

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

THE HON JULIA GILLARD AC, Commissioner

THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

**FRIDAY, 27 JANUARY 2023
AFTERNOON SESSION**

This transcript is intended as a guide only and as an aide memoire with respect to the audio-visual record, which constitutes the official record of the hearing on 25 January 2023

SARAH ATTAR, Counsel Assisting

< HEARINGS RESUMED AT 1.30PM

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Commissioner this afternoon, we have another panel this time with two people. Uh, I call Professor Sandie Wong and Dr. Whittington is returning to join us.

<PROFESSOR SANDIE WONG AFFIRMED

<DR VICTORIA WHITINGTON AFFIRMED

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Dr. Whittington, on Wednesday, you joined us with your Child Development Council hat on. Today, you've joined us in a different capacity as an adjunct associate Professor at the University of South Australia. And in particular, are you doing some work there involving the history of ECEC in South Australia?

DR WHITINGTON

Yeah, that is correct.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And as part of that work, have you been involved in contributing to the creation of something of an online timeline of the history of education and care in South Australia?

DR WHITINGTON

Yeah. So history

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And Professor Wong, are you currently a Professor in Early Childhood at the Macquarie School of Education at the Macquarie University?

PROFESSOR WONG

That's correct.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I understand you also hold a research fellowship with GoodStart Early Learning?

PROFESSOR WONG

I do.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Your career and qualifications are, are varied, but do you have an extensive background in the early childhood education sector?

PROFESSOR WONG

I do, as an academic teacher, researcher, evaluator, consultant.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We've asked today during the panel to have something of a retrospective to look backwards, with a dual focus to explore how nationally we have arrived at the service provision model that we have now, which is characterised by State and Commonwealth funding, and also a mixture of public and private providers. We'd like you Professor Wong to speak first to give us some contextual understanding as to how different values and philosophies and thinking over time have shaped first of all, our, our attitudes to early childhood education and care and how, how those thinkings and philosophies have to that model of service provision that we find today.

PROFESSOR WONG

I think it's really important to understand that there are many different purposes for early childhood education and that's been since its inception, which was back in the 1890s.

So we had the idea that early childhood education is for children's benefit for their learning development, but also to ameliorate disadvantage to improve the life chances of young children. But it was also constructed within a discourse of feminism. So work done for women work done by women. It was always done within economic discourse. So it's, it's early childhood education is around not just improving the life chances of children, but supporting society to have better outcomes, and of course, more recently that's moved into neoliberal discourse around the provision of early childhood as a business that wasn't there in the past is tied up with nationalistic ideas of, you know, improving the nation. And it's always been very tied to scientific understandings around how children grow, learn, and develop.

So all of those kind of ideas have led to where we are today in, in how early childhood education was set up and how we have it today. Interestingly, in the very beginning in our school system, very young children attended early learning. When you look at the numbers in New South Wales, for example, children of six months old, two years old were attending public schools, and largely that was to so that the older children could go to school and as, so that the parents could work, but they were there. And it was only when there was an economic depression then and the expansion of schools became expensive when there was a separation. So children younger than six were no longer allowed into the school system.

So there is a precedent there that we could have public schooling for very, very young children there that was there in the beginning, and it could be in the past, but it led to this separation. It would be true to say that that separation then led to sort of very distinct early childhood

curriculum for Froebelian ideas influenced early childhood in the beginning, then Montessori's ideas around play based relationship based early childhood education and reinforce that separation.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Did Froebel give us the name kindergarten?

PROFESSOR WONG

He did. Yeah. So kindergarten is German for kindergarten children's garden. Um, and that's how we ended up with, with that term. And of course, a problem we have in Australia is that we have a diverse nomenclature. So kindergarten in New South Wales actually means the first year of school. Whereas in other states it means the primary, the, the preschool setting. So that's a problem that we have as well. The history also led to this separation between what states were responsible for, what they considered themselves responsible for in terms of education, and later in the 1970s. So that continued really up until the 1950s.

And it was in, was further entrenched in the 1950s when State governments became more involved in providing funding for preschool. Um, and later in the 1970s, the federal government became more involved with the provision of long day care centres as part of workforce participation. So there was that separation and we are living with those separations today.

That's kind of where we got to and how, how the complexity of the, well, I wouldn't even call it a system, what we have today. Um, and the, the changes in the, in the 2010s when we were moving towards national partnership agreement was trying to address some of those entrenched separations that had existed by that stage over a hundred years.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

If we perhaps unpack at some of that history, if we go back to our colonial history, was the primary responsibility for education often the church and, and private enterprises?

PROFESSOR WONG

Yes. So prior to public schooling, the early all schooling was really part of the church system and in some cases, philanthropic. Early childhood has always had that philanthropic history. So when kindergartens were set up in New South Wales, which then spread to the other states, including South Australia it, it was a philanthropic endeavour.

So it's always been seen as separate from that from then from public provision and largely provided by philanthropic organisations charities.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Did that philanthropic attitude bring with it a concept that perhaps it was care or education aimed at a particular part of society. And is that considered problematic now? And if it is, why?

PROFESSOR WONG

So largely in the beginning when philanthropic organisations set up kindergartens, they were what we would call preschools now that they were for children primarily for three to five year olds, primarily for children from who were experiencing disadvantage, you came from poor areas of the city. Um, that kind of changed in the 1950s when kind of middle class families really wanted the same experience, the same opportunities for their children, and then preschools expanded in the 1950s.

Long day care, which kind of started in 1920s was always really focused on problem families, disadvantaged families largely for women who had to had to work because they didn't have a husband to support them in those days. Um, and so was seeing there was even within the profession, there was a big separation between those who provided preschool and those who provided long day care and quite a lot of tension between those two kind of settings with one being seen as primarily education and the other being seen as primarily work related childcare.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Is that a dichotomy that you see continuing today?

PROFESSOR WONG

Sadly, yes. Yes.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And in your view, is it a helpful one or a difficult one and are we as a society or a nation doing anything to try and address it? And does the NQS play role in that?

PROFESSOR WONG

It's a, it's a terribly difficult situation. As I said, it comes through our history, but there is no real need for that dichotomy. It should, what we should be looking at is what is the best interest of children, whether that be in a short hours, early learning space or long hours learning space, shouldn't really matter. It's just the history that we've had. That's caused this operation. There's no, there's not a lot of evidence around, which is, you know, which, which how many hours children should be in these different kinds of settings. Um, it's just a product of our history and it's led to lots of problems. So because preschools were seen as education, they were funded by State governments who had their own funding stream, but didn't fund long day care. And that continues to, to today.

So we have State governments who are continuing only to fund early learning for children when they attend to preschool. Whereas in other states children who attend preschool are now

getting access to the funding for preschool into a long day care setting. Cause it shouldn't really matter where the children are as long as it's high quality, as long as there are teachers that provide them high quality, early learning the physical space and the hours that they're attending. Shouldn't really matter if we take a child's perspective and think about what's best for the children. I think we have a different funding arrangement.

COMMISSIONER

Can I follow up. That's fascinating history and looking across that sweep of history, could you make some comments about how the science has intersected? You said there was always some science, but obviously the dimensions of the science that we have now is far different. So if you could talk us through that.

PROFESSOR WONG

Thank you. It's very interesting to see when more public interest comes into early, more government interest comes into early childhood. It's always when the science comes in. So at the beginning it was the child development movement that kind of laid the ground that enabled us to, to think that the earlier years were important. The next major development around integrated service delivery, the later Gowrie centres was when the National Health and Medical Council got involved and said, we really need to invest in early years.

The next kind of major development was when we had neurological neuroscience that has said, you know, we now have evidence about the importance of the brain development in the early years. So it's when science gets involved, that there becomes a, again, a greater emphasis on the need to invest in early years.

COMMISSIONER

Again. I also wanted to tease out the question of women's roles in this. We took some evidence on Wednesday that surveying, now – this was evidence about barriers to access - and surveying now shows that there's a cohort of people who think, you know, I don't want my child, or I don't think children generally should be going to preschool because they're better off or go to any form of early learning because they're better off in the care of a parent, most notably a mother at home.

How much of that has been throughout this development? I took what you said about the 1950s that this provision of long day care was correlated with women who had to work. So the assumption being that it was actually better if you had the option for a woman to be at home, can you just talk us through that changing perspective?

PROFESSOR WONG

Again, early childhood education has always been constructed within discourse, feminist discourse or women's discourse, and what, what we see as the role of mother and early childhood educators have always had to kind of push, push against this. So the construction of women as being the primary caregivers of children has worked in our favour, but also against us. So it's worked in our favour in terms of if this is important, women's work, then that's why

we have such a, a high number of high percentage, like 94%, I think now of early childhood educators are female. So we have a highly feminised workforce because of these motherhood statements. So that's, it's kind of worked in our favour in opening up opportunities for women's work.

But it's also worked against us because we're constantly having to push back against 'children will be better with their mother'. Yeah. And you, it's a, it's a deficit that, you know, if you, if your child's six months old and you've put them in children's services, that's problematic, you lacked your role as a mother. Um, so we've had to negotiate those discourses all the way through. And it during, in the 1970s that really came to play during second wave feminism when feminists were arguing for more and more spaces and to enable workforce participation that happened female workforce participation.

And at the same time female providers of preschool were pushing back against that because they were really more concerned with the children's access to high quality early learning, which they didn't see happening in long day care centres. So that was kind of the war of early childhood. And it was, it was a pretty difficult time. And that was when the Fry Report was developed at that time. And those kind of childcare wars were really problematic across the country.

COMMISSIONER

And can you just tell us a little bit about that report?

PROFESSOR WONG

Um, so the Fry Report I think it was Kim Beasley who was working with the Commission and, and it was to put some ideas around how we can, how the, the Commonwealth government could support early learning. Um, and there are lots of things in the Fry report that if we looked at them today would be really useful for us in thinking about how we could improve early, early learning. I can't go into the details of the Fry Report, but that it wasn't, it's got some fabulous things that we, many of us in early learning would agree with today, but it wasn't particularly well received at the time because of this war that was going on between advocates, for increasing spaces and advocates for preschool based because of the quality issue. And of course, quality has always been another challenging issue in early childhood.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. And there's big differences. I mean, much of what you've painted is could be painted as a sort of national history. And yet we know there's very big differences State by State jurisdiction, by jurisdiction on provision patterns. Have you got a, particularly the, the difference between how much is done by government and how much is done by the private, or if not for profit, the community sector, non-government sector, can you give us any insight into why it's developed in different ways in different states?

