Linking Research to the Practice of Education

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Editorial

Welcome to this edition of *Linking Research to the Practice of Education*, a UNE School of Education research newsletter for all educators.

Colleagues, this is my last address to you as I step down from the position of Lead editor of *Linking Research to the Practice of Education*. I leave you in the capable hands of Dr Marg Rogers, with her assisting team of editors, Dr Sue Elliott and Dr Devrim Yilmaz.

This issue includes six articles. Two of these comprise the innovative work of UNE higher degree research students Yumiko Coffey who unpacks ecological emotions in young people and Tanika Richards who explored online pedagogies in secondary music education. Recent UNE doctoral graduate, Jayne Kinley explored influences on educators' outdoor nature-related practices in an early childhood education centre. Additionally, you will read about impactful research projects in the School of Education that are benefiting the region and beyond. Jennifer Charteris and Joanna Andersen offer advice for educators on how to foster school connectedness during lockdowns. Kristy O'Neil and Pep Baker share updates on how their research and development project is affecting the health of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Jo Bird, Tammy Paterson-O'Kane and Galia Urquhart share their successful experiences with a closed-door policy during COVID at an early childhood education centre.

This issue also features a recent chapter contribution to a seminal writing by our valued STEM educator, Martin Levins. The book entitled *Things to do with a Computer: Forward 50*, is a must-read for anyone interested in visualising how the future of education looks in the digital era.

On a different note, we share promising findings related to a revolutionary project that is of interest to anyone willing to study Education at UNE! Ingrid Harrington pioneered this project with her team at UNE and shares her insights on how this is bringing about positive change to the experiences of first year students in the School of Education.

Lastly, I encourage our readers who work in the early childhood sector to engage with Marg Rogers, and contribute your insights and wisdom to inform her research study on systems that facilitate or hinder the work of educators.
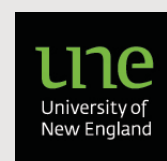
We hope that you find something engaging in this issue. The next issue will be published in August, 2022.

Nadya, Sue and Marg

Pedagogical approaches delivered via videoconferencing for enhancing students' musical creativity in secondary music classes

**Tanika Richards (UNE PhD student, supervised by Dr Myung-Sook Auh and Dr Marg Rogers)**

The aim of my research was to investigate what pedagogical approaches music teachers use to facilitate students' musical creativity in selected secondary music classes. My definition of creativity is the "production of ideas that are not only novel […] but also appropriate: useful, valuable, correct, or somehow fitting to the purpose that the individual creator intends" (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018, p.1). In 2020, the global pandemic significantly affected music education and the way in which teachers taught and students learnt. Because of the lockdowns in Victoria, I explored the pedagogical approaches of teachers during remote learning and how they were able to enhance the musical creativity of students in this unfamiliar "digital" environment, with limited creative electronic resources and limited student contact. My focus was not on assessment, but rather on finding musical activities that could be taught online. Often these activities included projects that could be done with minimal explanation or composition and arrangement-based tasks.

As outlined in Figure 1, four aspects affect students' musical creativity. To maximise the facilitation of students' creativity, tasks that were more towards divergent thinking and convergent thinking were chosen as appropriate to the music experience and skill level of students. Teachers used open-ended, partially open-ended and step-by-step instruction in the tasks students completed via videoconferencing. To assist the music learning experience of students via videoconferencing, students used visual and sound-based, as well as notation-based music software.

Figure 1

Aspects that affect students' musical creativity
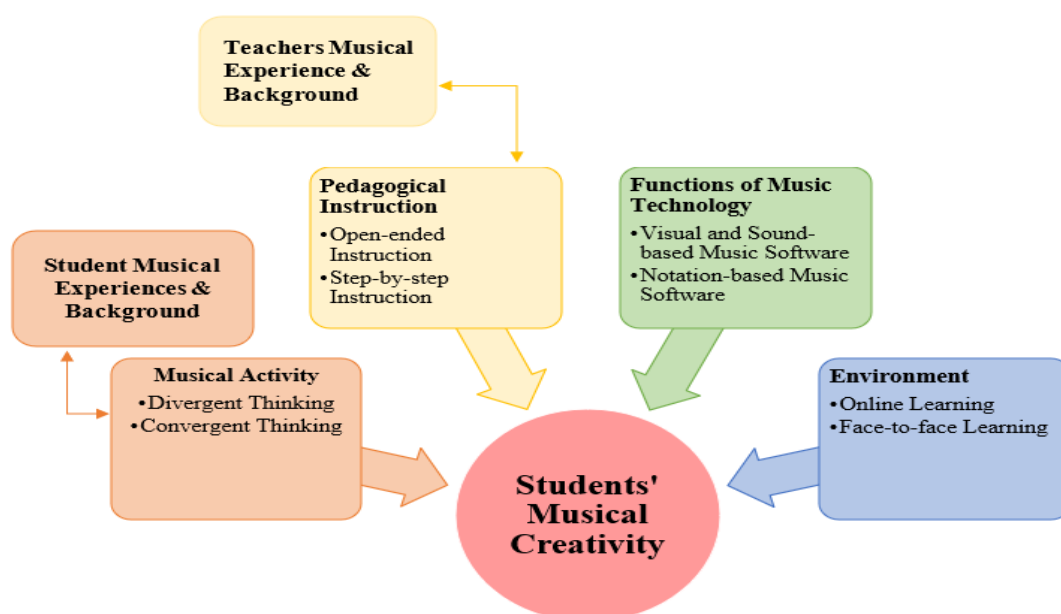
Online learning demonstrated that most students were able to manage their time, work on tasks at their own pace and communicate with their teacher in unique ways such as through videoconferencing chat, breakout rooms, and email.

