'Half of it's Out the Window': Exploring Tensions, Hierarchies and Positionalities Amidst the Changing Knowledge Base of Early Childhood Teacher Education Discourses

Lauren C Armstrong[1]
University of Tasmania

Abstract: Early childhood education is foregrounded in change. In Australia, this has encompassed the introduction, review and updates of national quality and curriculum frameworks from 2009, and changes to qualification requirements. Within the state of Victoria, further impacts have occurred due to the simultaneous introduction of a parallel curriculum framework. This paper draws on a qualitative study to examine how diverse teacher education discourses available to Victorian long day care educators have shaped their subject positions, discursive practices and reform engagement. Utilising Foucault's concepts of discourse, knowledge and power, and Foucauldian Discourse Analysis [FDA], findings offer insight into how diverse teacher education discourses and privileged content knowledge influence how educators engage in reform and the changing knowledge base of the field. Recommendations are put forward for consideration to better accommodate the diverse positionalities occupied by educators and ease the enduring hierarchies and tensions within the early childhood field.

Keywords: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis [FDA], early childhood education, long day care, privileged content knowledge, reform engagement, teacher education

Introduction

Early childhood education and care [ECEC] has been foregrounded by change since its inception. In Australia, its historical evolution has encompassed social, economic and political influences underpinned by the growing professionalisation of ECEC, changing familial and societal needs and government agendas (Brennan, 1998; Press, 2015). These changes have led to numerous reforms impacting the professional practice of early childhood professionals [ECPs] – a term used here to represent teachers, educators and co-educators within ECEC. Reforms introduced in Australia from 2009 (see *Table 1*) initiated a shift in theoretical and pedagogical direction, propelling a change in dominant content knowledge guiding the field. Although not exhaustive, *Table 1* exemplifies the swift progression of key reforms and events influencing Australian ECEC. These reforms included the introduction (and later amendments) of quality and curriculum frameworks and changes to national

[1] Lauren Armstrong is a lecturer in early childhood education within the School of Education, University of Tasmania. Her research interests involve early childhood policy development, educational change and reform, teacher education and professional learning, and how these factors impact early childhood professionals in the field. Corresponding author details: lauren.armstrong@utas.edu.au ORCID: 0000-0002-1166-3681.

regulations, paralleled with reforms introduced simultaneously within the state of Victoria, creating increased complexities for Victorian-based ECPs.

Previously, developmental psychology and *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* [DAP] shaped the dominant content knowledge (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; McArdle, 2007) – particularly in the state of Victoria where the ECEC field was historically grounded in health and maturational childhood development (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2011a; Scantlebury Brown, 1966). However, the field has since embraced a more 'eclectic mix of theoretical perspectives' (Sumsion et al., 2009, p.10) embedded across the Australian ECEC frameworks. For example, the *Early Years Learning Framework* [EYLF] accentuated how 'drawing on a range of perspectives and theories can challenge *traditional* ways of seeing children, teaching and learning' (DEEWR, 2009, p.12, emphasis added). These perspectives encompassed developmental, sociocultural, socio-behaviourist, critical and post-structural theories (DEEWR, 2009); and later included ecological, feminist and practice theories, ancestral knowledges and place-based sciences in *Version 2.0* of this framework (ACECQA, 2022). This exemplifies a clear shift from *traditional* understandings of ECE, towards a more *contemporary* approach that values a diverse range of knowledges.

Year	Title of Reform	Region
2009	*Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework [EYLF] for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009)	National
2009	*Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework [VEYLDF]: For all children from birth to eight years* (DEECD & VCAA, 2009)	State (VIC)
2011	Changes to the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* (MCEECDYA, 2011), including an increase in qualification requirements (ACECQA, n.d.)	National
2012	*National Quality Framework [NQF]* and *National Quality Standards [NQS]*, encompassing the curriculum frameworks to ensure quality, improvement and consistency across all early childhood services, including long day care [LDC], family day care [FDC], out of school hours care [OSHC] and kindergarten settings (ACECQA, 2012)	National
2014	Review of teacher education in Australia titled *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group [TEMAG], 2014)	National
2015	Requirement for Victorian ECPs to obtain teacher registration (VIT, 2015), with similar arrangements in other states and territories with differing commencement dates (ACECQA, n.d.)	State (VIC)
2016	Revised release of the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework [VEYLDF]: For all children from birth to eight years* (DET, 2016)	State (VIC)
2018	Revised *National Quality Standard* [NQS] effective from Feb 1, 2018 (ACECQA, 2017)	National
2020	COVID-19 virus worldwide pandemic declared, March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020)	Global
2021	*National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks [ALF] Update* (ACECQA, 2021)	National
2022	Release of the updated *National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks [ALF]*, including the *Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] Version 2.0* (ACECQA, 2022)	National

Table 1: Key national and Victorian reforms impacting ECEC from 2009

The rapid sequence of reforms has created a complex landscape for ECPs in Australia. This turbulence may now be further exacerbated through the enactment of the *National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks [ALF] Update* (ACECQA, 2021), the release of the revised *Early Years Learning Framework* [EYLF] *Version 2.0* (ACECQA, 2022); alongside the mounting pressures and fluctuating status of ECPs who were positioned on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bryant, 2020; Logan et al., 2021; WHO, 2020).

Given these many changes, it is essential to explore how the knowledges now privileged within recent reforms differs from or align with experiences of teacher education [TE] institutions and courses. Moreover, we must examine how certain TE discourses available to our ECPs influenced their ability to interpret and translate these reforms to practice. Though, early childhood TE policy has predominantly *'flown under the radar'*, and 'remains elusive' due to the 'deep ambivalence' surrounding the perceived purpose of ECEC (Nuttall, 2018, pp.155-8, original emphasis).

This paper presents insights from participants working as ECPs in Victorian long day care [LDC] settings regarding significant connections between TE discourses and reform engagement. More specifically, it is acknowledged that 'power' is visible in a multitude of ways in terms of the learnings acquired through qualifications and the learnings acquired through practice. These findings may contribute to our understanding of how TE institutions and the relevance of content knowledge privileged within their courses are conveying current practices in the field, and influence the ability of ECPs to engage in reform initiatives.