PROFESSOR WONG

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So some states have incorporated early learning into State based education. So today we have states like the Northern Territory and WA and Tasmania where preschool is delivered in school systems within the, within the school system. It's not compulsory, but it's delivered through those systems. And in other states a way of kind of providing preschool was much more mixed.

So in New South Wales, the State where I come from, for example, that I think there are a hundred preschools that are connected to school, the schools based like actually on schools, but it was largely left to community based organisations to provide preschool within. So they could have been connected to churches or to philanthropic organisations. A lot of them were community based as in parent, parent committees that set them up. Um, so as to why that happened I'm, I, I couldn't answer, but it's, it's definitely led to quite different arrangements. We're starting to see a shift in that now.

So New South Wales, Victoria are there, there were some restrictions on when the National Partnership Agreement came in. There were some restrictions on State governments being able to provide top up for children who attended their early learning in a long day care centre. So there was this very, this weird anomaly where children who were attending a long day care centre and had a teacher, so they were accessing early childhood education, weren't entitled to State based funding because they weren't allowed to, because of the rules weren't allowed to do that.

Those rules have been lifted as far as my understanding is those rules have been lifted now and states like New South Wales have moved to provide funding for children, regardless of whether they're in preschools or long day care centres. So there's a shift even 10 years ago in New South Wales, the government really saw their focus was on education and long day care was nothing to do with them. Um, and I think that has, that has significantly shifted in the last few years.

COMMISSIONER

And with your, with your GoodStart hat on, on the advisory council, is there evidence about the quality of the outcomes for children whose early education is accessed in long day care vs. children who access it through a more standalone model?

PROFESSOR WONG

It's very difficult to answer that question because there are so many ifs, buts, and, and other considerations. So any studies that have looked that look at the provision of early learning that try to measure quality to say whether or not this service is better than that service there, there are real problems in the way quality is measured. Sometimes it's, proxies are used, like there's a teacher in the room, or the, a rating is used. Um, so it's not a simple question and I can't really answer it because those reasons what, what I can say with absolute certainty is that early learning has the most beneficial outcomes for children from the most marginalised, vulnerable experiencing marginalisation, vulnerability, and disadvantage.

They are the children who derive the most benefit, regardless of as long as there's quality. Now, whether that quality be in a preschool or a long day care shouldn't really matter, but we don't have evidence around that. And we don't have evidence of that dosage effect either. So we don't know whether it should be 15 hours, which is considered the standard, but there's very little evidence around that, or whether it should be, you know, five half days, or it should be two full days. We just don't have the evidence for that.

COMMISSIONER

And if I can ask you to sort of speculate forward, you've talked about the interaction between the, the science and the policy, and that goes on. I mean, clearly the science is going to keep shifting. You may well be aware of things that are already in the research works that might then feed into practice. You know, if you were speculating forward about how we think about quality, early learning, best provision, any things that you'd like to share there.

PROFESSOR WONG

I think we need to get much better at measuring articulating what we mean by quality. And one of the challenges with quality is because of the diversity of the purpose. Um, it means different things to different people. So we actually really need to be consistent around what we mean by quality and not use proxies like our teachers there, because that's not enough.

I've forgotten where I was going with that. Now. Uh, we also need to think about dosage. We need to think about we, we need better understanding of the, how many days children should be attending, and we need a better understanding of how we can attract not just, not just enrolled children in particularly children from vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged background, but how we can keep those children within early learning so that they're attending, not just enrolled, but actually attending.

Um, and we need better understanding around what the qualities of teachers are because a teacher is not a teacher is not a teacher. And again, we don't have a lot of evidence. There is evidence, but not a lot of evidence about the difference a teacher makes. Um, and we need to, I, in my view, in my personal view, I think that's because we've not been very good at differentiating between teachers. When we used to look at the evidence around does early child is early childhood education, good or bad back in the sort of nineties when that, that a lot of that work was going on, there was a recognition that we had to, we need to think about quality here. It's not every child, every early childhood centre is not the same. They're not experiencing the same. And I think now we've come to the point where we also need to think about the quality of the teachers as well. So there would be the things that I, that I know are in the pipelines and really need to be supported in terms of the research.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Thank you. Thank you.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

We had some mention in the earlier session about the Australian kindergarten movement, I wonder if you might just give us some context around that and how it fits into the history that we started outlining a moment ago.

PROFESSOR WONG

Uh so the early childhood education in Australia commenced sort of around the 1890s and it began with the kindergarten union movement. Is that what you are referring to?

COMMISSIONER

Yes.

PROFESSOR WONG

So it began with the free kindergarten association in New South Wales and people that were involved in that then they, they got their ideas about Froebelian kindergarten from the US actually. And then they came to Australia. They, they then went to a realised that what they actually wanted to do was improve education within school systems. Because at that time there was the monitorial system and children learnt by rote, and there was a recognition through Froebelian kindergarten, which wasn't just focused on early years.

It was actually a different philosophy of, of thinking about early about pedagogy. And what they really wanted to do was influence the schools and change the schools, but because they were mostly women because they weren't particularly influential at that time. Um, and because of the separation between younger children, they, it was, they were able to show and practice kindergarten methods with younger children. And that's why we, that's why kindergarten methods from, Froebelian ideas are really focused on that, that birth to five period.

And then many of those people travelled across the country and Lilian Delissa was one who came here to South Australia. And those two organisations that set so free, it was free kindergarten association set up preschools. Some of those women that set up free kindergarten then kind of broke off again, because of the tension, the women recognised that there were many children who were missing out and so they set up day nurseries. And those free kindergartens kind of set up across the country in different, in all the capital cities and some in some capital, some places long day cares were, were established as well or nurseries or creches they were sometimes called as well. And those organisations, the Free Kindergarten Union, which is now Kindergarten Union and Sydney Day Nursery, which is now SDN children's services still exist in New South Wales. And the forerunners also exist in many of the other states as well.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You mentioned Lillian Delissa did she have some involvement in the initiatives that led to the first Kindergarten Training College in South Australia?

PROFESSOR WONG

I don't have a great deal of knowledge about the South Australian context, but that's my understanding that Lillian Delissa moved from New South Wales to South Australia and set up Free Kindergarten Union here with others. And then that led to the development of teacher's training. And which I should say was always like, even in New South Wales, as well as in South Australia and other states when these kindergartens were set up, they also established teacher training right from the very beginning.

So I think the, in the first kindergarten training college was established in 1896 in New South Wales. And it was always a feature of these free kindergartens that they would have qualified teachers. There was a recognition about the importance. And again, that comes from Froebel was very strong about having qualified teachers to provide early childhood education.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Dr. Whittington, are there aspects of South Australia's particular history and early childhood education and care and teaching qualifications that are somewhat unique nationally?

DR WHITINGTON

Yes. In many ways I think building on what Professor Wong was saying, there was a big interest in having a teacher. It was, I think it was called the Kindergarten Training College, KTC. Um, I think in South Australia had a slightly different feel to it because South Australia was built on a different foundation regarding what society was trying to set up here was more like setting up a new society and based on democratic values and ideas of equity and people like Catherine Helen Spence and others like that, it was a lot of discourse around about what we are trying to do here.

And so I think democracy and equity were really at the forefront. It was charitable in one sense philanthropic, but in another, it was not about nice ladies doing helpful things to poor kids. It was more around what are we trying to create here in our State, in our city. And of course, you know, through Federation as well at the same time creating a society together. So I think that was a, a unique, um aspect, I suppose.

More recent history I think is around seeing children as competent citizens from birth, which came with Carla Rinaldi's work here in South Australia as a Thinker in Residence, her idea you know, which really fitted in quite well with the SACSA. So this is our South Australian curriculum that was developed. And this is I suppose, a counter influence to the idea that we've got a separation between the early years and the schooling years in that in the early 1990s, we had a curriculum in South Australia that went from birth right through to the end of secondary school, SACSA it was called,. So that was an acknowledgement that learning happens and occurs all the way through.

But as Sandie was saying, we've been lumbered by a system that's built like topsy in a range of ways for different needs. But I have to say, if you decided to design it from the beginning, you wouldn't do it like the way, the way we've done it. Absolutely not. I think there's been a big push in South Australia regarding being curriculum leader. So going back to that idea of, um that this is a learning environment and we need to develop curricula and SACSA was a very good example of that, but there were other examples earlier of curriculum for these early years and curriculum implies that we are not just doing minding, we've actually got learning going on here, and that we've got to have a curriculum for children that are in those very early years rather than just saying we are having play here and isn't it fun.

And of course focusing on learning through play is very important and I think the work of Froebel and then of course translated through Delissa and others has kept that at the fore. I think that's really quite strong, but I think we are always in that kind of battle with a push down from the schooling system, which other people have said earlier in these hearings because people want children to have certain facts in their heads, not really understanding that learning happens in different ways.

So we go back to the French and the Mandarin thing which is about, there's a confusion about how learning occurs when you are under five, really. And I think, you know, we've held on very strongly, in South Australia, for example, birth to eight for our early childhood education, because we decided distinctively in South Australia that that was the early years. And that's how we were going to define it. Now, if you do a survey all over the place, you can get birth to five, you can get birth to six and this is internationally as well as nationally. Um, but I think it's, you know, if you start with a child, which is where I always return when I'm making my, you know, the decisions about things, and I think Sandie said the same thing that, um you know, that even into school, if you think about children as be able to sit in desks and learn from things that the teachers transmitting to them, it's not going to work. I mean, there's a lot of arguments about that further into the system.

And I know that I think another witness said that the early years can really inform the schooling system, that engagement. Um, so I think that's very important. I think we've been very, um interested in South Australia on how the community and families work in with early year learning centres and early, you know, whatever we are doing here, child parent centres were a very good idea about that. I think my main worry about it in some cases as we haven't done it as well as we could have. So we come in with an initiative and then we think, oh, well, we've done tick, move on.

And that's probably my biggest worry about what we're doing here right now is that whatever we do, I would plead that we do it as well as we can. And I'd rather it was small and invest and do it really well rather than get a big system and then get into all the scaling problems that we've been talking about. And then what happens is that you've got the tick by, yes, we did the initiative and that's our, you know, if you come from a, you know, government perspective, yeah, we did that, but hang, hang on. What's happening on the ground, you know, how deep it is. And universal access is an example of that re preschool. The one thing that's ...

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I might just interrupt you there, if I might. There was some definitely a theme from the session before lunch about the importance of quality teaching and quality training. Can I ask you, what can we take from South Australia's history when it comes to, has there always been a focus on teacher quality? If there has, what has that focus been and what insights might you have about how we continue to improve teacher quality as we move forwards to looking at universal three year old provision?