Here are the effective pedagogical approaches identified in this study and the implications of the findings.

Individualising musical skills and inspiration. When constructing musical tasks, teachers should consider the level of student skills and balance this with a task that will inspire students to create. For example, a student in Year 7 will have a limited skill level; however, they should complete tasks that employ their current skills and offer challenge, inspiration and motivation. Within each task, there should be scope for the extension of students who have musical skills beyond their year level.

Utilising technology for maximum benefits. With the development and expansion of technology, students and teachers should embrace new music software that enhances the music experience. Music software programs should not hinder students' music progress, but should assist them when composing, arranging, and learning the conventions of music theory.

Using a flexible learning environment. Much has been learnt over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic about how students learn in a flexible environment. Teachers have gained insights into students who can work independently and students who need the opportunity to learn and work with their peers . Teachers should allow students to have some flexibility in their learning environment. For example, a composition task for some students will require them to locate their own space and time and be inspired to create. In contrast, another student may find that socialisation with their peers and teachers to share ideas will assist them in creating and thinking in a creative musical way.

Providing safe performance opportunities. Reinventing how music teachers provide safe performance opportunities is paramount, particularly after the 2020 pandemic lockdowns. The opportunity to provide every student with a safe performance space is key to enhancing and creating a positive environment for each student. Safe performance opportunities may be provided either through live or pre-recorded approaches.

Using rich resources. Teachers are very good at providing resources for their students; however, it is essential to offer resources that enhance student learning. The resources can be in different forms such as handouts, digital presentations, videos and interactive forums. Some key questions that teachers should consider when creating and constructing creative learning tasks might be:

– what type of instruction are they using;
– what is the ability of the age group they are working with; and,
– how is the integration of music technology assisting the creative process?

The students and teachers who participated in this study were willing to share their knowledge, thoughts and experiences while also navigating new technologies, pedagogies and strategies for teaching and learning. While these conversations and observations were made through videoconferencing software, the data provided has demonstrated the factors that affect the creativity of students and identified pedagogical approaches for teachers.

If you are interested to learn more about this research, please contact Tanika via tricha27@myune.edu.au

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Fostering school connectedness during the COVID-19 pandemic

Associate Professor Jennifer Charteris (UNE) and Dr Joanna Anderson (UNE)

The last two years have seen educators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand move in and out of lockdowns, working from both home and school in a hybridised model. Under these challenging conditions, school leaders and teachers made rapid changes to pedagogy and curriculum to accommodate students' diverse range of learning needs. We undertook a qualitative case study to examine teachers' perspectives about the impact of COVID-19 distance learning requirements on the education of students with additional educational needs (See Page, Charteris, Anderson & Boyle, 2021). Through our research, we noted the importance of connectedness when schools close.

School connectedness is a feeling of belonging to a particular person or group and an important prerequisite for successful learning. Leaders, teachers, students, and school communities, benefit from school connectedness, particularly when students and teachers are required to work at distance. As a concept, it involves positive relationships with encouraging adults and peers - a sense of belonging, commitment to learning, and the experience of a safe and supportive environment.

Features that can be linked with school connectedness include:

- healthy and positive relationships within the school environment;
- care, respect, support, and positive feelings of liking or enjoying school; and,
- positive feelings towards the school community (García-Moya et al., 2019).

School connectedness is evident in the relationships between teachers, their commitment to students, and the important pastoral support provided by school leaders. Strong and supportive relationships develop through practices that promote school engagement, bonding, and attachment. In Figure 1, we depict these three aspects of school connectedness that we argue are important considerations when schools close and transition to distance learning due to COVID-19.

