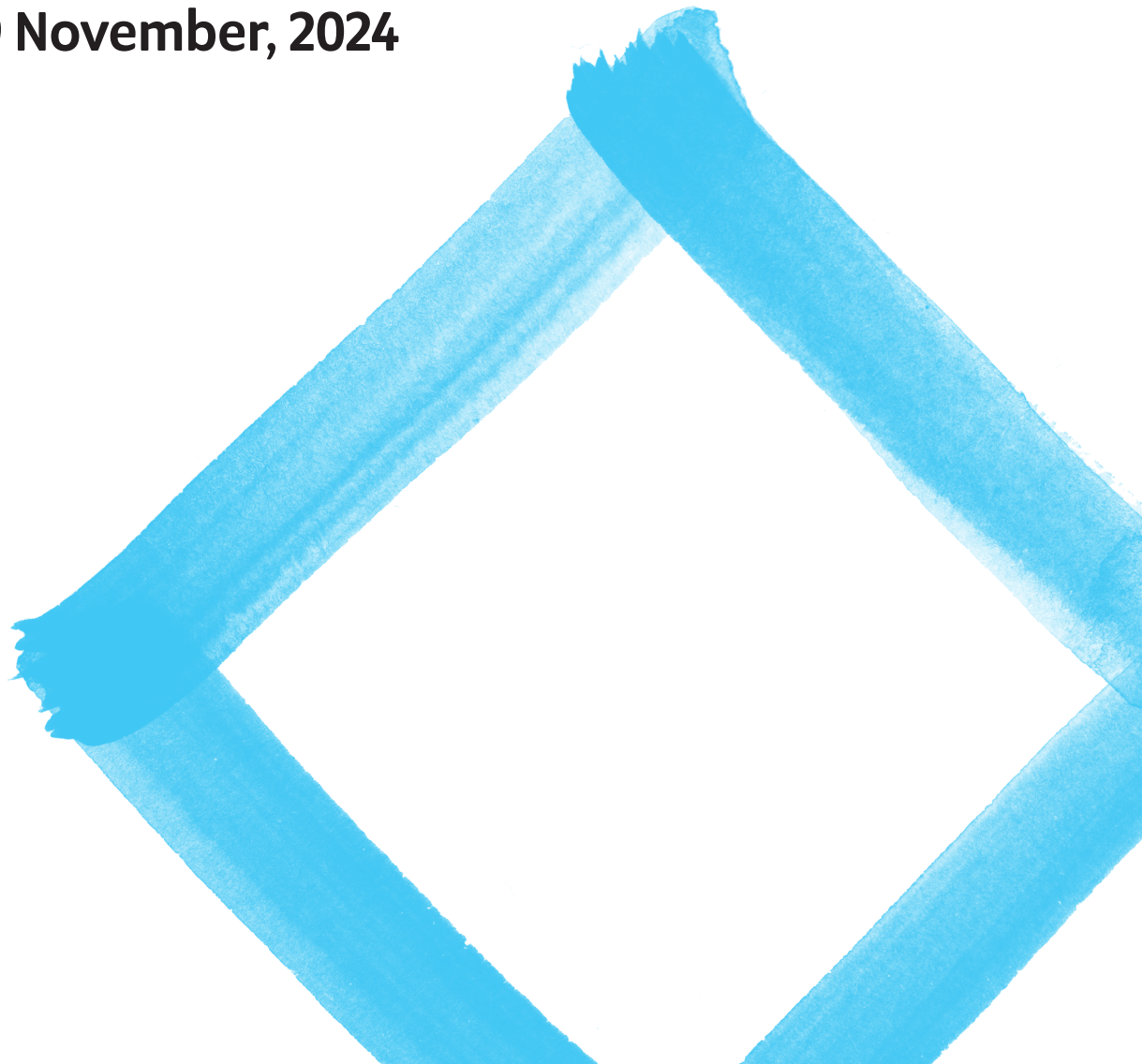


**VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY**

# **Contemporary Perspectives in Early Childhood Education Symposium**

**Saturday 9 November, 2024**



# Program

8.00–9.00am

**Registration**

City Tower Foyer (Ground floor)

9.00–9.30am

**Welcome – City Queen Lecture Theatre**

Professor Mary-Rose McLaren, Head of Program (Early Childhood Education)

Professor Rob Strathdee, Executive Dean College of Arts, Business, Law, Education and IT

Professor Anthony Watt, Associate Dean Research & Research Training (Initial Teacher Education)

9.30–10.30am

**Keynote Presentation – City Queen Lecture Theatre**

**Being an Early Childhood Professional in Contemporary Times: Navigating Complex Terrain**

Professor Andrea Nolan, Deakin University, Australia

**Morning Tea**

10.30–11.00am

**Morning Tea** – Level 10, City Tower

**Parallel Paper Presentation Session 1-1 – Room 610 Level 6, City Tower**

11:00–11:20am

**VU Play**

Judd Walsh

11:25–11:45am

**The Ins and Outs of Loose Parts (AKA The East and West of Loose Parts)**

Claire Paino

11:50am–12:10pm

**Art and Play – What’s the Difference?**

Trudy Moore

**Chair:** Easton Myat

**Parallel Paper Presentation Session 1-2 – Room 611 Level 6, City Tower**

11:00–11:20am

**Fostering Emotionally Intelligent Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care**

Koren Naylor

11:25–11:45am

**Supporting Early Childhood Educators to Foster Children’s Self-Regulation and Executive Functioning Through Professional Learning**

Rosalyn Muir

11:50am–12:10pm

**Pre-service ECTs Preparing for Trauma-Aware Practice: an Animal-Assisted Intervention**

Katharine Gronow Rajek

**Chair:** Joanne Tanean

### Parallel Paper Presentation Session 1-3 – Room 612 Level 6, City Tower

- 11:00–11:20am**      **Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Early Years**  
Tracey Cooper
- 11:25–11:45am**      **Including Same-Sex Parented Families in Early Childhood Education in Australia: Listening to Practitioners and Parents in Australia**  
Meg Liang
- 11:50am–12:10pm**      **Empowering Early Childhood Educators: Leadership Strategies for Integrating Anti-Bias Practices in Inclusive Learning Environment**  
Rachel Bao & Nurhan Yesildag

