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From the Executive Dean

Professor Caroline Mansfield, Executive Dean, School of Education.

Welcome to our final edition of Updated for 2025.

As we prepare to farewell the Mount Lawley campus, many readers will recall fond memories of this special place, moments that shaped careers, friendships, and lives. Over recent months, I've heard countless stories from staff, students, and alumni that speak to the enduring impact of this campus. This farewell marks the closing chapter of the last of Western Australia's teachers' colleges, a poignant reminder of a legacy that began in 1902 with the establishment of Claremont Teachers College. For more than a century, we have upheld a proud tradition of preparing teachers who make a difference in classrooms across WA and beyond.


Looking ahead, 2026 brings exciting change. The ECU Joondalup Campus will become the new home of the School of Education, complemented by fresh opportunities at our vibrant City Campus. These developments signal a future rich with innovation and collaboration. Inside this issue, you'll find highlights including a global review of STEM practices, practical strategies for lifting literacy outcomes, and an exploration of whether Australian students learn better writing on paper or keyboards. We share lessons from school principals on leading through crisis, and insights into young people in the UK and Australia learning languages. We also celebrate achievements: two outstanding Education Alumni Award winners and the joy of Children's University graduations.

This edition is both a tribute to our history and a celebration of the future, a testament to the power of education to transform lives and communities.



November - December

Honouring Kambarang, Welcoming Birak!



We see an abundance of colours and flowers exploding all around us. The yellows of many of the acacias continue to abound, along with some of the banksias and many other smaller delicate flowering plants including the kangaroo paw and orchids... There are many fledglings venturing out of nests in Birak, though some are still staying close to their parents such as magpies and parrots. Reptiles will also be shedding their old skin for a new one... The rain eases and the warm weather really starts to take hold. The afternoons are cooled by the sea breezes from the south west.

[Read more about both seasons on the ECU webpage.](#)

New Global Review of STEM Practices Shows the Power of Engineering and WA is positioned to deliver



Ms Natalie Kidd, Lecturer, School of Education.

Engineering is often described as the “glue” that connects science, technology, and mathematics in STEM education, but how is it actually represented in classrooms? New research provides the first comprehensive systematic review of K-12 STEM studies with a focus on engineering, analysing ten years of international research.

“Engineering provides the authentic, problem-solving contexts that bring STEM to life,” explains lead author Ms Natalie Kidd. “When students act like engineers, working in authentic contexts, to a design brief, building prototypes, testing, and improving; learning is deeper, more engaging, and longer lasting.” Across the global evidence, prototyping and model-building stand out as the most powerful learning tools. Students learn best when they design, test, and improve ideas against real constraints within authentic contexts. “You don’t need 3D printers to teach these engineering habits of mind,” Ms Kidd said. “Cardboard, tape and a stopwatch will do the job if students are testing against a clear goal.”

The study also revealed surprising gaps: While the review identified 38 international studies, very few originated from Australia. “This lack of local evidence matters,” Ms Kidd said. “Without understanding how engineering is actually represented in Australian classrooms, we risk missing opportunities to strengthen STEM practice and prepare students with the creativity, resilience, and problem-solving skills for a dynamic future.”

The study also found mathematics often sits in the background of classroom projects. “The surprise was how often the maths slips out of view,” Ms Kidd said. “One purposeful calculation, like a strength to weight ratio or flow rate, makes the whole design come alive and turns ‘making’ into STEM.”

Why it Matters for WA Classrooms

Western Australian schools are well placed to apply these insights with low-cost, locally meaningful design briefs. Whether it’s water-wise gardening, coastal winds, or mining safety – local problems translate into authentic design briefs that can be run with simple materials. “WA offers perfect contexts that are meaningful to students and affordable for schools,” Ms Kidd said. “The key is to make constraints and success criteria explicit, so every improvement is driven by evidence.”

Try-it Ideas for Next Term

- Years 5–6: Water-wise drip feeder – deliver 200 mL to a planter in under five minutes using gravity only. Measure flow rate and efficiency.
- Years 7–8: Cyclone-safe shade – build a 150 × 150 mm model that withstands a desk-fan ‘storm’. Compare deflection angles and stability.
- Years 9–10: Haul-road berm at scale – stop a rolling cylinder within the shortest safe distance; record uncertainty across trials.

Each follows a simple 50-minute cycle: launch the brief and constraints, quick sketch and estimate, first build, measure one success metric, short team stand-ups, improve the design.

“Our message is simple,” Ms Kidd concludes. “Engineering habits of mind can be taught with everyday materials and clear goals. Establishing design processes, making the brief clear, measuring what matters, and letting students improve with evidence. That’s how STEM comes to life. But Australia urgently needs more classroom research to capture these practices and ensure STEM teaching is as effective as possible.”



Read the full study here:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02635143.2025.2561994>

Australian students spend more time learning to write on paper than computers – does this need to change?



Dr Anabela Malpique, Senior Lecturer, School of Education.

Writing using computers is a vital life skill. We are constantly texting, posting, blogging and emailing. This is a huge change for schools when it comes to teaching writing. For students, learning how to write on a computer is crucial. National literacy tests are now administered online in many countries, including Australia's NAPLAN. The rise of AI tools such as ChatGPT still require students to become expert writers so they can prompt the technology and judge the quality of its products. However, despite its importance, our new research shows typing and word processing skills are often not explicitly taught in primary schools.

Why is it so important to learn how to write on a computer?

Research suggests teaching typing and word processing skills should start in primary school, much like writing with pen and paper. There is no evidence-based recommendation for specific ages to start, but it should also be taught as schools introduce students to computers. This is crucial to avoid incorrect key locations and hand and finger positions, which are difficult to correct later. This is not necessarily a skill children will pick up naturally. Research shows children who are explicitly taught typing and word processing together write longer and better computer-based texts than those who have not been taught.

Our study

Despite computers being introduced to classrooms in the 1990s, there is little information about how typing and word processing are being taught in Australian schools. In the first national study of its kind, we surveyed 340 Australian primary teachers from government, Catholic and private sectors across all states and territories about computer-based writing. There's no recommended amount for teaching computer-based writing. However, recommendations for teaching writing overall are to spend at least one hour per day on writing skills.

Similar to previous overseas studies, teachers in our study spent significantly more time teaching paper-based writing than computer-based writing skills. Overall, students spent an average of 143 minutes per week writing texts using paper and pen or pencil. They spent an average of 57 minutes per week writing using a digital device. The explicit teaching of keyboard use received an average of nine minutes per week, compared to 31 minutes for handwriting. Teaching computer-based writing skills was less frequent among teachers of years 1 to 3, when compared with years 4 to 6.

What are the barriers?

We also asked teachers whether they thought it was important to teach computer-based writing skills. More than 98% agreed it was important to teach keyboarding and word-processing skills. About 40% of respondents said specialised lab assistants should be available to help teach students in the junior primary years. But teachers reported there were no official programs to teach typing and computer-based writing in their schools. As one told us: "it's not consistent in my school and most instruction is ad hoc/entirely up to the teacher [...]"

Teachers also reported a lack of access to keyboards to teach computer-based writing skills. Only 17% said their students had access to devices with external keyboards (keyboards separate to the screen) in the classroom. When asked about their confidence to teach computer-based writing skills, most teachers (74%) said they had not been adequately prepared during their teacher education. Most (84%) reported they had little confidence teaching their students how to create texts using digital devices. As one teacher said: "much more training needs to happen for us to learn how to teach computer-based writing (not just keyboarding)."

