

# Getting the balance right in early childhood learning

Play-based learning and child-initiated play are widely recognised as central to healthy development and learning for children in Kindergarten, Pre-Primary, Year 1 and 2 classrooms and the school yard.

So, it is essential we continue to advocate for the rights of young children to learn through play.

Many people have influenced early childhood education (ECE) recently which has led to differing, and at times, opposing philosophical views of what early childhood education – Kindergarten, Pre-Primary, Year 1 and Year 2 – programs should look like.

Despite the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and National Quality Standard (NQS), in some instances pedagogical decisions have been made with little knowledge or experience in ECE, and with little consultation with trained early childhood education staff.

- Universities report pre-service teachers observe widely varying practices when completing their school practicums.
- Health professionals advise that we are raising a generation of anxious and at-risk kids who are buckling under the pressure to perform and compete from the age of three.
- Our teachers confirm that they observe negative impacts on children's social skills, emotional regulation and problem-solving capacity with the push-down of developmentally inappropriate practices.

Many school staff, parents and community members have raised concerns about practices in some early childhood education classrooms.

Questionable practices include direct instruction models, removal of play-based learning and applying similar teaching strategies across K-6 classrooms.

When teachers plan and implement the Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines and WA Curriculum in a child-friendly environment, through a balance of child-led and educator supported learning experiences, they see their young students engaged in learning.

We support schools making pedagogical decisions that consider the different learning and developmental needs of each individual student. In terms of early childhood education – Kindergarten to Year 2 – decisions should be based on a deep understanding of the EYLF and NQS.

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