The Turbulent Landscape of Early Childhood Teacher Education in Australia

Australian ECEC TE courses are managed by the *Vocational Education and Training* [VET] and *Higher Education* [HE] tertiary sectors. VET institutions including *Technical and Further Education* [TAFE] and *Registered Training Organisations* [RTOs] deliver Certificate III and Diploma courses; while universities deliver Bachelor, Graduate Diploma and Masters Degrees (ASQA, 2015; AQF, 2013). According to McArdle (2007), 'all early childhood workers who are involved in the planning of young children's programs are professionally qualified with at least two years of [vocational] training, and preschool and early primary teachers hold university degrees' (p.909). Specific qualifications equate to distinct position titles (i.e., Diploma – 'educator' and Bachelor 'teacher') – ultimately shaping the subject positions of ECPs within the field and within their ECEC workplaces. Changes to qualification requirements in the *Education and Care Services National Regulations* have led to a heightened expectation for all ECPs to be working towards a higher qualification (MCEECDYA, 2011). This has been a considerable challenge for professionals working in Victorian long day care [LDC] settings.

In times of incessant change and reform, there is an escalating insistence to upskill our existing ECPs, and to attract and recruit new ECPs to the field. The Australian ECEC context has been intensified by increasing demand for a greater array of services for our young children, a serious teacher shortage, low course enrolment numbers (Community Early Learning Australia [CELA], 2019); and issues with qualification, pathways, recruitment and retention for ECPs (Thorpe et al., 2023). This is further exacerbated by covid fatigue and burnout among ECPs working on the pandemic frontline (Community Early Learning Australia [CELA], 2020; Quiñones, Barnes & Berger, 2020). Consequently, it was stipulated that an additional 9,000 ECPs were needed by 2023 (Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, 2019). Although amplified attention is now placed upon ECEC qualifications (National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, 2021), greater incentives are needed to entice individuals to attain or upskill their qualifications (Boyd & Phillips, 2021).

Teacher education for ECEC 'is a divided system illustrated by differing levels of qualifications, fractured funding structures and diverse providers' (Ciuciu & Robertson, 2019, p.81). Australian TE institutions offer ACECQA-accredited ECE qualifications at various levels, with ECEC-Primary courses considered 'inconsistent and problematic' for 'not producing teachers who are prepared to deliver quality ECEC' (Boyd & Phillips, 2021,

p.12). Dual qualifications such as this often result in new graduates electing to work in primary schools over ECEC settings due to differences in professional recognition, status, conditions and wages (Robinson, O'Connor & Treasure, 2021). Thus, ECPs enter the field with diverse qualifications, adding yet another layer of complexity.

Politics of Knowledge and Power within Teacher Education Discourses

Discourse embody the diverse ways the world can be subjectively perceived (Foucault, 1972). However, when certain discourses are valued among institutions, *positions of power* (Foucault, 1980) are developed as these perceptions of the world become normative (Rivalland, 2010). Meanwhile, power can influence knowledge when perceptions held among individuals permeate institutional discourses and the content knowledge within. Thus, when diverse discourses are present among different institutions, tensions can arise from the conflicting content knowledge being privileged. The *politics of knowledge* has been recognised by Foucault (1974)*,* whereby 'there cannot be particular types of subjects of knowledge, orders of truth, or domains of knowledge except on the basis of political conditions that are the very ground on which the subject, the domains of knowledge, and the relations with truth are formed' (p.9).

In ECEC, such political conditions have influenced the value attributed to certain content knowledge within specific TE discourses leading to global debates between education and care; supply and demand, theory and practice, and the status of educators as professionals or skilled workers (Abawi, 2021; Krieg, 2010; Nuttall, 2018).

International research accentuates the divide between ECPs who occupy different positions that reflect diverse societal perceptions of status. According to Abawi (2021, p.1-5), 'power relations' are visible between ECEC *educators* and ECEC *teachers* which ultimately 'inform hierarchies of dominance' and 'constitute the positionalities' of ECPs, with 'one group privileged and included in the school community and the other precarious and excluded'. Additionally, ECEC teachers 'are often conceptualized as more powerful' than ECEC educators, 'and these hierarchical differences detrimentally impact the dynamic between these two cohorts of ECPs (Abawi, 2021, p.6). In Australia, such hierarchies may be also visible among the diverse positionalities of ECPs.

Australian TE appears to associate theory-based knowledge with tertiary/*Higher Education* [HE] and practice-based knowledge with vocational/*Technical and Further Education* [TAFE] institutions (Watson & Axford, 2008). This segregation of discourses has caused tensions between theory and practice. In ECEC, the dominant knowledge or 'claims of truth' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017, p.118) have shifted to a more diverse range of perspectives 'without advocating or assuming adherence to any one theoretical stance' (Sumsion et al., 2009, p.10). Yet, 'institutions mediate information and produce and privilege different knowledge', 'unequal power relationships', political agendas, and 'institutional power structures' (Gomez, 2012, pp.81-82).

National curricula introduced in 2009 promote pedagogical knowledge involving critical thinking and reflective practice. Though such skills align more accurately with tertiary/HE than vocational/TAFE institutions (Watson & Axford, 2008). These discourses '*intervene* in the relations of what can be known, said or practiced' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017, p.120, original emphasis), and encompass distinct discursive positionings and practices at diverse institutional levels.

According to a recent meta-analytic review, higher qualifications equate to higher quality education and care (Manning et al., 2019). ECPs with higher qualification attainment exhibit a greater understanding of theoretical content knowledge and abilities to engage in

critical thinking and effective communication (Phillips, 2020). Attention is now being drawn to the types of knowledge, skills and dispositions needed among ECPs to promote quality ECEC (Boyd & Phillips, 2021). As reported by Phillips (2020), this should include strong communication and planning skills, a motivated and nurturing disposition, a sense of humour, and a solid understanding of the contextual knowledge base of ECEC. Greater emphasis is also being placed on the importance of building leadership capacity among ECPs and broadening the scope for skill development (Page & Waniganayake, 2019).