What now?

Our research suggests we need three key changes to better support young Australian students to learn how to type and write on a keyboard.

1. **Resourcing:** schools need adequate technology to teach computer-based writing. Research indicates uneven access to laptops and keyboards across Australian classrooms is creating an equity divide in the teaching of digital writing.
2. **Professional learning:** teachers need evidence-based strategies to teach computer-based writing through meaningful, ongoing professional learning opportunities.
3. **Curriculum changes:** the school curriculum should integrate computer-based writing skills from early grades, including keyboard accuracy and speed and higher-order writing processes like planning and revising.

We know writing supports thinking and learning. It is also one of the key skills students learn at school. Primary students must be supported to develop computer-based writing skills so they can be skilful writers in our increasingly digital world.

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Leading through crises: Key lessons from school principals

Dr Michelle Striepe, Senior Lecturer, School of Education.

From navigating the COVID-19 pandemic alongside cyclones, bushfires, and other natural disasters, school principals are often the unsung heroes leading communities through crises. New research from Edith Cowan University's (ECU) School of Education, [Lessons from Australasian principals' experiences with crises: adapting, learning and transforming](#), has revealed important insights into how school principals navigated the extraordinary period of compounding crises between 2020 and 2023.

Analysis of interviews with principals from Australia, Fiji and New Zealand revealed a balance of directive and collaborative approaches as they adapted to meet changing community needs. "A common theme was a focus on wellbeing and relationship-building – although context-specific differences emerged. These differences are related to the type of crisis, school characteristics, and location," lead author Dr Michelle Striepe said. "As the crises subsided, the principals' experiences transformed their perspectives on their role and work, fostering personal and professional growth. The data also revealed valuable lessons principals learned about relationships, community, and wellbeing."

Dr Striepe, Senior Lecturer (Educational Leadership) at ECU, said the comparative analysis of Australasian school leaders navigating these compounding crises not only built on previous ECU research inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic, but provided qualitative insights into crisis leadership, and the long-term impacts and benefits of these experiences. "While Australian principals managed lockdowns and remote learning, alongside bushfires, floods, or cyclones in some areas, principals in Fiji faced the dual challenges of COVID-19 and Cyclones Harold and Yasa," Dr Striepe explained. The research findings illustrate critical lessons that can come from crises experiences, contributing to the evolving understandings of crisis leadership, and the impact of crises on principals.

Three key takeaways for leaders:

1. Adapt your leadership style to the demands of the crisis.

"What you usually do isn't necessarily going to work in every crisis. You're going to have to adjust your leadership style and approach as the demands of the situation change. Consider the duration of the crisis and what your community needs are at any given moment," Dr Striepe said. What worked yesterday or in a previous crisis may not work again in future. "Leading through a crisis requires constant recalibration. It's less about following a predetermined sequence of actions. Crises are, by definition, unexpected; so it is important to be responsive to the organic nature of a crisis."

2. Make relationships and wellbeing the priority

"Our research shows that in a school-based setting, making the physical and mental wellbeing of your staff, students, families, and community is key. It's not negotiable," Dr Striepe explained. Despite the need for a decisive approach early on, leaders need colleagues and their community's help and expertise to manage ongoing demands.

"Communication is your tool to understand the impact on your community and help each other navigate the situation. The relationships you foster and maintain through a crisis will not only help you get through it – but also recover. It's the people that will help you build a more resilient school community and make you better equipped to face future crises."

3. Prepare for the personal and professional toll of crises

"Regardless of your years of experience as a leader, our findings show that compounding crises can put you in a position where you're taking actions you've never had to take before, and you may feel like you're working completely outside the scope of your experience," shared Dr Striepe. School principals go far beyond their normal day-to-day work responsibilities when leading through a crisis. This can feel intense and overwhelming. "It's important that leaders have or understand strategies they can use to manage their own wellbeing, such as self-care, setting boundaries and accessing support services if and when they need them."

Reference:

Striepe, M., Cunningham, C., Devi, M., Gurr, D., Longmuir, F., Robertson, S., Thompson, P. (2025). Lessons from Australasian principals' experiences with crises: adapting, learning and transforming. *School Leadership & Management*, 45 (4), 344–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2025.2546094>.

Related research:

- [School leadership during the COVID-19 crisis: a scoping review of empirical research](#)
- [Responsive, adaptive, and future-centred leadership in response to crisis: findings from Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand](#)
- [Understanding educational leadership during times of crises: A scoping review](#)

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Young people in England and Australia are supposedly poor at learning languages – our research shows this isn't true



Dr Annamaria Paolino, Lecturer, School of Education.

Australia and England are both multicultural countries where hundreds of languages are spoken. However, in both, levels of language learning at school are worryingly low. Australia has seen a major downturn in language learning. In 2021, fewer than 10% of students in year 12 – the final year of compulsory education – were studying a language.

Exam entry figures for England show the numbers of young people taking languages at GCSE is stabilising to some degree. However, since 2004, when a language subject was made optional after the age of 16, there has been a decrease of 35%. In both countries, the lack of a strong language learning culture contributes to low enrolment and achievement rates in foreign language education. That both countries are English-speaking also leads to the idea that there is limited use in learning additional languages, because English is so widely spoken worldwide. This has resulted in the perception that inhabitants of both Australia and England are poor language learners.

Appetite to learn

Our research suggests this is not necessarily true. There is an appetite for language learning among young people in both countries, along with support from their parents. However, challenges such as harsh grading and teacher recruitment problems have meant this doesn't always translate into full classrooms. As fewer young people take languages after the ages of 14 and 16, there is a knock-on effect at degree level and beyond. This affects the supply of new language teachers.

Australian educators consistently argue that making language learning compulsory for longer is vital to increasing participation in language subjects. However, research by one of us (Abigail) in England indicates that students who choose to study a language are more motivated than those for whom it is compulsory. European languages have traditionally dominated language teaching in both countries. However, in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, GCSE entries in "other modern languages" – any language other than French, German, Irish, Spanish and Welsh – are rising. In Wales, government initiatives are attempting to secure the Welsh language learning pipeline from early years all the way to university, in addition to making Welsh more visible in media and daily life.

Numerous attempts have been made to improve Australia's Asian language capacities, in an effort to strengthen regional ties. Despite over \$337 million AUD (adjusted for inflation) of investment in government programs, the past 20 years have seen a continued

decline in numbers studying Asian languages there. Only Korean has seen any growth – but this can mostly be attributed to the rise of K-pop, rather than any Australian government initiative. This musical phenomenon, along with other cultural exports such as the Netflix series *Squid Game* and the film *Parasite*, has seen interest in the Korean language grow globally. Both England and Australia could use these successes to capitalise on language learning potential. Some Australian schools are already making the most of this wave of Korean popularity, called *hallyu*, to entice as many students as possible to the subject – but the language is not available as a school subject in England.

Australia is also taking steps to revitalise the teaching of Indigenous languages and to ensure their survival with future generations. Prior to colonisation, more than 250 Indigenous languages and 800 dialects were spoken throughout Australia. But a 2013 survey found only approximately 123 were in use, with only 12 being considered "strong". Australian primary students in particular have expressed a desire to learn Indigenous languages. This desire was also reflected in Louisa's PhD data collection, with one university student saying: "If we have a look [at the languages spoken] internally, before we look externally, I think we'll find a lot more answers, because there's a wealth of resources here."

