greer says the RAP has had a beneficial impact on the staff, families, children and First Nations People in the local community.

“Our educators are more knowledgeable and understanding – they include First Nations perspectives into their programming and practice and Wiradjuri language is spoken daily,” she says.

“Our Acknowledgement of Country provokes conversations with children around reconciliation, culture and language and it delights us when we hear the Wiradjuri language in play.

“Families share stories from home that include children singing the Acknowledgement in language or sharing facts they’ve learnt from our First Nations visitors,” Greer says.

Stronger relationships

The reconciliation initiatives at Uranquinty have strengthened positive relationships with the local community.

“We have connections with First Nations People who visit our service regularly to share language, culture and art,” Greer says.

“Our First Nations friends say they feel comfortable in our service and experience a sense of belonging.

“The children are responsive and enjoy these visits,” she says.

Greer says reconciliation is union business and teaching children about reconciliation is vital.

“Unions represent the wellbeing and interests of workers and have fought against historical and ongoing injustices faced by First Nations Peoples,” she said.

“I wanted to embed First Nations perspectives in early childhood education, because if children understand reconciliation at this young age, they will take it into adulthood.”

Beginning your RAP journey

Early childhood education services and employees can start by visiting the Narragunnawali page on Reconciliation Australia’s website.

The Narragunnawali website provides professional learning and curriculum resources for teachers and educators to support reconciliation initiatives.

Each professional learning resource aligns with:

- National Quality Standard (early learning)
- Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (primary and secondary)
- at least one RAP action.

IEU members can also register for Narragunnawali webinars and workshops for more insights on reconciliation in education.

This professional learning can be added to your elective professional development hours.

Please check the professional development guidelines with the teacher accreditation or registration regulatory body in your state or territory.

More information

narragunnawali.org.au

Getting started

Although a minimum of 14 “required” actions must be included in a RAP for it to be considered complete, Narragunnawali has a list of 40 potential RAP actions that early childhood education centres can implement.

An entry-level or ‘Reflect’ RAP framework will include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the classroom
- Cultural responsiveness for staff
- Welcome to Country
- Celebrate National Reconciliation Week
- Build relationships with community
- Teach about reconciliation
- Explore current affairs and issues
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- Take action against racism
- Curriculum planning
- Inclusive policies
- Staff engagement with RAP
- Celebrate RAP progress.

For information about the significance of these actions and how to implement them: narragunnawali.org.au



“It delights us when we hear the Wiradjuri language in play.”





FOUR CORNERS EXPOSÉ

Union calls for action on rogue childcare operators

The IEU is calling for urgent reforms to the early childhood education sector after shocking revelations emerged from an ABC investigation, writes Andrew Taylor.

The IEU has led calls for action to stamp out ruthless operators in the early childhood education and care sector following revelations of regulatory failings and the abuse of children in several centres.

An ABC *Four Corners* investigation in March exposed a flawed, inconsistent regulatory system for centres with allegations of mistreatment and exploitation of children.

The show found evidence of some centres seeking to boost profits by serving children nutritionally substandard meals, underpaying teachers and educators and hiring unqualified staff.

It was subsequently reported that some of the largest for-profit childcare operators were named in regulatory documents detailing hundreds of incidents of abuse of young children and, in some instances, inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Union calls for action

The union, which represents teachers in the long day care sector and community preschools, is appalled and saddened by the reports of unacceptable treatment of young children in some for-profit centres.

"We share the anger and disappointment of parents whose children have been harmed by a sector in systemic crisis through the failings of some for-profit childcare centres," said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"Children should never be the victims of cost-cutting by private equity and other for-profit players to boost profits and shareholder returns."

The union's Council, comprising more than 130 members, passed two motions in March demanding action from politicians in the wake of the *Four Corners* investigation.

The first motion called on the federal government to withdraw access to the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for services that repeatedly breach national regulations and any centre posing a genuine risk to children. It also called for greater funding for not-for-profit services.

The second motion expressed support for a parliamentary inquiry into the early learning system, and particularly into for-profit providers, as well as pay and conditions for staff.

"The business model of for-profit childcare providers needs reform – the focus on profits rather than high-quality education and care is behind the serious safety breaches uncovered by *Four Corners*," Matthews said.