The diverse TE discourses present within ECEC warrant thorough investigation to explore how these discourses (and changes to privileged content knowledge) shape the positions of ECPs and influence their reform engagement. As we navigate challenging times, the ECEC field may benefit from questioning what we can learn from the TE experiences of our ECPs.

The Study

This qualitative research study examines reform engagement in long day care [LDC] settings in Victoria, Australia (Armstrong, 2019), exploring specific discourses, positions and practices visible among participants from these settings, as they reflected upon their engagement in the 2009 early childhood reform period. This study aimed to address the overarching research question:

> *'How do educational reform discourses shape and reshape the positioning and engagement of early childhood professionals in Victorian long day care settings?' (Armstrong, 2019, p.260).*

A post-structural methodology was applied to foster a deeper understanding of 'the dynamics of relationships between knowledge/meaning, power and identity' (Hughes, 2010, p.51). Upon ethical clearance, Victorian ECPs were invited to contribute to the study through recruitment methods such as purposeful sampling (Bryman, 2012), snowballing and online research methods (Robins, 2015).

Participants

The seven participants involved in this study were positioned within LDC settings in the state of Victoria, Australia, and occupied various positions within their workplace settings with diverse levels of TE and professional experience (see *Table 2*).

Participants from Victorian Long Day Care centres					
Pseudonym	Location	Qualification	TE Completion	Experience	Position
Alana	Southeast	Bachelor	Intended 2016	20-29 years	Educator
Lucy	Southeast	Diploma	Completed 2009	< 10 years	Educator
Abigail	East	Diploma	Completed 2004	10-19 years	Educator
Gabrielle	Southeast	Diploma equivalent	Completed pre-2009	30+ years	Co-educator
Jade	Southeast	Bachelor	Completed 2013	< 10 years	Teacher
Adele	Northeast	Masters	Intended 2015	10 -19 years	Educator
Sonia	East	Bachelor	Intended 2015	< 10 years	Educator

Table 2: Demographical constructs of participants from long day care settings, dated mid-2015

These participants comprised five educators, one co-educator and one teacher. While only one early childhood 'teacher' is listed here, three other participants were in the process of

becoming teachers, as they were still undertaking their Bachelor/Masters degrees at the time interviews were conducted.

Data Collection

Data collection comprised single semi-structured interviews spanning 30–60 minutes, where participants were invited to share their experiences during the 2009 reform period, their TE and perceptions of policy reviews. Participants were encouraged to create an interactive timeline [TL] of their TE and professional experience (see *Figure 1*) – a method predominantly utilised in clinical studies (Sobell et al., 1988). This provided a useful prompt for memory recall and reflection among participants.
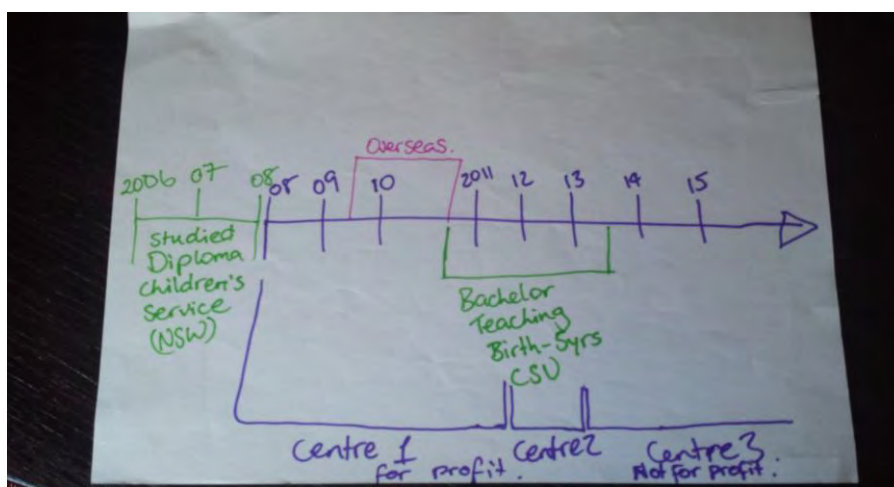

Figure 1: Sample from interactive timeline data

To ensure accuracy, interviews were recorded using audio/visual methods and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were then distributed to participants for member-checking (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

From a post-structuralist paradigm, it is understood that language, knowledge and meaning are subjective and that these concepts are forever changing and cannot be conclusively determined or explained, but rather subjectively understood at a particular point in time (Mac Naughton et al., 2010). Hence, this study utilised a subjective interpretation of Foucault's concepts of discourse, power and knowledge (1972; 1980) as valuable tools for analysing the positions and practices taken up by participants throughout the 2009 reform period, and teacher education [TE] discourses more broadly. It has been explained that 'discourses can facilitate and limit, enable and constrain what can be said, by whom, where and when' (Parker, 1992; as cited in Willig, 2013, p.130), involving a series of 'rules, divisions and systems' which relate to 'a particular body of knowledge' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017, p.114, original emphasis). Though, certain knowledge is privileged within specific discourses through power relations among political, societal and institutional positions:

> *Some discourses, because of their institutional location and wider social*
> *circulation, have more social and institutional power, suggesting that subject*

> *positions within such discourse may be more desirable, more justifiable, more accessible, and accessed more consistently (Ortlipp, 2003, p.33).*

This holds substantive weight for the ECEC context, as its knowledge base continues to shift in alignment with reforms, highlighting the potential power affiliated with the content knowledge and discourses privileged among specific institutions. Ultimately, these concepts offer a suitable lens for analysing data collected throughout this study.

Applying Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Following transcription of qualitative interview data, thematic coding was conducted using *N-Vivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software* to identify key discourses (including TE, learning and workplace discourses) made visible from participant responses regarding their reform engagement. Data were then analysed using *Foucauldian Discourse Analysis* [FDA] (Willig, 2013), which embodied six key components (see *Table 3*).