**Chair:** Anna Munari

### Parallel Paper Presentation Session 1-4 – Room 613 Level 6, City Tower

- 11:00–11:20am**      **Exploring the Impact of Digital Poverty on Early Childhood Education: A Yarning Approach**  
Janine Arantes & Masud Ahmmed
- 11:25–11:45am**      **Learning with Food in Early Childhood Education and Care: More-Than-Human Agency in Pedagogical Practices for Livable Futures**  
Sayuri Amemiya
- 11:50am–12:10pm**      **VR and the Preparation of Early Childhood Teachers – Barriers, Opportunities and Affordances**  
Associate Professor Wendy Goff, Anamika Devi & Jennifer Cutri

**Chair:** Christina McInerney

### Lunch

- 12.15–1.15pm**      **Lunch Break – Level 10, City Tower**

### Poster Presentations

**Our Journey to Multiage**

Shelli Giosis

**Inclusive Early Years Curriculum in Myanmar: Teacher Education, Policy, and NGO Partnerships**

Easton Myat

**Working with CALD Professionals (Pre-Service & In-Service Teachers) and Communities in ECE Workforce**

Joanne Tanean

**‘Lawlessness’ and Provocation: Activism in Curriculum**

Jessica Branca & Laura Kerr

**Reconciliation in Early Childhood Education Through the Trocess of Integrating Woi Wurrung Wurundjeri Language into our Learning Environment**

Ashanti Permatasari, Rieke Mattiesch & Carla Young

**Risks and Rewards Beyond the Gate: Why Agency Matters for Contemporary Early Childhood Education**

Stephanie Willey & Bronwyn Joslyn

**Who Works in Long Day Care and Why? Workforce Professionalisation and Retention, Understood Through a Geographies of Care Framework**

Ruth Slonimsky

---

**1:30–2.30pm**      **Keynote Presentation – City Queen Lecture Theatre**  
**Contemporary Perspectives on ECE Quality and Rights: A View from Sweden**  
Professor Valerie Margrain, Karlstad University, Sweden

**Parallel Paper Presentation Session 2-1 – Room 610 Level 6, City Tower**

---

**2.45–3.05pm**      **Care in the 3-Year-Old’s Curriculum**  
Sarah Louise Gandolfo

---

**3.10–3.30pm**      **Musings from a Multi-Aged, Multi-Skilled Collective**  
Audrey Robinson

---

**3.35–3.55pm**      **Interventions and Approaches Targeting Early Self-Regulation or Executive Functioning in Preschools: A Systematic Review**  
Rosalyn Muir

---

**Chair:** Katharine Gronow Rajek

**Parallel Paper Presentation Session 2-2 – Room 611 Level 6, City Tower**

---

**2.45–3.05pm**      **Changing Pedagogy and Practice; Why Bother?**  
Ruth Harper

---

**3.10–3.30pm**      **Supporting Recently Appointed Leaders’ Learning Needs: The Quest for Useful Knowledge and Social Connection**  
Rachel Foster

---

**3.35–3.55pm**      **My Practice of Nature Pedagogy**  
Rachel Bao

---

**Chair:** Hepsibah Zabde

**Afternoon Tea**

---

**4.00–4.15pm**      **Afternoon Tea – Level 6, City Tower**

---

**4:15–4.30pm**      **Closing – Level 6, City Tower**  
Launching Journal of Early Years Insights (JOEYI)  
Announcing ECE Conference 2025  
Summarizing, Thanking and Closing

**Symposium Committee**  
ece.symposium@vu.edu.au

**Prof Mary-Rose McLaren**  
Head of Program, Early Childhood Education program, VU  
mary-rose.mclaren@vu.edu.au

**Dr Nathalie Nehma**  
Senior Lecturer, Early Childhood Education Program, VU  
nathalie.nehma@vu.edu.au

**Dr Masud Ahmmed**  
Lecturer, Early Childhood Education Program, VU  
masud.ahmmed@vu.edu.au

**Bonnie Zhen**  
Lecturer, Early Childhood Education Program, VU  
bonnie.zhen@vu.edu.au

# Abstracts for Keynote Presentations

---

## **Being an Early Childhood Professional in contemporary times: Navigating complex terrain** Professor Andrea Nolan

Andrea Nolan is Professor of Education (Early Childhood) in the School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education at Deakin University, Australia. She is a member of Deakin University's Strategic Research Centre (SRC) – Research for Educational Impact (REDI). Andrea is the founder and Chair of the Victorian Early Childhood Research Consortium (VECRC), a group of 90 cross-disciplinary researchers from a number of Victorian and interstate universities who come together to support research capacity in early childhood. Andrea has produced a significant body of research focusing on the capabilities of the early childhood workforce with a specific interest in the professional learning of teachers. She has researched professional identities, mentoring, inter-professional work, and reflective practice. Her work has received national and international recognition particularly relating to mentoring. Educator practice has been a complementary theme to her research where she has focused on facilitating young children's language development, transition to school practices, and practice that improves outcomes for children and families experiencing disadvantage.

In many OECD countries, including Australia, the established link between quality early childhood programs and positive child trajectories has led to a push to professionalise the early childhood workforce. However, professionalism brings with it its own politics and often means an increase in accountability and performativity agendas being invoked that act to limit the agency and flexibility of educators. This presentation will reflect on what it means to be an Early Childhood Professional in current times focusing on what needs to be considered when the workforce is diverse in qualifications, experience, workforce profiles, ethnicity and positions within organisational workplace structures, and competing discourses vie for support.

## **Contemporary Perspectives on ECE Quality and Rights: A View from Sweden** Professor Valerie Margrain

Valerie Margrain is Professor of Educational Work at Karlstad University in Sweden. She also works as a part-time professor in Norway and adjunct professor to Victoria University in Melbourne. She has previously worked in early childhood teacher education in New Zealand and in Melbourne (at ACU). Since moving to Sweden in late 2018, Valerie has obtained substantive research funding in the areas of gifted education, early childhood education, and internationalisation in teacher education. She has family in NZ and Melbourne, enjoys travelling, lifelong learning, and her new e-bike.