The union has repeatedly raised issues that impact the early childhood sector such as ongoing teacher shortages leading to inadequate staffing ratios.

IEU backs NSW parliamentary inquiry

The union welcomes the establishment of a NSW Upper House inquiry into the childcare sector following the *Four Corners* revelations of serious safety breaches.

Submissions to the inquiry are open until the end of May and hearings are scheduled for later this year in Sydney and regional NSW.

The inquiry will be chaired by Upper House Greens MP Abigail Boyd who told the ABC she wants to uncover the “real reasons” behind the alarming rise in harmful incidents in early childhood education and care centres and “take decisive action to clean up this sector”.

“The safety of our children and workers is non-negotiable,” she said.

The *Four Corners* exposé of shonky for-profit providers also prompted calls for action from federal politicians.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said there needs to be an investigation and action taken if standards are not met but ruled out a royal commission into the sector.

Former federal Early Childhood Education Minister Dr Anne Aly said the states were responsible for ensuring services comply with the National Quality Framework, including safety, security and child health measures.



Calls for national body

Victorian Greens Senator Steph Hodgins-May in March called for an early childhood education and care commission with the power to crack down on rogue operators and shut down unsafe centres.

“The for-profit childcare sector is a playground for cowboy operators who are profiteering off our children,” she said.

Former Teal MP Zoe Daniel backed calls for a commission to determine a national approach to regulatory standards and weed out “unscrupulous operators”.

“It is reprehensible that some operators are putting profits ahead of children’s safety and wellbeing,” she said.

Daniel says Australia’s current early childhood funding model had facilitated the rapid expansion of for-profit providers, who now operate more than 70 per cent of all childcare services.

Quality concerns

Data from Australia’s childcare regulator shows for-profit childcare services are, on average, rated as lower quality than not-for-profit centres.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in 2023 found large for-profit providers spend far less on staffing than not-for-profit providers.

Large for-profit childcare companies have a higher proportion of part-time and casual staff and employ less experienced early childhood teachers.

Many for-profit childcare companies also have high numbers of staffing waivers granted by regulators, which permit them to operate centres without the required number of qualified staff.

Unpublished research by Macquarie University social policy Professor Gabrielle Meagher last year found more than one-third of staff in for-profit services were not qualified.

The Parenthood chief executive Georgie Dent said funding the sector through the CCS is “effectively a blank cheque for unscrupulous providers who choose to profit at the expense of quality education and care of children”.

“By moving to a fixed-fee model where parents pay no more than \$10 a day, we can ensure early childhood education and care is affordable for families, address excess profits and drive quality,” she said.

What research reveals

Research led by University of Queensland professor Karen Thorpe found there was a greater likelihood of cutting corners – no cleaners, teacher-student ratios exceeded – in centres located in low-income areas where the capacity to charge parents is constrained.

“I am not sure there is a systemic crisis but there is much to improve upon in assessment and rating and monitoring,” Professor Thorpe says.

The Productivity Commission last year noted many services assessed as “meeting” the national standards had a gap of more than four years between assessments – services with lower ratings are reassessed more frequently.

“This may be a matter of resourcing to regulatory authorities but there is also a need for a more efficient and educator friendly, collaborative system of assessment and rating and monitoring to support quality improvement,” Professor Thorpe says.

“There are elements in the NQS (National Quality Standards) that are not predictive of child outcomes and yet staff morale, turnover and general wellbeing is missing.”

Professor Thorpe says educators are at the heart of quality in the sector.

“Reasonable pay and conditions are a baseline for quality,” she says. “Turnover and poor wellbeing limit potential for high quality.”

“Most educators love their work despite poor pay. They want to do a good job but when they are treated poorly and given external pressures to perform that does not benefit children – or educators.”



Reversing the staffing crisis

The long day care sector has struggled with an acute staffing crisis due to low pay. But unions and the federal government have worked together to attract and retain the right staff through 15% pay rises for teachers and educators over 2024 and 2025.

The regulator also needs to ensure that all centres meet the accreditation standards required by the law and expected by parents. Highly qualified staff are crucial.

