

Article

Pedagogical Practices for Children Under Three Years: What Is Happening in Australia?

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Abstract

There is an unprecedented number of children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings owing to the increase in maternal employment over the past 40 years and recognition of the educational value of ECEC experience. What the educator does impacts children's learning, yet pedagogical approaches with children under three years are not clearly understood by educators. Legislation across Australia requires educators to be university-qualified (or equivalent) early childhood teachers (ECTs) to work with children who are three to five years but does not require educators to be qualified ECTs to work with children under three years. However, the early childhood teacher students are required to learn about pedagogical practices with children under three years in their studies. This research investigated academics' perspectives about pedagogical practices, and how they taught pre-service ECE teachers to work with children under three years. The findings highlight a diversity of approaches to pedagogical practices with six themes emerging: the need for unhurried time with children; understanding how children learn; the power of observation; intentionality and the learning environment; family pedagogy; and raising pre-service teachers' awareness of pedagogical practices. It is time to think otherwise and have higher-qualified educators working with the youngest of children in ECEC centres. This study recommends further research regarding the impact of the lesser qualified educators who work with children under three years to improve the quality of the ECEC experience for children.

Keywords: infants and toddlers; pedagogical practices; academics' perspectives; diverse approaches

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1. Introduction

The early childhood environment influences a young child's learning, wellbeing and development, and the young child's environment determines lifelong outcomes (Solang et al., 2024). The impact of the environment on children's developing brain capacity has been shown to affect the hard wiring that occurs in the first years of life (Rutter, 2006). Brain development in the early years is shaped and formed in response to environmental experiences. Such sensitive periods in brain development are significant for lifelong learning, with the provision of positive experiences considered necessary to ensure the best possible outcomes for children (Rutter, 2006). There is an unprecedented number of young children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings, owing to the increase in maternal employment over the past 40 years (Organisation for Economic and

[Cooperative Development \[OECD\], 2017](#)), and the increased recognition of the educational value of early childhood education experiences ([Sylva et al., 2010](#)). This highlights the need for learning environments to be high-quality, safe, and secure; stimulating learning environments with pedagogical practices that nurture children's learning and development. ([Callanan et al., 2017](#)).

2. Early Childhood Teachers in Australia

In Australia, early childhood centres are for children from six weeks to six years, and preschools/kindergartens for children aged from three to five years ([Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\], 2025b](#)). Qualified early childhood teachers (ECTs) are required to teach children aged from three to five years in ECEC centres. The ECT studies for the teacher qualification are from a higher education institution, usually a university. ECTs are strong predictors of quality for children's educational outcomes ([Manning et al., 2019](#)), and their role is recognised to be complex and demanding ([Pianta & Hamre, 2009](#)). Early childhood teachers are responsible for creating a safe and secure learning environment, for providing nurturing, secure relationships with children, and applying pedagogical approaches that support children's learning and development.

In 2025, there were approximately 900,000 children in ECEC settings attending 11,851 early childhood centres ([Australian Government Department of Education \[AGDE\], 2025](#)). Of the 900,000 children attending ECEC services, approximately 350,000 children (39%) were under three years old. Legislation across Australia requires educators to be trained ECTs to work with children who are three to five years but does not require educators to be trained ECTs to work with children under three years ([Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\], 2025a](#)). It is perplexing why this is, as research has shown how significant brain development is in the earliest years and how this impacts lifelong learning ([Solang et al., 2024](#)). Some early childhood services employ qualified ECTs to work with children under three years of age. Within Australia, 54% of ECEC centres are run 'for-profit'. Employing an ECT to work with children under three years is not common practice owing to the higher salary cost of an ECT compared to a less qualified educator. Early childhood teachers are paid at a higher rate than early childhood educators, who have a six-month Certificate III in Early Childhood, or a 24-month Diploma of Early Childhood and Care ([Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\], 2025a](#)). Thus, the learning environment for children under three years of age is usually created and implemented by educators who have a certificate or a diploma, not a qualified ECT with a university degree. This is a dilemma as the least qualified staff are employed to work with the youngest of children in the ECEC setting. This paper takes the position that all children should be taught by the highest qualified educators there are—that is, the ECT. However, in Australia, this is not a mandatory requirement for children under three years. In Australia, qualified academics teach early childhood students appropriate knowledge and skills to work with children under 3 years. Given that this is a requirement within the early childhood teacher programs, this study was interested in the perspectives of academics who taught this content and how they implemented content for children under 3 into their early childhood teacher education programs.

