

Media release

Intentional teaching and purposeful play boosts early education success

Release date: 30 April 2025

Effective intentional teaching is critical for maximising children’s learning and development outcomes, particularly for children experiencing disadvantage, according to a new discussion paper from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) released today.

‘This paper, *Play-based learning with intentionality*, reviews global evidence on the conditions and practices that maximise learning and development for all children in early childhood education and care,’ said AERO CEO, Dr Jenny Donovan.

The new paper builds on [previous AERO research](#) from 2024, which showed that a strong connection exists between children’s learning and development and the educational program and practices used within early childhood education and care (ECEC) services.

Taking this one step further, the new research sought to understand how best to support young children’s learning and development in early childhood.

‘At its simplest, intentional teaching is teaching that has a purpose or reason behind it,’ said Dr Donovan. ‘Effective intentional teaching is quite complex. Educators need knowledge of a diverse range of teaching strategies, along with the insight to know when and how to use them. It also requires an understanding of how children learn, familiarity with relevant curriculum documents, expertise in specific content areas, and a deep knowledge of each individual child.’

‘Historically, intentional teaching and play have often been positioned in opposition to one another,’ continued Dr Donovan. ‘Our research challenges that notion, showing that significant associations exist between educators and teachers intentionally supporting learning through play to achieve positive outcomes for the child.’

‘The research tells us that educators’ and teachers’ attitudes and beliefs are central to this relationship – they shape how educators view the child, learning, and play, as well as their own role in supporting children’s development through intentional play-based approaches.’

Dr Anne Kennedy, AERO Board Member and respected early childhood academic, welcomed the research: ‘This is an important paper at a time when the focus in ECEC is often on everything else except the pedagogy, curriculum and relationships at the heart of play-based learning with intentionality. The paper is readable, well-researched and informed, provoking reflection and having a positive impact on improving educators’ capacity, confidence and understanding.’

[Play-based Learning with Intentionality](#) is available now from the AERO website.

Key findings from the discussion paper include:

- Intentional educators and teachers are critical to maximising children’s opportunities for learning and development, particularly for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Active decision-making and a knowledge of learning and teaching strategies are required to maximise children’s outcomes through intentional teaching.
- Foundational beliefs, knowledge and attitudes enable and impact educator and teacher intentionality within play-based learning.

About Us

AERO is Australia’s independent education evidence body, established in 2021 and funded by Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Our vision is to achieve excellence and equity in education outcomes for all children and young people through effective use of evidence. AERO’s role is to generate high quality evidence, make it accessible and encourage adoption and effective implementation of evidence into practice and policy.

Media contact

For AERO media enquiries please contact Think HQ:

M: 0488 534 201

E: aero@think-hq.com.au