The IEU is also pursuing pay rises for teachers in NSW community preschools, where there is a similar staffing crisis. These teachers have the same qualifications as their colleagues in schools but are paid substantially less. We are fighting to change that.

“The wellbeing of children should never be sacrificed for the sake of profit,” Matthews says.

Skilling up New tool for teaching toddlers

An innovative program offers early childhood teachers specialist knowledge and skills for teaching children under three, writes Andrew Taylor.

Two-thirds of children in Australia under the age of three regularly attend an early childhood education service.

Evidence shows that from birth to three years is a critical period for learning, development and wellbeing – underlining the importance of access to high-quality services and family support.

Macquarie University Education Professor Linda Harrison says highly qualified teachers are associated with better quality early childhood education and improved learning outcomes.

Meetings between early childhood education and care professionals, government representatives and employers also identified a need for research focused on teachers working with children from birth to three years.

This prompted a team led by Professor Harrison to develop Observe, Reflect, Improve Children's Learning (ORICL) – an online tool that aims to equip teachers with specialist knowledge and skills so they can effectively document and plan for infants' and toddlers' learning, development and wellbeing.

ORICL also provides on-the-job professional learning to complement and align with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

Addressing the skills gap

ORICL supports early childhood teachers and educators to observe, reflect on and improve the quality of individual children's learning experiences.

Professor Harrison says observation (noticing/recording), assessment (interpreting learning) and planning (consolidating, enriching and extending learning) are critical components of the EYLF V2.0 planning cycle. They are also essential requirements of the National Quality Standard.

"But educators working with very young children report that their pre-service qualifications provide insufficient coverage of the developmental and pedagogical needs of children under three," she says.

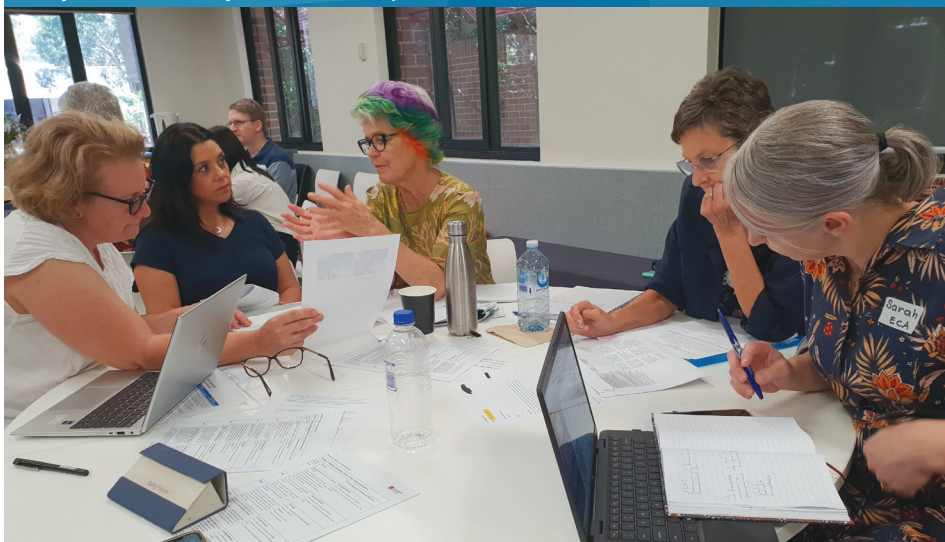
"Once working, they have limited access to professional development that supports their capacity to provide quality experiences for children in this age group."

Professor Harrison says ORICL was designed to meet that gap.

Educators can use ORICL to observe and record a child's initiatives, actions, interactions and communications – as well as the responses of other children and educators to the child.



Macquarie University Education Professor Linda Harrison.



Meetings called for more research into teaching children up to three years.

ORICL provides 117 stimulus items across six domains aligned with the EYLF learning outcomes, principles and practices.

"Educators can also upload examples such as photographs, communications with the families, and any reflections on or interpretations of the child's experiences," she says.

Guided reflection on a child's progress

ORICL prompts educators to rate what they observe, guided by a specific statement and description.

"Most items include examples to guide educators in their choice of response," Professor Harrison says. "They simply click on the most appropriate rating that captures the child's typical experiences and can add comments to give more detail."