DR WHITINGTON

Yeah, look, I think this is a really important topic and Professor Wong talked about that too. I, I think that qualifications are very important. I think in South Australia we have perhaps differently from others emphasised qualifications. And I know that in my submission, I talked about how, if you came to be uh, the Kindergarten Training College, you had a three year award. Whereas if you went in for a teacher, you could, you know, in the primary and secondary could be a two year qualified, and this is back in the, you know, post-war sort of period of time. So there's always been a higher thing a higher requirement there.

And then at the University of South Australia there was definitely a requirement that was high, that moved from a three year award to working with children birth to five, and then it moved to an award for birth through to eight in 1995. And it was a four year degree again at a time where you could get a teaching degree for primary, particularly in, um to be qualified. And of course that was a with honours degree. So involved the research component. And of course now we've moved to four year degrees, but I think there has been that requirement. The other thing that I think is very important to this and something that I feel quite passionate about is the industrial issue related to this in South Australia for a long time, we've had, um teachers working in standalone preschools associated with the Education Department paid in the same way as teachers in primary and secondary schools. And that's been a major difference.

However when we started to bring in childcare and we had teachers in there, or we had teachers who weren't working in those standalone preschools, and I don't know the history of this, but we developed something called the modern award. Now, if you track that award, you'll find out that from the institution of the modern award that allowed employers to employ teachers with the same qualifications. So four year degree, early childhood focus allowed them to be employed at about, I think about 75% of a full teacher salary. And then it went down south from there. So if you tracked it over 10 years, it got to be more like 65%. Now this is the same work for a different pay scale. And I think this has resulted in the churn that we see regarding people with four year qualifications who would look at the two salaries and say, well, I'd like to work with children. I can't get that job in a government preschool standalone or what, whatever other service is offering it. So therefore I'm going to go and work in a primary school as a junior primary teacher or whatever. And you can't blame people for that, you know, and also of course the status issues as well.

But I think that whatever we do here, we've got to be sure that in order to get the quality that we are talking about, not only just in terms of getting the quality teaching force, but also

providing the stability that was named this morning, very clearly in our teaching workforce for children in this young age group is to make sure that they're properly remunerated for their work. And of course, alongside that goes a status. So if you, you know, hear that someone's getting a \$200,000 job salary for their job, you know, that they're in a high status position. If they're getting \$55,000, you know, something else, and that's kind of where we are coming from.

So we've got to be really careful about that. And that of course has had a wash on effect with people who wanted to not wanting to come into early childhood, because they know that the career opportunities, while they've got the choice of childcare preschool, or the lower years of school, they haven't got the salary. And in many cases that opportunity to build a life around building, you know, buying a house and all those things that one does as an adult.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Thank you. Um, I think coming out of the discussion, which might surprise many, I think many, if they'd been asked to speculate on the history of the early childhood education and care system, would've thought but probably all arises from women making cooperative arrangements to look after each other's children. And then it's got professionalised over time with the education over time, but actually the history's very different to that with this concept of professionalism and learning way back. So that's very interesting.

I'd like to just follow up some of the, um your most recent contribution I'd just like to drill a bit into this concept of why, why birth to eight? I mean, obviously age ranges, how we think about early childhood education and care is really a function of where we draw the line for schooling. And so we think about the years before school but was that zero to eight line drawn in South Australia because of the conception of how children on average changed their learning styles between zero to eight and the years beyond. And if the answer to that is, yes, do you think that still holds true or do we know more now about child development, which would give us a different way of looking at it?

DR WHITINGTON

From a child development perspective, we know in terms of learning also learning and development, that we've got to think about how best to engage children and how do we engage children and maximise their opportunities for learning. We know very definitely then the early years that the play based way to go is the way to go. Now, Fraser Mustard actually didn't like the term play. He called it problem solving, but he is right, because in a way play sounds like messing around and, you know, having free time when you're doing something more important somewhere else. Whereas of course it is problem solving and it's highly demanding of children because they're making decisions about what their intention is. They're having to hold that idea in mind and to carry out that, and then of course, in social situations to do it with others, right? So it's highly demanding. It also requires exploration of your world and through your senses and all of that, and learning about how things work together in the world and what things touch like smell like all the senses are engaged very strongly, which really

goes back to theory of Piaget and so forth who really believe very, you know, found that that was a very part, very strong part of learning.

So with regard to the birth to eight, if you're going to a school where children are five years old and they're being asked to sit in seats and be delivered curriculum to, unless they've been told that they've got to behave themselves and they used to being like that, they'll find it very difficult to learn in that way. They want to explore the world. They want to be on the floor. They want to be with each other. They want to talk, you know, the quiet classroom in a, you know, five to eight year old setting is not the place to be because children need to vocalise their ideas.

They even need to vocalise to themselves private speech because private speech from a Vygotskian perspective, for example, supports them to carry out the task at a level they couldn't do if they didn't have that tool. So we really want in our early learning in the schooling sector education environments that allow children to learn in the best way possible. And again, through the 'schoolification', even of the early years of schooling, you know, that transmission thing then that's harder for them. And therefore, particularly the children who are more vulnerable, they get put off school and remember that from a classical conditioning perspective, you're setting up an attitude towards learning in those very early years, and then they get put off, right? Because I can't sit there. I can't attend to someone that's over there, you know, and I've seen this in so many classrooms. I used to be a teacher, you know, there's somebody over there doing something. And I can't see it really well, or I can't hear it all. What's it got to do with me, you know, and I've got something else going on here or nothing very much.

And so you're wasting that child's learning opportunity. So what we need to say to ourselves is given the, what we know about social, emotional, cognitive development, and physical to a degree. If you bring all those things together, then you have a much more active and engaging kind of learning environment for children from five to eight. And that's a reason for birth to eight long answer.

COMMISSIONER

that makes good sense. Uh, thank you. Now you did. And I'm going to invite both of you to contribute on this question. You did use the expression. If we were designing from the ground up, we wouldn't have designed this. Uh, so what would we have designed?

PROFESSOR WONG

I think you have to start with the child. No, you have to start with, what is it you want to achieve? Because remember I said that early child has different many different purposes. What is it you want once, you know, what you want, then you start to design a program that based on evidence around what will achieve what you want. Um, but it really needs to be focused on the child. What are the best learning environments for children? Um, what are the best conditions? And in, in, in top of what you Professor were saying, in terms of what we know about the way children learn, we actually know more about the way people learn. We

have 21st century learning, which now which most schools are not implementing, you know, providing opportunities for exploration, development and curiosity, and hypothesising all of these kind of things of what we do.

And what we've always right from Froebel, Pestalozzi, has argued about creating learning spaces and learning environments. Really, no matter what age we are for, for young children, it also of course, has to meet the needs of the family. So I'm part of the stuff about the child as well. Think, I really want to say this is why it has to be fun for children. Um, one of the things that worries me is I see a push in international context to impose programs on learning.

So, you know, these evidence informed programs about how you can teach maths, how you can teach language and then them being implemented by teachers without really thinking about from the child's perspective, this also has to be fun because we only have our childhood once, right? So if we, we need to think about what are the best learning environments, who are the, who are the people that we need with children? How do we support the families to achieve their, their goals, their parenting goals, their aspirational goals how could we support organisations to deliver those services?

And by and large when I, when I talk to teachers, I have never come across a teacher who has never wanted the best for children. We really need to support educators and by which, I mean both certificate, diploma, and degree qualified teachers to do what they wanted to do, what they know, not just what they want, but what they know is in the best interest of children, give them the resources, give them the space, the time and the acknowledgement and the conditions including pay that enables them to do that work. What do we want as a society? We want, we want children who have equal chances, regardless of where, what, where they come from now. That means inequitable. We have, sorry, not inequitable. That means providing more resources for those children who require it.

DR WHITINGTON

Yeah, no, this is a really important question. And I think first of all, no, this morning there was a very good discussion here about the role of families and community in education and in providing a context within which education can occur. And I would like to see those connections between communities, between families and between education settings, much stronger.

Now, some sites are doing it because they know how important it was. I actually worked as a community liaison type teacher at one point in my career as a teacher. So I know about that. I also heard recently from Sally Brinkman that with our early learning Professor Sally Brinkman, that when she and others did an assessment of our you know, these integrated large sites, that the ones that didn't do well were the ones that didn't connect with the community.

Well the, so professionals who were very good at connecting with the community, they were, the leaders in the site did well. Those who weren't good at doing that connection. So I'd like to start with, you know, families where they are, you know, like down in Port Augusta preschool at

the footy, right? How do we make those connections, not sit in our ivory tower? And I'm talking about preschool as well here for people to come, but say, where are they? Right.

So to build the connection over time, so if you said to me, would you like to have three year old preschool adapted sort of how it is, or would you like to have really good play groups run by really good teachers, right across the State universally available and for two half days a week, I'd be inclined to go for that. You know, because it brings in the families, particularly families who live in vulnerable circumstances, they've got models of their peers around them. They've also got this professional, who's working with them who would be able to give them ideas and support who would be able to do that sensitive inquiry about how things are going for you. Not I've got a checklist here and I've got tick people off on some scale or other, but, you know, being tuned in so that you can know what the circumstances are.

So then if there's DV going on in the home, I've got a connection and I'll take you there after the session, you know, or whatever it might be or a health issue, or child's developmental issue that the health the local health service might be able to help with a doctor or social work, whatever it is. So I think that I like that idea. And because I don't think that a lot of children's preschool is currently set up, um, if they were to go as three year olds into that, they would really be able to manage it. Some would.

But what we are finding at the Gowrie for example is, you know, some of them aren't toilet trained, right. You know, we're a bit slow with that these days for a lot of reasons. And so is that what teachers are gonna be doing in a setting where they've got three year olds to five year olds and some approaching six, you know, there's all of those complications, changing nappies and stuff like that. So I think just thinking about the three year old, thinking about their family, thinking about them in context, thinking about them culturally.

So what does it mean for a Muslim family to have their child in service? You know, in some early childhood service, we are providing holistic. Um, you know, we say that in our curriculum, where's Islam in that and what does this, how does the service engage with that? Right? Because you know, we say we're secular, but we do Christmas, you know, Easter and all of that, you know, and yet the whole life world of someone who's Muslim for many of them is about, you know, living through the Quran and the beliefs there. And yet they're totally not even visible and yet, so it's not holistic. So there's all of those tensions. So I just think we need to think about the context. We need to think about the families. And we need to think about the children and great staff well paid with great conditions. So that's my interest.