3. Becoming an Early Childhood Teacher in Australia

Teachers intentionally make decisions to choose pedagogy that supports children's learning and development. To be an ECT in Australia, an accredited early childhood teacher education program must be studied. The [Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\] \(2024\)](#) accredits ECT programs run by higher education

institutions—usually universities. Teaching pedagogies is one of six key areas included in an early childhood teacher education program for children aged from six weeks to six years and is assessed by the [Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\] \(2024\)](#). The six key areas include child development and care; teaching pedagogies; education and curriculum studies; family and community contexts; history and philosophy of early childhood; and early childhood practice. The teaching pedagogies area requires the program to include alternative pedagogies and curriculum approaches, play-based pedagogies, guiding behaviour and engaging young learners, including children with diverse needs and backgrounds, and who speak languages other than and in addition to English within contemporary society ([Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\], 2024](#), p. 3).

Completing an ECT program qualifies graduates to teach children aged from six weeks to six years. The Australian Early Years Learning Framework Version 2.0 (EYLFV2.0) ([Australian Government Department of Education \[AGDE\], 2022](#)) provides guidance for educators on the principles and practices for working with children. Yet there is little written guidance on choosing teaching pedagogies when working with children under three years. Students are required to study children’s learning and development for children under three years, with at least 15 days of professional experience with children under three years, while 30 days are required in the ECT program with children aged over 3 years ([Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\], 2025a](#)). When studying to be an ECT, the students are taught the units within each course of study by academics, who may or may not have qualifications and/or experience working in early childhood education (ECE)—there is no legislative requirement to have qualifications and/or experience in ECE—it is up to the recruitment of the higher education institution. The academics’ knowledge of the early childhood discipline content, their experience as academics, and their experience as early childhood teachers in the field are key to being able to engage the early childhood teacher students ([Perry & Smart, 2007](#)).

Prior research has shown that pedagogies for younger children are highly specialised. Nearly 20 years ago, [Manning-Morten \(2006\)](#) argued that the skills and knowledge for infant and toddler educators were highly specific and should include a “broad theoretical knowledge, a deep understanding of individual children and a high level of self-awareness” (p. 45). [Manning-Morten \(2006\)](#) called for teacher preparation with infants and toddlers to be “adequately addressed through standard, content-focused training” (p. 46). In a review of Australian ECT education in 2013, [Garvis et al. \(2013\)](#) found that ECT programs of study had a limited focus on infants and toddlers. What this means is that greater consideration is needed on how skills and knowledge for infants and toddlers can be included in the ECT degree. Over the past ten years, there has been a focus on pedagogical practices when working with children under three years and specifically on the importance of the care routine to support children’s learning and development ([Hydon, 2021](#)). In addition to this focus, there has been a call for early childhood educators who work with young children to slow down the routine to ensure that children receive responsive education and care ([Quinones, 2025](#)). As such, it is recognised that the teaching pedagogies for children under three years are complex ([Degotardi, 2021](#)) and different to working with children aged three to five years. To develop an understanding of how early childhood students are taught about working with children under three years, this study explored academics’ perspectives of their approach to teaching pedagogies for children under three years to early childhood students.

4. Theoretical Background

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory was used to frame this study. Of particular significance to this study is that ECTs are viewed as influencing children's learning and development (Manning et al., 2019). The academics' approaches to pedagogy (Perry & Smart, 2007) influence the students' learning during their study to become an ECT. The study frames the students' learning as influenced by their own attributes and disposition to learning. The student is at the centre of the ecological system: the microsystem. The reciprocal two-way interaction between the student and the academics influences the student's learning—that is, the mesosystem. The exosystem includes the academics—what they bring to their teaching of the students. The macrosystem includes the children's services regulations and society's values and customs regarding children's learning. The chronosystem highlights that the system is ever-changing. Of key importance in this ecological system is the perspective that what the academic does and says in engaging students influences the way that the student will be prepared when they become an early childhood teacher.

5. Methods: Data and Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive framework to address the aim of understanding how academics conceptualise their pedagogical approaches for children under three, and how they teach the students about this. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method because it allowed for the collection of rich, contextualised insights into academics' personal and professional meaning-making regarding pedagogical practice for children under three years.

Seven early childhood academics were recruited from universities across Australia who were all teaching early childhood students. A purposive sampling strategy was utilised to invite the academics who were known to the researchers and invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. The criteria for each academic were that they needed to be teaching in an early childhood teacher program about how to work with children under three years of age, and that they had taught children in an ECEC centre.