School engagement. School engagement can be directly linked with students' commitment to schooling practices and includes behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement (Cumming et al., 2017). When there is behavioural engagement, students attend school regularly while emotional engagement involves students' reactions to teachers, classmates, and the school itself. Lastly, cognitive engagement concerns students' willingness to expend the effort required to tackle challenging skills and complex ideas.

Figure 1

Key elements of school connectedness
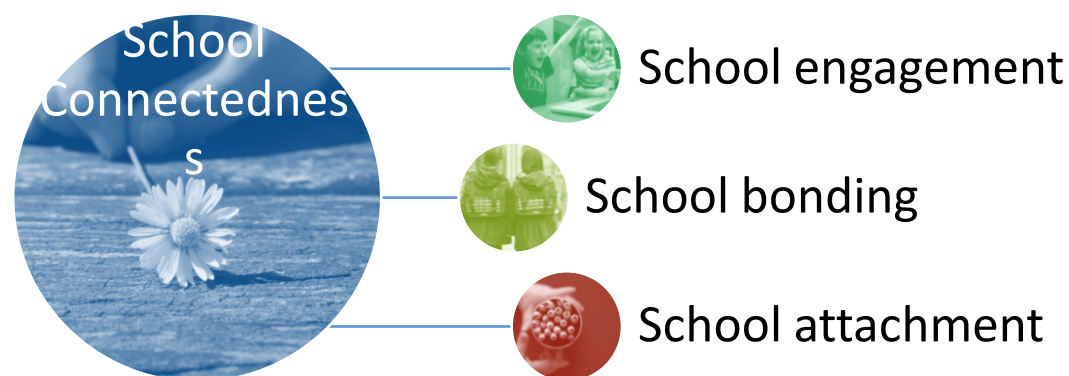
School bonding. School bonding is the extent to which students feel a part of their school community and are happy to be there.

School attachment. School attachment is the emotional feeling of fondness for, and an enjoyment of school. When students experience school attachment they are accepted and liked by peers and teachers. They enjoy being at school and feel they are participating members of the school community.

Teachers in our study described how students with additional educational needs had trouble transitioning from face to face to distance learning. Students who needed more explanations to contextualise their learning were at risk of slipping through the cracks. It remained a challenge to engage students who were already school refusers or found learning difficult. Teachers also expressed concern that students who were not engaging were missing out on vital lessons, and the gap between these students and their peers was growing.

To contribute to the development and maintenance of school connectedness for all students, particularly those with additional learning needs, we advocate for the maintenance of effective communication, peer connectedness, and individual plans (Page et al., 2021). We provide these questions as a prompt for further conversations in schools around how to foster school connectedness:

- How can students' routines be retained and maximised?
- What channels of communication can be developed and/or further strengthened to maintain contact with parents where students are reluctant to communicate online?

- How can formal and informal relationships with peers be fostered and supported?
- How are students isolated at home to receive Specialist Service provision?
- How can families receive assistance to use technologies?

School engagement, bonding and attachment, can be regarded a key focus when schools aim to promote school connectedness during crisis events like COVID-19 school closures. With the fracturing of the day-to-day learning and teaching practices we have experienced over the past two years, connectedness is an important aspect of student wellbeing that addresses the needs of individuals and school communities.

For more on the research please visit:

https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=10304 or contact jcharteris@une.edu.au for a copy of the full article.

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Understanding ecological emotions in young people

Yumiko Coffey (current UNE Masters student, supervised by Professor Navjot Bhullar and Dr Marg Rogers)

When viewing the social media commentary and images on #fridaysforfuture and other youth led climate movements, it is clear that young people are experiencing an array of emotions associated with the threat of climate change. This should not come as a surprise. In 2019, the Australian Medical Association declared climate change as a health emergency. No doubt, young people are vocal about climate action as the future generations are the ones being impacted by the negative consequences of climate change.

In 2020, the British Broadcasting Corporation surveyed 2000 people aged 8-16 years, demonstrating that 73% were worried about the state of the planet and 58% about the impact that climate change will have on their lives. Another 41% said they do not trust adults to tackle the challenges that climate change presents (Atherton, 2020). Similar sentiments were found among youth in Australia. According to Australia's Biggest Climate Poll, 1 in 2 young Australians (aged 18-24 years) have reported worry about the negative impacts of climate change.

As part of my research degree (MPhil) at the University of New England, I and my supervisor (Professor Navjot Bhullar) from School of Psychology along with colleagues from School of Health conducted a review to understand and explore ecological emotions, published in *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* (Coffey et al., 2021). Here, we share with you some of our review findings and provide suggestions about how to promote positive eco-emotions among children and adolescents.