COMMISSIONER

Interesting to hear. And I think, um the observation about what's the purpose, I think and the way we need, well, the system has grown up with different ways of reform in part, depending on the foremost purpose. I want to circle back to the interstate comparisons that you did. Um, and I don't know whether you would have an insight into this, but it does, it does imply doesn't it, that different structures of provision have led to different interactions and draw down on the funds from the national partnership arrangements?

PROFESSOR WONG

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

COMMISSIONER

Is there anything you'd like to say, say about that?

PROFESSOR WONG

I think there's been policy development has, has kind of, instead of, instead of us going, what's the best interest of the children in the families policy has led us to shift focus a little bit. It's, we, we take what we've got and we shift it, the national partnership agreement, it was a fabulous initiative and it led to still one of the only countries in the world, that's got a national approach to early childhood still. We've got this national approach to quality. I, I it's absolutely watershed moment in the development of early childhood, but what, it, it didn't fundamentally change the provision of early childhood. It, it shifted what we already had to try and kind of change things a little bit.

And I think what we need to do is have a complete rethink. The idea that the minute you turn five, you have a right to free education, but prior to that, you don't, but where did that come from? Why is it that that exists if we changed our ideas? And we said, every child has a right to education. Every child, regardless of what setting they're in, has a right to high quality early childhood education. That would mean that we would do things differently. It, we wouldn't be trying to fix problems with an already broken system. So I'd like to be audacious and like to recommend that, that there is a different way of um, looking at and thinking about children's right to high quality early learning.

Now, of course, that's a huge, that would be a huge undertaking. And I think maybe it's Pollyanna of me. Um, but there are, there are children who are not accessing early childhood, or who are enrolled, but not attending because that's slightly different and they are the children who really need, we need it. So we can keep patting ourselves on the back and saying, oh, we got 95% attendance rate of four year olds, or we've got this many percentage of three year olds, but what we're missing is the very children who benefit the most. So if we think about, will they have a right to early childhood education and what can we do to enable them to enact that? Right. I think we would think about things differently than thinking about, oh, it's workforce participation. It's a, it's a different view.

COMMISSIONER

And looking, looking at international models, are there international models you'd point to on online with that kind of approach you've just articulated.

PROFESSOR WONG

So some of the countries that we think might have, those sort of Scandinavian countries like Finland and so on because they have better parental leave provision, they have a very different early learning system to what we have here. We don't have particularly good parental leave. And so we have a very many children in the early years attending it's one of the highest, I think, in, in the OECD countries. So again, it's not that simple that you can just say, oh, well, there's a model. We need to follow it. Because we have a highly multicultural society. We have an indigenous population and we need to think about things slightly differently for indigenous people. So there isn't a, let's take that off the shelf and copy it.

In terms of democratic ideals, we, there are countries like Finland and Norway and so on that have that kind of lean much more towards that way and thinking much more about children's rights than we do in Australia, where we have that. Certainly the provision of long day care has always been tied to workforce participation of particularly female workforce participation. And that tension continues to play out. The very different population, the problems with the comparisons with Scandinavia, very different population come true. Another difference is of course that they have more highly skilled teachers or more, more qualified teachers in their long-term care centres or higher taxation.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

PROFESSOR WONG

They spend more so it's never an easy kind of solution. And we really need to think about what do we want for Australia? What do we want for Australian children? And if we frame that within well, we think children should have the right to those learning spaces and whether it be playgroup, maybe they they're better off with the parents, but there's a playgroup that they can attend.

If we think about it from a child's right to those spaces, those people who are going to provide the best learning environment, but, but also the safest, the most joyful as well for, for them. Um, and not doing that predicated on the on educators, not predicated on educators having to, you know, work longer hours or not have support or not be paid appropriately, which is what we have at the moment.

We have educators who are, who are not supported, who are working well outside the number of hours they should be. And that's, what's leading to the burnout. One of the reasons it's leading to the burnout, they're not valued despite all of that, despite the important work they're doing, they're not particularly valued outside of the context. So I'm absolutely reiterate, let's focus on children's rights, but also we need to think about the educator's rights as well, to safe working environments that enable them to do the work that they know that they can, can do that they, if you just give them the space, the resources, the time and the pay and the recognition, they could really do it. Um, so children's rights, but also educators' rights as well.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you very much. And we need to popularise this history, you know Netflix series, something like that. We could work out who can cast it and how to get Cate Blanchett to star in it.

PROFESSOR WONG

I had always wanted to turn it into a play to show because these were they've been called formidable women. They've been denigrated back in sort of revisionist history as being women who, you know, could do good as women. But when you read their words, when you read what they did, they were going into very impoverished areas, working really hard. They weren't doing it just because they were 'do gooders', they were doing it because they really believed in it. And we have a history of that in early childhood of women advocating for children's rights, educators, rights, families, rights, community's rights. Um, and yeah, we're continuing in that.

COMMISSIONER

That's great. Thank you very much.

DR WHITINGTON

Sorry, I'm aware of the time, but I just think we need to say too, that we have a very rich, diverse community in Australia, very rich one. And with many, many strengths, we know that, but I think the question of how well we are leveraging the strengths of those communities in co-designing, what quality looks like in these early years settings or whatever arrangement we come up with is really important because they know about what's important for them.

We know a lot about education and about learning and about development and bringing knowledge bases together to co-design so that we can find the elusive quality that is not a standard approach, but it fits that community or that group of people in that setting those families or whatever it might be. I think that is an important part of it. So whichever way we can bring those strengths into whatever we do, I think will create a better learning environment for children. That'll be more relevant to them, and that will be more engaging. There'll be better learners. Families will come out of it.

Jane Lemon's ideas this morning about that Learning Together program. It is excellent and empowers parents in terms of not only their parenting, but also in terms of qualifications. It takes them on in their life personally. So, and that benefits every everybody. So we need to think about, you know, who our population and how we can leverage their capacities and their knowledge base, whatever we create. And don't forget Fraser Mustard's thinker in residence. It's a good report though, Julia.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you. That's great. And we are going to take five minutes to reset the room. Yes. Both witnesses. We've got virtual sessions after this, so we're doing a little, little shifting around, but thank you so much.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I call Professor Siraj.

<PROFESSOR IRAM SIRAJ AFFIRMED

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Thank you for joining us Professor, especially after you've just done a long haul flight from, I believe the UK to Brisbane. So we're very grateful and you on a Friday afternoon, so thank you.

You're currently the Professor of child development and education at the University of Oxford. Is that correct?

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

Yes, it is.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You've got a very long ranging history with respect to early childhood education and care in that you've published very widely and taught very widely. Is that correct?

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

It is.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You've been heavily involved in policy direction in this space in the United Kingdom, but also I believe you've done a lot of work in Australia and currently in Queensland in the early childhood education and, and care sphere. Is that right?

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

Yes. But more, more in Victoria and South Australia

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Today, we are lucky to have you here and we're very interested to hear from you about the EPPSSE study. It is a 17 year long study. We have an hour, we realise we can't do justice to the richness of, of what that study involved, but I wonder whether you would, for those who are

not familiar with that study, provide us with a brief overview as to what it involved generally. And then we are particularly interested today in what the Commission can learn from the study about quality in terms of the provision of preschool for three and four year olds.

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

Okay. Um, that's a, a really big question, but I will try to answer it. Um, yes, it was a 17 year study that started in 1997 and went on till 2015 and we picked up over 3000 children between the ages of three and four and followed them through preschool primary and secondary school and looked at the long-term impact preschool on, on their primary achievement and secondary achievement. But we also looked at the home learning environment and the quality of stimulation offered within the home. And we looked at the quality of preschools.

We had the first preschool effectiveness study that could look at the value added that a preschool was adding to children's development. So it wasn't just about quality. It was also about effectiveness that is impact. So we had to have between 16 and 20 plus children from each setting to measure the quality of each setting, and then look at the relationship between quality outcomes, family contribution, and children's development over time. And look at the interaction between those things. I can give you a little bit of a run through of what we found in terms of the long term impact of preschool and in particular quality. And then we could look at if you, if you want the specific sub study that looked at the more effective centres in terms of leadership and how they added value to children's development. So overall we found that preschool has a long term impact on both cognitive and social, emotional development. Um, even lower quality, preschool, medium, and high quality offered something in comparison to staying at home, not for every child. We're talking about group patterns now, statistically, because preschool offers something different and that's good for taxpayers to know because they're paying for preschool and it's good for governments to know that preschool offers something different.

And if you think about it, really, you know, what your children are doing at home has one impact, but what qualified staff are doing by having, you know, scientific investigations outdoor play that's guided by adult, um interventions as well and developing play routines and cooking. And so on children get different experiences in a preschool than home, including the compositional effect of interacting with other children from different backgrounds and as not in Australia, but many countries the birth rate is falling and many children are singletons and it is good for them, A three year old, to meet another three year old and a four year old to meet another four year old.

So we know that preschool has a long-term impact on cognitive and social development and that that human development as the World Bank puts, it contributes to the wealth of nations. It's a major contributor and we underestimate how much it could contribute if early childhood education was run properly. And in most countries, it is not. Um, I recently shared a platform at the House of Commons where a senior civil servant from Norway presented their system, which is a relatively good coherent system, but still they have a private sector as well, which offers preschool provision early childhood education. (I'm sorry if I keep slipping into preschool as a generic term for early childhood education, it's what we do in England. I'll try not to use

that term because I know it means something very specific in Australia.) And even there, there were some issues with the private sector in terms of control, you know, in terms of quality and profiteering and so on. Uh, overall, they've got a very good system, a strong system, and both the private and the maintain sector contribute enormously, but where there is this kind of difference in how things are funded and who are the beneficiaries, the children, the people running it, you get some of these issues.

Let's go back to high quality in terms of a the EPPSSE study, we found the high quality and an early start preschool helped disadvantaged children. Um more by that, I mean by the age of three. And in fact, we found in our study, the children, disadvantaged children, who went to high quality preschools from the age of two benefited the most, and hence our policy of extending 12 and a half hours for three and four year olds to 15 hours. And now 30 hours free preschool where parents are working to, all three and four year olds. And that is also extended to 40% of two year olds who are on the lowest um, socioeconomic rungs.

We also found that regular attendance was better for children, you know, four or five days per week, rather than we talk about flexibility. Um, but children who went more often in a week did better. What we did find was that going to preschool five days a week, part-time had the same impact or a similar impact as going fulltime. And it was interesting because we were asked this question often, particularly by policy makers, if it's okay, if they get just as much advantage out of halftime, should we not bother with full time? Now, we were not asked to disaggregate that according to social class, more disadvantaged children, more advantaged children, however, in the follow up study, the SEED study, which followed 8,000 children over five years, they did find that more preschool for disadvantaged children did benefit them when they disaggregated by social class.