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of Early Childhood Reform	
1. Discursive constructions	Implicit and explicit constructions within the dataset, emphasising 'educational reform' as the discursive object
2. Discourses	Where participants constructed educational reform as involving strategies for reform engagement
3. Action orientation	Understanding the purpose of discursive constructions within the text regarding participant statements of educational reform and engagement
4. Positionings	Occupied by participants, and shaped by the discourses made available
5. Practice	How strategies of educational reform, and diverse subjective positionings of participants influenced their practice
6. Subjectivity	Made visible through connections between discourse, discursive positioning and subjective experience

Table 3: Components of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis [FDA] – adapted from Willig (2013)

Throughout the FDA process, TE discourses were identified among participants' which impacted their engagement during the 2009 reform period. While educational reform was recognised as the discursive object, certain subjective positions and discursive practices were made visible through the TE discourses available to participants at the time (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). It is important to note here that Foucault's conception of discursive practices 'operate according to rules which are quite specific to a particular time, space, and cultural setting' (O'Farrell, 2005, p.79). This suggests that certain practices are largely dependent upon context and may only be available and taken up by individuals at particular points in time and place. The following sections offer insights regarding TE discourses, and the subject positions and discursive practices of participants involved in this study following this reform period.

Findings and Discussion

It is important to explore TE discourses and where the knowledge attributed to these discourses resides. According to Kendall and Wickham (2003, p.48), 'the field of knowledge can be said to be dominated by the primacy of discourse'. Therefore, the availability of knowledge depends on certain discourses. TE discourses were recognised by participants as vital for reform engagement. Discursive practices enmeshed within TE discourses related to pre-service TE and qualifications. Nonetheless, attributes of these practices were interpreted as either a *stressor* or *support* for ECPs. Though based upon participants' varying levels of

recollection, findings tendered some discernable connections between TE discourses, the subjective positions of participants, and the discursive practices available to them.

Discursive Practices of Teacher Education Discourses for Reform Engagement

Foucault's concept of *discursive practices* involves an 'active deployment' of 'practices (or operations)' which are integrated with certain discourses (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014, p.173). Pre-service qualifications can be perceived as a discursive practice visible within TE discourses. Participant responses inferred that vocational/TAFE-run Diploma-level qualifications and tertiary/TE-run Bachelor qualifications encompassed diverse content knowledge that was being privileged among these different institutions at the time of the 2009 reform period (Gomez, 2012). This illustrates how knowledge and power inform one another. In reference to this, O'Farrell (2005, p.54, original emphasis) has described:

> *...knowledge is always shaped by political, social and historical factors – by power – in human societies. It is absolutely essential to examine the relationship between knowledge and the factors that produce and constrain it.*

Power has been established as a strategy within the social structure, discourses and practices of specific institutions (Foucault, 1980), and is evident through the power structures within TE in ECEC (Grieshaber, 2008). However, the early childhood knowledge base may have been constrained by the historical significance, or as Foucault (1972) has termed – the *archaeology of knowledge* that is associated with traditional content knowledge, as opposed to the more contemporary content knowledges embedded within the new frameworks.

Although some ECPs with qualifications acquired prior to the 2009 reform period may have struggled with changes to knowledge and practice, one participant adapted quite well. Jade (a Diploma-qualified educator) had previously taught as an ECP in another state within Australia that already had a curriculum framework in place. This former experience of engagement with reform and new content knowledge became a supportive practice and a *strategy of power* for this participant, where power was 'developed within social structures and practices' (Foucault, 1980, pp. 92-3):

> *...I think they were actually a little bit ahead of their time because .... It's a really beautiful document. So, we were encouraged to write learning stories...and use this curriculum framework...and we were already being encouraged to move away from that whole...developmental age and stage appropriateness (Jade).*

Conversely, when Jade relocated to a centre in Victoria, she found herself moving backward until the 2009 curricula were adopted by her Victorian ECEC setting:

> *...I moved down to Victoria, and they were still doing this developmental age and stage appropriateness and I didn't know what to do with it – and I had a mental breakdown, and I went, 'oh my gosh, I don't know how to work with this'.... when the framework came out, I went oh, I can work with this. This is fantastic. ...which was really good for me (Jade).*

To a certain extent, Jade was subject to an opposing experience over other ECPs in Victoria, where she had previously learnt to apply a curriculum framework to her practice but was then required to back-track to the more traditional approaches. Jade's unfamiliarity with the developmental ages and stages suggests that this regression was an initial stressor (effect of power) for her. This illuminates the diverse and often conflicting content knowledge accessible at the time; but also, a disconnect between the application of theory to practice. Moreover, it highlights Foucault's distinct relationship between knowledge and power, where 'the ways some knowledge is made available by the operations of the institutions involved in instances of governance while other knowledge is not made available' (Hunt & Wickham, 1994, pp.90-1). Correspondingly, new content knowledge associated with progressive early childhood reform is made available through government bodies and TE institutions. When

the state and national curricula were introduced in Victoria in 2009, Jade was able to understand and translate these documents into her practice more easily. Hence, Jade's previous interstate experience proved to be a supportive practice for reform engagement.

The Un/availability of Privileged Content Knowledge within Teacher Education Discourses

ECEC has experienced a significant shift in theoretical underpinnings over the years (Sumsion et al., 2009). This shift has generated inconsistencies in the un/availability of specific content knowledge among TE institutions (Gomez, 2012). As participants involved in this study completed their interactive timelines during the interview process, they reflected upon the content knowledge embedded in their pre-service TE courses. When considering theoretical knowledge, an educator named Alana spoke of the very developmental approach taught during her Diploma from 2004 to 2007:

> *...we weren't taught about any theories at all. Oh, maybe Piaget....it was a lot about Piaget-type theories (Alana).*

This response indicates more traditional content knowledge being privileged within Alana's course. Though, the slow recall regarding 'Piaget-type theories' may imply a limited understanding of this knowledge and its application to practice. Comparisons were also made between the content and approaches within Alana's Diploma course and those applied in practice at the time of her interview:

> *Writing goals over and over again and...the deficits... very structured planning, and you had to have a goal and it was an umbrella. And you had to have little goals coming off the major goal.... you planned based on children's deficits basically – not on their strengths and interests.... very different to now (Alana).*