Information that educators enter online – such as the ORICL ratings, additional photos and observations – can be downloaded as a PDF summary that captures what educators have noticed about a child's experiences, interactions and communications over a defined period.

"This is not an assessment, or a developmental summary, but a way to deepen understanding of an individual child's interests, ways of learning and sense of wellbeing," Professor Harrison says.

Workload implications

Burgeoning workloads are a long-standing concern of early childhood teachers.

Professor Harrison's research is collecting information on workload implications for teachers with differing workplace agreements in terms of their 'off-the-floor' planning time as part of her research.

"But we expect that ORICL observations would be undertaken by educators during their normal time allocation," she says.

Development of ORICL comes as the federal government prepares to trial its preschool outcomes measure (POM) in 2025. "The POM is an outcomes measure whilst ORICL supports documentation and critical reflection on pedagogical practice," Professor Harrison says.

More information: oricl.org



IEU Member Meredith Wakeman was nominated for Wingecarribee Shire's Citizen of the Year award.

Leading the way

Meredith Wakeman's achievements in early childhood education are valued in her community, writes Tania Yardley.

Meredith Wakeman had never heard of Bowral, NSW, before she applied for a job in a preschool.

She got the job and "literally moved here four weeks later".

Thirty-five years later, Meredith is the director of Gumnut Preschool and a much-loved member of her local area who has educated generations of young children.

"We have had multiple generations of families coming to this preschool, and they always look to come back to the same preschool again with their children," she says.

Meredith's achievements, both locally and overseas, were recognised this year when she was nominated for the Wingecarribee Shire Council's Citizen of the Year award.

Recognising great work

Meredith hopes the nomination raises the profile of early childhood education.

"It's recognition for the great work that all of our early childhood teachers and educators are doing here at our preschool and across the state," she says.

Meredith's achievements include celebrating the preschool's 50th anniversary and overseeing an upgrade of Gumnut's playground to make the space "more child-centered".

"We now have more challenging play areas," she says.

The new playground is made of natural materials. It has raised ramps for riding bikes over, a sensory pathway and tree stumps of varying heights for climbing and testing balance.

Meredith has plans for more improvements.

"We've just demolished another storage shed," she says.

"We're hoping to build a sheltered space for the children so they can access either an arts space or a flexible area that we could turn into our woodwork space."

Meredith's influence extends beyond Bowral to Cambodia. She has twice visited a preschool there to mentor educators and maintains regular contact between visits.

In 2023, she personally raised \$1200 for the Cambodian preschool. Her students in Bowral then got involved, raising money for books and art materials.

Last year, her fundraising efforts expanded, with the Gumnut community donating a further \$3500.

"One hundred per cent of the funds raised at the parents social evening went towards the running of the preschool in Cambodia," she says. "Paying wages and funding breakfast for the children."

Meredith hopes to foster an ongoing relationship between Gumnut Preschool and its counterpart in Cambodia.

Changing profession

Meredith has witnessed many changes in her profession since she began teaching preschoolers.

"I think we give the children a lot more agency than we used to," she says. "We're more responsive to what we see in the children."

Increasing cultural awareness and inclusivity are also important changes in the evolution of the profession and "embedding Indigenous perspectives into our service", she said.

Meredith has been a proud IEU member for over 15 years. Last year, she became an ambassador for the Unite for Change campaign for better pay for community preschool teachers.

"I've been involved with the IEU promoting improved wages and conditions for quite a number of years," she says.

Meredith said better pay and conditions for early childhood teachers is crucial to improving learning outcomes for young children.

"Early childhood is the time when the building blocks are established for lifelong learning," she says. "There's also the scientific data that tells us that the greatest amount of learning occurs in the first five years."

BRIGHT SPARKS

Igniting children's curiosity

Promoting curiosity is a powerful way to foster a love of learning, writes Emily Campbell.

Griffith University recently published findings on how young children's curiosity can be activated and nurtured to benefit their social, emotional and cognitive development.

The research followed 57 preschool-aged children who were engaged in fortnight-long enrichment programs on 15 separate topics over three years.