This reflects a growing appetite among young people in Australia to learn Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as part of a more locally grounded education. Through our work, we feel strongly that educators should listen more closely to what students are saying they want, rather than taking the well-worn route of telling them to learn a language for economic or strategic reasons. By listening more closely to the interests and goals of young people in schools, we can start to provide teaching which supports their need for autonomy – even if, in the short-to-medium term, systemic problems such as the supply of teachers and resources also need to be addressed.

Students need to see the benefits of learning a language for themselves, and have the opportunity to connect with a language on their own terms. Louisa's PhD thesis asked language students in Australia about improving language participation. As one participant answered, students need to realise "what a cool life they're going to have from knowing a language".

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Delivered from Perth's stunning new CBD campus, ECU City, the course is designed to fit into the lives of busy education sector leaders with full-time and part-time options available for study.

Who is this course for?

- School Leaders: Principals, deputy principals, business managers, heads of departments, curriculum directors;
- Tertiary: VET leaders, associate deans, heads of school, TAFE/ VET executives;
- Community Sector: State education leaders, education-focused NGOs, indigenous education leaders, corporate ed/tech partners;
- Early Learning Centres: CEOs, directors, centre managers.

Two schools, one innovative course

A collaboration between ECU's School of Business & Law and the School of Education, this one year course provides an opportunity for education leaders to undertake advanced business study and apply it to real-world education sector challenges.

Find out more

Scan the QR code, or reach out to the Course Coordinator



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Who cares for the carers: Supporting you while you support future teachers



Lemon, N., Sanbrook, C., James, R., Harris, M., Green, T., Dass, R., Adkin, B., Berman, G. (2025). Who cares for the carers: A poetic inquiry of initial teacher educators of professional experience. 52(3), 2731-2750.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-025-00834-4>

When you open your classroom to a pre-service teacher, you're doing vital work, but who's looking after you and them during this challenging time? Our university team; Professor Narelle Lemon, Dr Carli Sanbrook, Dr Rikki James, Marnie Harris, Tammy Green, Dr Rozita Dass, Bev Adkin, and Gail Berman, came together as a collaborative "squad" with three clear goals: supporting future teachers on professional experience, prioritising wellbeing, and working together with genuine care. We

discovered something powerful: by integrating character strengths (a positive psychology approach that identifies what makes each person uniquely capable) into our work, we created a ripple effect of support. Our research through poetic inquiry revealed that when we—as university educators—care for each other with compassion and mutual respect, we're better equipped to support pre-service teachers, who in turn thrive in your classrooms. The key insight for mentor teachers? When the support network is built on authentic care and collaboration, your mentoring work becomes more sustainable and rewarding.

My mum sometimes helps me with my writing: Parents' and children's perspectives of home-led writing



Kelso-Marsh, B., Malpique, A. A., & Davis, H. (2025). 'My mum sometimes helps me with my writing': Parents' and children's perspectives of home-led writing. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 165, 105174.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.105174>

In this study, we examined parents' and children's perspectives of parental involvement in children's writing. We interviewed 92 Western Australian Year 2 parent-child dyads to understand parents' perceived responsibility, self-efficacy, and motivation to support their children's writing, and how children perceived that same parental involvement. Findings suggest that parents encourage their children to write by offering incidental writing activities, such as composing cards or shopping lists, which the children themselves reported willingly participating in at home. These findings emphasise that parents can facilitate their children's writing development through methods that are straightforward, cost-effective, and engaging. To support children's writing development, families, teachers, and schools must work together to recognise and value the writing experiences that are already happening at home. This requires active negotiations between families, teachers, and schools to make strategic decisions that help all children developing effective writing skills.





Lessons from Australasian principals' experiences with crises: adapting, learning and transforming

Striepe, M., Cunningham, C., Devi, M., Gurr, D., Longmuir, F., Robertson, S., Taylor, A. & Thompson, P. (2025). Lessons from Australasian principals' experiences with crises: adapting, learning and transforming. *School Leadership & Management*, 1-23.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2025.2546094>

What do principals learn from navigating compounding crises like cyclones, bushfires, and pandemics? Our latest research features 17 school leaders across Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand, building on five years of international collaboration on crisis leadership.

This study reveals transformative lessons for every educator. Principals discovered they had to constantly adapt their approach, shifting between directive and collaborative leadership while making wellbeing truly non-negotiable. As one principal reflected: "Maslow before Bloom", relationships and care must come first.

These leaders learned to slow down, question traditional priorities, leverage community expertise, and recognise their own limits. Some gained newfound confidence; others faced burnout and questioned their capacity for the long-term. All learned that building resilient school communities requires being responsive to ever-changing demands. The bottom line? Strong relationships and responsive leadership are essential survival tools.

Dive deeper: [Listen to Teacher Magazine's Research Files Podcast Episode 103.](#)

Join our research. We are seeking teachers, leaders, schools, and graduate students passionate about educational leadership during crises. Contact us: m.striepe@ecu.edu.au and c.cunningham@ecu.edu.au.



Skilled migrants' experiences of othering, alterity and language policing

Jogulu, U., **M. McAlinden**, M. A. Parris, and J. Mutum. (2025). Skilled migrants' experiences of othering, alterity and language policing. *International Migration*

<https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.70074>



This study explored how highly skilled migrants from Southeast Asia face different forms of linguistic discrimination in Australian workplaces despite being proficient in English. The study found that language policing related to accent and varieties of English spoken, marked migrants as outsiders, led to underemployment, and adversely affected their well-being despite their qualifications and language proficiency. The research highlights how certain varieties of English were privileged over others providing insights into the challenges that migrant teachers, students, and their families might face as they settle in Australian schools and workplaces.

Celebrating the legacy of ECU Mount Lawley Campus

Professor Clare Pollock, Vice-Chancellor and President of Edith Cowan University, and Professor Caroline Mansfield, Executive Dean, School of Education.



Held at ECU's Spectrum Project Space, the afternoon brought together colleagues, classmates, and friends to reflect on the unique history of Mount Lawley Teachers College and its transformation into ECU. The event was an opportunity to look ahead, as the campus prepares to close in 2026 before the university relocates to its new City campus.

ECU Vice-Chancellor Professor Clare Pollock was in attendance, alongside Executive Dean of the School of Education, Professor Caroline Mansfield. Professor Mansfield delivered an address thanking the dedicated committee of alumni and former staff for their years of work preserving these invaluable stories.

"These remarkable history books do more than chronicle the events and milestones of our university; they bring to life the people, places, and moments that have shaped our identity,"

The e-book captures memories and milestones of the ECU Mount Lawley Campus from 1970 to 1980, brought to life through contributions from all the authors.

"Your commitment has given us a gift of significance, one that honours the past while inspiring the future." Professor Mansfield said.

Foundation students Rivka Niesten, Marjorie Bly, Terry Watt, and Neil Kidd are also continuing this legacy, documenting the student and staff experiences that shaped life at Mount Lawley during this formative era.

Importantly, the committee hopes that future generations will continue to build upon this work by adding their voices, memories, and experiences to preserve the rich history of Mount Lawley for decades to come. The launch was complemented by Through the Lens, a photographic exhibition by Photomedia alumni and current students, which highlighted the character and meaning of the campus through striking visual storytelling.

Out of the Woods will be available online soon at the ECU Library, upon which a link will be provided, offering a lasting record of the pioneering vision and community spirit that continues to define ECU.