This foregrounds that for Alana, both the theoretical and pedagogical content knowledge had changed since the completion of her pre-service TE. However, this shift was yet to transpire during Sonia's Diploma:

> *We had the developmentally appropriate practice....so yeah [laughs] (Sonia).*

These testaments exemplify that changes to early childhood TE discourses and the underpinning content knowledge had not yet occurred among some institutions offering Diploma qualifications. Although the ECEC knowledge base had shifted, the relevance of traditional content knowledge to current practice was raised by Lucy:

> *Ah, I feel like half of it's out the window but then on the other hand.... I think that really helped really knuckle down with the language and...knuckle down about behaviour guidance and...engagement with the children, I think that's helped a lot. And then also...just the basic developmental things even though they're irrelevant in our planning process – well not irrelevant, but less relevant.... I think it sort of prepared me in lots of ways but lots of it is irrelevant at the same time. Half and half really (Lucy).*

Here, Lucy alluded to tensions between the relevance of traditional developmental knowledge compared with the contemporary knowledges underpinning the frameworks. Some correlation with Aldwinckle's (2001, p.39) sentiment of 'throwing the baby out with the bath water' can also be made. Though a document was released in 2011 to support ECPs in making connections between the developmental milestones and the frameworks (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2011b), it is uncertain to what extent this document was promoted among TE institutions and utilised by ECPs in practice. Regardless, Lucy's account raises an important consideration as to whether the Diploma qualification is perceived as relevant for current practice and for the effective interpretation of our national frameworks. This may be especially pertinent to tensions associated with the

theory versus practice debate (Krieg, 2010), and the hierarchies and positionalities discussed previously (Abawi, 2021). The divide between the privileges attributed to these discourses made available within TE institutions may be contributing to the perplexity for ECPs in the field, and a potential stressor and *effect of power* (Foucault, 1980), for engaging in reform processes (Gomez, 2012).

In contrast, participants who had completed higher pre-service TE at tertiary/HE institutions offered a different comprehension of changes to theoretical and pedagogical content knowledge, correlating with evidence of differences between what is privileged among vocational/TAFE and tertiary/HE institutions. This study revealed that ECPs who completed a Bachelor course were exposed to a more diverse range of theories. Though, some ECPs who had completed their Bachelor courses either during or following the establishment of the frameworks were not yet incorporating the frameworks into their courses at that time. For example, Adele shared her thoughts regarding her Bachelor course completed in 2011:

> *…for the lecturers and everyone…the course content hadn't changed yet. So…some verbal understanding that things are changing but what you're learning is still…more traditional…. I feel like it was at a time of change where…we had all those traditional theorists but also then…framing that, that things were changing (Adele).*

Adele's account suggests that the new content had not yet filtered through to some TE institutions, or perhaps these changes were still being processed and interpreted by teacher-educators. This illustrates another layer to the un/availability of content knowledge among specific institutions (Hunt & Wickham, 1994). Conversely, two participants were privy to interactions with well-known academics and mentors who were previously involved in developing the frameworks. As a result, this became a *strategy of power*, enabling these educators to establish a greater understanding of these documents:

> *I was studying at that time of change when the frameworks were coming in… the coordinator of my degree course at [name omitted] was actually a part of the…working group…for the framework… and so she was quite…proactive in introducing that to us…at the time that it was unfolding. So, I think…that was a real benefit for me… (Lucy).*
>
> *There was another lady that used to work at this centre who was my mentor while I was studying my Bachelor. And she writes modules for the [name omitted] Bachelor course that's just come out (Jade).*

This highlights the significance of TE institutions and their teacher-educators being aware and involved in the processes of reform processes. In both cases, the involvement of Lucy and Jade's teacher-educators enhanced their awareness and understanding of impending changes, enabling them to impart new content knowledge to their students and mentees. Therefore, having supportive and involved teacher-educators and mentors during their Bachelor courses became a supportive practice and a strategy of power, ultimately enhancing their understanding of the reforms and elevating their subjective positionings during the process.

In relation to contemporary theories associated with the 2009 reform period, Alana spoke of 'learning about all of them' during the first three years of her Bachelor course:

> *Well, we've learnt a lot about ecological systems. We're doing that now…. they talk a lot about sociocultural theory – they're probably the main ones…. They seem to be the most common theorists that are going around…. we can all relate to them in this kind of service anyway (Alana).*

While Alana described her Bachelor course encompassing 'all' theories – only two were mentioned here. This may imply that ecological and sociocultural theories were dominant

within this course (Gomez, 2012). Alternatively, these theories may have proven most relatable to Alana's practice, whereby her knowledge and uptake of these theories could be deemed as a strategy of power for engaging with changes to theoretical content knowledge. The power and knowledge infiltrating this TE discourse impacted how this educator positioned herself; ultimately influencing the discourses available to her surrounding colleagues, and how she interpreted and engaged with changes outlined in the frameworks (Foucault, 1972; 1980; O'Farrell, 2005). If Alana's TE institution privileged the specific content knowledge of ecological and sociocultural theories, this may have positioned ECPs to engage with the frameworks more effectively. However, this can also limit and constrain the abilities of these ECPs to engage in future change, as institutions may have positioned ECPs with only two lenses for viewing the world.

This study revealed that some Bachelor courses offered by tertiary/HE institutions privileged contemporary content knowledge and theory. For example, Sonia spoke of her Bachelor course as she neared its completion:

> *...we're learning about theorists and... how all their theories sort of make up everything we know about early childhood…. obviously, they're expecting us to know about developmentally appropriate practice and the Early Years Learning Framework. So, they don't really talk about it as much as the theorists that make up where all this information has come from… (Sonia).*

This TE institution recognised the contemporary theories embedded within the frameworks released from 2009. Nonetheless, the connection between this privileged content knowledge and the content within the frameworks had seemingly not yet occurred. Furthermore, it appeared that knowledge of traditional approaches to child development was limited. This implies a potential either/or approach to theory and practice among some TE institutions (Krieg, 2010). According to Sonia, pre-service educators were expected to be aware of traditional content knowledge regarding child development and the new frameworks; however, it seems that these connections were not made visible to Sonia throughout her course, leading to her TE experience being distinguished as a stressor and an effect of power (Foucault, 1980).