In this presentation, contemporary perspectives on early childhood education and care from Sweden will be shared, with particular focus on quality ECEC, and rights. Firstly, ECEC policy enactment in Sweden will be shared as inspiration for what is possible from a context where there is national, municipal, cultural and societal commitment to ECEC. This includes families' right to an ECEC place for their children, low or no fees, focus on nature and outdoor play, sustainability, degree qualified teachers for every child from age one, legal status for children's rights, and migrant language learning support. Secondly, some contemporary Swedish ECEC research will be shared, which raise challenges around ratios, shifts in pedagogical and leadership roles, increasing emphasis on learning with subsequent risk to play, workload issues and EC teacher job satisfaction. The session concludes with some provocations around ECEC utopia, and what might be possible for the future of ECEC in Australian contexts.

# Abstracts for Parallel Paper Presentations

---

## Session 1-1

### Playwork – VU Play

#### Judd Walsh

Judd is a passionate advocate of Play with a strong base in Playwork and the Playwork Principles. Judd has run hundreds of workshops around Australia focusing on the importance of Play and Playwork. Pop Up Playgrounds and loose parts are also prominent in the work she does within the Early Childhood sector. Currently working at Victoria University where Judd lectures in the Bachelor of Early Childhood, she focuses on preparing the next wave of EC educators to be innovative by providing an environment that puts the child at the center of their practice.

Victoria University has students across the Bachelor of Early childhood & Post Graduate courses all complete a placement on a Pop-Up Play space. These placements are done through the lens of Playwork & are run under the name of VUPlay. This session will explore the practice of Playwork in Victoria University. What does it look like when we apply the Playwork Principles to Pop-Up play spaces in urban environments? We will explore the practical side of co-ordinating these projects, along with addressing some of the challenges faced by Victoria University staff, mentors & students. How can we plan for play and design the built environment to create a shared sense of place? And how can these spaces cater for disparate communities with competing values and needs? In what ways did Playwork and the children's play redesign and reshape the boundaries of community in this place?

### The Ins and Outs of Loose Parts (AKA The East and West of Loose Parts)

#### Claire Paino

With a Bachelor of Social Science & Diploma of Early Childhood, I'm here to support children's holistic development through play, wonder and relationships. Quality Early Childhood environments like East West are a protective factor for children's wellbeing now and into the future. What an extraordinary thing to call my 'work'.

'In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it' (Simon Nicholson, 1971).

Loose Parts play in early childhood environments is an expanding and emerging pedagogy. As a sector, there is still a gap in practice, as there are competing ideologies which value aesthetics above play. Although well-meaning, these ideas, constructed and implemented through an adult lens, limit children's play – manipulate it even, so that it is only a portion of what it could become if left unfiltered.

To become the teachers we need to be, to support children's wellbeing in a complicated world, we must evaluate what it looks like to genuinely implement loose parts in learning environments. We must examine the rules around the use of these parts, and be cautious of the interactions between children and adults which either facilitate or dissolve children's curiosity and wonder.

Using East West Childcare Association as a case study, this presentation will include:

- ◆ A short introduction to loose parts theory and why this practice is valuable
- ◆ Discussions about what constitutes a loose part, including misconceptions and competing ideas
- ◆ Rules around the use of these loose parts
- ◆ Common criticisms or barriers

This presentation will help educators to understand that to do loose parts well, you have to let go of some of your ideas about environments; and when you do, the result is better outcomes for children.

### Art and Play – What's the Difference?

#### Trudy Moore

Adjacent to early years teaching, Trudy is a practising visual artist, with an MFA from RMIT. She is interested in how we can expand free, unstructured play across the curriculum of early education (and beyond!) as a way of supporting the creative process; in turn, discovering and understanding the Self.

'The studio is a safe space for not knowing what you are doing' – William Kentridge. I will present a series of photographs of children's artworks, collected from my workplace. Some artworks will be traditional in nature, such as painting and drawing. Others will be spontaneous creations made from various objects and materials – processed and natural, toys and loose parts, sculptural and performative, solo and collaborative. Adjacent to the images of the children's works, I will present a series of artworks by established contemporary artists – equally diverse in their use of materials and genre. Through this project I am inviting educators to (re)consider their understanding of the creative process, their current approach to art activities and the importance of child-driven, adult-free play.

Where does play stop and art begin – is there a difference?

How important is free, unstructured play in the creative process?

How can we look at the work of artists today as a way of understanding and respecting the creative process of young children?



## Session 1-2

### **Fostering Emotionally Intelligent Leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care**

**Koren Naylor**

Koren is an Early Childhood Educator and Leader with over 25 years' experience. A passionate advocate for the field, she champions pedagogical leadership, sustained professional learning and community engagement. She holds degrees in Disability Studies, Education, and a Master's in leadership and management and is enthusiastic about creating a place of encounter for current and emerging leaders and educators.

This research explores the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), focusing on how leaders can foster EI to enhance group effectiveness. Despite being a mandated position in the sector for over a decade, the role of the educational leader remains ambiguous, with its interpretation and execution varying significantly across services. Effective leadership in ECEC requires not only strong pedagogical knowledge and professional identity, but also relational skills rooted in EI. Drawing from personal experience as an educator and leader, this research aims to understand the dispositions and skills necessary for emotionally intelligent leadership, and how these can be cultivated to empower teams. While EI has been extensively studied in the business sector, its application in education, particularly in early childhood settings, remains underexplored. Goleman's foundational work on social and emotional learning provides a basis for applying EI in education, yet its relevance to leadership in ECEC is often overlooked. This study seeks to address gaps in the literature by investigating practical, sustainable methods to support the development of emotionally intelligent leadership in both current and emerging educational leaders. The findings will aim to reduce inconsistencies in how leadership roles are enacted across services and contribute to a deeper understanding of EI's role in ECEC leadership.

### **Supporting Early Childhood Educators to Foster Children's Self-Regulation and Executive Functioning Through Professional Learning**

**Rosalyn Muir**

Rosalyn's extensive experience across five continents, has reinforced her belief in the pivotal role teachers play in shaping children's future. Her recent PhD studies focused on the intentional development of self-regulation and executive functioning in preschool settings. Rosalyn developed and evaluated a framework to intentionally develop these vital skills.