This article is republished from the **ECU Newsroom**.
Read the original article [here](#).

Introducing our 2025 School of Education Alumni Award Winners

Introducing the 2025 ECU Alumni Award winners from ECU's School of Education, this spectacular event was hosted by broadcasting alumna and recent Business News 40under40 recipient, Cassie Silver, and featured a stunning performance by Australian-American soprano and last year's ECU Young Alumni Award winner, Amy Manford. It was a wonderful occasion to celebrate the 2025 winners in true style.

The Alumni Awards were created to recognise and celebrate those alumni who embody ECU's values through their hard work and achievements.



Emeritus Professor Colleen Hayward AM

Winner of the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award
Diploma of Teaching (Primary), 1974.

Some 50 years since graduating from Edith Cowan University (ECU) with a Diploma of Teaching (Primary), Professor Colleen Hayward AM has been named the winner of the Distinguished Alumni Award 2025.

Pivoting from teaching after a cancer diagnosis in her 30s, the highly respected senior Noongar woman has been a trailblazer throughout her illustrious career, reflecting the needs of minority groups at community, state and national levels.

Colleen has provided significant input to policies and programs on a wide range of issues across the fields of health, education, training, employment, housing, child protection, and law and justice.

Catrina-Luz Aniere OAM

Winner of the 2025 Community and Impact Alumni Award
Diploma of Teaching (Primary), 1981

Teacher turned environmental education trailblazer Catrina-Luz Aniere always wanted to work with children, but figured out early on in her career that she wanted to do it differently.

Inspired by young people who wanted to change their world, Catrina gave up her secure teaching job to co-create youth environmental organisation Millennium Kids.

Twenty-five years on, Catrina has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her service to children and youth, and to environmental education.



This content is republished from the **ECU Alumni and Supports Website**. Watch the video [here](#).



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Find out more about the Graduate Certificate of Education on our website by scanning the QR code below, or reaching out to the Course Coordinator.



Course Coordinator
Dr Tetiana Bogachenko
t.bogachenko@ecu.edu.au

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Inspiring Children's University graduates celebrate learning beyond the classroom



Proud First Nations Noongar Whadjuk boy and Year 6 student Hedley Ryder celebrated his learning journey to success thanks to the support of ECU's Children's University program. From overcoming a brain injury to getting accepted into a gifted and talented program for high school, Year 6 student Hedley Ryder from Swan View Primary School celebrated his learning journey to success, thanks to the support of ECU's Children's University (CU) program. The CU program in Western Australia encourages outside school education and connects families to educational learning experiences offered by 115 local community organisations (learning destinations), including public libraries, zoos, parks, museums, art galleries, theatres, sporting and school clubs and businesses.

Nurturing learning through hardship

On Christmas Day 2022, after completing two years in the CU program, Hedley acquired a permanent brain injury from a viral infection, leaving him in a wheelchair for a short time, resulting in a long stay in Perth Children's Hospital and a lengthy period off school. Hedley's mum Bonnie Ryder said the program provided a valuable platform for nurturing a love for learning and played an integral part in his road to recovery. "Having the Children's University program meant he got to stay engaged in his education and keep his thirst for knowledge alive," Mrs Ryder said. "Hedley has even been offered and accepted a position in the Gifted and Talented (GATE) Program at Kalamunda Senior High School for next year, which is a huge accomplishment, and we could not be more proud." More than 770 WA children are set to graduate from the CU program this year, with celebrations being held across seven graduation ceremonies hosted by ECU and the University of Western Australia (UWA) through the Children's University Western Australia Partnership (CUWAP). In 2025, WA CU graduates collectively achieved a staggering 51,602 hours of extracurricular learning. Hedley was joined by fellow graduates who looked the part in their regalia and crossed the stage at the 2025 ECU Children's University graduation ceremony, held at ECU Joondalup.

Building aspiration for academia

A proud First Nations Noongar Whadjuk boy, Hedley has graduated from his fifth and final year in the program and delivered an inspiring speech to his fellow graduating peers. "I am so glad that I was in the Children's University program because I did so much extra learning that I could not normally do at school - and that meant I didn't fall behind and have always been keen to learn more," Hedley shared. Hedley credited the CU for providing opportunities for additional learning. "I have had the opportunity to participate in many of the on-campus holiday workshops at ECU.

In particular, my favourite one was when my dad took me to a fossil workshop, and now I am eager to go to university myself someday and become a paleo artist. This is someone who draws what the dinosaurs would look like based off their fossils. "Some of my best Children's University memories were made with my family when we travelled to learning destinations. We have searched for the CU logo on all our holidays but some of the best have been Taronga Zoo in Sydney and Busselton Jetty."

Supporting family connections

Mrs Ryder praised the excellent learning support provided by ECU CU educators and facilitators for keeping Hedley engaged in his education and motivated to learn. "Hedley has big future goals thanks to the CU program. The exposure he's had over the past five years to the world of opportunities available through university study has given him the passion to explore and expand his knowledge," Mrs Ryder said. "This program has not only helped our son but also helped us as a family. The time we have spent together and the memories we have made doing the workshops and visiting the different learning destinations is priceless. "Children's University will always hold a special place in our hearts, and I thoroughly recommend it to other families."

Championing lifelong learners

ECU Vice-Chancellor Professor Clare Pollock said the CU program nurtures the aspirations of young children and aims to inspire a passion for lifelong learning. "At ECU, we pride ourselves on nurturing students who are adaptable, curious and lifelong learners. Our Children's University graduates exemplify this spirit," Professor Pollock said. The program also aims to strengthen educational engagement, widen participation and support students from diverse backgrounds to access higher education. "Through your participation, you have shown curiosity, creativity and determination to make the most of every learning opportunity."

Children's University WA facts:

- ECU first established the CU program in Western Australia in 2017.
- Since 2020, the program is jointly delivered by ECU and UWA through the Children's University Western Australia Partnership (CUWAP) to 37 schools across Perth, South West, Peel and Great Southern regions.
- More than 3,000 graduates have emerged from the CUWAP, with primary school-aged children dedicating over 231,335 hours to extracurricular learning.
- Over the past five years, ECU's CU on-campus University School Holiday Programs have welcomed more than 3,900 children and family members.
- In 2025, through on-campus holiday workshops, holiday activity booklets, and learning destination days, a total of 5,268 learning engagements were achieved by children and family members who participated in the program.

For more information, visit the ECU Children's University webpage, watch the Children's University WA Partnership video or email childreuniversity@ecu.edu.au.

This article is republished from the **ECU Newsroom**.
Read the original article [here](#).

ATAR Exams: Experts offer up advice as year 12 students pack out libraries for last-minute cramming

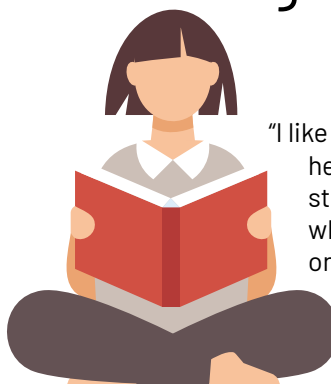


Dr Sarah Jefferson, Senior Lecturer, School of Education.