Ecological emotions, also known as eco-emotions, broadly describe the emotions related to the potential impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Other popular terms entering our everyday language are:

- eco-anxiety - a chronic fear of environmental doom;
- ecological grief – a sense of grief or sadness in response to experienced or anticipated loss of natural environments;
- solastalgia - distress due to environmental change negatively impacting on people and their homes and natural world; and,
- eco-angst - a feeling of despair at the fragile condition of the planet.

Figure 1.

Word cloud of vocabulary and phrases used to describe emotions related to eco-anxiety

In our review, we found a range of eco-emotions used to describe negative emotions related to climate change impacts. The Word Cloud in Figure 1 captures these eco-emotions.

Who is vulnerable to eco-anxiety? We found that the specific population groups most vulnerable to the negative mental health impacts of climate change are children and young people, Indigenous groups, and

those who are more connected to the natural world and more caring about environmental issues (e.g., climate scientists). Research into the mental health impacts of climate change on vulnerable children and young people is necessary because future generations will live with the ongoing and escalating challenges and consequences of climate change for longer.

How can I recognise children or students who are experiencing eco-emotions? While most youth are aware of climate change and its impacts, regardless of experiencing the direct or indirect effects, their reactions to the effects of the climate crisis on their future vary. Some young people may express their environmental concern with a range of complex emotions like sadness, fear, powerlessness, shame and display pessimistic views of the future such as the 'planet is doomed' or 'humans have failed to take care of the planet'. Some may have anxiety or stress-related responses such as loss of sleep or an inability to focus.

A more positive response to managing negative effects of eco-emotions, especially eco-anxiety and worry, is coping. Meaning-focused coping (Ojala, 2012) is particularly useful to activate positive emotions, which draw on beliefs, values, and goals to mitigate the anxious response to climate change. Those with constructive hope and meaning-focused coping are more likely to be seen attending protests and actively promoting pro-environmental behaviours like recycling and talking about caring for the planet.

How can we support young people with this complex emotion? Eco-emotions are not necessarily a bad thing and there are ways we can promote meaning-focused coping to activate collective activism and support young people to deal with the worries they have about the natural world.

Youth are at a crucial point in their psychological development where the further stress of a climate crisis may increase their own mental health

challenges (Wu et al., 2020). Understanding, acknowledging and validating young people's eco-emotions will help identify ways to utilise education to encourage pro-climate action to transform negative eco-emotions into constructive motivations to manage climate change issues. Figure 2 provides suggestions to promote and encourage positive eco-emotions.

Figure 2.

Suggestions to encourage positive eco-emotions

For more on the research please contact Yumiko.Coffey@une.edu.au.

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The power of partnerships: Education-community collaborations to enhance lifelong physical activity among young people from newly-arrived migrant and refugee backgrounds in regional Australia

Dr Kristy O'Neill (UNE) and Professor Penelope (Pep) Baker (UNE)

Launched in early 2021, the Driving Social Inclusion through Sport and Physical Activity (DSISPA) program, supported by the Australian Government – Department of Health (2020-2022), has been providing funded sport and physical activity opportunities to people from newly-arrived migrants (within 5 years in Australia) and refugee backgrounds in Armidale, NSW. DSISPA program has already had a strong impact, particularly among the Ezidi community through engagement with over 500 children and adults. To date, participants have been involved in swimming lessons, going to the gym, winter soccer and twilight volleyball competitions, Inclusive Football Coaching workshops, a Youth Leadership program, Armidale Sport and Recreation indoor bowling nights, a Football Academy Development squad and attending the National Primary School Games. This has shown the power of education providers (Early Childhood, Primary, Secondary, Universities) working in local partnerships with community stakeholders and Not-For-Profit organisations for the benefit of young people. Importantly, it meets the key objectives of the WHO (World Health Organisation) Health Promoting Schools framework, also known as taking a Whole School Approach (NESA, 2018). Working together via 'partnerships and services' with the local community are key to reinforcing health promoting behaviours that occur through 'teaching and learning' and the microcosm of the 'school environment'. Collectively, these domains seek to enhance the health of all students, but particularly take a social justice approach to balance the health inequities that may be experienced by some students in their lives beyond the school gates (WHO, 2021).

Beyond broader health promotion, social inclusion and community cohesion objectives, community-based sports and physical activities are complementary to school-based Health and Physical Education curriculum outcomes. Undertaking regular physical activity or engagement with sport is so much more than just fulfilling core values of Australian

mainstream culture or avoiding obesity, heart disease or Type 2 Diabetes. Compared to prior generations of HPE (Health and Physical Education) syllabi that took more of a pathogenic approach (i.e. How do we avoid disease?), public health promotion and the Australian Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum (ACARA, 2021) now takes a salutogenic, strengths-based approach. This approach recognises that most children and young people are in good health and takes a generative focus upon lifestyle practices that can be implemented from childhood to enhance or move towards holistic health benefits beyond just the physical.

