



Early Childhood Educators' Well-being Project (ECEWP)

ISSUE 9 – DECEMBER 2022

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the ninth ECEWP newsletter. After another big year, we hope this newsletter finds you planning for some rest and recovery time!

As you will read, the ECEWP team has been hard at work over the past six months. October was an especially busy month with the fabulous Early Childhood Australia conference and grant writing time in Canberra, visits to new partner organisations in Melbourne, and a trip to Singapore to attend the CHILD Conference and meet with international ECEWP team members.

Despite the difficult conditions in our sector at the moment, there is a real feeling of change in the air. We will continue to do what we can to promote the importance of supporting educators' well-being and hope the New Year brings brighter times ahead!

We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners, past and present, of the lands where we live and work.

Australian Research Council update

In October, ECEWP researchers met both in person and online to finalise our resubmission for an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project, which has now been submitted.

Our application combines an experienced research team, strategic alliances with Australian and international universities, and an incredibly strong group of partner organisations. Together, we aim to build on and expand the knowledge and learnings from ECEWP.



ARC planning in Canberra. L to R: Kim Woodland, Tamara Cumming, Sandie Wong & Rebecca Bull (online were Laura McFarland & Sandy MacQuarrie)

Hair cortisol pilot project

Piloting a new project is always busy and exciting, and over the last few months we have commenced two. The first is a pilot project investigating the feasibility of using hair samples to measure cortisol levels. This will allow us to determine whether early childhood educators would be willing to provide a hair sample, and to trial the collection and analysis of hair samples.

As we all know, stress levels among early childhood educators can be high; however, the research tools we can use to measure educator stress (like questionnaires) tend to be subjective. In order to objectively measure stress, saliva samples can be collected to test cortisol levels, which we have previously done as part of our holistic research process. However, the collection and use of salivary cortisol is problematic, especially given the context of COVID-19.

Following a short survey process, we have now begun trialling the collection and analysis of hair samples as an alternative to salivary cortisol.



Macquarie University School of Education Merit Scholar Jacquie Miller collecting a hair sample for analysis of cortisol levels

CIPS pilot project

Our second recent project involves piloting the first use of the Caregiver Interaction Profile Scale (CIPS) in the Australian early childhood education context. CIPS is used to measure educator–child interaction quality.

Supporting educator well-being and promoting quality interactions between educators and children is essential to give children the best start in early education. However, the measurement of educator–child interaction quality can be problematic.

This pilot project will help us to establish the appropriateness of the tool for the Australian context, and for training researchers to conduct reliable coding of educator–child interactions.

International news

Our research team has been meeting monthly with international partners since 2021 to better understand early childhood educator well-being in different country contexts.

The international collaboration – Well-being of early childhood educators: An international research alliance (WECARE) – includes researchers from Australia, Canada, Finland, Hong Kong SAR, Iceland, New Zealand and Singapore.

In late October, members of the international team met in Singapore to present a panel at the [CHILD Biennial Conference](#).

Ng, E., Cumming, T., Bull, R., Liley, K., Saha, M., & Wong, S. (2022, October 26–28). *Early childhood educator well-being: Conceptualization, measurement, predictors, and intervention*. Curated panel discussion presented at the CHILD Biennial Conference, Singapore.



Panel discussion in Singapore. L to R: Tamara Cumming, Rebecca Bull, Mari Saha, Sandie Wong, Kate Liley & EeLynn Ng (panel facilitator)



Visit to an early childhood centre in Singapore. L to R: Mari Saha, Dawn Hu, EeLynn Ng, Rebecca Bull, Sandie Wong, Jolyn Ong & Tamara Cumming (Used with permission)

Workplace bullying presentation

In October, our team (Laura McFarland, Tamara Cumming and Rebecca Bull) presented on workplace bullying in the early childhood education sector at the [Early Childhood Australia National Conference](#) in Canberra.

The focus of the presentation was on the prevalence of workplace bullying and protective factors, and the session was very well attended.



Rebecca Bull presents to a full room at the Early Childhood Australia conference

Q&A on educator well-being

At our stakeholder update event in May (see Issue 8), participants asked some great questions and indicated interest in a number of areas related to educator well-being. Here is the final of our two-part Q&A series.

Can you tell us more about family day care educators' well-being?

This is an important question! We haven't yet focused on family day care educators' well-being, but are very interested in pursuing research in this area. Importantly, our Caregiver Interaction Profile Scale (CIPS) pilot project will include family day care educators.

Were there different results between different early learning types, for example, long day care, family day care and school aged care?

At the moment our research is limited to educators working in long day care and preschools, with plans to expand into family day care. But we won't expand into school aged care for now, as the working conditions are very different from prior-to-school settings.