It's one of the biggest moments in many teenagers' lives, one they've been working towards all year – the start of Year 12 final exams. Many will be hitting the books hard for last minute cramming, while others work through reams of past exam papers. In WA, nearly 11,000 students are studying four or more Australian Tertiary Admission Rank courses – making them eligible for an ATAR score – while more than 13,000 will take at least one exam this year. The four-week exam period kicks off on Wednesday, though only 156 students will sit the subjects scheduled for the first day. Far more students will be taking their first written exam on Thursday, with around 1600 candidates turning over their literature paper in the morning and 961 sitting accounting and finance in the afternoon. Even though getting into university has become easier than it used to be, rivalry for high-demand courses – such as medicine or veterinary science – is as cut-throat as ever. Competition for high ATAR scores is also fierce among top students vying for lucrative scholarships. Edith Cowan University senior education lecturer Sarah Jefferson said that as students neared the finish line, now was the time to put in one last spurt. "This is the time to put your phone in the cupboard," she said. "You've got this window of opportunity. I'd also really encourage kids, if their home environment is not one where it's easy to have a quiet, calm environment, or if they lose focus quickly ... go to the local library.

Dr Jefferson said teenagers' pre-frontal cortex – which helps manage thinking and emotions – was still developing. "This is a cohort of kids who are used to working with others, so suddenly moving into an isolation-based environment, often when they're working at home, they haven't necessarily developed the skills sets yet to work independently for sustained periods of time," she said. "That change in setting and working with a cohort who are also focused on exams or assignments and study can really help keep you on track." Hundreds of students have already taken that advice, with staff at Perth's State Library of WA reporting a noticeable increase this year in teenagers flocking to its dedicated WA Certificate of Education (WACE) study space. As well as being able to access past exam papers and study guides, students are also drawn to the library's central location, plentiful desks, long opening hours and free wi-fi. Rossmoyne Senior High School's Briony Pilkington and Jasmine Xu admitted to having "mixed feelings" about the looming exams – excitement they would soon be over, tinged with some nervousness. Both students have been using the State Library for study sessions since they were in Year 10.

Jasmine, who will start her exams with chemistry on Friday, said she liked the quiet atmosphere, because the library near her home was too noisy for her to concentrate.



"I like going to the library because it helps me to get into the mood to study and really focus," Briony, whose first exam is literature on Thursday, said. "It's a nice wide-open space and there's resources and stuff like that to look at. I've also set up pretty harsh screen restrictions on

my phone." Cooper Vincent, from John XXIII College, who started studying at the State Library four weeks ago, said he felt "pretty good" about his preparation for the chemistry exam. While he was confident he would do well, he was aiming for an ATAR above 90 in the hopes of nabbing a \$10,000 scholarship to study engineering at the University of Western Australia.

Acting chief executive and State Librarian Catherine Belcher said for many students, preparing for exams at the State Library was a "rite of passage". "We know that lots of students want to study together, rather than alone at home, and the State Library provides a space where they feel focused and connected," she said. "Students set up in our study spaces year-round and there's been a noticeable increase in numbers and the length of their stay in the lead up to exams. This past weekend was especially busy, with students working on all four levels of the building."

Dr Jefferson, a former secondary school teacher whose third child is about to sit Year 12 exams, said if students hadn't already mapped out their study timetable, it was not too late. "You still have time up your sleeve to improve things," she said. "Do those practice papers that are all on the School Curriculum and Standards Authority website, freely available, under timed conditions. "Divide up your subjects, practically review your mock papers really carefully – where are the holes in your game – and go back and tackle the questions you avoided in your mock exams." Dr Jefferson said parents could also help by creating a calm environment. "For parents, rather than saying 'why aren't you studying', reframe the question more to 'how can I help'," she said. "If you're calm, they'll be calmer. Now is not the time to trauma-dump your experience of Year 12 at school. "Also, load up the snack cupboard, whatever the current favourite is – in our house it's haribos – it's really important for kids for there to be a sense of a reward along the way."

Head of Educational Neuroscience at CQUniversity Ken Purnell said the smartest exam strategy was not cramming, but calmness. "Cramming feels productive, but it's a trick of the mind," he said. "The brain remembers best through spaced study – short, focused bursts over time.

And sleep isn't optional. It's when the brain locks learning into memory and clears away stress chemicals." Professor Purnell said parents played a key role in helping students stay steady under pressure. "Calm is contagious," he said. Above all, students and families should keep perspective. "Final exams still matter, but they're just one part of the picture," he said. "Today's assessments are more balanced, school-based work counts too." Education Minister Sabine Winton – a former school teacher – wished all students across WA who were sitting their ATAR exams this year "the very best of luck". "I know this can be a stressful time for students, so I'd urge them to do their very best, but not put too much pressure on themselves," she said.

Ms Winton reminded students to stay focused and positive, to look after themselves and their friends, take breaks and spend some time doing things they love with friends and family. "I'd also like to give a special shoutout to students' teachers and support networks who have shared important lessons and provided encouragement during this journey," she said.

This article is republished from **The West Australian**. Read the original article [here](#).

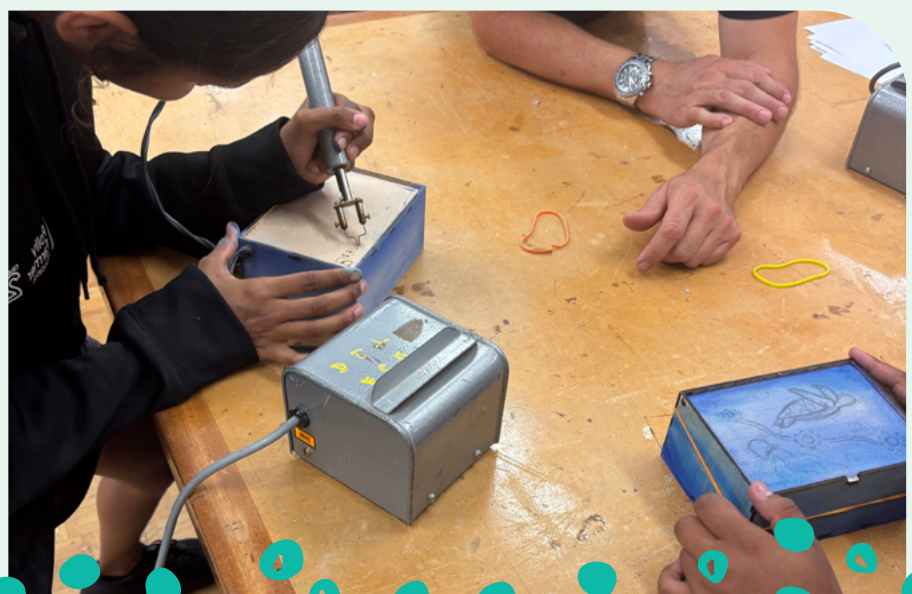
Follow the Dream Students Craft Cultural Connections in the Workshop

Dr Carol Puddicombe, Lecturer, School of Education.



On 5 November 2025, Edith Cowan University's School of Education welcomed 19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from the Follow the Dream Mount Lawley Outreach Program for an engaging hands-on Design and Technology (D&T) workshop hosted in the university's wood workshop. Led by Dr Carol Puddicombe and Marco Tolomei, the session invited students from Mount Lawley SHS, Warwick SHS, Ballajura Community College, Duncraig SHS, Carine SHS, Belridge SHS, and Shenton College to explore creativity and storytelling through material design.