Similarly, both school and community sport provide a host of opportunities for children and young people to develop lifelong physical activity habits that comes with a range of physical, social, emotional and mental health benefits. These can include, yet not limited to: enhanced fitness and bone health, greater proficiency in Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS), improved mood and mental health, plus the development of friendships, a sense of self-worth, and pro-social behaviours. These outcomes have potential to carry over into the classroom to promote learning by enhancing brain function and long-term memory, improved motivation and concentration, stronger team-work and cooperation skills alongside decreased absenteeism (Dudley et al., 2021). Opportunities to achieve these outcomes at school and in the community are especially vital for young people whose early years of education and childhood play were disrupted through the experiences of war and displacement.

Despite understanding these benefits, Australians of all ages are less likely to be physically active than ever before. Current Australian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that Pre-school aged children 3-5 years engage in at least 3 hours per day (with 1 hour being energetic play), whilst Primary and

Secondary students (5-17 years) should aim for at least 1 hour daily of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) involving mainly aerobic activities, plus several hours of light activity per day (Australian Government – Department of Health, 2021).

Schools, early childhood services and local communities are vital networks during every child's early development, as they provide opportunities to build the physical literacy of the child. This 'literacy' is so much more than reading, writing and communication. It refers to the foundations of human movement, and developing the skills, knowledge and behaviours that allow us to be active throughout the lifespan (Sport Australia, 2019). Schools can support this by setting active homework, providing sporting and active play equipment during breaks and participating in initiatives such as 'Thinking while Moving' when engaging in English or Mathematics learning. Where opportunities to engage in community sport are financially, logistically, geographically and culturally available, teachers can encourage their students to participate as early on as possible. Aside from the benefits to health and learning, many of the taken-for-granted skills needed to participate in core school events such as swimming and athletics carnivals, recreational swimming days, school camps and Outdoor Education programs can be developed outside of school hours and prescribed curriculum.

The DSISPA research, involving interviews and PhotoVoice, will commence in 2022 to investigate the Armidale community experiences (participants and stakeholders) of DSISPA activities. The intent is to become more informed about how sport and physical activity in regional Australia can facilitate community building, skill development, and particularly assist people from migrant and refugee backgrounds during their Australian settlement. This will build the initial foundation for the development of a national model to support the settlement of displaced peoples in regional centres, a model that takes into account the whole person and is centred on community partnerships and relationships.

For more on the research please contact kristy.oneill@une.edu.au.

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Call for Participation in Research: An invitation to contribute ideas to early childhood study, PLUS go in the DRAW to WIN

Our research team (Dr Marg Rogers, Associate Professor Laura Doan, [Canada], Professor Fabio Dovigo, [Denmark]), are conducting an international survey to look at early childhood educators' work.

The study explores the systems that help and hinder educators' work, and how they believe their government could better support their work. The aims of the study are to raise awareness about educators' work, and influence policy makers.

Initial Australian data has revealed the systems educators work with affects the amount of time spent children (Rogers, 2022a), the quality of education (Rogers, 2021a), unpaid hours (Rogers 2021b), staff morale (Rogers, 2021c), burnout (Rogers, 2021d) and hidden costs of being an educator (Rogers, 2022b).

We are asking for Australian early childhood educators to be involved in the survey that takes about 20-30 minutes. Educators who complete the study can go into a draw for a chance to win one of 5 x $50 grocery vouchers for participants.

To find out more about the study, please read the information sheet which links to the survey: https://uneprofessions.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_38j3CdPsHnM8l81

Closed door policy: The power shift from parents to children

Dr Jo Bird, Tammy Paterson-O'Kane and Galia Urquhart

During the COVID-19 pandemic, early childhood settings have remained open, receiving NSW Department of Education recommendations for ways to reduce the risks of exposure to the virus. Yarm Gwanga Preschool and Early Education Centre, based on the UNE campus, changed its drop off and pick up procedures for children and families. Previously, Yarm Gwanga had an open-door policy where parents/carers came in and settled children in their room. The procedure changed and the front door was closed. Families had to ring the doorbell and hand children over to staff, saying their goodbyes at the door. At pick-up, parents/carers could collect their child at the back gate, often seeing their child playing before being noticed.

While several studies have documented best practice strategies for settling children into childcare settings (Brace, 2020), there is a scarcity of research about how centres protect the health of staff, children and families while also meeting the emotional and practical needs of all involved in the centre. A secure attachment (Bowlby, 1998) to educators is a vital component of high-quality childcare (Blewitt, 2018). Research often reports on children being settled into a room, with no research exploring children and parents saying goodbye at the front door. A significant change was occurring for all stakeholders and determining the impact of the closed-door procedure for children, educators and families was needed.