Children innately curious

In *The impact of interest: an emergent model of interest development in the early years*, researchers – led by Dr Christa van Aswegen from Griffith's School of Education and Professional Studies – unearthed insights into how young children develop sustained interest in a topic.

She says young children are naturally inquisitive and it is relatively easy to rouse their curiosity.

"The early years are an ideal time to introduce children to a range of different topics and begin developing interests, because their little brains are highly malleable," Dr van Aswegen says.

"Their curiosity needs a spark, which typically comes in the form of a social interaction with an adult, such as an early childhood education teacher or parent, who provides an initial hook."

Dr van Aswegen says children typically need extrinsic motivation from an adult to generate curiosity.

"A teacher pointing out a nearby bird in the garden to children and providing children with an interesting piece of information about the bird can be enough to spark their interest," she says.

"Once a child's curiosity is stirred, their interest grows, their knowledge increases, so their interest shifts to become intrinsically motivated."

"General interest is a powerful motivating force, and impacts children cognitively, behaviourally and emotionally."

"Once a child's curiosity is stirred ... their interest shifts to become intrinsically motivated."

Building brain files

Once curiosity is sufficiently sparked, knowledge and emotion are key components to developing an authentic interest in a topic.

Dr van Aswegen says knowledge acquisition in the early years is vital because it forms the foundation for children's cognitive, social, emotional and academic development.

"During the early years, the brain grows and forms neural connections at incredible rates, so rich exposure to knowledge during this time strengthens cognitive pathways and makes learning more efficient later in life," she says.

Brain-filing is the term Dr van Aswegen uses in her research to describe having a rudimentary understanding of, and interest in, a topic.

She says brain files are the basic building blocks young children rely on to understand more complex concepts as they grow.

"If a child knows the name of some animals or has a brain file for the difference between a mammal and a reptile and an insect, that lays the

groundwork for later learning of biology in primary school," Dr van Aswegen says.

"The more brain files a child has at an early age, the better, because all that information is stored in the right place and can be easily retrieved and built on."

Imparting knowledge requires adults to intentionally provide children with terminology and basic concepts to build brain files.

Learning new things and building brain files provides children with new vocabulary, new ideas and reasons to talk.

Dr van Aswegen says this can help develop expressive and receptive language, which helps with communication and school-readiness.

"Knowledge acquisition is not just about having facts, it's about wiring the brain for learning, building confidence and creating the base for everything that follows," she says.

Emotional engagement

Dr van Aswegen says interest is deepened when children feel an emotional connection to the subject matter.

"Emotion prompts children to feel something for the subject matter and care about it, such as the birds in the earlier example," she says.

"Children become more interested in topics that feel personally meaningful or connected to their sense of identity."

"Positive emotions like a sense of wonder, awe or compassion, or excitement, pride and joy, help children remember experiences and develop empathy."

Resources for interest development

The research also found value in using diverse learning materials and resources to spark curiosity.

Dr van Aswegen says no matter the topic, whether space, nature, trees,



famous landmarks, birds or insects, having high-quality materials assisted with capturing children's attention.

"I chose big-picture topics to help children make sense of the world, but in my research, I wanted to see what worked best to generate children's interest," she says.

"My elements included large, realistic images like photographs, objects, short documentary clips, music, action, story books and I always followed with an art-based activity related to the topic."

These varied resources are connected to the five senses, helping children connect new ideas with what they already know.

Dr van Aswegen says keeping momentum was vital to maintaining interest.

"Knowledge acquisition is not just about facts, it's about wiring the brain."

"As soon as children began to disengage, I changed the component to recapture their attention again," she says.

"This way, you're engaging with the topic in different ways and that repetition with variety helps reinforce their learning and interest by keeping it exciting."

In many cases, Dr van Aswegen noticed children's interest in a topic was sparked shortly after being introduced, as evidenced through their play.

"Interest is a very difficult thing to measure, but the topics emerging in the themes of the children's play were a strong indicator to me," she says.

The more interesting a topic became to a child, the more questions they would ask or seek answers to independently, leading to a positive cycle of repeated engagement and learning.

Dr van Aswegen says early childhood teachers, assistants and parents do not need to be experts in a topic to spark children's interest – almost any subject can be covered in an age-appropriate way.