Students worked collaboratively to construct and design a wooden box that represented their personal or cultural story, using laser-cut components, painting, and pyrography techniques to individualise their artefacts. The activity reflected the Year 11 D&T curriculum focus on design thinking, creativity, and making, while celebrating storytelling, identity, and hands-on learning. The workshop was delivered in partnership with Kurongkurl Katitjin and the Follow the Dream program, inspiring students to imagine future pathways into education, design, and technology-related fields. "It's always inspiring to watch students express their stories through making," said Dr Puddicombe. "Design and Technology offers a tangible way for young people to connect their creativity, culture, and learning." This event exemplifies ECU's commitment to inclusive and culturally responsive education—providing authentic, hands-on learning experiences that bridge classroom learning with community connection.





A once in a generation opportunity to lift literacy outcomes

Associate Professor Helen Adam, School of Education.

As Canberra debates the shape of the new Teaching and Learning Commission, one question keeps resurfacing: will this be the moment Australia finally tackles the root causes of our long-standing literacy gaps, or will we slip back into the same narrow arguments that have dominated classrooms for years? Associate Professor Helen Adam, a leading literacy researcher, PETAA president, says the stakes couldn't be higher. Her message is blunt but timely: better phonics teaching alone won't shift outcomes if children still have no books at home, if school libraries are hollowed out, or if classroom practice fails to recognise the rich languages and cultural knowledge students bring through the door. As governments promise "once-in-a-generation" reform, Associate Professor Adam argues this window won't stay open forever, and warns that getting it wrong now means condemning another generation to the same avoidable gaps. In her upcoming book, 'Creating Equitable Literacy Learning Environments', Associate Professor Adam draws on extensive international research across Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States to examine how a groundbreaking framework can guide schools in creating truly equitable learning environments. The Model for Equitable Literacy Learning Environments (MELLE) framework combines solid teaching, plenty of chances for kids to read, and books that reflect students' real lives and identities. Associate Professor Adam says that when these three pieces work together, students feel included and engaged, which makes it easier to lift achievement and close long-running gaps.

Families' real struggles rarely factored in

When asked how the research behind Creating Equitable Literacy Learning Environments helps to explain why policy tweaks alone won't shift long-standing gaps in reading outcomes, Associate Professor Adam said the real barriers to better reading outcomes sit well beyond classroom technique. "Many families simply cannot afford books—when choosing between groceries and rent, purchasing children's books is often out of reach," Associate Professor Adam told The Educator. "If we want to build readers, the burden of poverty must be addressed with genuine cross-ministerial portfolio support for families."

Meanwhile, diverse communities' rich literacy practices – oral storytelling, multilingual homes, cultural knowledge transmission – are frequently dismissed in schools privileging Standard Australian English and middle-class practices, she pointed out. "Research shows children excel when their linguistic resources are valued through culturally responsive teaching," she said. "When home languages and ways of knowing are instead viewed as deficits, children face barriers regardless of instructional quality." Associate Professor Adam added that when achievement gaps persist despite these systemic barriers, teachers are blamed, and explicit instruction is "prescribed as the remedy – as if better phonics teaching could overcome poverty or compensate for children having no books at home". "Policy tweaks typically mandate 'better' instruction whilst ignoring these systemic inequities," she said. "Without addressing parental capacity to provide books, valuing diverse literacy practices, and ensuring schools compensate for – rather than compound – home disadvantage, we simply reinforce existing patterns where privilege predicts outcomes."

Evidence helping principals shift the dial

When asked what this framework would actually look like in the day-to-day life of a principal, and how it could realistically help turn around Australia's stubborn literacy results, Associate Professor Adam said it starts with widening the lens beyond classroom technique to what children can actually access at school and at home. "On day one, a principal using MELLE wouldn't just audit instruction—they'd ensure every child has books at home and school," she said. "This means guaranteeing library access and qualified librarians—not treating libraries as expendable when budgets tighten, and where possible using early childhood funds to enrol families in book gifting programmes like Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Dymock's Children's Charities or others, or running regular book appeals."

Classroom audits would examine whether books represent diverse communities authentically, she added. "Professional learning would focus on culturally responsive implementation of evidence-based instruction for diverse learners, building on children's home languages and cultural knowledge. Teacher standards would equally value technical expertise and culturally responsive practice," she said. "This integration disrupts patterns where disadvantaged schools often get intervention programs whilst advantaged schools get more books and reading time." Associate Professor Adam said the MELLE framework provides principals "evidence-based justification" for demanding that alongside government mandated phonics instruction and testing, must sit mandated support for school libraries and book access for all families. "You can't become a reader without access to books."

Literacy reform needs more than education alone

Associate Professor Adam warns that Australia risks returning to the same conversations about the same literacy gaps in another 15 years unless the paramount issue of equity is addressed within this time. Looking ahead, she said it is important to watch whether the Commission addresses literacy and equity as an education-only issue or recognises it requires cross-portfolio action supporting families, but noted that there are some positive signals that offer hope. "These include education departments partnering with community services to ensure book access for disadvantaged families; policies supporting programs like Dolly Parton's Imagination Library as front-line family support; funding formulas ensuring under-resourced schools get library staffing and book budgets, not just intervention programs," she said. "Also watch the Commission's guidance documents. If they overwhelmingly emphasise explicit instruction without equally addressing culturally responsive practice and access to diverse books, the window is closing."

Associate Professor Adam said teacher standards should integrate responsive pedagogy throughout, not as separate competencies, adding that curriculum resources should provide flexible frameworks requiring adaptation, not standardised scripts. The key concerning signal, she said, is that of a two-tier literacy system quietly hardening into place. "If schools serving disadvantaged communities continue spending more time on isolated skills whilst advantaged schools provide books, choice, and reading time, and if policy rhetoric still centres only 'explicit instruction,' we've learned nothing and we've missed a once in a generation opportunity."

This article is republished from the **The Educator Australia**. Read the original article [here](#).



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Trauma-informed Practice | Short Course Suite

This suite of five short courses builds participant knowledge and understanding of children and young people impacted by trauma, with a focus on development, behaviour, learning and vulnerable children. Participants will learn about the impact of adversity, traumatic stress on development, the brain and learning.

An awareness of teacher responses to trauma-driven behaviour and evidenced-based strategies to assist the traumatised child or young person to self-regulate will be explored through case-studies. Being understanding of and responsive to the unique needs of these children is essential to providing support. Participants will learn the importance of providing trauma-responsive support within a context of relational safety. Finally, understanding the needs of children who have endured complex vulnerabilities, will be explored with the unique child, positive relationships, and a strengths-based approach at the heart of practice.

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Trauma-informed Practice #1 - Understanding Childhood Trauma: An introduction for educators

Trauma-affected children can be found in any classroom and any school. In fact, one in four children experience a traumatic event before they turn three years old (Child, J. 2017). Trauma impacts development, behaviour and learning. This short course is an ideal introduction to childhood trauma for all educators including parents, carers and youth workers. Providing effective support for children and young people affected by trauma begins with educators who are trauma-informed. By building your understanding and knowledge you have a better chance of making a positive difference.

Cost

- **\$199.00** to undertake the course which includes all reading materials, case studies, and online activities.
- A 10% discount is offered to ECU alumni and for multiple bookings from the same organisation.



[Register Online](#)



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Trauma-informed Practice #2 - Trauma and Development: Understanding the impact for educators

Children and adolescents who live in adverse circumstances where there is neglect, abuse, or violence live in a state of hypervigilance and with toxic stress from experiencing ongoing, traumatic events. Toxic stress sabotages development and wellbeing - the brain and the body struggle to function effectively, the consequences of which can be far reaching. This short course looks at the impact of adversity and toxic stress on development, focussing on the brain. Educators will build their knowledge and understanding of children and adolescents whose development has been interrupted by toxic stress and trauma.