An online survey was conducted (for both families and educators) to ascertain the impact of the closed-door procedure, and ways it could be improved to enhance experiences for all involved. The overall response was confidence in the closed-door procedure, citing a stronger sense of security knowing that visitors to the centre were limited, which in turn reduced the risk of COVID-positive people entering the premises. In addition, the feedback about the policy in relation to the children was very supportive, with children embracing the new procedure and taking ownership of their daily arrival at the centre. The findings also revealed areas that needed work including: Optimising the time it takes to pick up children at the end of the day; increasing the communication with families about what occurs for children during the day; recognising negative feedback about the current digital platform used for communication with families; and, the need for increasing the sense of belonging and community for families.

Initial findings revealed that the children displayed agency and a newfound confidence when saying goodbye to their parents/carers at the door, before walking inside to their respective rooms. Educators also reported children had "less separation issues" (Educator 3) and children were "happier at drop off… and are taking ownership of entering [the] centre" (Educator 6).

The closed-door policy has flipped the power when arriving at Yarm. Previously, parents/carers held the power and settled the child into the room before

deciding when to leave. Now, children have the power and decide when to leave the parents at the door before heading off to their room. For young children, their lives are often controlled by adults, but having agency and the confidence to leave their parents is improving their drop off experience .

On the other hand, while parents were overwhelmingly positive about the changes and supportive of the initiative in terms of their child's health and safety, they also acknowledged certain challenges adapting to this new procedure. These included: a loss of responsibility for settling their child into the centre and lack of belonging to the centre; limited access to educators who care for their child; and, less understanding about what was happening for their child during their day.

The lack of having a sense of the child's day, their room and what occurs, was exacerbated by the extreme weather event which occurred in October 2021. The Yarm Gwanga building was damaged by a tornado and the centre moved to occupy a college hall with attached offices, called the Wright Centre. While the sense of community was strongly felt by the educators through words of support, donations of toys, books and other essential items, and even offers of help, it has meant parents were not familiar with the space and arrangements within the 'new Yarm'. Ongoing COVID-

19 restrictions have resulted in parents/carers having no access to their child's room in order to reduce the spread of the newest Omicron variant. Reassuringly, the children settled into the new building with a strong sense of resilience, which reflects the warmth, dedication and the relationships they have with the centre educators (Blewitt, 2020; Bowlby 1998).

This research highlights the positives of the closed-door policy for health and safety as well as positive outcomes for children given the shift in the power locus when transitioning into the centre. There are, however, areas that require further reflection and development. For other centres considering a closed-door policy we recommend the following:

- Ensure the digital platform used to communicate with parents/carers allows for real time communication, the sharing of unlimited photos and videos throughout the day and encourages parents to feel part of their child's centre experience.
- Schedule times for parents to regularly communicate with educators and other families. Morning and afternoon teas can allow educators and families to casually communicate and spend time together.
- Encourage children's independence and sense of agency through saying goodbye to their parents/carers at the door and walking (age dependant) to their room.
- Provide families with a visual of their child's room either through photos or videos.
- Check in with families to ensure they feel part of the centre and the centre community, encouraging suggestions of ways to improve their sense of belonging.

COVID-19 will be around for the foreseeable future, but we know that the children at Yarm are not being negatively affected by the closed-door procedure and are actually strengthening their resilience and practising new found power in this process.

For more on the research please contact jo.bird@une.edu.au

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Celebrating innovative teaching at UNE: The Commencing Student Success Project

The Commencing Student Success Project (CSSP) is an innovative research and development project that started in the School of Education (SoE) mid-2019. The team, led by Associate Professor Ingrid Harrington, have been working closely with SoE Education developers and Unit Coordinators (UC) to disseminate 14 evidence-based core pedagogical strategies and innovations known as the 'Basic Elements' (BE), consistently within and across all first year units.

Examples of the Basic Elements comprise:
- Using a range of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) methods to scaffold and assist students when completing assessment tasks
- Providing flexibility for due dates without penalty
- Providing students with opportunities to give feedback on assessment tasks
- Mapping unit assessment due dates with other units, to enable students to better manage their time
- Distribution of Student Achievement Certificates (SACs) to reward student effort

Feedback from first year Education students in 2021 indicated that they overwhelmingly found their overall experiences in the CSSP units to be most valuable to their learning.

The CSSP trial suggests that units that have embedded the BEs (1) offered students support for easier navigation of the Learning Management System (Moodle), (2) promoted clearer understanding of the unit requirements in topic learning outcomes and assessment tasks, and (3) generated greater engagement with the unit material, and an overall more positive educational tertiary experience for first year students.

