



Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing Project (ECEWP)

ISSUE 12 – JULY 2024

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

Introduction

Hello and welcome to our newsletter. We begin this issue by summarising our recent evaluation of clinical supervision in the early childhood context, including what makes it most effective.

We have also continued our focus on collaboration. This has included making available our anonymised data set on educators' intention to leave the sector. On page 2, you can read about how this data has already been used in research into workforce retention and attrition in Victoria. Our group of international early childhood researchers (WECARE) has also continued to grow and meet regularly online.

We are currently in the early stages of co-designing a wellbeing intervention for early childhood professionals in the Australian context. This collaboration builds on work we have been doing for almost a decade with colleagues from around the globe, and draws on our relationships with experts in the United States from two different universities.

Clinical supervision research

In Australia there is little evidence into what works to support and sustain educators' wellbeing. As one way of addressing this, Sandie Wong recently led two projects looking at the potential of clinical supervision to support educators and improve workforce stability.

What is clinical supervision?

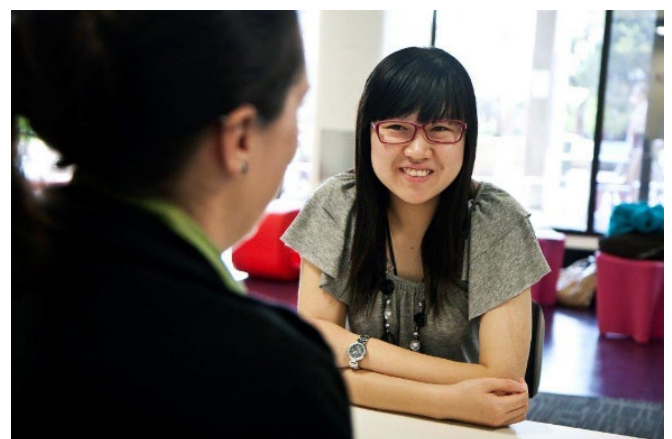
Clinical supervision is different to mentoring, coaching or an employee assistance program. It is usually delivered by someone external to the organisation and it includes ongoing reflection.

Clinical supervisors (who are qualified psychologists or counsellors) aim to provide safe, secure, trusting spaces that enable supervisees to reflect on their practices, interpersonal relationships and the personal and organisational factors that impact their work.

Despite clinical supervision being common in other similar professions like social work, it has not been a tradition in early childhood education practice. However, some organisations have started to provide clinical supervision as a way to support staff.

“Given the shortages that we have, and the need to support educators in their complex work, even during regular times, clinical supervision is a promising approach to helping support educators, to support retention, and to assist educators with their wellbeing and processing those difficult parts of their work.”

Tamara Cumming



What characterises effective clinical supervision?

- Clinical supervision needs to be best practice – that is, trauma informed and relationships focused.
- It needs to be delivered by supervisors who understand the early childhood context.
- It needs sufficient time and space.
- Educators need to be given the skills to receive the supervision.
- In times of natural disaster, supervision is important in both the immediate and recovery period.

Further information on clinical supervision

We have [recorded a video](#) – in the form of a chat between Sandie Wong and Tamara Cumming – which summarises our two projects evaluating clinical supervision.

There are also two journal articles that are available to read in full for free:

[Supporting leaders in early childhood education settings: An evaluation of a clinical supervision program for centre directors](#) (*Cogent Education*)

[A case study of clinical supervision to support early childhood leaders in times of natural disasters: 'It's not a designer handbag'](#) (*Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*)

Intention to leave data set

A stable early childhood workforce is vital to supporting children and families. However, the retention of qualified educators is a global problem, including in Australia.

In early 2021 we collected and analysed data on 'intention to leave', the stage before educators and directors actually leave their positions. 713 members of the early childhood workforce in Australia completed our survey. We collected information on personal and workplace characteristics, workplace culture and climate, and work-related wellbeing.

Our anonymised intention to leave data set has also since been used by public policy organisation *dandolopartners* to help validate and strengthen the qualitative findings from

consultations and research they undertook, on behalf of the Victorian Department of Education, into the drivers of workforce retention and attrition in the Victorian early childhood education workforce.

This research is informing the implementation of Victoria's *Best Start, Best Life Workforce Strategy*, including the development of an evidence-informed guide that aims to increase awareness across the sector of best practice in workforce retention.

Intention to leave findings



The ECEWP team has newly published research on [the impact of work-related wellbeing and workplace culture and climate on intention to leave in the early childhood sector](#).

In this article we focus on the stage *before* educators and directors leave their jobs or the sector – their 'intention to leave'. We talk about the ways educators' and directors' intentions are similar and different, and propose ways having this information could inform interventions to support early childhood staff to stay.

We are proud to have had this work published in early childhood education's highest ranking scholarly peer-reviewed journal, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. We have paid to make this article 'open access' so everyone can download a copy and have access to the findings. Please feel free to share [the article](#) with colleagues who might also find it useful. We hope you find it informative and useful in your practice too!