Heightened Tensions and Subjective Interpretations of Qualifications, Experience and Positionalities

Participants acknowledged differences between the Diploma and Bachelor courses adding to the stress experienced by ECPs as they attempted to engage in the 2009 reform period. Strong connections were made between the practice-based Diploma courses offered by vocational/TAFE institutions, and the theory-based Bachelor courses delivered by tertiary/HE institutions (Watson & Axford, 2008). Evidence of some considerable issues was presented by participants involved in this study. For instance, Abigail (a Diploma-qualified educator) had mixed perceptions about the subject positions of Bachelor-qualified educators:

> *I remember that they had employed a Bachelor – a girl that had just finished her Bachelor. And she was coming out fresh to the centre and she had a lot of knowledge of the Elf [EYLF] from being just completed her Bachelor – and the framework and everything sort of put together (Abigail, sic).*

Abigail's account suggests that the Bachelor qualification contains relevant content knowledge that aligns with the curriculum framework and the changing ECEC knowledge base. Though in a contradictory statement, Abigail also claimed:

> *You could run a kindergarten room better than someone that's done a Bachelor (Abigail, sic).*

This implies that although some relevant knowledge may be present within Bachelor courses, the practical skills may be lacking (Krieg, 2010). If so, this can be perceived as a stressor and an effect of power for ECPs, as they endeavour to translate new knowledge relating to recent reforms to their practice.

The value attributed to experience over theory was also visible among several vocationally trained ECPs, potentially influenced by their own subjective positioning. According to Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine (2017, p.118), these positionings 'allow individuals to manage, in quite complex and subtle ways, their moral location within social interaction'. This was indeed the case for Gabrielle, (a vocationally trained educator):

> *Yeah. But you've still gotta get experience, and I understand that. But…some of them are just qualifying on… they're not really doing enough of the experience skills… And a lot of them come out and are immediately put into a team leader job – have no… no idea. It's like anything, you should start at the bottom and work your way to the top (Gabrielle, original emphasis, sic).*

Based on this assertion, the moral vantage point and subjective positioning of some educators demonstrate merit for experience over qualification. This division appears to enhance tensions, as a perceived effect of power, where a value for higher qualifications is emerging. Although a 'hierarchy of dominance' may still be present (Abawi, 2021, p.1), the updated qualification requirements have raised the professional status of newly qualified ECPs, who often exhibit less professional and life experience. As such, the qualifications of newly qualified ECPs can be viewed as a *strategy of power* established through the discourses, 'social structures and practices' (Foucault, 1980, pp.92-3) made available within TE institutions. Comparatively, some vocationally trained educators have since been demoted in their professional roles due to the updated qualification requirements (ACECQA, n.d.; MCEECDYA, 2011). This implies that these ECPs may feel as though they are being forced from the field, as they are mandated to upskill or move on. During this study, one ECP claimed that upskilling was not an achievable option:

> *I could go back and do a training course I suppose but I'm too old. …but I do struggle with it (Gabrielle).*

From this statement, it seemed that Gabrielle associated her age with her anxiety about learning and the possibility of upskilling. While the shifting privilege associated with diverse content knowledge within early childhood TE discourses and the updated qualification requirements also generate a stressor for some ECPs (Gomez, 2012). However, a genuine need for ECPs 'to familiarise themselves with new discourses in the ECEC profession' remains (Quiñones & Ridgway, 2015, p.146).

Participants revealed the complex nature of qualifications and the tensions they cause among the diverse positionings of ECPs in the field. With the additional pressures experienced by ECPs in the present ECEC context and ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic (CELA, 2020; Quiñones, Barnes & Berger, 2020), it is any wonder that ECPs may feel overwhelmed (and exhausted). The consequences of these conditions may further exacerbate a reluctance and resistance to engage in change and contemplate the upskilling of qualification levels. Yet, it is essential to consider how the experience held by our ECPs and the TE discourses available to them impact their ability to translate new content knowledge to practice.

The value of experience was recognised as an effective support for some participants, generally leading to a growth in confidence over time:

> *I do think my experience has been able to help me because although there is a lot of new things, the whole basis and understanding of it, is very similar – the foundations are basically the same (Abigail, sic).*

Abigail's prior TE and experience as an educator have shaped her subject position in a way that acted as a supportive practice (and strategy of power) in her understanding of the frameworks introduced from 2009. Markedly, Abigail's reference to 'the foundations' highlights how access to traditional content knowledge through previous TE discourses was made available to her. Through professional experience gained over time, Abigail can build upon these foundations and engage with new content knowledge more confidently. Hence, it can be argued that traditional content knowledge continues to be relevant even amid times of change and reform.

Practical knowledge and skills are also perceived as discursive practices associated with TE discourses. The necessity for ECPs to acquire strong practical skills in TE was a clear point of discussion for two participants:

> I suppose 'cause when I trained, ours was a lot of practical…. What I learnt then – beats anything that I learnt in a class (Gabrielle, sic).
> I really believe back then that a lot of that was on-the-job training. I still believe that actually. You can learn only so much, but once you get out there, it's a totally different story (Abigail).

For both Gabrielle and Abigail, value was attributed to practical and hands-on approaches to ECEC as a discursive practice (and a strategy of power). This acknowledges the power relations immersed within TE institutions and reinforces the subjective positions and learning styles of ECPs who undertake these courses. Ultimately, the diverse preferences towards either practical or theoretical content knowledge across various TE institutions can cause TE to be considered as either a support (strategy of power) or a stressor (effect of power) for engaging with reform processes and the changing early childhood knowledge base.

Conclusion

The research discussed throughout this paper provides an opportunity to contemplate what we can learn from our ECPs as we continue to navigate complex times of change in ECEC. Notably, this research was not without its limitations. Due to its small-scale nature and use of purposeful sampling, results cannot be generalised and are not transferrable to other contexts or broader population samples within ECEC (Bryman, 2012). Additionally, the use of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis [FDA] (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017; Willig, 2013) limits the focus of analysis to verbal discourses (Willig, 2013). Though the focus on Foucault's concepts of discourse, knowledge and power (1972; 1980) aims to avoid a prescriptive and linear approach to analysis, comparisons between analyses cannot be made (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Yet, there is still much we can learn.