The interview included questions about the academics' perspectives on pedagogy for children aged six weeks to three years, and how they taught their students about pedagogical practices for children under three years of age. Each interview was approximately 45 min long and was conducted by the researchers. The interviews were conducted online and recorded with permission of the participant and then transcribed. Approval was provided by Southern Cross University's ethics committee Number #20203/179. To protect the participants' identity, they were allocated pseudonyms (see Table 1). Five of the seven participants had completed a PhD with research in ECE, and the two who had not. They also did not have experience working with children under three years of age yet were employed by their university to teach students in this area.

Table 1. Academics' qualifications and experience.

Pseudonym	Highest Qualification	Past Experience Prior to Entering Higher Education Institution
Annette	Masters	Kindergarten and lower primary
Kylie	Masters	Early childhood director *
Krystal	PhD	Early childhood director
Sarah	PhD	Early childhood director
Tina	PhD	Early childhood director
Vera	PhD	Kindergarten and lower primary
Wanda	PhD	Early childhood director

* In Australia, being a Director of an ECE centre means having oversight of all of the staff within the setting.

The interview questions were in two sections. The first section asked the academics about their perspectives on pedagogical practices of working with children under three years. The five questions about the academics' perspectives were:

1. Can you talk about your pedagogical approach that is important for children aged up to three years?
2. How do you think children of this age best learn? Why?
3. Can you talk about how your pedagogical approach aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework V2.0?
4. What role does the educator play in pedagogical activities?
5. What do you consider to be important when planning activities for children up to three years?

The second section asked the academics about their approach to teaching the students and their rationale for this teaching approach. The five questions in this section were:

1. When planning pedagogical activities, what approach do you teach the students to focus on, e.g., self-care, playing, transitions, rest time, dressing, nappy-change, outside time, music, arts?
2. Can you talk about teaching students to do planning and documenting of pedagogical activities? How do you support students in this area?
3. How do you teach students to work with families' expectations and their child's learning?
4. How do you support the students to prepare their pedagogical activities for children?
5. Are there particular strengths you have, and areas for improvement associated with pedagogical activities when teaching students?

The analysis followed the six stages of [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis. First, the transcription of the interview was read and re-read and then coded. This coding then merged into themes which were reviewed, defined and named, before being finalised into the final themes—see Table 2 ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)).

Table 2. Phases of Thematic Analysis.

Phase	Description of the Process
1.	Familiarisation with the data
2.	Generating initial codes
3.	Searching for themes
4.	Reviewing themes
5.	Defining and naming themes
6.	Reporting findings and producing the report

([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)).

6. Findings

The analysis generated six themes regarding academics' perspectives on pedagogical approaches for teaching children under three years and teaching the students about these pedagogies. The six themes included: unhurried environments as pedagogy; understanding how children learn; the power of observation; intentionality and the learning environment; family pedagogy with nonjudgemental, respectful relationships; and raising ECT students' awareness. Each of these themes regarding pedagogical approaches are presented and discussed below. These themes largely focused on the interactions between teacher and young child within the ecological system but also acknowledged the importance of working with families.

6.1. Theme 1: Unhurried Environments as Pedagogy

Each of the seven academics stressed the importance of teaching pedagogies that highlighted having very calm, unhurried environments with children under three years. Kylie explained in response to being asked about their pedagogical approach to working with children under three years:

It's really about utilising those normal moments, that are really big moments in a child's world and affording opportunities to just slow down. . .to really engage with the children in their own time, in their own way, and to really embrace that concept of that slow pedagogy because through those meaningful moments that is where the best opportunities (are) for relationship building . . .a caring and nurturing environment will be created.

Unhurried time as a pedagogical approach included routines that were consistent, where children understood what was expected of them, were able to predict what would happen next, and the environment was set up in the same way each day. As Tina said about a centre that was very calm for the children:

. . .the pedagogical approach of having the beds in the same space every day and having the same seating at the lunch table and how adults were with the children who could serve their own lunch. What I saw was a calm, unhurried routine.

Vera identified that routines and associated caregiving were really strong pedagogical approaches when working with children under three years—as she said:

So much happens between zero to three—babies are very different creatures to toddlers, obviously, with very different needs and developmental stages. But I think that the key always is being time centred. It's the routines that are also really, really important, particularly with the very little babies, because it's almost like without wanting to diminish our work as educators I feel like when they're really little, our main role is primary caregiving. You know, it's literally being responsive to all their basic needs, it's more, you know, focused on responsiveness and caring.