Given the recognised importance of self-regulation (SR) and executive functioning (EF) in young children's academic and social-emotional wellbeing, their development should not be left to chance. This mixed methods study investigated whether the children taught by educators trained in the SOWATT program, a purposely designed professional learning program targeting self-regulation and executive functioning, would achieve better outcomes on a range of SR/EF measures than a control group who followed their usual program. Participants were 14 educators and 106 children, between the ages of 4 and 5 years, from four early childhood centres, run by the same not-for-profit organisation in Melbourne, Australia. Following a six-month intervention period, multiple regression analysis of pre and post task-based measures and a behaviour rating questionnaire, indicated that the children in the intervention group had made significantly greater gains than those in the control group. Qualitative data obtained from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews confirmed the acceptability of the program by educators as easy to implement, and as a catalyst for change in their practice. Findings support previous research that building educator capacity through in-service professional learning is a viable, and potentially sustainable approach to improving young children's self-regulation and executive functioning abilities.

### **Pre-service ECTs Preparing for Trauma-Aware Practice: an Animal-Assisted Intervention**

**Katharine Gronow Rajek**

After teaching children and adults in the community for over 15 years, Katharine's formal teaching career started within the early years, followed by primary and secondary. Inspired by previous paid and volunteer work in allied health, the disability sector and the Deaf community, Katharine moved into special education, deaf education and animal-assisted interventions. For 4 years now she has worked within the Program of Early Childhood Education at Victoria University as a convenor, lecturer and researcher focusing on arts, play and trauma-aware practice.

Early childhood teachers (ECTs) are at the forefront of human development, with 90% of brain development occurring in the early years, (Tierney & Nelson, 2009; StartingBlocks.gov.au, 2024). Children experience trauma at all ages. Fifty percent of Australian 0-3 year olds attend an early learning service and 90% of 3-5 year olds attend a kindergarten program, (AIHW, 2021). Are pre-existing ECTs trauma-aware? (Bilbrey et al, 2024; Sun et al, 2024) and what about new ECTs? Initial teacher education (ITE) programs may be responsible for Pre-Service Teachers' (PST) learning to recognise, identify and respond to a child with trauma, (L'Estrange & Howard, 2022; Bartlett & Smith, 2019). Early Childhood Education (ECE) ITE programs inevitably evoke self-reflection on one's own

childhood, (VEYLDF Evidence Paper). One in five adults have experienced childhood trauma (Childhood abuse, 2023). Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI) has been popularly researched for different education settings, (Smith & Bradley, 2016), although rarely in tertiary and unfound for trauma-aware ECE ITE, (Cooke et al, 2022). This study aims to investigate the nature of PSTs responses to trauma-aware early childhood program content in the presence of a therapy dog. PSTs will be delivered third year content, via in-person delivery mode over a 4-week period. Data collection will include qualitative commentary on animal-assisted interventions. Data will be collected through interviews and surveys. Results aim to inform the ECE programs within Victoria University, strengthen graduate outcomes and offer insight into further research in animal-assisted intervention to better prepare ECTs for trauma-aware practice.

### **Session 1-3**

#### **Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in Early Years teaching**

**Tracey Cooper**

Tracey Cooper is a proud Yorta Yorta woman with over 15 years of experience in the higher education sector, Tracey Cooper currently serves as the Director of Teaching and Learning at the Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit within Victoria University. Tracey is committed to advancing academic excellence and promoting Indigenous perspectives in higher education. Tracey's involvement in several key committees at Victoria University showcases her leadership and dedication to curriculum development and governance. She is an active member of the Academic Board and Course Committees contributing her insights to enhance educational programs. Additionally, she plays a pivotal role in the NTEU VU Executive Branch Committee with a focus on Indigenous issues and is part of the bargaining team, advocating for equity and inclusive practices within the university. Her contributions extend to numerous advisory groups, including the ABLE&IT Course Advisory Group, the Master of Clinical Exercise Science and Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee, and the College of Sport, Health, and Engineering Program Advisory Committee. As a member of the AI in Teaching and Learning Working Group and the Professional Learning Network, Tracey is at the forefront of integrating innovative teaching methodologies. As a dedicated academic, she serves as a Teaching Academic across several programs at Victoria University in all three colleges. Tracey is the Unit Convenor for AEK7001 and key academic in various other units, where she is deeply invested in fostering student success and engagement. Tracey's multifaceted role at Victoria University reflects her passion for education, advocacy for Indigenous knowledges, and commitment to creating inclusive learning environments.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, 2016 (updated 2023) LEARNING OUTCOMES are mirrored in The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia V2.0, 2022. Belonging, Being & Becoming states: Providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in their environment is important for growing a strong identity. Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all educators' philosophy and practice is a key tool to advance Reconciliation. This also contributes to Closing the Gap commitments and fulfilling every Australian child's right to know about Australia's First Nations' histories, knowledge systems, cultures and languages. Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives is a shared responsibility of approved providers, educators, and other professionals working in early childhood educational settings, regardless of whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are enrolled in that setting.

#### **Including Same-Sex Parented Families in Early Childhood Education in Australia: Listening to Practitioners and Parents in Australia**

**Meg Liang**

Xinyun Meg Liang (she/her) is a PhD candidate and Teacher Educator at Macquarie School of Education with a background in psychology and EC teaching. Meg's primary area of research is in diversity and inclusion in EC education with a current PhD focus on matters related diverse gender, sexualities, and family structures.

The early childhood (EC) sector has the potential to be a transformative space for celebrating diverse identities and family structures, especially in light of the inclusion of gender and family diversity in Learning Outcome 1 in the recently updated Early Years Learning Framework v2.0 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022). As part of a three-phase study, this paper presents findings from a mixed-method survey of EC practitioners and parents of children attending EC settings in Australia to capture these key stakeholders' voices about welcoming same-sex parented families and educating children about these families in EC education. Preliminary findings indicate that practitioners and parents are generally comfortable working with or interacting with same-sex-attracted parents and have generally positive attitudes toward various inclusive practices in EC settings. Nuances are also revealed from the analysis of the perceptions of practitioners and parents about children's understanding of same-sex parented families, practitioners' self-reported experiences and preparedness in implementing inclusive practices and parents' observations of these practices in the EC settings their children attend. The findings could assist practitioners and policy planners in better understanding how to support



the full participation of same-sex parented families in EC settings and inform the development of evidence-based pedagogical resources, practices, and policies for improved anti-discriminatory EC education.

