

Professionals "need common approach to children"

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The agencies that provide services to young children will be far more effective when the education that professionals receive to prepare them for practice has a common, national approach, a Flinders academic says.

School of Nursing Senior Lecturer, Dr Julian Grant is leading a multi-institutional team which has received funding of \$223,000 from the Federal Government's Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) to develop a national interdisciplinary framework for professionals working with [children](#) in the early years.

Dr Grant said that over recent years there has been considerable progress across Australia in setting up a model for services using hubs that co-locate [child care](#), child and family health nurses, welfare services and some other health services.

But, she said, the problem of disparate approaches and regulatory systems remains.

"We've got the people located in the same place, but they aren't developing an integrated service," Dr Grant said.

She said that [early childhood education](#), nursing and social work each have varying philosophies and principles about what is important for children from birth to five, and that there are also differences in the guidelines within which each profession operates.

"It has led to quite a lot of challenges in the workplace, as to how these people can move together and work together for the benefit of children and families," she said.

Dr Grant said that gaps in language and terminology, for example, can cause problems with referrals between [professionals](#) from different disciplines.

She said the OLT project will go right back to tackle the pedagogical fundamentals of the relevant professions.

"We're trying to go back to basics to establish principles that all can agree on, so that there is a common framework of principles that every single person who works with a child from birth to five will accept, and which will be embedded into their teaching and learning from the start."

"We think it's important to have an early-years focus – to say, in a sense, 'Despite what profession you're in, let's focus on the needs of the kids'."

To achieve a degree of "commonality", the project will initially work to define an agreed statement of common outcomes involving all the disciplines and will then develop an interdisciplinary map of evidence-informed theory.

The goal is to create a set of universal elements – knowledge, skills and attributes that are required for working with children.

"We want to have some common ones for all of the professions, at all of the skill levels," Dr Grant said.

She said that ultimately it is proposed that the universal elements feed into TAFE as well as university curricula.

Acknowledging the ambitious nature of the project, Dr Grant said the wide community-based consultation of the initial research was intended to assist adoption of the final outcomes.

"We want people to be on board and to be engaged," she said.

Provided by Flinders University

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