This theme highlights the importance of responsiveness to infants and toddlers and the importance of having time to respond in suitable relational ways. In particular, the comments highlight the importance of relationship building, helping to support strong attachments between the educator and the child. The theme also shows the importance of the ecological systems approach, where the educator and child engage in continual interactions within the early childhood service.

6.2. Theme 2: Implementing Pedagogy: Understanding How Children Learn

Each of the academics explained that their pedagogical approach was influenced by their understanding about how children learn, and specifically the impact of neuroscience, and included sensorial learning from Piaget, as Tina stated:

This pivotal time is where so much learning is taking place in the first three years of life has been acknowledged in neuroscience. We understand so much more about those neural pathways between the brain and body. Piaget is very much with me when I'm thinking about the pedagogical approach for sensory learning and that aligns with neuroscience. But I also have developed more. of an approach of post developmental learning where developmental learning that was ingrained in me has now been something that I question but not left behind. I learned from them and with them, rather than imposing ideas of what they already are. And I think that's part of that post developmental approach.

The focus was on the rapid learning that children of this age undertake, which challenges the educators' approaches. As Krystal explained,

They're really amazing and when you work with two year olds, your whole day is completely different (to working with older children) because you are viewing the world through the lens of someone who is discovering so many things for the first time, and it's so joyful and their questions really make you think.

Wanda had a view that children learned based on enabling them to focus on their interests within a safe environment:

...ensuring that the environment is safe for functional play, with opportunities for repetition, and a large focus on sensory and physical development.

The comments identify that the academics recognised the importance of understanding how infants and toddlers learn and develop, especially through the environment. It was important that students understood and recognised the importance of sensory practices to support young children and also how to engage in questioning and talking with young children.

6.3. Theme 3: Implementing Pedagogy: The Power of Observation

The academics highlighted how important the art of observation and reflection is when working with young children (interactions within the microsystem). They talked about 'deep noticing', and 'meaningfulness'. Kylie explained how carefully observing children results in deeply understanding each child, which in turn informs the educator's sense of the children's learning through the cyclical approach of the planning cycle. As Kylie explained:

And the example I use is, you know a child for the first time. You know, finding their bag, identifying where their bag is. Or it's the simple things that are sometimes the most meaningful, and so it's really about that cyclical, careful observation that then leads into that planning cycle of asking what does this mean?

Tina too identified the importance of careful observation; however, she recognised that sometimes educators do not have the time- or make the time- to do this. In response to the question about the role of the educator, Tina stated:

It's having time to do it. But I think what sometimes gets missed is that need for deep noticing, make reflections and even research, you know some of those higher-level skills that can sometimes get missed from the planning. It isn't just a matter of observing children, jotting all that down, taking lots of lovely pictures, and planning a curriculum. It really does need you to step outside of that with that kind of deep understanding of what is going on. Stepping back, talking to others, talking to families. I think sometimes that can get a bit missed.

Krystal too highlighted that the educator needed to be present, sharing the world with the child so that secure attachments are formed to engage children's learning, as Krystal stated:

... it's being really present and sharing that wonder and joy... making sure that you're really aware of the joint attention, particularly in someone who is pre verbal, and making sure that we're looking at the same thing. Thinking about how what we know about the conversations that go backwards and forwards that are really focusing on those serve and return—which highlights the need for secure attachments.

The planning cycle for young children became evident in this theme. A key focus was not only collecting data by deeply observing each child but also how to critically reflect

on the data in relation to building secure relationships and the importance of high-quality interactions through approaches such as ‘serve and return’.

6.4. Theme 4: Intentionality and the Environment

The perspectives of the academics highlighted that educators need to be very intentional in their pedagogy with young children. They recognised the importance of intentionally using routines as a pedagogy that engages children’s learning and development, as Krystal stated:

It’s very much in those taking those routine times as spontaneous, intentional moments for learning. There is intentionality in everything that we do in every little moment that we have, knowing that for babies and toddlers, a lot of their time may be spent in sleep routines or bottle routines or nappy changing routines.

Wanda explained in her work with young children that it is important to be intentional and to take a holistic approach and really use things like transitions and caregiving routines as teaching moments, as well as relationship building.

Vera talked about how being intentional with routines helped to build relationships with the child and their family, as she said:

Routines like nappy changing or eating or nap time, then you are actually trying to integrate their learning rather than making this a separate experience. And then it is really important to build trusting, respectful relationships and looking at what families want from us and how can we support them to create that really smooth transition between home and the centre.