The CSSP will be rolled out across all units offered by the SoE. In doing so, the School of Education anticipates this evidence-based model will assist all students in the school throughout their degrees.

To learn more about the CSSP, you can contact Associate Professor Ingrid Harrington on iharring@une.edu.au

Influences on educators' outdoor nature-related practices in an early childhood education centre

Jayne Kinley (UNE PhD recently completed, supervisors Dr Sue Elliott, UNE and Honorary Professor Margaret Sims, Macquarie University)

With increased awareness of the importance of children's early connections with nature, there are requirements for educators to create outdoor environments that encourage young children's respect and appreciation of the natural world. My interest in educators' outdoor nature-related practices with infants and toddlers emerged from professional observations of inequities between nature experiences educators offered to very young children and those offered to older children in early childhood settings. Experience suggests that while educators are committed to exploring natural outdoor experiences with infants and toddlers, they face multiple challenges influencing practices and teaching methods to make this happen.

My research explored various influences on educators' outdoor nature-related practices in a long day care centre. I explored the influence of educators' early life relationships with nature, family culture, beliefs about infants and toddlers, and the educators' interpretations of nature. While all investigated influences impacted educators' outdoor practices to varying degrees, educators' interpretations of government and centre policies were particularly influential. Here is what I found out.

The influence of policy. Australia's policy documents, including The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) and Australia's National Quality Framework (NQF) (ACECQA, 2020) give "complex and inconsistent images" (Kinley, 2021, p. 6) of educators. They must on one hand, comply with policy to offer 'good quality practice' and protect children "from harm and hazard" (ACECQA, 2020, p. 90) as shown in Figure 1.

On the other hand, educators are expected to encourage children's "risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16). This challenged not only the outdoor pedagogies of the educators in my study; but, is concerning for educators more broadly (e.g. Little & Stapleton, 2021).

Figure 1.

Safe outdoor play for infant and toddlers

The CPAR project. The educators were invited into a critical participatory action research (CPAR) (Kemmis et al., 2015) project including focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. These individual and group discussions showed how the educators' understandings of government and centre policy influenced their outdoor role beliefs. They saw their outdoor 'pedagogical' role as less important than their primary role of supervising the safety and protection of infants and toddlers (see Figure 2). Furthermore, this primary role seemed to be endorsed by centre policy. For example, during my study the reconstruction of children's outdoor spaces offered little or no access to natural elements, depending on space, and safety was

often cited as paramount. Also, policy influenced the educators' perceptions of young children. The children were perceived to be in need of stringent supervision according to educator-to-child ratios and protection from harm in outdoor spaces. Involvement in this research and particularly the CPAR project encouraged the educators to explore alternate views for creating accessible outdoor environments and nature-experiences for infants and toddlers.

Figure 2.

Safety and supervision are paramount

Some change. Examples of change included infant access to the larger outdoor space originally designated only for the older children, and this led to multi-age outdoor play (see Figure 3). This change was not easy for educators who needed to rethink their outdoor roles, particularly those whose focus was safety and hygiene (see Figure 4).

Figure 3.

Multi-age outdoor nature-related play

Policy, whether government- or centre-based, can significantly influence educators' outdoor nature related practices and their pedagogical roles with children under three years of age. However, an action-based research approach to questioning practices and perceptions may create educator change.

Figure 4.

Not easy for hygiene-focused educators

References

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New publication: Some Modern Things to Do with a Computer

Martin Levins authored an essay in the new book, "Twenty Things to Do with a Computer Forward 50", to mark the 50th anniversary of a seminal paper by Cynthia Solomon and Seymour Papert.
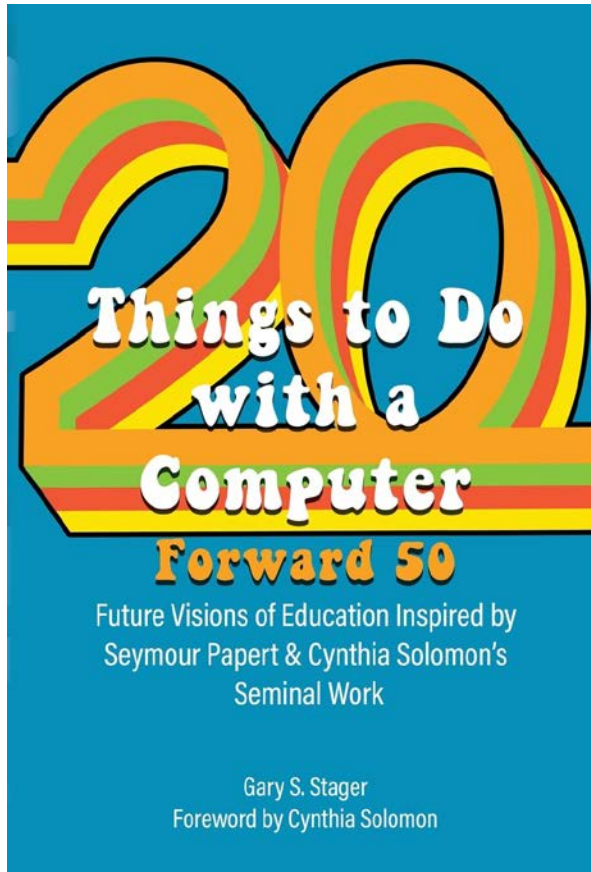
Their revolutionary 1971 document, "Twenty Things to Do with a Computer", would set the course of education for the next fifty years and beyond. The new all-star book, Twenty Things to Do with a Computer Forward 50, is a celebration of the vision set forth by Papert and Solomon a half-century ago. Four dozen experts from around the world invited us to consider the original provocations, reflect on their implementation, and chart a course for the future of learning through personal recollections, learning stories, and imaginative scenarios.

