

## RUN LEARNING AND TEACHING AWARDS 2023

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**Title:** Boosting Retention Through Equitable Assessments in Early Childhood Education

**Abstract:** Australia faces a shortage of 21,000 Early Childhood Educators (ECE). The Bachelor of Education (Birth to 5) degree aims to address this gap, but student retention has been a challenge. To improve retention and prepare students for professional practice, an Interactive Oral Assessment (IOA) was introduced in EEB309 - Wellness and Wellbeing, the first subject in this degree. Research indicates that success in the initial subject is crucial for retention.

EEB309, with 212 students in 2024, includes vocational education trained (VET) diploma-qualified educators, predominantly working professionals, with a median age of 31. The cohort is diverse, with 97% female, 33% from low Socio-Economic Status (SES) backgrounds, and over 50% first-in-family tertiary students, many studying part-time while working full-time.

The IOA replaced a 1500-word written assessment to create an equitable assessment and enhance professional skills. It involved a 10-minute professional conversation based on workplace scenarios. The IOA received positive feedback from 94% of students, increased retention by 21%, progress rates by 20% and improved student satisfaction by 13%. Fail rates and non-submissions were reduced by over 50%, demonstrating its effectiveness in supporting student progression.

This will help to alleviate Australia's shortage of degree-qualified early childhood educators, particularly critical in regional areas.