Kylie identified that

Transitions and routines may matter more than what they’re doing. Toddlers even more than infants struggle with transitions and need them explained. They need planned transitions and routines.

The theme of intentionality within the environment came through when Tina talked about using routines intentionally as a pedagogical approach:

We are creatures of routine and habit and understanding that helps to create an unhurried space. We started to do when children served their own lunch. It was beautiful. It was a really, really lovely routine. Further toddlers developing self-help skills gives them a great sense of achievement and agency—which is a great example of a pedagogical approach.

Intentionality and the importance of intentionality for learning were evident. This suggests that the academics understood the importance of the daily activities, such as routines and transitions, that could also be considered learning experiences and could be approached with intentionality to nurture children’s learning and development. This aligns with the importance of the role of teachers and children within the microsystem of the ecological systems model.

6.5. Theme 5: Family Pedagogy: Non-Judgemental and Respectful Relationships

The academics all referred to the significance of ensuring that working closely with families was essential in ECEC, but even more so with children under three years. But being responsive and respectful to families presented challenges for the academics (again showing the microsystem working within the ecological systems model). Annette summed up challenges working with families with the statement:

This is sometimes tricky—having robust conversations... for example I was in a service with a lovely natural environment and a family had decided they

did not want their children playing in the shrubs and the bushes in case they got scratched. I retell this experience to students, and I talk about the family, how we had conversations about the philosophy of the service, and the value of children engaging in risky play even if you know dangerous elements especially in a big garden. The family came around to understanding the philosophy and understood that for the children it was a big part of their social development.

Vera talked about how she maintained her partnerships with families even though she was challenged at times by the family's decisions. Vera reflected upon her past practice and explained that when she was teaching students, she shared her background and how she reflected upon being (non-) judgemental with families and children. This led Vera to address her inclusive teaching practices with the pre-service teachers as she stated:

I am a migrant myself, but I found that sometimes I became frustrated with parents that I thought: why aren't you trying harder to learn the language right? And then I thought, you're being judgmental. You don't know why they're not trying harder, you know? I grew up in a family, which was very classical mom and dad. And I never, ever thought I would be a single parent living in a foreign country. So here I was in, sort of encapsulating, a lot of the biases that society holds against migrant single moms. So that was more of a moment where it was making me conscious of how people might see me perhaps and judge me and then that made me reflect about how could I be more inclusive, you know?

In these situations, the academic was demonstrating reflective practices where they were questioning their own thinking and making a concerted effort to understand how parents were behaving and to demonstrate tolerance of their behaviour.

6.6. Theme 6: Raising ECT Students' Awareness

While the academics remarked on how students often were anxious about working with children under three years, they were ready to teach the students about the significance of their role as educators implementing pedagogy. As Kylie stated:

I always tell my students you are everything when you're in early childhood you are a cuddler a carer, a nurse, a psychologist—You know a food maker, nurturer, facilitator, scaffolder, role model.

Vera always told her students how to ensure that children flourished with them: to be safe, loving—more than anything. If the children feel safe and valued and loved, then all the learning can happen.

Annette talked about planning the curriculum for these children:

So I think they (students) need a lot of experience of understanding, obviously planning curriculum in the daily curriculum routines and transitions matter. They're part of the curriculum and they often get overlooked.

Tina highlighted that being aware of moments were important for children's learning:

Very much about meaningful observation of the little moments and the big moments and having a toolkit of observation styles. I really encourage our students to do when they develop their teaching portfolio is to explore different observation styles knowing that they can capture different aspects of a child's learning and development through different observation styles.

The final theme highlights the importance of relationships with families and others to support infants and toddlers within early years settings. Taking on various roles throughout the day also creates a fluid understanding of pedagogy. Families are an important part of the

ecological systems model, and their influence on children's learning must be acknowledged. Overall, these six themes highlight the complexity perceived by the academics of working with children under three years.

7. Discussion

The findings from the data show initial categories of pedagogical practices with infants and toddlers from early childhood academics. This study explored academics' perspectives on specific pedagogical practices for children under three years taught and implemented to students. Graduate early childhood teachers need to have the skills and knowledge to support the learning and development of infants and toddlers, even though they may not work with this age group. The ECT graduate would have a strong understanding of relationships, intentionality, and secure attachments as identified by [Boyd et al. \(2020\)](#); however, they may not actually engage with very young children. Taking a responsive and unhurried approach to working with young children was highlighted by the academics. This approach was termed 'slow pedagogy' by some of the academics, which aligns with [Clark \(2023\)](#)'s and [Quinones's \(2025\)](#) work, and encourages educators to flow with the child's rhythm throughout the day and not be governed by the clock ([Quinones, 2025](#)). As children's routines are important for children's security, it was identified that the ECT students were aware of this understanding to support children's learning and development ([Hydon, 2021](#)).