### **Empowering Early Childhood Educators: Leadership Strategies for Integrating Anti-Bias Practices in Inclusive Learning Environments**

**Rachel Bao & Nurhan Yesildag**

Rachel is a passionate and experienced University lecturer, trainer, assessor, and Educational Leader with a Master's in Early Childhood Education from Monash University. Rachel was recognised as a Subject Matter Expert by the Department of Education's Resource Development Project, where she contributed to high-quality learning resources for Early Childhood Education qualifications. Rachel currently teaches and coordinates at the university level while also leading a large childcare centre in one of the bayside suburbs in Melbourne.'

Nurhan is an experienced educator who has dedicated over eight years to teaching at a Leading Early Learning Centre. Her passion for early childhood education has been the cornerstone of her career, driving her commitment to nurturing and supporting young learners. Nurhan finds great joy in guiding children through their early development, witnessing their growth, and fostering their learning each day. She is committed to continuing her professional journey, aspiring to make a meaningful and lasting impact on the children and families she works with.

We'll combine insights from our action research to create a comprehensive abstract. We're eager to share what we've learned and how it's shaping our practice. This action research project addresses the challenges early childhood educators face in implementing anti-bias practices. Conducted in a 68-place day care centre in Melbourne, the study focuses on developing leadership strategies to help staff integrate these approaches into daily interactions. Over three weeks, data will be collected through observations, surveys, and interviews to identify barriers and opportunities. Our goal is to provide actionable recommendations that enhance inclusion, ensuring all children feel safe, valued, and respected, while emphasising the need for continuous professional development and a shared vision for equity.

### **Session 1-4**

### **Exploring the Impact of Digital Poverty on Early Childhood Education: A Yarning Approach**

**Janine Arantes & Masud Ahmmed**

Dr Janine Arantes a Senior Lecturer and Research Fellow in the College of Arts and Education at Victoria University, Victoria Australia. Her research interests are in digital learning and leadership, education policy, and teachers' workplace, consumer and human rights. She has worked in education for the past 20 years, as a classroom teacher, and course leader in Government and non-Government sectors, TAFE and Higher Education. She has published various journal articles and book chapters, and presented at various conference nationally and internationally. She has also written various media articles.

Dr. Masud Ahmmed is an academic and Research Fellow in the College of Arts and Education at Victoria University, Australia. His research interests include trauma and inclusive education. He has professional experience as a research associate, lecturer, early childhood teacher, and early intervention professional. Dr. Ahmmed has published journal articles and book chapters and received the Graduate Scholar Award at the Diversity Conference at UBC, Canada. He has presented papers at various national and international conferences.

This paper provides a conceptual framework to explore the intersection of digital poverty and early childhood education, focusing on the minimum digital tools, skills, and services necessary for effective participation. Through the application of yarning, an Indigenous research method, this study engages early childhood educators in collaborative discussions about their experiences with digital access and the socio-digital inequalities that affect both educators and students. Yarning is used to create an inclusive and culturally safe space, enabling participants to share stories that reveal how limited access to technology exacerbates existing inequalities and may contribute to trauma in students who are digitally excluded. The framework developed in this conceptual paper identifies key factors that influence digital poverty, including access, capability, and participation, to provide a scaffolded approach to explore the broader socio-cultural dimensions of the digital divide.

The framework aims to contribute to the ongoing research into inclusive education and offers practical strategies for researching digital poverty within early childhood education settings. The paper concludes with insights for developing the framework, including its limitations and risks to offer a replicable model for future research and policy development.

## **Learning with food in Early Childhood Education and Care: More-than-human agency in pedagogical practices for livable futures**

**Sayuri Amemiya**

Sayuri is a PhD candidate at the Early Years Living Lab, University of Tasmania. Her research explores the multispecies implications of food practices in an early childhood setting. She lives on the Boonwurrung land and works in vocational and higher education including her role as a Tutor at Victoria University.

In the recent update of the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, intentionality in pedagogical practices is redefined to recognise and include children's intentionality. While the change emphasizes children's agency, it stops short of recognising more-than-human agency in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Growing scholarship in ECEC with posthuman and new materialist perspectives considers pedagogical practices as enacted not only by humans but also by diverse nonhumans. My ongoing PhD research attunes to food-child relations to envision pedagogical practices 'with' foodstuffs rather than 'about' them. I present a narrative of a pedagogical event in which an educator introduces some fruits to children with an intention to teach 'about' them through sensory exploration. The fruit's materiality, its juicy flesh and slippery skin, is an agentic part of what enacts the event, and children learn 'with' it. Close attention to the fruit illuminates connections to the industrial food system that alters the fruit's genetics and surrounding ecosystem for the benefits of some humans. The research problematises the humancentric and unsustainable food system in which many of us including children in ECEC are implicated. Pedagogical practices with nonhumans is a critical shift for teachers and educators who care for young children as children's wellbeing is increasingly intertwined with the planetary wellbeing. The presentation invites changing educational practices and paradigms for liveable futures that sustain humans and nonhumans.

## **VR and the Preparation of Early Childhood Teachers - Barriers, Opportunities and Affordances**

**Associate Professor Wendy Goff,  
Dr. Anamika Devi & Jennifer Cutri**

Wendy Goff is an Associate Professor Mathematics Education and Deputy Chair of the School of Education (Victoria) at the Australian Catholic University. Her research examines the dynamics of adult relationships and partnerships through four key vehicles: mathematics education; new technologies; early childhood education; and children's health and wellbeing.

Dr. Anamika is a senior lecturer in the School of Social Sciences, Media, Film, and Education at Swinburne University of Technology. Her research and teaching interests include play and pedagogy, initial teacher education, inclusive education, intentional teaching, STEAM, VR, numeracy, and the cultural-historical theory.

Jennifer Cutri is a lecturer in early childhood and primary education and a researcher at Swinburne University of Technology. She directs the Bachelor of Education Early Childhood Teaching and Bachelor of Education Studies programs. Her research focuses on enhancing early childhood teaching programs, international education, and the transnational flow of educators and curricula in the Asia-Pacific region.