Cost

- **\$199.00** to undertake the course which includes all reading materials, case studies, and online activities.
- A 10% discount is offered to ECU alumni and for multiple bookings from the same organisation.



[Register Online](#)



Fully Online

Trauma-informed Practice #3 - Trauma and Behaviour: Reflecting and responding for educators

Behaviour is communication. Behaviour for the child or young person living with trauma is often an expression of their struggle to cope. This may include struggling to cope with managing big emotions, struggling to cope with learning and struggling with being with others. Trauma means days are full of struggles and feelings of fear. This short course aims to build your understanding of children and young people's trauma-driven behaviour and your knowledge of evidence-based strategies so you can more confidently and effectively, guide and support their development of self-regulation and behaviour competencies.

Cost

- **\$199.00** to undertake the course which includes all reading materials, case studies, and online activities.
- A 10% discount is offered to ECU alumni and for multiple bookings from the same organisation.



[Register Online](#)



Fully Online

Trauma-informed Practice #4 - Trauma and Learning: Meeting complex support needs for educators

Early childhood learning environments and school environments can be a struggle for the child or young person living with trauma. Struggling to think, pay attention, remember, play with others, trust and form friendships with peers and adults, every day can be exhausting and overwhelming for these children who often struggle to cope. In this short course you will explore trauma-responsive pedagogy to promote positive interactions and assist children and young people affected by trauma to achieve better learning outcomes. Teaching troubled children and young people is difficult and can take its toll therefore attention to educator wellbeing and self-care is introduced.

Cost

- **\$199.00** to undertake the course which includes all reading materials, case studies, and online activities.
- A 10% discount is offered to ECU alumni and for multiple bookings from the same organisation.



Register Online



Fully Online

Trauma-informed Practice #5 - Trauma and Vulnerable Children: Helping them heal for educators

In this short course you will be introduced to children and young people living with family violence, refugee and asylum seeker experiences, children in out of home care, children living in poverty, and children impacted by the collective trauma histories of their families and communities. By the very nature of these specific experiences, it can be argued that these children and young people are vulnerable and are highly likely to be living with trauma. You will gain insight into the needs of these children and young people who have endured complex vulnerabilities, with the unique child, positive relationships, and a strengths-based approach at the heart of practice.

Cost

- **\$199.00** to undertake the course which includes all reading materials, case studies, and online activities.
- A 10% discount is offered to ECU alumni and for multiple bookings from the same organisation.



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School of Education Research Showcase



Dr Trish Collins

Lecturer, School of Education.

Dr Trish Collins was raised in a family of six children, spending her early years often moving states before the family moved to Perth in her teens. Trish worked in hospitality and mining before her amazing 20+ years in early childhood classrooms, working in close knit teams to care for, and educate, children from 3 to 8 years of age using a project-based hands-on play pedagogy. She is the proud Mum of three children, six bonus children and eight grandchildren. Prior to beginning her career at ECU, Trish was lucky enough to travel all over the state as an early childhood consultant for CEWA for 5 years. This part of her amazing journey was spent working in remote aboriginal communities, country towns (small and large) and metropolitan Perth providing mentoring, support and professional learning to principals, early childhood teachers and education assistants. This support focused on good early childhood practice, all curriculums impacting early childhood (e.g., National Quality Standard, Early Years Learning Framework, Australian Curriculum); helping school's write quality improvement plans; and collect/analyse Maths and Literacy data to facilitate future learning goals in schools.

Trish's background has shaped her, making her very passionate about current practices in early childhood as well as both child and adult wellbeing. She began her research journey from a dinner party question from Professor Julie Lee asking her "Do you think children have values?" where she said, "Of course they do, they have them at 3 when they come to me". And Julie responded, "There's no research on that". This led to Trish combining all her passions to improve children and teacher's wellbeing, ensure children are all able to participate in research through technology and teacher's embrace technology rather than fearing it (including coding and the use of apps). Trish is a quantitative researcher, which is rare in education! Quantitative just means she loves numbers, spreadsheets and working with big data sets.

During her Master of Education and PhD, she was instrumental in developing a web-based animated values instrument (AVI) designed specifically for children who cannot yet read or have trouble reading. This enabled her to gather data from children 5 to 12 years of age about their personal values (i.e., motivational goals). She has now written several articles showing children's personal values impact their wellbeing, self-esteem, and behaviour, as well as the impact of children's values on how they perceive social support from their parents, teachers, classmates and friends'. The AVI (now in its 3rd iteration), has been adapted for use on i-Pads, is being used in several other countries (e.g., Israel, Poland, Portugal), and used with children as young as 3. She wants to continue this values research so educators and children know and understand their own values and those of others, as this creates tolerance and understanding of difference and shows teachers' how their own values impact the children they teach.

With her background in technology and quantitative research it will come as no surprise that Trish teaches at ECU in all things STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in early childhood. She has recently written a new unit: technology in early childhood (birth to 8 years of age), where she is particularly focused on enhancing pre-service teachers' confidence in not only using technology to enhance their teaching by using AI, apps and other digital tools, but how to use technology WITH children. Technology WITH children includes teaching unplugged as well as plugged coding, problem solving using engineering design skills and the importance of using interactive rather than passive apps. Trish's expertise in technology has been enhanced by her research in the Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. Her research now extends to technology use in early learning centres. Her and her colleagues has shown there is a lot of technology use, but it is not often used WITH the children. This led to a pilot research project that partnered 'digital ambassadors' (4th year STEM students) with early learning centres to help educators to see how they could use technology WITH children. Trish is hoping this pilot project can be implemented into schools in the future. She is working on a longitudinal project teaching teachers the importance of hands-on learning with manipulatives in mathematics (K to yr 2).

Trish's contributions to education don't stop there. She is on the consultative committee for SCSA in Early Childhood Education and for Mathematics, a community representative on a school board, and has been invited to co-edit an international journal in 2026.

Find out more about ECU's School of Education research activity by visiting our [website](#).



Future Research & Career Pathway



Cynthia Howard

PhD Candidate, School of Education.

Can you introduce yourself and tell us about your background and academic journey?

My name is Cynthia Howard, and I'm a full-time online PhD candidate studying from Hobart, Tasmania. As a mature-aged student, my career has been wonderfully diverse, starting with fruit picking in North Queensland, moving through retail and disability work, and now teaching music. Lifelong learning has always been important to me, and I'm grateful to continue that journey at Edith Cowan University.

My academic path began with music studies at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) Conservatorium, followed by a teaching degree. I was thrilled to land my first teaching role in the scenic Huon Valley, and it wasn't long before I felt the pull to learn more. I returned to study, completed a third degree, and later a Master of Education at UTAS. During this time, I became increasingly concerned about the challenges music teachers were facing with reduced resources, increased demands, and a lack of recognition. This led me to research how primary music teachers felt valued in their schools and communities, and how this impacted their wellbeing. I wanted to give a voice to my colleagues' experiences. I completed my master's in 2021. After COVID, I presented my research at the International Society of Music Education (ISME) conference in Helsinki in 2024. It was a small audience, mostly unfamiliar faces, but among them was Dr Jason Goopy, who would later become my PhD supervisor. I'm incredibly thankful he was there.

Why did you choose ECU to do your PhD degree?