We also found that high quality preschool continued to influence all groups of children throughout primary and at age 11, particularly it was particularly important for boys and children from vulnerable back backgrounds. And we also found that high quality enhanced outcomes in maths and literacy for children from poor homes. And with other disadvantages, this early childhood education influence continued to age 16 where social and behavioural and academic outcomes were higher, including reducing the risk of antisocial behaviours and the Institute. We did some further analysis with our colleagues at the Institute of fiscal studies, which estimated that high quality preschool yielded positive financial returns over the li over lifetime earnings.

So, we know that poverty is not good for children, and it's a little like the PWC report, which was commissioned by the Front Project in 2019, that showed the contribution of early education to children's development. I think that high quality is really important and we can begin to dissect what that means in a bit, but I'd just like to give the background of why I think it's important, given my extensive experience of early childhood education from starting out as an early years teacher, to being an advisory teacher to 35 years in research inequality for our population for children starts at birth, because children don't have a choice who they're born to or gender they're born and what economic circumstances their parents will have or the education they have. And that means that we are born into inequality.

Once we leave the maternity ward, early childhood education is the next chance the children get to levelling up or the possibility of social and educational equality. And if the staff in those settings are not well educated, if the staff in those settings do not have a strong understanding of intentional and relational pedagogy or a strong understanding of how to educate young children, how to use this concept, not complicated notion of play, to facilitate motivation and learning, then we're exacerbating inequality. And not saying that it would be worse than if children didn't go to preschool because we might be lifting everybody, but we would not necessarily be closing the gap or, or narrowing the gap.

And actually we show that in our, in the EPPSSE study that preschool benefits everyone, but the gap remains the same. Uh, but the most disadvantage are lifted into being in a better position to cope with the challenges of, um of school. So there, there, there are tensions in your system and there were in ours of this conflict between access and quality. Andreas Schleicher at the OECD talks about how there is, has been a huge expansion of early childhood education across the globe with an emphasis on mothers working and uh, providing the importance of early education.

Yet quality has not kept a pace with quantity, and it's the quality bit that really does support children's early learning and it's that quality bit that supports children's development. And in my view adds to the wealth of nations. We know that interventions at any age for children or adults are supportive and helpful, but the value you get from interventions in early years because of the cumulative effect is something else. You know, you can, you can see logically that that would support children far more in terms of children's quality. In terms of what that looks like in the EPPSSE study, we did a sub study of the more effective settings.

Those that had better outcomes in terms of social, emotional development and cognitive development, compared to some that just had slightly better outcomes. We didn't study in depth ineffective centres, because I think most of us know what that looks like. So what were the characteristics of these more effective centres? One unsurprisingly to me was that they viewed cognitive and social development of children as complimentary. They didn't prioritise one over the other. And this was a surprise to many people in early childhood education and care because many preschools when we interviewed teachers were saying that if you didn't get the social development, right, the cultural development, right, children couldn't progress cognitively. But unfortunately we did find that centres that focused more on social and cultural development didn't necessarily have the follow up cognitive gains, but centres that focused on both, both early academics and social and emotional development and cultural development had the best outcomes

So in my view, one of the challenges for South Australia is whether there is a will to combine day care and preschool. In many of the studies in Australia, as in the United Kingdom, we found that, um social services day nurseries, which are different from your day care, had more children in them that had less educational input and they were not doing as well. And didn't have as higher quality. They had fewer teachers, often better ratios, but the children didn't do as well. Whereas our, our nursery schools and nursery classes, which were maintained, had higher teacher input and better quality and outcomes, that's not to say that there weren't day

care centres or private day nurseries that didn't have high quality. There were, but generally the pattern was similar to what you have in Australia at the moment.

In this in depth study of the more effective centres, we also found that having strong leadership and long serving staff, that is three years plus had both in private and in, in, um public sector had had better outcomes. And we found that in the private day care, there was a higher turnover of staff and the, the effective centres we found had a lower turnover of staff, even in the private sector. We also found that in terms of these centres that had better outcomes for children, that is they were more effective, they had better impact. They had more value to child development. They provided a strong educational focus with trained teachers working alongside other appropriately qualified staff. And the optimum ratios we found were 50% teachers, 50%, um two year what you'd call TAFE and what we call further education qualified staff, who had a focus on child development and care.

We also found that settings that provided children with a mixture of adult initiated small group work and learning alongside freely chosen play had better outcomes than those that were two adult dominated or two free play focused. So this guiding by adults, whether it's in creating play routines, um supporting children in adult initiated activities, such as dialogic reading, or cooking growing activities or even extending children's play worked better. We also found that adult child interactions that involved something I've turned sustained, shared thinking and open ended questioning, helped to extend children's thinking. So one of the things that I think is coming out of our research is the really important role of the adult.

There's a huge focus constantly on children and children's play and how they learn, which is right and proper and absolutely essential. But there's also a role for the adult. It's not just to stand back and let children play. It's also about thinking through the enabling environment, thinking through how we extend children's vocabulary, how we help support them to become numerate, how we help them to stay fit and healthy and how we encourage wellbeing. We also found that, um educators with good curriculum knowledge combined with knowledge of how children learn was absolutely critical. And if you let me, I'd like to come back to this issue of curriculum and how children learn, because we often don't get that balance right and we, we constantly struggle with it in the UK as well.

We also found that strong parental involvement was very important, but it wasn't just any kind of parental involvement, although it was important to have cultural events and provide support for parents and child development knowledge for parents, what was especially important in more effective settings. And this came from the settings, not us imposing it was settings that shared their educational aim with parents. And now that doesn't surprise me because the home learning environment was such an important predictor of children's outcomes. And I can come back to what that was as well. If you want me to a few more points, we found in the more effective settings, high quality included formative feedback to children during activities and providing regular reporting and discussion with parents about their child's progress. Now, I see a lot of documentation and portfolios of children, around the world, where there is an assessment between activities of children and sometimes a discussion with the children of those activities, but actually feedback as learning or assessment as learning has a more powerful impact on children's progression.

And a couple of other things, behaviour policies where staff support children in rationalising that is thinking about their behaviour and talking through difficulties, we've come to learn since this research how important self-regulation is for children, you know, their ability to think about their own thinking and to be able to regulate that when it comes to emotions, behaviour, and planning learning, those are the, those children are often dysregulated and co-regulating with adults who are more knowledgeable is a powerful learning aspect.

And also staff's ability to differentiate learning opportunities that meet the needs of particular individuals and groups of children. So children who are have English as an additional language have special needs or children who have particular needs like EAL or children who haven't got special needs, but maybe some aspect or level of trauma like, um asylum or, or, or refugee children, for example. So those are some of the things that have come out of our study.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you very much. This is Julia Gillard speaking. And I know that there is so much in your study that there's no way to go into all aspects of it in an hour long discussion, but I did want to, um I, I do want you to flesh out the curriculum bit that you alluded to just before, but in addition to that, I would be very keen to make sure we are clearly understanding what you are saying about hours and, and dose to use the, the terminology. Um, you'd be aware obviously of the 15 hour mark as the, the general mark for what we would refer to as preschool at the four year old level, and that we are inquiring into universal access to three year olds. Um, so I just wanted to clearly understand what you are recommending based on your research as to the appropriate pattern of hours. Um, if the aim is to you know, be, be a great system for all children, which may mean for the most disadvantaged children that you've got some form of differential provision.

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

Okay. So there are three stakeholders here. Firstly this brings us back to the issue of access and quality and the tension that exists there. It might work for the stakeholder. That's a parent to you know, that's studying for two days or working for two days to have their child in early care and education for two days or three half days or four half days. Uh, and then there's the child as the stakeholder. That might work for the parent, and it might pull the parent out of poverty, which benefits the child. Okay. So for the child that's two days of intensive input or three days of slightly less in, in input. And if we think of preschool as an intervention, a drip, drip, drip, every day is going to have a better impact. Two full days. I mean, if we take it as a kind of medical model in terms of nutrition, if we gave children 3000 calories on two days, then, you know, gave them 500 calories for the rest of the time. It's not going to have the same impact as 1,500 calories every day. So with, if we think of early education as a quantity of something valuable, the children are getting, then it doesn't make sense to have them only there in attendance in that irregular way.

The third stakeholder is the workforce. If you have children coming to you for three hours every day, for five days, you can plan effectively for small groups, you can assess effectively. Um,

especially if you haven't got too many part-time staff, which is also an issue that Australia suffers from. So, you know, you don't get the strong attachment or continuity for some children. So if the staff have lots of different children coming at this different times, then they're not just planning for a group of children. They're planning for a very large group of children on different days, and it makes their job almost impossible in terms of child development. So we take our cheapest least qualified educational workforce and put them in the most complex circumstances of people coming children coming at different times with you know, again a context that isn't ideal for continuity and progression of learning, right?

COMMISSIONER

And the, the reference you made to the difference between part-time being what I think you've referred to there as the three, three hours by five days model and full time, which I think you were referring to a 30 hours model. Can you explain that?

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

Uh, yes, that's that, that's the 30 hours. If, if in, in Wales and Scotland, we've got, we've, we're suffering a little bit from your federal system now in Wales, Scotland, we're becoming over governed in Wales and Scotland. Now the 30 hours are accessible to all children if, if their parents are working or not, and it's free for the, in England it's for parents who are working or studying 16 hours or more, and they then get the 30 hours support. But when I was teaching, it was 12 and a half hours or 15 hours for most children. And I had 26 children in the morning, 26 in the afternoon. It was the same children every day. You could plan as a, when I go into some of your preschools and we have this in some of ours now as well sometimes I was planning for, you know, 52 children and they could be planning for 70 to more children who are there on different days.

Now, how do you do that? Um, I think with great difficulty, especially as the early years learning framework does expect people to know families and children. So well, how do the key workers keep on top of that? How they, how do they keep on top of attachment and all those important developmental aspects? Um, so yes, that's the, the 15 hours that were added, um were seen as care and that's been a problem. In England, we had a separate in, in the UK, we had a separate social services and care education model. And 25 years ago, we campaigned very hard to get rid of that and had joined up thinking and everything was brought under the Department for Education. And that has really helped in terms of thinking and strategically working both at a local and a national level.

And as colleagues said in the previous session, it doesn't make any sense from a child's perspective to separate care from education now and being cared for now and being educated. You know, it's all they're learning from, from everything. And, and this is really important because there are, you know, I understand that one of the biggest disadvantages for any family is poverty. So, you know, parents' ability to work to provide is, is actually very important.