The potential of Virtual Reality (VR) and simulated and immersive learning environments are now being realised and embedded into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses across the world. The research reported in this presentation is the culmination of five years of studying the impact of a VR simulated classroom in the preparation of early childhood, primary and secondary school teachers. The VR simulated classroom utilised across the five years was a low-immersion VR platform supported by Mursion software and a 'human in the loop'. It was drawn on to provide an authentic, real-time teaching experience for pre-service teachers (PSTs). In this presentation the opportunity and barrier lens (Goff, 2021) is drawn on to highlight the strengths and the weaknesses of the VR simulated classroom in the preparation of early childhood teachers, as well as the opportunities and avenues for extending the VR simulated classroom into the early childhood teacher professional development space. The presentation concludes by outlining the plans for future research in the ECE-VR context.

### **Session 2-1**

#### **Care in the 3-Year-Old's Curriculum**

**Sarah Louise Gandolfo**

Sarah Louise is a Melbourne based early childhood teacher and mum of two. Her 20+ year career spans a variety of roles and settings, and she has complemented her work with formal studies in the areas of early childhood education, leadership and research. Sarah Louise is a forever learner who is committed to making the world a better place for children by tapping into love and kindness.

As a practice, care and theories of care have been heavily researched all over the world in relation to children aged under three years old. However, little to no research currently exists exploring the ways in which children aged over three years in formal ECEC settings experience care or how care is planned for in these settings. Recent Victorian reforms have seen the welcome introduction of 15 hours

per week of funded kindergarten for both three- and four-year-old children, with the result being an increase in the number of children aged three who are now accessing funded kindergarten programs. With these reforms come questions of the impact on the way care is both understood and enacted with three-year-old children in standalone kindergarten environments, as well as the decisions early childhood teachers working in these programs make about the inclusion of care in their curriculums. Having conducted a small case study to understand the elements of care that are considered in the curriculum decision-making of an early childhood teacher working with three-year-old children in a Victorian standalone kindergarten, I present my findings as a quadrilateral theory of care along with implications for practice.

### **Musings from a Multi-Aged, Multi-Skilled Collective** **Audrey Robinson**

Whilst studying the Diploma of Early Childhood in 2006 I came to East West Childcare as a student and never left. Our philosophy, child-led practice, multi-aged care, understanding of the importance of play and community consciousness are why I have been here all this time.

We all know that it takes a village to raise a child and, since opening in 1978, we have worked hard to be a part of, and facilitate that village. East West is a community run centre and has always had a supportive and collaborative focus. This collaboration takes shape in both our distributive leadership model and the multi-age grouping of the children. Where the common model is a hierarchical one, with (usually) the most experienced and knowledgeable person at the top. East West has 3 coordinators who work directly with children and who value this connection with educators and their families. Much like multi-ageing allows children to learn alongside each other irrespective of age, our staffing structure allows for this cross pollination of learning and ideas. Our collaborative way of working has led to high staff retention and longevity of service. In the presentation, I will discuss the ways in which this cooperative practice weaves throughout our service and program. I will share examples of practice which show the teamwork involved on the daily. I will share the benefits of multi-ageing that we see regularly and which makes East West a unique service. East West reflects what many theorists have taught us – that people learn from each other and are capable of great things when they work as a collective.

### **Interventions and Approaches Targeting Early Self-Regulation or Executive Functioning in Preschools: A Systematic Review**

**Rosalyn Muir**

Rosalyn's extensive experience across five continents, has reinforced her belief in the pivotal role teachers play in shaping children's future. Her recent PhD studies focused on the intentional development of self-regulation and executive functioning in preschool settings. Rosalyn developed and evaluated a framework to intentionally develop these vital skills.

This systematic literature review sought to reconcile the evidence of efficacy for interventions and approaches to enhancing self-regulation and/or executive function in preschool settings. Following PRISMA methodology, a comprehensive search of 20 years of intervention research identified 85 studies that met inclusion criteria. Interventions were categorised by intervention approach and coded for their characteristics (e.g. sample size, dose, duration, interventionist, intervention activities), outcomes (e.g. significance, size of effects) and study quality (i.e. risk of bias). Reconciliation of intervention results indicated (1) within intervention approaches, some approaches had more consistent and robust evidence of efficacy (e.g. mindfulness, mediated play, physical activity) and (2) across intervention approaches, characteristics that had greater (or exclusive) presence amongst the higher efficacy interventions (e.g. cognitive challenge, movement, as well as interventionist, fidelity and dose considerations). Implications for future intervention (re)design, and for theorising about mechanisms of self-regulation and executive function change, are discussed.

### **Session 2-2**

#### **Changing Pedagogy and Practice; Why Bother?** **Ruth Harper**

An Early Childhood teacher, I've been learning from and with young children and their families for 36ish years, 24 at East West. I'm always asking "why" and wondering if things can be done differently, better. Trusting children and being unafraid to take risks has led to some extraordinary adventures.

East West has always been different. No 'rooms', no segregating children by age – just everyone from 12 months up, all in together, all the time. True indoor/outdoor, with the children choosing where they want to be and when they want to be there. No compulsory mat times and not too many set routines. No highly qualified director working just in the office, but instead, a number of us (currently 3) sharing the coordinator role, and a culture of cooperative, distributive leadership and reflective practice. Lots of agency for everyone, children and staff!

But, even so, a few years ago, we started asking some really Big Questions: ‘How much meaningful time are the children really getting for free play?’ ‘How often are we interrupting them?’ ‘What does Connecting with and Caring for Country look like and how sustainable are we?’ and, the big one, ‘Do we really need all these rules?’

All these questions opened up space for us to really delve into our philosophy and pedagogy, our beliefs and understandings about how children learn and develop. We took the time to establish if what we believed was supported by evidence, and chose a series of PDs that would really challenge and inspire us. We were able to define the “good bits” of our practice – the bits we wanted to keep, and figure out how to change the rest. The ensuing journey is not an easy one; it is complex and messy and challenging, but totally worth it.

### **Supporting Recently Appointed Leaders’ Learning Needs: The Quest for Useful Knowledge and Social Connection**

**Rachel Foster**

Dr Rachel Foster is a kindergarten service coordinator and sessional academic. Originally from NZ, her EdD research focused on the professional learning needs of recently appointed early childhood leaders in NZ. A considerable focus of Rachel’s experience involves supporting the adults who work with children to ensure better outcomes for children.