Responses reinforce the idea that conflicting content knowledge continues to be privileged among the different types of TE institutions. This implies that diverse TE discourses may further aggravate the 'theory versus practice' debate (Krieg, 2010), a 'hierarchy of dominance' (Abawi, 2021, p.1), the value attributed to qualification types and levels, and heightened tensions and divisions between the positionalities of Victorian ECPs. This study revealed an expectation for ECPs to possess a solid understanding of the underpinning foundations of early childhood learning and development. Nonetheless, available TE discourses within ECEC are shifting towards a more contemporary knowledge base. This may prove challenging for emerging and future ECPs who may experience an omittance of traditional knowledges within their pre-service TE courses and an ostensible irrelevance to their professional practice. While contemporary knowledges are important, it is still vital for all ECPs to be cognizant of traditional knowledges, so they can develop a

holistic understanding of child development and learning, and how these knowledges remain relevant to practice.

Potential ramifications are also present for our existing ECPs who are now mandated to upskill their qualification levels (ACECQA, n.d.; MCEECDYA, 2011). It appears that some ECPs originally trained in traditional knowledges may experience being left behind, and may feel overwhelmed when considering engagement in additional TE. Further research is needed to explore how TE institutions are supporting existing ECPs to bridge the divide between traditional and contemporary knowledges, including an emphasis on resilience and adaptability for reform engagement. Intrinsically, caution is needed to ensure that the traditional foundations of ECEC are not being devalued, erased and forgotten among TE institutions; provoking us to revisit the question: are we *still* at risk of 'throwing the baby out with the bath water?' (Aldwinckle, 2001, p.39). When preparing and upskilling our existing, emerging and future ECPs, it is recommended that TE institutions, their courses and teacher-educators provide ample opportunities for acknowledging, integrating and celebrating all positionalities and knowledges. In doing so, this may support the much-needed repair of enduring hierarchies and tensions afflicting the ECEC field.

References

Abawi, Z. (2021). Privileging Power: Early Childhood Educators, Teachers, and Racial Socialization in Full-Day Kindergarten. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, *46*(1), 1–12. https://discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=b84928a9-f011-350d-9b7e-9a05f3420fb9 https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs00202119594

Armstrong, L. (2019). Multiplicities in early childhood reform engagement in Victorian long day care centres: Discourse, position and practice. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *44*(3): 257–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939119855558

Aldwinckle, M. (2001). The DAP debate: are we throwing the baby out with the bath water? *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 26(2), 36–39. https://journals.sagepub.com/ https://doi.org/10.1177/183693910102600208

Arribas-Ayllon, M. & Walkerdine, V. (2017). Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. In Willig, C. & Stainton-Rogers, W. (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2nd ed.), 110-123. SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526405555.n7

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] (2012). *National Quality Framework*. http://acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework/the-national-quality-standard

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] (2017). *National Quality Framework – Information sheet. 2018 NQS and other changes: Summary of key changes to the NQS from 1 February 2018.* https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/acecqa/files/NQF/RevisedNQSandOtherChanges_2.pdf

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] (2021). *Discussion Paper: 2021 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update.* https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-09/2021NQF-ALF-UpdateDiscussionPaper.PDF

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority [ACECQA] (2022). *Belonging, Being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia – V2.0, 2022*. https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf

Australian Qualifications Framework Council. (2013). *Australian Qualifications Framework*: *Second Edition January 2013*. https://www.aqf.edu.au/framework/australian-qualifications-framework#the-aqf-second-edition-january-2013

Australian Skills Quality Authority [ASQA]. (2015). *Training for early childhood education and care: Report*. https://www.asqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Strategic_Review_2015_Early_Childhood_Education_Report.pdf

Bacchi, C. & Bonham, J. (2014). Reclaiming discursive practices as an analytic focus: Political implications. *Foucault Studies*, 17, 173-192. https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i17.4298

Boyd, W. & Phillips, A. (2021). Getting it right for early childhood teacher programs in Australia. In W. Boyd & S. Garvis (eds.). *International Perspectives on Early Childhood Teacher Education in the 21st Century* [electronic resource], 1-16. Springer Nature Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-5739-9_1

Brennan, D. (1998). *The politics of Australian child care: From philanthropy to feminism and beyond* (Rev.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511597091

Bryant, L. (2020). Politics of care in the early years in Australia since the pandemic. *Global Studies of Childhood*, *10*(4): 395–400. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610620978509

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ciuciu, J., & Robertson, N. (2019). "That's what you want to do as a teacher, make a difference, let the child be, have high expectations": Stories of becoming, being and unbecoming an early childhood teacher. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(11). https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44.n11.5

Community Early Learning Australia [CELA] (2019). International ECEC workforce survey results. https://www.cela.org.au/publications/amplify!-blog/november-2019/ecec-workforce-survey-results

Community Early Learning Australia [CELA] (2020). ECEC front line – we thank you. https://www.cela.org.au/publications/amplify!-blog/june-2020/ecec-frontline-thank-you

Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.). (2009*). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs: Serving children from birth through age 8* (3rd ed.). National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Department of Education & Early Childhood Development & Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority [DEECD & VCAA] (2009). *Victorian early years learning and development framework: For all children from birth to eight years*. Early Childhood Strategy Division.

Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business (2019). *Newsroom: Employment projections.* https://www.employment.gov.au/newsroom/employment-projections.

Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations [DEEWR] (2009). *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*. Commonwealth of Australia. https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf

Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations [DEEWR] (2011a). *Final report: Baseline evaluation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*. Monash University Education. https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-12/BaselineEvaluationEYLF-QuantitativeReport.pdf

Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations [DEEWR] (2011b). *Developmental milestones and the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards*. https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/DevelopmentalMilestonesEYLFandNQS.pdf

Department of Education and Training [DET] Victoria (2016). *Victorian early years learning and development framework: For all children from birth to eight years.*

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (Sheridan Smith, A. M., tr. Ed.). Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1974). Truth and juridical forms (Hurley, R., tr.). In Faubion, J. D. (Ed.), *Power*, pp.1-89. The New Press.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings*, 1972-1977 (1st American ed.). Pantheon Books.