"Interest fuels joys and confidence and connection, which creates a strong foundation for learning," she says.

More information

Read the study: bit.ly/435G6cH



Emotional labour

Ways to lighten the load

Early childhood teachers are weighed down with too much “emotion work”, writes Andrew Taylor.

Joanne Ng worked at several early childhood education services during her decade-long career as an early childhood teacher.

At the time, Ng says she had limited knowledge of the emotional labour she put into her job, “let alone awareness of my emotional state”.

“Feeling burnout was the common theme in most instances for the change of role, while others were for career progression,” she says.

Ng says she suppressed her true feelings to comply with the expectations of the workplace and managers, recalling an instance when a colleague disparaged a meal she had brought for lunch.

“I felt hurt by that remark,” she says. “Being new to Australia and teaching, I felt like an ignorant outsider who did not care about others.

“I had to pretend nothing had happened and learnt quickly that anything fishy is not welcome in a shared space.”

A Master of Research student at Macquarie University, Ng says those teaching experiences sparked her interest in burnout and the role of emotional labour in teacher turnover.

Managing feelings

Emotional labour is often used to describe unpaid activities, usually carried out by women, such as keeping mental to-do lists or remembering birthdays and medical appointments.

The term was coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in her 1983 book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*.

However, Hochschild disagrees with the popular definition of emotional labour and instead defines it as “emotion work”, or the management of one’s own feelings, performed for pay and as a condition of employment.

Examples of jobs demanding emotional labour include flight attendant, executive assistant, waiter and early childhood teacher.

Like teachers who employ emotional labour in their work with children, Ng says women in home settings often carry a significant nurturing load.

“However, a key distinction lies in the context: unlike educators, women in domestic roles are not subject to formal organisational expectations or bound by a prescribed job design,” she says.

“Educators, by contrast, must navigate institutional demands and accountability structures that they have little power to alter.”

Exhaustion and burnout

Ng’s research focuses on the use of emotional labour by early childhood teachers – and the factors that lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout and the decision to leave a job.

Her study reveals that supportive leadership, meaningful work and recognition help retain staff.

In contrast, Ng says factors such as poor leadership, infrequent work recognition, inadequate physical work environment, poor resources and lack of job clarity demand more emotional labour from early childhood teachers.

This can lead to feelings of emotional dissonance and increase the likelihood of job turnover.

Ng’s study builds on earlier research from the University of Waikato’s Samantha Carey and Anna Sutton, who found the regulation and management of emotions was integral to the early childhood teacher’s role.

“Surface acting (outwardly displaying a feigned required emotion) is negatively associated with wellbeing,” they wrote in *Early childhood teachers’ emotional labour: The role of job and personal resources in protecting wellbeing*.

Early childhood teachers are required to be emotionally available to interact positively in a relational manner as set out in the relational pedagogy in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).



“Directors should have open and frequent check-ins with early childhood teachers to prioritise their wellbeing.”



Macquarie University researcher and former teacher Joanne Ng.

“Early childhood teachers use emotional labour voluntarily to regulate their emotions to support the growth and development of children,” Ng says.

“The emotional labour is like an invisible cushion prodding them to continue to function in a professional manner, displaying calmness and patience when faced with a toddler biting another child.”

Emotional dissonance

However, Ng says the involuntary use of emotional labour may lead to exhaustion and burnout that, in turn, leads to teacher turnover.

“Emotional dissonance arises when educators are required to employ emotional labour in high job demands or to cope in low job resources situations,” she says.

Ng says the absence of supportive mechanisms – such as strong leadership, accessible feedback channels and alignment between pedagogical approaches and organisational values – undermines teachers’ practice.

“Similarly, at the individual level, insufficient professional development to meet evolving job demands, along with a lack of training in emotion regulation strategies and skills, leaves educators feeling isolated,” she says.

Ng says teachers can be trained to develop awareness

of emotional labour, creating a shared understanding that supports individual reflection.

“Open conversations with colleagues and directors about early childhood teachers’ use of emotional labour can lead to improved resource allocation,” she says.

“This helps mitigate emotional exhaustion and the risk of burnout, by conceptualising emotional labour as a professional skill.”