This presentation outlines knowledge gained from a doctoral study that examined the support and professional learning needs of recently appointed early childhood leaders in New Zealand. The main aim of this research was to generate sector-specific principles of how to best support the professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. The research questions established the professional profile of the participants, the preparation and support that participants had before and after assuming their roles, and their supporting and learning needs. The study used a qualitative methodological, exploratory orientation, and a Pragmatic conceptual framework. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 recently appointed leaders. Findings emerged through deductive and inductive analytic processes. The study established that recently appointed leaders have specialized learning needs. The findings that will be discussed show that the participants were challenged by the distinct situations they were navigating. Key evidence was that participants expressed a need and desire for additional support and social connections to transform their knowledge and

their practice. This presentation provides insights into the support and professional learning needs of recently appointed leaders. The findings show that recently appointed leaders require learning experiences that provide useful knowledge in the context of social connection which has implications for organizations, professional learning providers, and those supporting recently appointed leaders. The need for useful knowledge development and social connection to be incorporated within professional learning opportunities to support recently appointed leaders will be discussed alongside the models that were developed within this research.

### **My Practice of Nature Pedagogy**

**Rachel Bao**

Rachel is a passionate and experienced University lecturer, trainer, assessor, and Educational Leader with a Master’s in Early Childhood Education from Monash University. Rachel was recognised as a Subject Matter Expert by the Department of Education’s Resource Development Project, where she contributed to high-quality learning resources for Early Childhood Education qualifications. Rachel currently teaches and coordinates at the university level while also leading a large childcare centre in one of the bayside suburbs in Melbourne.

This presentation explores the application of insights gained from my Nature Pedagogy training with Clair Warden, an esteemed international consultant in outdoor learning, alongside my experience leading a nature kinder program since 2015. Grounded in the philosophies presented in Warden’s influential books, *The Right to be Me* and *The Potential of a Puddle*, I share my journey in implementing these concepts within our bush kinder program. Through hands-on activities, we engage children in outdoor learning, fostering curiosity, problem-solving, and collaboration. This session also highlights strategies for integrating natural materials, promoting risk-taking within safe boundaries, and encouraging children to take ownership of their learning experiences. The program’s success, marked by enthusiastic feedback from fellow educators, demonstrates the transformative impact of nature-based pedagogy on early childhood education.



# Abstracts for Poster Presentation

---

## **Our Journey to Multiage**

### **Shelli Giosis**

With over 30 years of experience in various early years spaces, Shelli Giosis celebrates each year with all of its potential for learning and growth. She is currently working in a suburban sessional kindergarten in Melbourne that is offering a multi-age kindergarten program.

Our small, stand alone sessional kindergarten has been offering a kindergarten program for over 40 years. I have been working at Delta Road Preschool for the past 10 years. During this 10 years we have evolved the program to suit the needs of the community – the families and the children. In 2024 we are offering our second year of Multi-Age kindergarten; for children accessing 3 year old and 4 year old kindergarten.

The Multi-Age group is where both kindergarten groups are combined and the sessions are open to those accessing their 3 year old year and those accessing their 4 year old year. The journey to what the program actually looks like has been constantly evolving. Come and join me for our journey to our Multi-Age reality. I will share why we have chosen our program and how we have implemented it in our kindergarten. I will share our bumps in the road and our joyous moments of wonder and exhilaration as we provide what families and children need and want.

## **Inclusive Early Years Curriculum in Myanmar: Teacher Education, Policy, and NGO Partnerships**

### **Easton Myat**

Myanmar, a Southeast Asian nation, has faced prolonged isolation due to military rule and ongoing conflict, disrupting its education system, particularly at the primary and early childhood level. Frequent school closures and the absence of policy updates have hindered the adoption of contemporary educational approaches. Despite recent reforms in elementary and secondary education, early years education remains underdeveloped and lacks a structured curriculum to achieve inclusiveness to diverse communities and abilities families. This poster delves into the impact of these policy gaps on early childhood education through an analysis of policy documents and recent data from various NGOs. It will discuss the role of teacher education and its influence on curriculum outcomes and student experiences from an inclusive education perspective. Additionally, it will present a comprehensive review of existing initiatives and identifies the urgent need for collaborative action among stakeholders to address these challenges. The research highlights the significance of inclusive education and offers policy recommendations to strengthen early childhood

education through effective partnerships with NGOs. This poster aims to engage the international community in joint research and advocacy efforts to support inclusive early education in Myanmar.

## **Working with CALD Professionals (Pre-Service & in-Service Teachers) and Communities in ECE Workforce**

### **Joanne Tanean**

Joanne Tanean is a Teaching-Focused Academic at Victoria University, with experience working with children and families from diverse backgrounds. She has worked in various settings, including Long Day Care and Early Parenting Centres. Having been a CALD learner throughout her life, her interests include supporting children and families, engaging with CALD communities, and focusing on infants and toddler and their mental health and wellbeing.

This paper is aiming to discuss the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Early childhood Education (ECE) workforce in Australia. Australia is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, in fact almost 1/3 of Australia population were born overseas and more than 20% of Australians speaks other language than English at home. As a result, education sector in Australia has also become more culturally diverse. However, there are currently not many studies and understanding about the diversity of the ECE workforce. CALD preservice and in service teachers often face challenges during their professional practice in Australia. For example, different cultural values that clash with dominant educational practices, discrimination and difficulties in fitting in the work environment, language and communication barriers, and even different view on definition of success during practice. On the other hand, there are numerous services that are available for families in Australia. However, many CALD parents still do not feel comfortable accessing them or are not even aware of them. This may be due to cultural barriers, different parenting expectations, and a complicated healthcare system. Differences in child rearing, personal childhood experience, concepts of justice etc. are one of many issues that CALD communities are facing. Hence, this paper aims to address some common issues for CALD professionals and families in ECE. In addition, strategies to support ECE CALD practitioners and families will also be included in this paper.



## **‘Lawlessness’ and Provocation: Activism in Curriculum.**

**Jessica Branca & Laura Kerr**

Laura Kerr is a team leader at The Learning Space in Preston and is also studying the Bachelor of Early Childhood Teaching at VU. Laura has over 12 years’ experience in ECE and is passionate about exploring the unknown with children, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in education.