Highlights

- One in three respondents reported an intention to leave the profession.
- Emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and age predict centre directors' intention to leave.
- Pay/benefits, emotional exhaustion and qualification level predict educators' intention to leave.

- Findings may inform interventions to improve workforce stability.
- Findings are timely given the current government spotlight on the early childhood education and care workforce.

Global workforce challenges



Tamara Cumming and Sandie Wong co-edited a special issue of the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* focusing on [global workforce challenges in the field of early childhood](#).

The collection of articles make visible the connections between macro-level policy and micro-level effects on the lived experiences of early childhood educators.

You can read Tamara and Sandie's editorial for the special issue [here](#).

Wellbeing intervention co-design

Over the next six months we are working – together with experts from Macquarie University, the University of Melbourne, industry stakeholders, and researchers from the United States – to co-design a wellbeing intervention for early childhood professionals in the Australian context.

For more information please contact the team at ecwp@mq.edu.au

WECARE update

Our group of international early childhood researchers (WECARE) has continued to meet regularly online, with researchers now joining us from Canada, mainland China and Hong Kong SAR, Finland, Iceland, Indonesia, Macau, the Netherlands, Aotearoa New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and the United States.

EdUHK Conference for Research in Early Childhood Education and Development

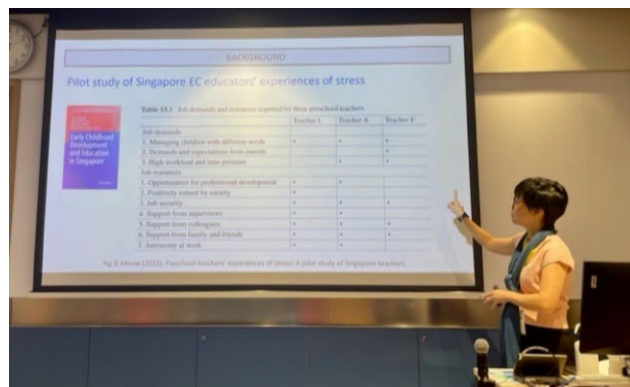
In early June, WECARE members Mari Saha (Tampere University), Tamara Cumming (Macquarie University) and EeLynn Ng (National Institute of Education, Singapore) presented at the first International EdUHK Conference for Research in Early Childhood Education and Development, held in Hong Kong. The conference theme focused on ecologies for development and learning, and supporting children to reach their full potential.

Mari and Tamara presented work by Mari and Linda Nurhonen (also of Tampere University) titled “Being nice no matter what: Emotional labour and organisational factors among educators and centre leaders in Finnish early childhood education”.



Tamara Cumming and Mari Saha in Hong Kong

EeLynn's presentation reported on work with Rebecca Bull (Macquarie University) and Alfredo Bautista (EdUHK) titled “Associations between early childhood educators' psychosocial wellbeing and classroom quality in Singapore”.



EeLynn Ng presents at EdUHK

Visit from US researchers

In early June, Professor Kyong-Ah Kwon and Associate Professor Tim Ford from the University of Oklahoma visited the ECEWP team at Macquarie University in Sydney. They visited as part of the Happy Teacher Global Project partnering with ECEWP researchers.

The researchers shared their work into early childhood educator wellbeing in both the US and Australian contexts, with Dr Kwon and Dr Ford also presenting to a broader group of faculty and students. They also visited three exemplary early childhood centres, which they noted was a highlight of their trip.

You can read about the [Happy Teacher and Happy Leader Projects here](#), which are interdisciplinary, holistic approaches to improving teacher and leader well-being in US early childhood contexts.



Tamara, Sandie, Tim and Kyong-Ah meet in Sydney

MORE INFORMATION ON ECEWP

- Web [ECEWP website](#)
- Facebook [ECEWP](#)
- X [ECEWP Aus](#)
- Email ecewp@mq.edu.au
- Video <https://youtu.be/QqfNX7f4XnQ>

Latest resources at a glance

Bull, R., McFarland, L., Cumming, T., & Wong, S. (2024). The impact of work-related wellbeing and workplace culture and climate on intention to leave in the early childhood sector. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 69, 13–24.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2024.06.002>

Cumming, T., & Wong, S. (2023). Beyond workforce shortages: A call for holistic care and recognition in early childhood policy [Editorial]. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 48(4), 265–267.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391231213926>

Wong, S. (2023). A case study of clinical supervision to support early childhood leaders in times of natural disasters: 'It's not a designer handbag'. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391231217266>

Wong, S., Bull, R., Cumming, T., & McFarland, L. (2024). Supporting leaders in early childhood education settings: An evaluation of a clinical supervision program for centre directors. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2309749.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2309749>

VIDEO: Summary of our [clinical supervision research](#) (YouTube)