She also says a shared language around emotional labour can help identify when emotion regulation strategies are used, guiding training needs or resource distribution.

What employers should do

Employers can help teachers manage the burden of emotional labour by providing clear job descriptions that reflect the expectations of work.

“Employers should also take responsibility for organisational burdens such as staff shortages and not expect remaining staff to shoulder that burden – for example, to complete outstanding children documentation on their own time,” Ng says.

Ng says directors should have open and frequent check-ins with early childhood teachers to prioritise their wellbeing and manage resourcing.

“Formal and informal channels of work recognition can be established to support positive reinforcement of early childhood teachers’ feelings about their work by recognising their work efforts,” she says.

Contact your union for support

Employers have a duty of care to ensure the health and safety of staff. This means they are legally obliged to mitigate psychosocial hazards such as high workload and poor job clarity that can lead to emotional dissonance.

IEU members can also feel empowered to take action to reduce psychosocial hazards and bring them to the employer’s attention by attending member training, electing a rep and establishing a Health and Safety Committee.

Members should contact the union immediately for support and advice about potential psychosocial hazards or psychological injury in the workplace.

The union can support members through the best process of dealing with an injury or making a claim for workers compensation.





Melanie Stellmacher is an Industrial Officer for IEU-QNT. Tina Smith is an Organiser for the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch. They answer your industrial and legal questions as they relate to state laws and regulations.

NSW/ACT Dealing with challenging students

Dear Tina

We have a child attending our preschool who is violent towards other children and staff. I have been kicked, bitten, and had furniture thrown at me.

The incidents have been documented, parents informed, and the preschool has provided extra support.

However, I don't feel safe. I specifically want to know my rights around my safety as I am anxious in going to work.

Erin



Tina Smith

Dear Erin

You are not alone. We are hearing from members across all educational sectors of children exhibiting extreme behaviours, leading to workplace injuries.

Your preschool is certainly on the right track. Document the event: keep a record of the date, time, location, and details of the incident.

Follow up with your employer or relevant department if you work for a larger organisation.

If you are injured or have suffered a diagnosable condition (physical or psychological) caused by something that has occurred in your workplace, talk to your GP about a Mental Health Plan and/or a workers compensation claim.

Employers have a legal responsibility to provide a safe workplace free of physical and psychosocial hazards under the *Work Health & Safety Act 2011*.

You should report incidents and hazards involving significant violence such as biting, tearing hair out, kicking and psychosocial hazards to SafeWork NSW.

You can also report incidents that compromise, or have the potential to compromise, the wellbeing of children to the NSW Department of Education. This can include children experiencing and witnessing violent behaviour. Your employer has a responsibility to act on injury reports.

Tina

QNT Performance under scrutiny

Dear Melanie

I am an experienced teacher, and I have been working at my current kindergarten for some time without there ever having been an issue.

We've had a changeover in committee with the new president recently advising that I will be placed on a PIP.

What should I do?

Janita



Melanie
Stellmacher

Dear Janita

A performance management process (sometimes known as a performance improvement plan or PIP) is a process to address deficiencies in an employee's work performance or conduct.

It is critical that a performance management process is designed to achieve an identified level of performance or conduct and should not be a fast track to disciplinary action.

Before a formal PIP is initiated, an employer should:

- outline the performance concerns clearly and in writing
- invite you to respond to the performance concerns in writing
- confirm that a formal performance management process will commence if performance concerns are not addressed.

Where a formal PIP is initiated, any plan must outline, in detail, the concerns and expectations the employer has of you. Your employer must explicitly list their issues and specify exactly what needs to be done to address these to improve your performance.

A PIP must include specific, clear and objective criteria or benchmarks by which your performance will be monitored during the process so that improvements can easily be measured and evaluated.