I chose ECU largely because of that connection with Jason. I'd worked with supervisors before and realised how important it was to find someone who understood me and who spoke my language.

I also wanted a team of supervisors who shared my values, and now I have three. My master's research highlighted many challenges faced by music teachers, and I wanted to explore solutions, not just problems. A message from ISME stuck with me: "The fire of injustice you feel can be reframed to be the energy of hope." That resonated deeply.

What have you enjoyed the most?

Nine months into my PhD, I've found so much to appreciate at ECU. My supervisors have been very supportive, kind, and genuinely invested in my growth. I feel inspired by them. Earlier this year, I was part of an international conference at ECU's Mount Lawley campus, where I helped host the event. My roles were hands-on and varied from assisting with registrations to gaining valuable editing experience. It was a fantastic opportunity to build practical skills and connect with ECU staff, fellow students, music educators from across Australia and the Asia-Pacific, and respected academics.

I've really valued the support from HDR advisors and the weekly HDR Writers Club sessions. It can be isolating studying on your own and being able to discuss your PhD journey with others who understand has been a great comfort. In addition, ECU staff have been fantastic, whether I've called or emailed, they have always responded kindly and efficiently. On my recent visit to Perth, I was struck by how prominent ECU is in the city and I felt proud to be part of it.

What is the focus of your thesis?

My thesis explores the wellbeing of primary specialist music teachers. With the global teacher shortage and my 17 years of experience in schools, I wanted to find practical, accessible solutions that could be easily implemented. I believe that when teachers are happy in their roles, they're better equipped to manage challenges and provide meaningful, high quality learning experiences for their students. Guided by my supervisors and through a positive psychology lens, I'm investigating how music teachers stay rejuvenated in their roles. I'm especially interested in those who are thriving and what strategies they use, and how can we learn from them.

What will you do after your PhD? And why?

After completing my PhD, I hope to continue researching in the areas of positive psychology and music. I would like to undertake post-doctoral work, as I feel I have much to contribute through both academic knowledge and real-world experience as a music educator.

I want to remain active in community music, playing violin with contemporary folk ensembles and orchestras. Teaching music to primary-aged children remains close to my heart, and I hope to support other music teachers through mentoring and training. I feel fortunate to have the musical skills to do so, and I love sharing the joy of music with others, not just as a subject, but as a way of experiencing life.

ECU Education Alumni Spotlight: Emeritus Professor Colleen Hayward AM

Diploma of Teaching (Primary), 1974.

Winner of the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award



Admired. Influential. Courageous. Respected.

These are just a few of the words used to describe Professor Colleen Hayward AM. Some 50 years since graduating from Edith Cowan University (ECU) with a Diploma of Teaching (Primary), Colleen has been named the winner of the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award. The highly respected senior Noongar woman has been a true trailblazer, reflecting the needs of minority groups at community, state and national levels, and providing significant input to policies and programs on a wide range of issues. It is a career journey that began when Colleen decided to follow in the footsteps of her parents and become a teacher.

"I was still living at home when I was at teacher's college and the nightly routine was always, after dinner everyone was doing schoolwork," Colleen recalls. "Mum and Dad were doing prep for their lessons, my older sister who'd also gone into teaching was studying and doing assignments. I was studying and doing assignments and the rest of the kids – another four after me – were all still at school. It was very much the norm in the household." After graduating, Colleen began teaching at Spearwood Primary School, before being transferred to Gingin. "I had the best of both worlds. Gingin was only an hour up the road, so I boarded with another teacher during the week and I could come home on weekends," Colleen says. "Being in the country was a blessing. You really were embedded and embraced, in terms of the school community, the broader community. Everyone knew you, and you knew everyone. You knew the family stories."

Colleen then moved back to Perth, teaching at North Lake Primary in Coolbellup followed by Dalkeith Primary School, before a major health scare in her early 30s steered her on a different career path. "They were very different experiences but I didn't have a bad experience while I was teaching – the classes of kids were always fantastic," she says. "At the end of my third year at Dalkeith, I was diagnosed with cancer and while surgery and treatment was successful, it made me realise what a physical job teaching is. "And while I was well enough to work, I wasn't well enough to go back to teaching." With an interest in policy initiatives sparked while teaching, Colleen was thrilled to win a position with the teacher's union after her cancer battle. "I'd been sitting on their education and Aboriginal education committees. That gave me a different look at things and forced you to look bigger, because those policies were across the board, not just for your classroom or your school or even your district – they were much bigger and more impactful."

Colleen achieved many things during her time at the State School Teacher's Union of WA, including amending the teacher promotion system, introducing a major structure change and abolishing compulsory country service. She also worked with the Education Department on the development of the Aboriginal studies curriculum and spent time in the Aboriginal issues unit of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody. "It was absolutely gut-wrenching, because we weren't on the legal side, we were on the policy side of things – you were seeing people who were horrendously marred by tragedy – interviewing them and collecting their stories. "I think that's what led me to work in the Aboriginal Legal Service. I was there as Deputy Chief Executive, so it was all about defending people and advocating so that government policies were changed."

Colleen then went to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) bringing change on a national level, before heading the Aboriginal maternal and child health research arm of the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. In 2009 Colleen was appointed as Head of Kurungkurl Katitjin, ECU's Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, where she was instrumental in shaping inclusive education policies. By 2012 Colleen was part of the executive of the very institution she studied at, as Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Indigenous. "Decades before when I first started at Mount Lawley with my teacher training qualifications, there were no amenities, there was no cafeteria – it was only part way through my first year that they developed any kind of library," she said. "To come back and see the growth and development and the spread of occupational endeavour and qualification was just fabulous."

"From every perspective, I absolutely loved my time at ECU. I retired almost seven years ago but I still say we – I'm incredibly proud of ECU – how far we've come, what we lead, the culture, the focus, the concentration on student experience, which takes me right back to my teaching days." With no slowing down in retirement, Colleen sits on multiple boards, including as Vice President of the Fremantle Dockers Football Club. Her recent appointment as the first Aboriginal woman on the board of an ASX50 company, Mineral Resources Ltd, further enhances her national profile and influence, and shows she's still breaking down barriers. "I know that so much of what I've had the pleasure of being involved with over my life journey is an absolute privilege, and there has been a lot of work of course – no one succeeds without hard work and drive and motivation – but the fact that I've also been recognised is a bonus."

Colleen's contributions have been formally recognised through numerous prestigious awards, including the National NAIDOC Aboriginal Person of the Year Award, the WA Premier's Multicultural Ambassador's Award, induction into the WA Women's Hall of Fame and Department of Education's Hall of Fame for Aboriginal Education, and appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia.

But it's something much simpler that she's most proud of. "I am thankful every time anyone says to me 'I didn't know I could do this, but I saw that you had and that gave me the motivation'. "You know, you live your life trying to be a good person and trying to make a positive difference for others, especially others who are not as advantaged as you. And when you can be any kind of motivation for anyone to do better or to strive more or to achieve more – I don't know that anyone could ask for more than that."

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Student

SHOWCASE

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Ceramic Figurine



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Ceramic Bowls



Grace Humphreys-Lewis
Ceramic Teapot



Kierah Lawler
Ceramic Box



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Shams Alkhaznawi
Ceramic Vase



Marcail Maunder
Ceramic Bust



Liv McIntyre
Ceramic Vessels



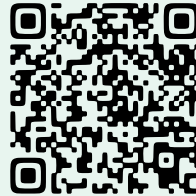
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
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
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