But on the other hand, we need a system that thinks through the different stakeholders and does it from the top and the bottom up. I think it's no good as I used to say, 30 years ago,

we've got to start from the children because I've realised it's more complicated than that if children are living in poverty because their parents haven't got a job, then it's much more difficult. But strategically given the positions you've held you'll know that the wealth of a nation does benefit from childcare and education being available. Mothers, generally parents are free to work that contributes to the Exchequer in terms of taxes, but we don't think about the cycle of how some of that could then be used to fund a stronger system for children and families.

COMMISSIONER

And you made a reference to the benefits for a more disadvantaged cohort of actually starting some form of early education at two years. And we had some evidence on Wednesday from a Melbourne based project where very highly disadvantaged families were in a three year, so the children were in a three years, from memory, I think it was five hours a day, five days a week. So 25 hour model you know, very intensively over the three years. And that, that did make a difference for the outcomes for those children. Can you just talk to us about how you see that extra, if I can put it like that, for more disadvantaged families?

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

Again, there's a tension between creating academies of disadvantaged children, which, you know, almost, you know, like incarcerated people, sticking them all together, makes them worse. It's we need to think about the composition effect, which is why I argued very strongly when ministers were saying they wanted the lowest 20% to go to.

We, we managed to argue to say, you know, the bottom 40% would be better because there is a compositional effect of children being together with more articulate children, with more capable children. Our system has also been influenced by and predicated on a provision with special intervention for particular groups within that universal provision, what we call progressive universalism. You can have pockets of interventions around language development or around and toddler groups that come into the early childhood education centres for support with play and, and, and so on.

So I think that this early intervention is particularly important and supportive, but it's got to be of the right quality. Again, I remember arguing with ministers that bringing in an initiative of the two year olds, which was going to cost 740 million a year had, we had said it had to be in high quality settings. That's what our research found. So what they did was say that it had to be those children, our two year olds, were only to go into schools that had enough SP that's the equivalent of our NQS in early years, it's the Office for Schools Inspection had good or excellent, and then the children could go in it. But the problem is that good, isn't the same as excellent.

And you will see from the evidence that I've submitted, that we found something, you know, similar in your own provision. We looked at validated quality rating scale data from Australian centres and compared it to NQS measures. And we found that there's a real advantage to having national quality standards. It certainly was lifting the centres at the bottom to try and get

into good exceeding, but what it was doing, we didn't find a huge difference in quality. There were quality in preschools was slightly better, but again, many centres that were getting exceeding were around three or four in our scales, which go from one to seven.

So many, the top, unintentionally, get suppressed into maybe thinking that they're exceeding and in our own system, in the OFSTED inspections, we do find that excellent (which is outstanding, sorry) which is, um not as prevalent apart from in nursery schools, is associated with better outcomes for children, but good isn't the kind of practice uplift that is sufficient for making that kind of difference. I mean, if we're hard-headed about it and say, this is about, you know, really trying to level up, and it's about social mobility, it's about making a difference to children. A slight increase might be great for everybody, you know, a good increase might be good for everybody, but you know, a substantial increase, which we know is possible is something that we should be aiming for in early years, because that's what contributes to the human development for the rest of their educational career.

In the trajectories we did of our children, there were six patterns of children starting at different levels. And the movement seemed to be in the first, up to the age of seven, after that the trajectories were set. So children could have another you know 12,000 hours of paid intervention by the State called schooling and stay in the same trajectory. It didn't mean they didn't progress from where they were by age and the school contributed, but it didn't improve social mobility. So what we were looking at was population change in those first seven years. And that I think is, is significant.

You know, this, we did find that cognitive and social, emotional outcomes being seen as complementary was really important. And I don't know what kind of will there is in the government, because I see now that you know, we were under a lively new administration in 1997, trying to lift and initiate and support early education. And I get that slight sense at the moment with the current administration. And I think it's a real opportunity. You're pushing at an open door to do something fantastic and, and great to overhaul a system that as we heard from the previous speakers has had a rather random and ad hoc background.

COMMISSIONER

Can, can I just come back to the curriculum reference that you made before, what would you like to tell us on curriculum?

PROFESSOR SIRAJ

Well I'd like to say a little bit about the role of the adult I think is really critical. So one of the things we found was that curriculum knowledge sometimes wasn't great amongst our early year staff. So children were engaged, they were motivated, they were playing, but the adult intervention was wrong. Sometimes because, you know, for example, I'll give you an example where, an adult was working with the children and about pets talking to the children about their pets and you know, what pets have the children got to? Um, the project was on animals. One child said, I've got a dog. Another said a cat. And one child said an insect. And the adult said, that's not an animal.

So, you know, it's knowledge of science, of early maths, of physical development and how children, it's not just how children learn. It's also about what they learn. Both things are important. And the adult role in setting up the environments in the kinds of thinking that goes into developing children and supporting them both through their own role, but also through what the children can do themselves by exploring and playing. Play pedagogy is really complicated. And I think I have some sympathy with Fraser Mustard when he said play was an overused word, and that it was more to do with problem solving. I think children don't always learn through play. You know, we know that, I mean, some play can be very repetitive, boring, and, and so on, but play is vital to supporting learning because children are naturally motivated by it. It makes school and early education fun.

And I want to draw your attention to a paper I read recently in Child Development came out just a couple of months ago, and this makes my point. Um, it's by Jamie Jarousse and colleagues and Child Development is a great journal. And in it, I learnt that when pre-schoolers know more, they enjoy school more when they enjoy school more, they learn more. So this notion of enjoyment and learning is very closely linked, which is why people pick up on play and say, that's so important. And it is, but enjoyment of learning and preschool or school is intertwined.

So the big focus, for example, of the Early Years Learning Framework, the new one on play is really to be welcomed. And I noted that play has been mentioned 133 times in the document, but the enjoyment has also to be linked to knowledge. Enjoyment of what? So here there's a need for support from content too. And from a knowledgeable adult. That is curriculum. So it's not it's not the right place in your framework. I understand this as only mentions numeracy, I think around five times and literacy around just over 10 times. But as Jarousse says, their study specifically explored the relationship between general knowledge. This is children's general knowledge and school or preschool enjoyment. And the early years learning framework does provide for enjoyment, but more focus could be considered around enjoyment of what so therefore content and social and cultural capital become really important. And they need to be explored at the State and federal level. The form that takes is up to you guys and your country.

But interestingly, South Australia has provided some really good support and guidance through documents on literacy and numeracy aspects, but linking the two, the early years learning framework and the guidance always needs some attention because when the NQS, when the moderators go in, what are they actually looking for? Are they guided by their own guidance and the EYLF or is there also more attention to the 'what' too? So I think that's, that's kind of my bug bear, I suppose.

And that's where the role of the adult comes in, not just in letting children play in interpreting that and helping children to move their thinking forward, but also adding what we know is important. If we take one strand of knowledge, for instance, word gap, which people went on and on about. And I remember hearing you speak about, you know, the, the Feinstein curve, Leon Feinstein, who's now in our Department as well, where children could start off less well off. Children could be brighter at the beginning of their learning measurement and actually be

overtaken by more middle class children later on in their life. Simply because of the advantages that they've had.

If we are serious about early education and care, then we have to pay attention to that education. I also conducted a sub study called ELIEY, early, um Effective Leadership in the Early Years, looking at the more effective centres and what the leaders in those centres were doing, and to cut a long story short cause it's another long report and all these reports are freely available online. We found there were two things, more effective leaders did. One was they had a core focus on education. You know, they did all the other things, you know, supporting parents, being culturally relevant, open to diversity. But they did have a focus on education. What is it? We want our children to learn, what is it we want our families to learn? How can we respectfully get them to get there?

The second thing they had, I mean, they had all the other things, vision, communication, you know, we could go on about that, what we called contextual literacy, they really understood their families and children. They weren't just imposing 'here's the curriculum, here's the framework on how we do how we do it,' but they really understood. So for instance, in our study, the early home learning environment is critical. And it's the second biggest predictor of learning through the child's learning life course to mother's education. And then, later on, things like income, so on mother's education was the biggest predictor at three. So that brings into especially a degree, you know, there was a linear relationship between mother's education and children's outcomes, you know, from 16 year exams, 18 year exams, but when they were degree level, it jumped.

And one could argue from that, that it might be that, you know, this is something we need to bring into the workforce as well, a higher level of degree, educated staff. There's a whole literature around, you know, what universities provide and the quality of the courses. And when you've got, when you've got a capacity issue at one level in a particular area, it usually goes through the system and that capacity needs lifting. Hence, when I worked with South Australia, we talked about a strategy that would go over 10 years. At least when I did the workforce review for the Scottish government, we had a strategy the 15 years, and that's very hard for governments states local government national governments, because they work on electoral cycles rather than you know, the wealth of the nation.

But if Australia, like in the UK is going to progress, we have to invest in our people. And that does mean starting early with, um with children. I, I, I think that looking at the, I don't know what Sally Brinkman talked about, but I've been looking at her data and looking at how over the last few years, the AEDC data look like, and you know, some states were doing better than others, and they seemed to be the states that had the ones that were doing better that had slightly better policies around playgroups. And you know, how the system they'd done a bit more joined up thinking about what children were getting when and how it was articulated with other components of the system, which of course is overly complicated and probably very expensive to run in both our countries.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you. Unfortunately, our time together is coming to an end. And I feel like you set us a course of study, many things to look at and consider, which is an appropriate role for you to play, but we are very grateful that you've come on the line and particularly grateful. I know what it's like to tumble off those long flights. So thank you so much for making the time available in those circumstances. It's been terrific to hear from you.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Yes. Commissioner, I call Dr. Hayley Guiney. Hello?

DR GUINEY

Oh, yes, I can hear you now.

< DR HAYLEY GUINEY AFFIRMED

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Thank you, Dr. Guiney, are you presently a research fellow with the Dunedin multidisciplinary health and development research unit at the University of Otago?

DR GUINEY

Yes, that's correct.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I believe you joined the Dunedin study team as a research fellow in 2020.

DR GUINEY

Yes.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And that was following a completion of your PhD in 2019 in psychology, focusing on everyday interventions that might help to protect our brain health as we age.

DR GUINEY

That's right

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Today, we are particularly interested in having you speak to us about the Dunedin study. And can I start by asking you to give us a brief overview as to what the study involved and what its key purpose was?