How has the Caregiver Interaction Profile Scale been developed and used in research?

CIPS is an observational measure developed to capture important aspects of quality interactions between educators and young children (aged birth to five) in an educational setting. This innovative measure is gaining traction in international research. The scale was developed in the Netherlands, but it has been used in other countries, including [Norway](#) and [Bangladesh](#). We're excited to be the first team to use this scale in Australia!

Is there any evidence of the impact of educators' psychological and physiological stress on children's health and well-being?

There is very little existing evidence linking educators' well-being with outcomes for children. A [Finnish study](#) makes some links in regard to kindergarten teachers' occupational well-being and the quality of teacher-child interactions.

Are there any directions to explore in regard to physical environment and well-being?

We have collected some data about educators' work environment, which we are still analysing. In future we would like to include other aspects of the work environment, such as noise levels and the physical demands of the work.

Are there any promising interventions to support educators' physical well-being?

There is a [recent article](#) from the United States on physical well-being in early childhood educators – in particular, in regard to work-related musculoskeletal issues and fitness.

Do you have any results/recommendations relating to the well-being of leaders?

The supervision evaluation we recently conducted focused on professional supervision provided to centre directors. This research highlights the important role that leaders have in supporting educators. In addition, we can explore our data by position, such as room leader or educational leader.

When sharing this incredibly important evidence, how have different stakeholders (such as policy makers) responded?

We usually find people are really receptive to our work. But how this translates into action and policy change is yet to be seen.

Recent publications

Since the last newsletter, we have had three new publications on early childhood educator well-being, and three more have been submitted or are in press.

McFarland, L., Bull, R., Cumming, T., & Wong, S. (2022). Workplace bullying in early childhood education settings: Prevalence and protective factors. *International Journal of Early Childhood*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13158-022-00341-y>

McFarland, L., Cumming, T., Wong, S., & Bull, R. (2022). 'My cup was empty': The impact of COVID-19 on early childhood educator well-being. In J. Pattnaik & M. R. Jalongo (Eds.), *The impact of COVID-19 on early childhood education and care* (pp. 171–192). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96977-6_9

McFarland, L., Wong, S., Bull, R., & Cumming, T. (2022). Early childhood educator well-being in Australia throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. *ChildLinks*, 2, 21–24. <https://shop.barnardos.ie/products/ebook-childlinks-staff-wellbeing-in-early-learning-and-care-issue-2-2022>

Recent media coverage

The Lighthouse | [Why early childhood educators are going on strike](#) [article]

ABC NEWS | [Childcare centres shut across the nation as workers strike](#) [video]

MORE INFORMATION

Video <https://youtu.be/QqfNX7f4XnQ>
Facebook [ECEWP](#)
Twitter [ECEWP_Aus](#)
Email ecewp@mq.edu.au

ECEWP timeline

Here is an overview of the research of the Early Childhood Educators' Well-being Project from 2017 to today.



Early Childhood Educators' Well-being Project (ECEWP) timeline

2022

An online stakeholder update event with over 40 participants is held to share research findings, future directions & ways to contribute

A pilot study begins on the (first) use of the Caregiver Interaction Profile Scale (CIPS) to measure the quality of educator-child interactions in Australia

A pilot study begins on the feasibility of using hair samples to measure cortisol

ECEWP partners with Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA) to examine what works for supporting EC educators' well-being



Wellbeing Initiatives
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS

2021

Laura McFarland joins the project team

The survey is replicated with over 800 EC educators across Australia

The study is partially replicated in Canada, Finland, Hong Kong SAR & China, allowing international comparisons of educators' well-being

A generous donation is received from a national EC organisation to support continuing research into educators' well-being

The team contributes to consultation on the National Quality Standard & new National Workforce Strategy

2020

Rebecca Bull joins the project team & hosts the first meeting with international collaborators

The team lobbies the federal & state governments to increase support for EC educators during the COVID-19 pandemic

The team is commissioned by industry partners to conduct workshops on well-being for EC services across Australia



2019

A stakeholder roundtable event attracts over 40 participants to hear initial findings of the pilot project & provide feedback on research directions

ECEWP holistic protocol used in contract research examining the effects of clinical supervision on EC centre directors

2018

A holistic conceptualisation of EC educators' well-being is published (Cumming & Wong, 2018)

A pilot project, using standard & innovative tools, objectively measures 30 educators' psychological & physiological well-being within their work environment

Researchers: Sandie Wong, Tamara Cumming, Helen Logan & Sandy MacQuarrie
Project Manager: Kim Woodland



2017

A comprehensive literature review on EC educators' well-being is published (Cumming, 2017)