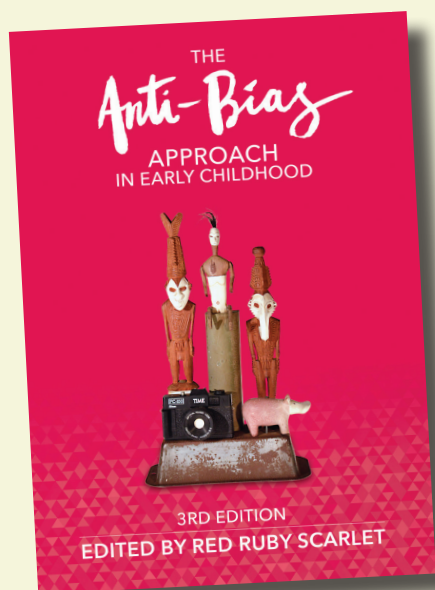
Performance processes must be designed to give you a genuine opportunity to either show you are meeting the requirements of your role, or to improve on any valid concerns raised.

Any plan should involve regular reviews where you can have a support person with you. Your employer must similarly offer additional information and support to assist you in addressing existing performance concerns.

If you have concerns about a current process, contact your union branch for assistance and support.

Melanie

BEDROCK GIVEAWAYS



The anti-bias approach in early childhood, 3rd edition

Edited by: Red Ruby Scarlet

Publisher: Multiverse Publishing

This edition revisits and builds upon the content from previous editions to include research and practice that has shaped early childhood over the past 15 years.

It also contains the stories of more than 50 early childhood educators who share their powerful experiences of anti-bias curriculum approaches and efforts to promote social justice.

Superheroes for a day

Author: Craig Cormick

Publisher: Exisle Publishing

Three autistic friends transform their unique abilities into superpowers to save their school from endless maths.

This engaging story normalises the experiences of autistic kids in an entertaining and accessible way, making them the heroes and offering a fresh perspective on neurodiversity.



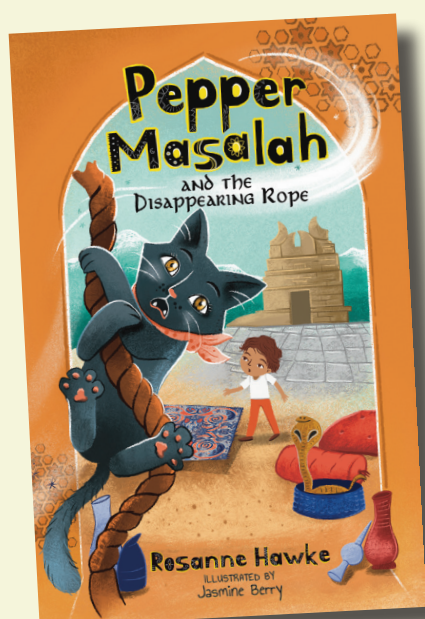
Pepper Masalah and the disappearing rope

Author: Rosanne Hawke

Publisher: Rhiza Press

Pepper Masalah and Zamir fly with their magic carpet back in time to find its original owner. They travel to Moghul India to meet the ailing Emperor Shah Jahan. Zam is accused of stealing the carpet and is thrown in the dungeon.

How will Pepper and her new friends rescue him? And how can they return home without the carpet?



Email entries to giveaways@ieu.asn.au with the title of the book you would like to receive in the subject line. Write your name, membership number and postal address in the body of your email. All entries must be received by 10 July 2025.

Make your big tomorrow your best tomorrow

It's never too early to start planning for your big tomorrow. The new NGS Super calculator can estimate how much super you may have by retirement, how much you might need and how long your super may last. It is an easy-to-use tool designed to make planning for your retirement simple and suited to your needs and goals.

Try the calculator today.



This is general information only and does not take into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. Before acting on this information, or making an investment decision, consider whether it is appropriate to you and read our Product Disclosure Statements and Target Market Determinations. You should also consider obtaining financial, taxation and/or legal advice tailored to your personal circumstances before making a decision. This information has been issued by NGS Super Pty Ltd ABN 46 003 491 487 as trustee of NGS Super ABN 73 549 180 515, RSE Licence L0000567 and AFSL 233 154. Ratings issued by SuperRatings Pty Ltd a Corporate Authorised Representative (CAR No. 1309956) of Lonsec Research Pty Ltd AFSL No. 421445 are general advice only. Rating is not a recommendation to purchase, sell or hold any product and subject to change without notice. SuperRatings may receive a fee for the use of its ratings and awards. Visit [SuperRatings.com.au](https://www.SuperRatings.com.au) for ratings information.