DR GUINEY

So the Dunedin study is a longitudinal research project that has followed over a thousand participants since they were born in the early seventies in Dunedin. And so the overarching purpose of the study, although it wasn't necessarily right at its inception, but as it has come to be over time is to track people's health and development as they age, and to understand the factors that might influence people's outcomes as they get into adulthood and then age later on.

So study members have had almost every aspect of their lives measured as they have grown up. They were assessed at birth. And then in childhood at ages 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. So every two years they were then assessed across adolescents at ages 13, 15 and 18. And then in adulthood, we've assessed them at five data points spanning from young adulthood at age 21 through to the latest assessment phase when study members were 45 years old. So study members are now starting to turn 50 years old and they'll be assessed again when they turn 52.

And over that time, they have answered a huge number of questions. They themselves, their parents, and also their teachers when they were children have answered questions about lots of different aspects of their life including their social relationships, their financial situations, their views on different matters. Um, and we've also assessed them on a number of different objective tests of health and development including cognitive functioning tests blood tests, oral health, lung function, antisocial behaviour, the list goes on. So as you can see with over time, we've been able to develop a comprehensive picture of each person's life experiences and to be able to link things in their early childhood through to health and development outcomes later in adulthood.

So one of the important features about the Dunedin study members is that they are an unselected group of people. So they're representative of the general population. Over 90% of the eligible babies born at the time in Dunedin are included in the study. So that means we have a really good representation of the breadth of experience in the population, and as thanks to the, the hard work of the people who have worked on the Dunedin study so well, with study members over the past 50 years, the study is characterised by very high retention rates. So at the age 45 assessment, over 94% of those participants who are still alive, which is the vast majority of them took part in that assessment. So that's a real strength of our longitudinal study because we know with other longitudinal research that people tend to drop out of studies over time, just because things happen with their lives. Um, but we've managed to retain a really high proportion of people in our study so that with our representative sample and the high rep retention, it means that we have quite low bias. We're not just following the healthy and wealthy. We're able to understand the breadth of people's experiences as they get older.

I was just going to say, so the study design, the longitudinal design allows us to look at the early childhood factors that are the consistent predictors of outcomes later in life. So it's not just one finding at one time point it's, we're looking at the factors that consistently predict things as people get older. Um, and so our observational study can tell us the factors that are likely to be important for deciding how to target interventions, either as a way to identify the children who might benefit most or to identify the factors that the intervention might seek to change.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You've highlighted in the written submission, you've provided with five key factors, but I'm particularly interested today in the work around childhood self control and the finding surrounding that we had a witness before you who mentioned childhood self regulation and the importance of that how was that assessed with study participants? And is it something that's malleable? And if it is, this is a long question, can you provide us with some insights as to when the optimum time to look at childhood self-regulation is and how we can go about that?

DR GUINEY

Yeah, sure. Um, and so the way that we measure childhood self-control in our study, part of a benefit of assessing children repeatedly, or as they grow up is that we were able to look at their self-control or self-regulation abilities across multiple time points in childhood from ages three, through to age 11. Um, we were able to observe their self-regulation skills and have them assessed by different people, researchers, teachers, and parents, and also in different situations. So we have managed to make a come up with a self-regulation measure. That's a really good representation of the children's overall self-regulation skills. Um, I, I realise I haven't defined self-control or self-regulation for you. Would you like me to do that?

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Thank you.

DR GUINEY

And so it is described in different ways by different people in different fields, but really it's the ability to appropriately regulate your emotions and your behaviour, according to the situation and the context that you're in. And it has attributes, like things like include including delaying gratification, controlling impulses, persisting in the face of challenges. So those types of factors help to represent this concept of self control, or self-regulation.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

And that's something that neuroscientists can study in terms of executive brain function. Is that correct?

DR GUINEY

So we know that executive functioning is closely linked to your self control skills. Yes. So you are able to see self you are able to see strong executive functioning relating to much better self-control in childhood. So we, by looking at childhood repeat sorry, self-control repeatedly across childhood. We were able to see that children with poor self-control across that long period of time when they became, when they were adults, they had poorer physical health. They were more likely to have substance dependence difficulties, financial difficulties, and more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour in their thirties.

And then by their mid forties children who had a poorer self control, they had a faster pace of biological ageing. So they had poorer physical health and a faster decline in physical health. As they're getting older, they also had more signs of brain ageing and less consistent use of positive health and financial behaviours. They also had lower life satisfaction. So I think it's really clear that self-regulation skills in that early period very strong predictor of outcomes across many different domains in somebody's life. And it's important to note that those that relationship is not simply explained by a child's IQ or another big factor, like the socioeconomic status.

So in the Dunedin study, we were able to look within those groups within a group of high socioeconomic status children or within a group of children with higher IQ. And we can still see a close relationship between those self-regulation skills and outcomes in adulthood. So it's not just that the wealthy children had better outcomes. We can really see that self-control or self-regulation is, is an important predictor there.

And as you mentioned, yes, it is, it is malleable. It is a skill it's not a built in trait. And so children can begin to learn their self-regulation skills early in their life. I know that in New Zealand, we have a number of programs established from the age of three that really help to promote the development and learning of self-regulation skills early in childhood. And that those benefits continue to accrue across childhood. But of course, the earlier you start the bigger impact you might see.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I'm curious to know what some examples might be of a child as young as three. What, what was being looked for when, when the assessments were being conducted, what were some signs that perhaps both ends of the spectrum, what was classified as good self control and poorer self control?

DR GUINEY

So there are small indicators things like turn taking, being, being able and willing to take your turn in a game or some other kind of interaction with other children, being able to share toys with other children and have your time with it, and then sharing it with your peers. You can also see at the other end of the spectrum, children having very extreme, emotional reactions to certain situations or feeling a minor, um conflict in the playground, for example, might result in extreme emotional reaction from the child that is perhaps disproportionate to the situation. They might act out not necessarily verbally, but physically or something like that, to be able to

show their distress. So they're not quite able to keep, keep their emotions in check in that, in that moment, we also had sorry, we also had measures of distractibility. So children with poor self control were also more, much more distractible, less able to stay on task or focused on the goal that they had in front of them.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Am I correct that the Dunedin study didn't involve an intervention per se. And if that's the case, how are you able to assess how it was that increasing self control can predict better outcomes?

DR GUINEY

So with our observational study design, as you're correct to say that we haven't tested an intervention, we haven't developed a self control intervention and it, and manipulated it to see if it can lead to better outcomes. What we can see with our observational design is that poor self control is consistently associated with those outcomes in adulthood, but intervention studies are needed to test that actually changing someone's self control can lead to a benefit. What we do know though, is that even within people, without other risk factors across different strata, we can see that self control is a really consistent predictor of outcomes in adulthood. So that's a con it is a consistent finding that comes out.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

How did it sit in terms of being a predictor amongst some of the other big predictors that you highlight in, in the written submission you've provided?

DR GUINEY

Yeah, so, so there's no one, there's no one big factor that is the main driver of these outcomes. And of course, all of these factors within a real person, they interact together to create outcomes in adulthood. So self control is, is one of the important ones. It's not necessarily the largest, but it's one that has a really reliable relationship. And it is perhaps one of the most malleable ones from an early childhood perspective.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

Are there any insights that you could share based on your familiarity with the Dunedin study about how interventions might be incorporated into early childhood education and care, for example, trying to help foster good self-regulation.

DR GUINEY

Yeah, so well, the Dunedin study itself has not tested specific self-control interventions, but we do work with other researchers at the University of Otago that have programs game-based programs that they've developed to help improve children's self-regulation skills. And so that,

that program is called engage and it can be adapted to the age of the children so that the games are appropriate and just helps children to learn different ways of regulating their behaviour and emotions. So engage has on its own, been shown to be an effective intervention in improving children's self control, but that's, that's outside the Dunedin study framework itself, but it's an affiliated program.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

You made mention in your written submission of a, I think it's a one, two punch approach. Uh, could you flesh out what that, what that means?

DR GUINEY

Uh, can you tell me more.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I might've taken the reference from one of your, the articles about the Dunedin study. Actually, my apologies that there is discussion in one of your key papers about an approach not being limited to early childhood, but one punch at childhood, one, one in adolescence. Is that a concept you're familiar with?

DR GUINEY

Yes, yes, that's right. And so the interventions can be adapted to the correct developmental age, and we can see that adolescents really benefit from a, a boost in self-regulation skills. It helps them to avoid the, the, the, of adolescents perhaps taking more risks than you would normally do that might help that might send you down a path that is less desirable. So absolutely I, we can see that children self-regulation skills in childhood and then in adulthood and adolescents really build together to produce outcomes in adulthood.

COMMISSIONER

I think there would be people listening to your evidence that can intuitively relate to it with, you know, sort of toddler tantrums and moody teenagers. So thank you for putting all of that in a much more scientific framework for us. I just want to drill in you, you've been very clear, you didn't test an intervention but you've also been very certain that self-regulation can be taught your language, is that it's malleable. What gives you that degree of confidence?

DR GUINEY

So that, that confidence comes from, from other research and also that we can see that some people so mostly from other research that shows intervention that can improve children's self-regulation, but also in the Dunedin study, we could see that some people were able to improve their self control skills over their lifetime, so we could see change within a person.

COMMISSIONER

Right. And you made the point that when, when you were looking at self-regulation at the start of the Dunedin study and then tracking people through as many years in, in their life, as you've had at more than 45, to more than to the age of 45, that the absence of, or problems with self-regulation were a good predictor. And that was true.

Irrespective of other factors, IQ income cohort, there was still, so you could have had a high income, high IQ person, but still with self-regulation issues. But was there a clustering or preponderance, if you were dividing income up into quintiles or quartiles, would you see a preponderance in any income group? If you were dividing IQ into the sort of bell curve distribution, would you see a preponderance at any particular end of the bell curve?

DR GUINEY

Yes. So, so like with lots of early childhood factors and experiences, you can see that many things are closely related to each other. So socioeconomic status is related to self-regulation, it is related to adverse childhood experiences, for example, other health outcomes. And so it's not to say that those factors don't matter and that self control might be more of a an issue in children who have a number of other risk factors as well. Um, but we can see that it has an impact over and above those, those risk factors. So it's a, it's a combined picture. It's a cumulative thing that you can see happening.

COMMISSIONER

And in this study going all the way through to the 45 year olds, and now you're going to test them at over 50, I mean, you can see the correlation, but can you talk to us about what may be the causal pathway from things, you know, it seems it's a sort of a perplexing thing to think through, you could intuitively you could go, oh, issues with self-regulation might mean more problems with addiction in adulthood. That makes some intuitive sense. But it gets a little bit harder to say and, you know, in terms of brain ageing and some of the other factors that you went to, it's going to be a predictor of that. Can you try and flesh out for us what's going on there?