Gomez, R. E. (2012). Resistance, reproduction, both, or neither: Exploring the influence of early childhood professional development specialists on the field of early childhood education. *NHSA Dialog*, 15 (1), 81-94. https://doi.org/10.1080/15240754.2011.636487

Grieshaber, S. (2008). Interrupting stereotypes: Teaching and the education of young children. *Early Education and Development, 19*(3), 505-518. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280802068670

Hughes, P. (2010). Paradigms, methods and knowledge. In Mac Naughton, G., Rolfe, S.A., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (Eds.) *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory and practice* (2nd ed.), 35-61. Allen & Unwin.

Hunt, A. & Wickham, G. (1994). *Foucault and law: Towards a sociology of law as governance*. Pluto.

Kendall, G. & Wickham, G. (2003). *Using Foucault's methods*. Introducing Qualitative Methods series. Sage Publications.

Krieg, S. (2010). The professional knowledge that counts in Australian contemporary early childhood teacher education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 11*(2), 144-155. https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2010.11.2.144

Logan, H., McFarland, L., Cumming, T., & Wong, S. (2021). Supporting educator well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of leadership in early childhood education and care organisations. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *46*(4), 309–321. https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.utas.edu.au/ https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391211040940

Manning, M., Wong, G., Fleming, C., & Garvis, S. (2019). Is teacher qualification associated with the quality of the early childhood education and care environment? *Review of Educational Research, 89*(3), 370–415. https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.utas.edu.au/ https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319837540

Mac Naughton, G., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Rolfe, S. A. (Eds.). (2010). *Doing early childhood research: International perspectives on theory & practice*. Allen & Unwin.

McArdle, F. (2007). Learning and assessment. In R. S. New & M. Cochran (Eds.). *Early childhood education an international encyclopedia*, 909-913. Praeger Publishers.

Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development & Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA] (2011). *Education and Care Services National Regulations*. Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/sl-2011-0653

National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2021). *Shaping our future: A en-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce 2022–2031*. https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-10/ShapingOurFutureChildrensEducationandCareNationalWorkforceStrategy-September2021.pdf

Nuttall, J. (2018). Engaging with Ambivalence: The Neglect of Early Childhood Teacher Education in Initial Teacher Education Reform in Australia. In C. Wyatt-Smith & L. Adie (Eds.). *Innovation and Accountability in Teacher Education: Setting Directions for New Cultures in Teacher Education. Teacher Education, Learning Innovation and Accountability*, 155-170. Springer Link. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2026-2

Phillips, A. (2020). *Exceeding the National Quality Standard: An investigation of high-quality long day care services in Australia*. The Faculty of Education and Social Work: The University of Sydney [Dissertation].

O'Farrell, C. (2005). *Michel Foucault*. London: SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446218808

Ortlipp, M. (2003). Assessment of the early childhood practicum: What can we learn from tertiary supervisors' silences? *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 28 (4), 29. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693910302800406

Page, J., & Waniganayake, M. (2019). Early Childhood Educational Leaders in Australia: Tensions and Possibilities in Leadership Preparation and Capacity Building. *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM))*, *47*(2), 23–36.

Press, F. (2015). The Australian early childhood education and care workforce: Feminism, feminisation and fragmentation. In V. Campbell-Barr & J. Georgeson (Eds.). *International perspectives on workforce development in early childhood education and care: History, philosophy and politics*, 69-82. Critical Publishing.

Quiñones, G., Barnes, M., & Berger, E. (2020). The emotional toll of COVID-19 among early childhood educators. Lens, Monash University. https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2020/08/05/1381001/the-emotional-toll-of-covid-19-among-early-childhood-educators

Quiñones, G., & Ridgway, A. (2015). Early childhood pre-service students' transitioning into discourses of professional practice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(1). https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n1.8

Rivalland, C. (2010). *Encounters between new migrant families and early childhood professionals in EC services in Australia: A sociocultural and post-structural analysis* [Dissertation]. Monash University Research Repository (Offsite store call no: R616.1).

Robins, G. (2015). *Doing social network research: Network-based research design for social scientists*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473916753

Robinson, C., O'Connor, D., & Treasure, T. (2021). Education or Care? Childcare or School? Pre-Service Teacher Perspectives on Teaching in the Childcare Sector. *Issues in Educational Research*, *31*(4), 1231–1248.

Scantlebury Brown, V. (1966). *A guide to the very young child* (6th edition). Campbell, K. & Wilmot, A.E. (Eds.). Department of Health, Victoria.

Sobell, L. C., Sobell, M. B., Leo, G. I., & Cancilla, A. (1988). Reliability of a timeline method: Assessing normal drinkers' reports of recent drinking and a comparative evaluation across several populations. *British Journal of Addiction*, 83 (4), 393-402. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.1988.tb00485.x

Sumsion, J., Barnes, S., Cheeseman, S., Harrison, L., Kennedy, A. & Stonehouse, A. (2009). Insider perspectives on developing Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. 34 (4), 4-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/183693910903400402

Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group [TEMAG] (2014). *Action now: Classroom ready teachers*. Australian Department of Education and Training.

Thorpe, K., Panthi, N., Houen, S., Horwood, M., & Staton, S. (2023). Support to stay and thrive: mapping challenges faced by Australia's early years educators to the national workforce strategy 2022–2031. *The Australian Educational Researcher: A Publication of the Australian Association for Research in Education*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00607-3

Watson, L. & Axford, B. (2008). *Characteristics and delivery of early childhood education degrees in Australia: PART A, Final Report, October 2008.* Faculty of Education, University of Canberra.

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology* (3rd ed.). Open University Press: McGraw-Hill Education.

World Health Organization [WHO] (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

Acknowledgements