Intentionality emerged as a key focus within and across themes and a cornerstone to high-quality early childhood education, aligning with the EYLFV2.0 ([Australian Government Department of Education \[AGDE\], 2022](#)). Research has shown that intentionality supports secure attachments and fosters cognitive, social, and emotional development in young children ([Rutter, 2006](#); [Solang et al., 2024](#)). Intentionality involves creating predictable and calm learning environments to support young children's confidence, which links to the caring routine approaches. By embedding intentionality into everyday routines, early childhood teachers can ensure that all children have access to learning experiences ([Australian Government Department of Education \[AGDE\], 2022](#)). This study has confirmed that the early childhood academics understood the importance of intentionality for all children in early childhood education and shared this importance with their students.

From this small sample, further development of specific pedagogies for infants and toddlers is needed within early childhood teacher education programs. Many of the themes were general pedagogical practices that could be applied to all young children in early childhood settings. There was no mention by academics teaching pedagogies regarding supporting children's language development ([Degotardi, 2021](#)) or supporting peer-to-peer relationships through strategies as identified by [Nolan and Moore \(2025\)](#). These pedagogies are essential, and as such, given previous research such as that of [Manning-Morten \(2006\)](#), who called for a higher standard of teacher preparation, it is important that pedagogical practices for infants and toddlers are taught specifically, with elaboration and guidance, beyond generalist ideas of quality interactions, intentionality, and relationship building with very young children.

One way forward could be a greater focus on child development and learning trajectories with the youngest of learners within early childhood teacher education programs, where a stronger focus on the pedagogical approaches that optimally support young children. From the ecological system perspective, having students understand how to provide an unhurried curriculum and to intentionally provide learning environments that scaffold child development will support infants' learning, for example, with games such as peek-a-boo. Further research is needed on specific, effective, and evidence-based pedagogical

practices with the youngest of learners in early childhood settings, especially looking at how these can be supported within an ecological approach.

This paper has presented the perspectives of academics and how they teach pre-service ECE teachers to work with children under three years. The academics' perspectives highlight the approaches they take to teaching pre-service teachers about quality pedagogical practice for children under three years. They were found to teach students about pedagogical practices that support the first three years of life, which include implementing unhurried environments as pedagogy; understanding how children learn; using observation of children to make decisions; teaching with intentionality; and working with families nonjudgmentally and respectfully. What was not evident in the findings was how the academics taught students about supporting language development and peer-to-peer relationships. With these pedagogical approaches enacted, it is time to think otherwise and to mandate that ECTs work with the youngest of children. This may have the impact of raising the quality of the ECEC centre.

8. Conclusions and Limitations

The study is limited in that only a small number of early childhood academics were interviewed. Data was acquired through semi-structured interviews, meaning that it was unclear if shared perspectives were implemented in actions. Nevertheless, the study is important in helping build a foundation of understanding about specific pedagogies for infants and toddlers in early childhood settings. It also shows a need for further development of specific pedagogies that move beyond general pedagogical practices within early childhood that are specific to the learning and development needs of infants and toddlers. Future studies would benefit from a larger sample of early childhood teacher academics, while also collecting examples of effective pedagogical practices from the field. Different perspectives from across the ecological systems approach would also support an ecological understanding of how systems can work together to support infant and toddler learning with appropriate pedagogical practices.

This paper has provided a snapshot of perspectives of early childhood academics on pedagogical practices with infants and toddlers. Further research is needed on specific pedagogical practices with infants and toddlers, beyond generalist pedagogical practices for all young children in early childhood settings. This includes greater recognition of the developmental needs and learning trajectories of the youngest of learners. Mismatches occur between training at the university to be an ECT and not being required in under-threes rooms. This is governed by processes and training requirements administered by government organisations ([Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority \[ACECQA\], 2025a](#)). Further research is needed not only on the pedagogical practices for the youngest of children in early childhood settings, but also on what the youngest of learners are currently experiencing with less qualified staff in their daily interactions with educators. We hope that this paper promotes conversations on how to best support infants and toddlers in Australian ECEC settings.

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