DR GUINEY

Yeah, sure. So as an observational study, of course we can't directly attribute the causes, but we can see the things that are likely to be potential mechanisms through which self-control might influence some of those health outcomes. So for example, a lot of health outcomes, like brain age, or biological ageing, as you get older are influenced by your health behaviours. So things like engaging in physical activity in, in engaging in smoking or heavy drinking eating well, those sorts of things are all related to self control.

So people being able to if they, you know, if they have the resources that they require, being able to make the decision about what to, what to eat, to avoid the situations that might be tempting them to try smoking, for example, something like that. So we can see that route

through health behaviours is a really key one, and also in terms of people being able to keep a goal in mind and to persevere to working towards it. So that might be you can imagine in a financial situation, someone with more self-control is able to apply themselves better in the, in their education system that leads them to be able to get good qualifications and to move on, to be able to get a good job as they get older or at being able to achieve other, other health goals, for example, things that are malleable with those, those health behaviours that people can engage in.

COMMISSIONER

So the impact on how people live, you, you would speculate the impact on how people live, maybe health choices goal oriented choices, which then may lead to additional income and living standards, they then come back into the physical health manifestations that you're seeing?

DR GUINEY

Yes, yes, that's right.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Now given the scope of what this inquiry is trying to do you, we can very much hear from you, and from the Dunedin study, the importance of thinking about self-regulation, it being malleable and how that therefore intersects with early childhood education.

But are you able, and I know this is probably taking you into the zone of speculation, but are you able to give us any advice about what that means we should be thinking about in terms of the structure of early childhood education or interventions in the first thousand days of life?

DR GUINEY

Well, I, I think definitely from the programs we have seen that the earlier you're able to implement them the better, obviously with interventions that are developmentally appropriate for the age that you're implementing them with. As I mentioned earlier, there are, there are game-based self-regulation interventions that have been shown to be effective and that they can be adapted for children of appropriate ages. They can be implemented in a classroom setting. And also children can take the games learn the games and play them at home with their parents as well. So that helps to reinforce that learning.

Most of the, the evidence that we have relating to self-control and the Dunedin study begins at age three. So there are of course brain health development things that might help promote self control before that. But we weren't able to look at that just because of the, the limited data that we were that we collected early in the seventies on people in those younger ages. So from age three, we can see the impact. I can't comment on whether intervening earlier than that with self control specific interventions could be beneficial. Um, but I can say that we know that from age three onwards, we do see benefits for children.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. And are you aware, I know it wouldn't be directly the Dunedin, but are you aware of any studies around interventions, which are more in the zone of parenting education? So, um information advice for parents about parenting styles, which may enable the formation of better self-regulation in their child, as opposed to the, the game based technology you've just referred to, presumably the main stakeholder recipient of that is the child. I'm just wondering if there are other interventions where the main sort of stakeholder recipient is the parent.

DR GUINEY

Well, we do, we do know. So, so the games are not necessarily technology based, their sorry, can often be quite, quite classic games. Things like Simon Says and changing the, the difficulty level of it, things like that. But what we can see with the Engage intervention, for example, that even though it's not developmentally targeted, playing those games with their, with their children is part of the Engage program has benefits for parents' wellbeing as well.

And so it may well help to improve their way of thinking about how they might improve their child's development or help improve their child's self regulation by thinking about, about the types of factors that are important, what they might, what types of behaviours they might be encouraging and ways to do that.

COMMISSIONER

Right.

DR GUINEY

We know that parent, we know from the engaged work, that parents are very positive about the intervention and the children like really enjoy playing the games. And so that helps to make sure that they maintain doing the intervention, even when they're outside of a classroom setting.

COMMISSIONER

Right. And, and sorry, I shouldn't have made the jump that all games are technology based games. That's a, a slip by me, but can you just flesh out for us how Simon says, I think we'd all be familiar with, but how does that assist with self-regulation? I mean, what, what's the pathway there?

DR GUINEY

Yeah, so it, it involves inhibition really, which is one of the key skills that is needed for self-regulation is your ability to inhibit your first reaction or your big reaction in order to do

something more goal directed. And so Simon Says is one of the games that allows you to practice those inhibition skills.

You've got to not touch the touch, the body part that is being touched by the teacher that kind of thing to, and so that helps you to practice those inhibition skills and develop them over time. There are a number of different games that can benefit inhibition, but that's a key aspect of self-regulation right.

COMMISSIONER

And zooming out a bit from self-regulation are there other aspects of the Dunedin study that you would point us to, which you know, are probative on, on early education and how we should be thinking about it?

DR GUINEY

There are a number of factors, many of which you will already be aware of. So it, in the Dunedin study, it is really well documented, of course, that childhood socioeconomic status has a strong impact on children's outcomes later in life. And so the early childhood sector, of course, can't necessarily influence a child's socioeconomic status, but perhaps they can help to provide children or help to meet children's need the needs of children like the nutritional educational and enrichment needs that they might be missing out on a bit at home.

So there could be some gap filling there that helps to, um give children those benefits earlier on and also interventions that are aimed supporting families to be able to help them provide for their children so that they have the best possible outcome later in life. We also know that childhood social isolation is an important predictor of outcomes later in life. So that's when children are have difficulty with peer interactions, they're often on their own, they're struggling to build relationships with children of their same age.

And we see that children who are chronically socially isolated across childhood again, have these poorer health outcomes when they're adults. Um, so they have poorer cardiovascular health in their thirties, they have more risk factors for age related diseases. Um, and they also show markers of faster age related, cognitive decline in their forties. And so childhood social isolation is something of a childhood stressor that can create chronic stress in a child. Um, and though that the effects of chronic stress can accumulate over time and lead to these poorer health outcomes as they get older.

And then similarly, although early childhood can't necessarily directly influence this, another really important predictor of outcomes is adverse childhood experiences. So that's things like abuse, neglect, serious household dysfunction. And so the more adversity ACE experiences, the more likely an adulthood they are to have poorer outcomes across multiple life domains, their physical health, cognitive functioning, mental health, and their social wellbeing.

And so while of course those experiences are happening outside the early childhood sector, having an environment where children can feel safe and help to learn in a safe environment

where those chronic stresses of their other life experiences are reduced or help to ameliorate could have a beneficial effect for children later on. So intervening early with those children who have those adverse experiences to try and mitigate those.

COMMISSIONER

And can, I mean, you're obviously you know, remarkably the, the remarkable degree of follow up of the individuals in this study is incredible, but you you're inherently looking at the lives of people who were born in the early 1970s. Once again, I recognise this as speculation, but what, what do you think are different considerations and issues that pertain to children born today? Um, what, I mean, you, you know, the social isolation thing, my mind immediately ran to excess screen time now, I don't know whether or not that's a good direction for my mind to be running, but clearly there are, there are some additional some quite different factors for children today, as opposed to children born in the born in the first half of the 1970s. So can you take us through anything that would be on your mind there?

DR GUINEY

Yes, that's right. And so as part of the Dunedin study, we also have a sub study where we have followed up the children of study members at age 15. And so by looking at the children of study members, we've been able to see that their lives are a lot more unsettled than they previously were. Their family lives are a lot more unsettled than they previously were.

COMMISSIONER

So that's comparing them with their parents, you mean?

DR GUINEY

Yes. Sorry. So their, their parents were more likely to have two parents in the household to have living in this, in, in the same house or the same area as they grow up and being in a part of a neighbourhood community. They have that quite stable living situation when they were younger, but then their children had much more dynamic family environments, much more changing, changing relationships, not necessarily a stable family situation and also moving house a lot more often as well to different areas. So there's less community connection as well for children in that younger generation.

COMMISSIONER

And are there any so that's a general set of factors there, any factors sort of emerging over time? Presumably this cohort of people had children at different ages. So some might have had children as, as late teenagers. Um, some might have had their children in their late thirties, potentially even 40 or early forties. Can, is there anything trackable in the differentiation as to when the children were born?

DR GUINEY

Not, I don't think we would. We haven't been able to look at that because there's not quite enough people with the Dunedin across the different age ranges, to be able to make a comment on that per se. But we do know that people from more disadvantaged situations, also people with poorer self control tend to have children younger, and they also tend to have less positive parenting skills. And so that can lead to intergenerational effects with these health and wellbeing outcomes travelling through.

But we, we can't quite look at the specific trajectory generational effect with Dunedin study children. There's not quite enough people, but of course there are a number of other cohorts that are start that have started more recently, like the growing up in New Zealand study, for example, that has children are now around age 12. And so that's a much more recent study that would reflect the more modern situations that we see, but these key factors that we see here in the Dunedin study also come up in those more recent studies. So it's not that they are unique to that generation.

COMMISSIONER

No. And, and of the key factors that are showing up for today's 12 year olds, what would you say is new there? If you're familiar enough with the growing up in New Zealand study?

DR GUINEY

I don't think that there is anything that is really specifically new. Although what we have is children who are just living much more trauma, unsettled lives that the parents that are looking after them are changing more frequently, their caregivers they're moving house more frequently, that same kind of thing that we see in the Dunedin study. Second generation.

COMMISSIONER

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Interesting. We might be able to have an early minute.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I don't have any further questions. Thank you so much, Dr. Guiney.

COMMISSIONER

Yeah, we've learnt a lot. That's fantastic. And how long you how long can the Dunedin study go on into the future? Do you think is the intention to keep tracking people for you you'd have 50 years in you yet you'll be able to track them to their 102 or something?

DR GUINEY

Well, the idea is to go as long as we can. And so of course we will keep studying study members as long as we can. And as long as they're willing to participate. They've been so

generous so far by continuing to participate well into midlife. And so we hope to continue that for as, for as long as possible,

COMMISSIONER

It is incredible. The retention rate in the study. Amazing.

DR GUINEY

Yes. I think that that's a really big benefit because it helps us to know then that we're not just looking at healthy and wealthy people and seeing how they do over time. We can have that, that broader set of people and really understand the differences in their experience.

COMMISSIONER

Okay. Thank you very much. That's been fantastic. Thanks a lot.

COUNSEL ASSISTING

I ask Commissioner that we adjourn until the March set of hearings.

COMMISSIONER

Thank you. And we will do that. We will adjourn until our March sittings. Thank you very much for all of your efforts and work and thank you to everybody who's come along to attend as well in those watching online. So thank you.

< HEARING ADJOURNED UNTIL MARCH HEARINGS