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Early years care must improve teaching strategies

Early years education systems must focus on effective teaching and learning strategies and improving staff qualifications to ensure successful outcomes for all children, Professor Collette Tayler will tell educators at two [Early Learning State Conferences](#) for the Australian Council for Educational Research in March and April.

Professor Tayler, Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care in the University of Melbourne Graduate School of Education, will stress that in terms of the overall education debate, nothing matters more, or has more long term impact on education outcomes, than the provision of quality education in the early years.

“Staff who care for and educate very young children – all those under five years old – have a large influence on children’s development and learning and their long-term outcomes. It is time to recognise this, invest in staff development and value the contribution of early childhood professionals to children, families, the economy and society,” she says.

Professor Tayler conducted a 2006 review of early childhood education and care in 20 OECD countries. This review found that in many childcare services the majority of staff do not hold internationally recognised qualifications for education and the curriculum does not contain sufficient pedagogical content to rank as educational.

According to Professor Tayler, it is widely acknowledged that current staff training levels are inadequate to assure children receive a quality educational experience, and that Australia’s investment in early childhood education has been among the lowest in the OECD despite this country being one of the more wealthy members.

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“The quality of children’s early experiences has enduring effects on their learning, educational attainment and productivity,” she says.

It is time to reconsider the shape of childcare and preschool programs and ensure a robust mix of programs that enable a fair start in life to all children. Who the programs serve, what they achieve and how they are funded determine access, affordability and program quality.”

“There is converging international evidence from developmental science and economics that indicates investment in early childhood education and care programs is socially and economically prudent,” she explains.

Professor Tayler will speak at early learning state conferences to be held by the Australian Council for Educational Research, together with Early Childhood Australia and Gowrie Victoria and Gowrie NSW, in Sydney on 26 March and Melbourne on 2 April. Her presentation will focus on teaching and learning strategies and tactics for working effectively with young children and families in the contemporary Australian policy reform agenda.

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Transform schools through powerful learning, urges UK expert

Everyone agrees that schools should be preparing all young people to be lifelong learners – but, Professor Guy Claxton wants to know, what does lifelong learning mean to a 37-year-old hairdresser in Bacchus Marsh?

UK education expert, professor of learning sciences and co-director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester, Professor Claxton brought his brand of “real-world learning” to Australia for a seminar hosted by the Australian Council for Educational Research in March.

The key message, he said, was that all young people, not just the academic successes, must receive an education that will prepare them for life.

“People have talked very glibly about education as preparation for lifelong learning, but if you ask them what lifelong learning means to a 37-year-old hairdresser in Bacchus Marsh, they don’t have a really good answer,” Professor Claxton said.

“It’s not just lifelong consumption of accredited courses; it’s about being open to change, being inquisitive, and being willing to have a go at things.

“To truly prepare all students for lifelong learning, we need to narrow the gap between the antiquated model of schooling which we’re still stuck with in some places, and what would be a really powerful, accurate preparation for complicated living,” he said.

According to Professor Claxton, many thousands of young people are stressed by the challenges of living in the 21st century. Education systems must take responsibility for this, and focus on providing all students with life skills.

“Approximately half of young people leave school without much to show for it, and that’s the fault of our system,” said Professor Claxton. “To blame family background, community or ethnicity, or to say some kids just aren’t bright enough, is lazy and irresponsible, scientifically false and educationally indefensible.”

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In his 13 March seminar for ACER, titled 'Transforming Schools Through Powerful Learning', Professor Claxton explained the thinking behind school transformation and showed how busy teachers can work on creating small but significant shifts, and illustrated practical ways for a school to become a more powerful learning community.

Guy Claxton is Professor of the Learning Sciences and Co-Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning at the UK's University of Winchester. His Building Learning Power programme has boosted young people's learning confidence and capacity in hundreds of schools across the UK, Australia and New Zealand. He has worked directly with teachers and policy-makers in every state of Australia. His 2008 book, highly praised by Howard Gardner, David Perkins, Susan Greenfield and Sir Ken Robinson, is called 'What's the Point of School?'

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ACER UPDATE

ACER named 'Employer of Choice for Women'

ACER has been awarded Employer of Choice for Women status by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA). ACER was one of 111 Australian employers to receive the citation on 18 March. ACER was awarded the citation on the basis of its existing policies and practices that were shown to support women across the organisation and have a positive outcome for both women and the business.

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