Jessica Branca is currently a casual academic at UNE who has worked as an educational leader, STEM leader, researcher and ECT within the sector. Her interest in science and mathematics in early childhood education and her passion for social constructivist approaches to these topics inform her work with children.

What are children’s understandings of time? During successive COVID lockdowns, two educational leaders were looking to drive pedagogical change beyond the delivery methods that focused on themes, beautifully set-up tables or rituals and routines. Through a pedagogical project focused on physics that spanned two countries, time and space, assumptions were challenged and practices shifted in ways that celebrated children’s thinking and honored their intelligence.

## **Reconciliation in Early Childhood Education Through the Process of Integrating Woi Wurrung Wurundjeri Language into our Learning Environment.**

**Ashanti Permatasari, Rieke Mattiesch & Carla Young**

Ashanti Permatasari, Rieke Mattiesch, and Carla Young from Raleigh Street Community Children’s Centre share a part of their reconciliation journey. This presentation explores their collaborative process of renaming rooms in Woi-Wurrung language. Engaging educators, children, families, and community members to celebrate cultural connections in their community centre in Metro North-Eastern Narm.

Our vision for reconciliation is to foster equality and unity between our community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As early childhood professionals, we recognize that we play an important role in this process. Reconciliation involves respect, responsibility, awareness, and strengthening relationships, and this journey should start in early childhood education. This presentation will explore the impact of integrating Woi Wurrung Wurundjeri language into our center through the process of renaming of our rooms. Renaming to us is more than a symbolic gesture; it represents a tangible step towards honoring and incorporating the rich heritage of the traditional custodians of the land on which our center is located. We undertook a collaborative process involving local Aboriginal community

members, children, staff, and families to ensure the language was used accurately and respectfully. By incorporating Woi Wurrung names into our center, we aim to: Promote Cultural Awareness: Engage children, staff, and families with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture daily, fostering respect and appreciation from an early age; Support Language Preservation; Contribute to the revitalization and continuity of Woi Wurrung language by incorporating it into everyday settings; Facilitate Reconciliation: Recognize and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in education, supporting broader reconciliation efforts and helping to address historical injustices and build a more inclusive society.

Join us to explore our process of integrating Woi Wurrung language in our early childhood center as a meaningful step towards our reconciliation journey.

## **Risks and Rewards Beyond the Gate: Why Agency Matters for Contemporary Early Childhood Education**

**Stephanie Willey & Bronwyn Joslyn**

Stephanie Willey is the Coordinator and Bush Kindergarten Teacher at Yarralea Children’s Centre in Melbourne and Convenor of EEEEC (Environmental Education in Early Childhood). Over the last 26 years she has worked in a variety of public and private Early Childhood settings both in Australia and overseas and is passionate about embedding Education for Sustainability into daily practice and advocating for children’s right to access rich natural outdoor play spaces for healthy development and wellbeing.

Bron Joslyn is an Early Childhood Teacher with a Masters in Education and over 30 years’ experience across a broad spectrum of settings. Bron is a passionate advocate for the ‘implantation’ of Education for Sustainability across curriculum. As a Service Director of three Community based Kindergarten in Victoria, Bron enacts a sustainability lens across all organisational practices. Bron is a long serving executive committee member of EEEEC and Victorian Board member of Play Australia.

Responsive outings offer children unique opportunities to exercise agency, connect with their community, and engage with Country, aligning with contemporary Early Childhood Education (ECE) values. In this poster presentation, we explore the risks and rewards associated with these practices, highlighting the significant benefits for children’s development. In today’s culture where many children spend extended hours in care, the ability to step outside the centre’s gates and interact with the wider world is vital for their sense of autonomy and belonging. By supporting children’s agency in decision-making and respecting their natural curiosities, educators can nurture confident, capable learners. These outings provide a foundation for building meaningful connections with their local community and

the land, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural and environmental stewardship. This approach also strengthens links to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) outcomes, particularly the sustainability principle, as children experience firsthand the value of engaging with natural and social environments in respectful and sustainable ways.

However, these practices are not without risk. Challenges such as safety concerns and logistical hurdles must be carefully managed. Yet, the rewards – enhanced learning experiences, stronger community ties, and a heightened sense of agency – outweigh these risks when supported by thoughtful planning and responsive educators. This presentation demonstrates how prioritising children’s agency through responsive outings enriches ECE practices and supports holistic development, making a compelling case for their integration into everyday early childhood education.

**Who Works in Long Day Care and Why? Workforce Professionalisation and Retention, Understood Through a Geographies of Care Framework**  
**Ruth Slonimsky**

Ruth Slonimsky wrote her Honours thesis in 2023 at the University of Melbourne. Her research draws on observations from her work as a Certificate III educator, as well as feminist geographies of work and care, population studies, and the literature on Australian social and childcare policy. Ruth believes in the potential for reciprocal care relationships that support early childhood educators as well as children, families and communities.’

This research examines tensions between the professionalisation agenda and staffing challenges in Long Day Care. While existing studies of the Early Childhood workforce address concerns around retention and low pay, this research investigates how these challenges are related to the workforce’s demographic composition.

Employing mixed methods, it combines analysis of secondary data from the Australian Census of Population and Housing with in-depth insights from thirteen semi-structured interviews with Early Childhood Teachers and educators. This approach allowed personal work and life course trajectories to be situated against large-scale workforce trends. The quality and professionalization agendas to which this sector has been subjected are often framed as having led to increased workloads and qualification requirements without increases to pay, resulting in challenges in attracting and retaining staff. Insights from in-depth interviews suggest that participants’ work decisions were further influenced by personal and life-course factors.

This research develops Razavi’s “care diamonds” framework, which models care responsibility as being shared between four actors: market, state, not-for-profit and community, identifying a fifth actor: the individual educator or teacher. This extends existing understandings of the role of women’s unrecognized labor in the provision of unpaid care, finding that informal delineations of responsibility for care to women and migrants continued to play a vital role in sustaining the provision of education and care within a highly regulated, professionalised context. Conflicting policy settings played a significant role in shaping this process.

# Notes

---

# Notes

---