In his essay, Levins briefly recounts his own 40 year plus journey with computers in education, before outlining his recent work with underprivileged schools as part of the ACARA "Digital Technologies in Focus" national project. Examples of how Computational Thinking together with a hands-on, transdisciplinary approach can enhance student interest and intellectual growth are outlined for both primary and secondary.

In 1971, Solomon and Papert predicted 1:1 personal computing, the maker movement, the rise of computational thinking, children programming computers, robotic construction kits, computer science for all, and integrating computing across the curriculum. All of this, years, or even decades, before such notions became more commonplace. Even more importantly, "Twenty Things" situated the ideals of progressive education in a modern context. Papert and Solomon demonstrated how computing could be creative, humane, whimsical, childlike, and a way to learn "everything else", even ideas at the frontiers of mathematics and science.

Fifty years later, schools are still striving towards realizing these ideals. The authors of these current essays lay out compelling arguments and practical examples of what the future of education can look like when we stand on the shoulders of giants. "Twenty Things to Do with a Computer Forward 50" is an effort to share timeless, powerful ideas with future generations seeking a more creative, personal, empowering, and meaningful educational experience for young people.

This book will be of interest to educators, school leaders, preservice teachers, policymakers, technology developers, as well as parents.

Levins, M. (2021). For Real: Some Modern Things to Do with a Computer. In G. Stager (Ed.), *Twenty Things to Do with a Computer Forward 50: Future Visions of Education Inspired by Seymour Papert and Cynthia Solomon's Seminal Work* (pp. 267-271). Constructing Modern Knowledge Press.

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Are your students or staff interested in studying Early Childhood Education?

Studying early childhood education has many benefits, including:

- making a difference in the most important years of a child's life,
- the ability to build on children's interests and strengths,
- being able to place children at the centre of their education,
- being part of a growing and important field,
- being in demand (there is a shortage of degree qualified early childhood teachers in Australia),
- working closely with families to support children's learning, and access to a variety of work options
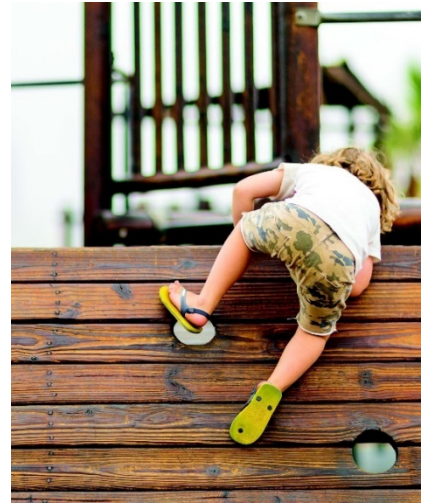
There are two different early childhood education courses offered at UNE

Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Primary)

This is a unique teacher education course that offers two career options for graduates. The course allows employment flexibility across schools and early childhood services to suit graduates' opportunities and circumstances. It is an initial-teacher education qualification that encompasses working with children from birth to age 12 in both early childhood and primary school settings.

This course is available:

- full time or part time,
- on-campus or online,
- to start in Trimester 1 and 2 each year.

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This degree is designed to meet the Australian Government's requirements for Early Childhood Education and to qualify graduates as four-year trained Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) for children aged birth to 5 years. Students are offered 2 years credit into the degree, if they have a Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care or equivalent, plus a year of work experience post Diploma study in an early childhood setting.

This course is available:

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Master of Education (Research)

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PhD

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Bachelor of Education (K-6 Teaching)

Bachelor of Education (K-12 Teaching)

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Bachelor of Education (Secondary Music)

Bachelor of Education (Secondary Mathematics)

Bachelor of Education (Secondary Science)

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