

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



TeEACH

**Transforming early Education
and Child Health**

Conducting world-class transdisciplinary research in collaboration with our partners to improve the lives of young children and their families.

TeEACH

TeEACH works collaboratively with service providers, government and families to undertake research and translate research findings into actionable policies and practices that address complex issues associated with ensuring the best start in life for all young children.

Almost a third of Australian children experience some form of disadvantage that can have a lasting impact on their health, development and educational achievement.

No child should have his or her potential limited because of the circumstances into which they are born or live. Our transdisciplinary research contributes to actions that change the trajectories of young lives.

We bring together the diverse perspectives of families, communities, service sectors and industry partners in order to make a difference with and for children in Western Sydney, throughout Australia and around the world.

28 Active projects



with 12 government partnerships

and 14 NGO partnerships



Conducting research across 12 different countries.

PROJECTS DESIGNED BY CHILDREN FOR CHILDREN

Our child-led research uses a participatory approach in which children identify a problem and design the solution. Through community collaboration and ongoing evaluation, this approach is transforming lives in Sydney and internationally.

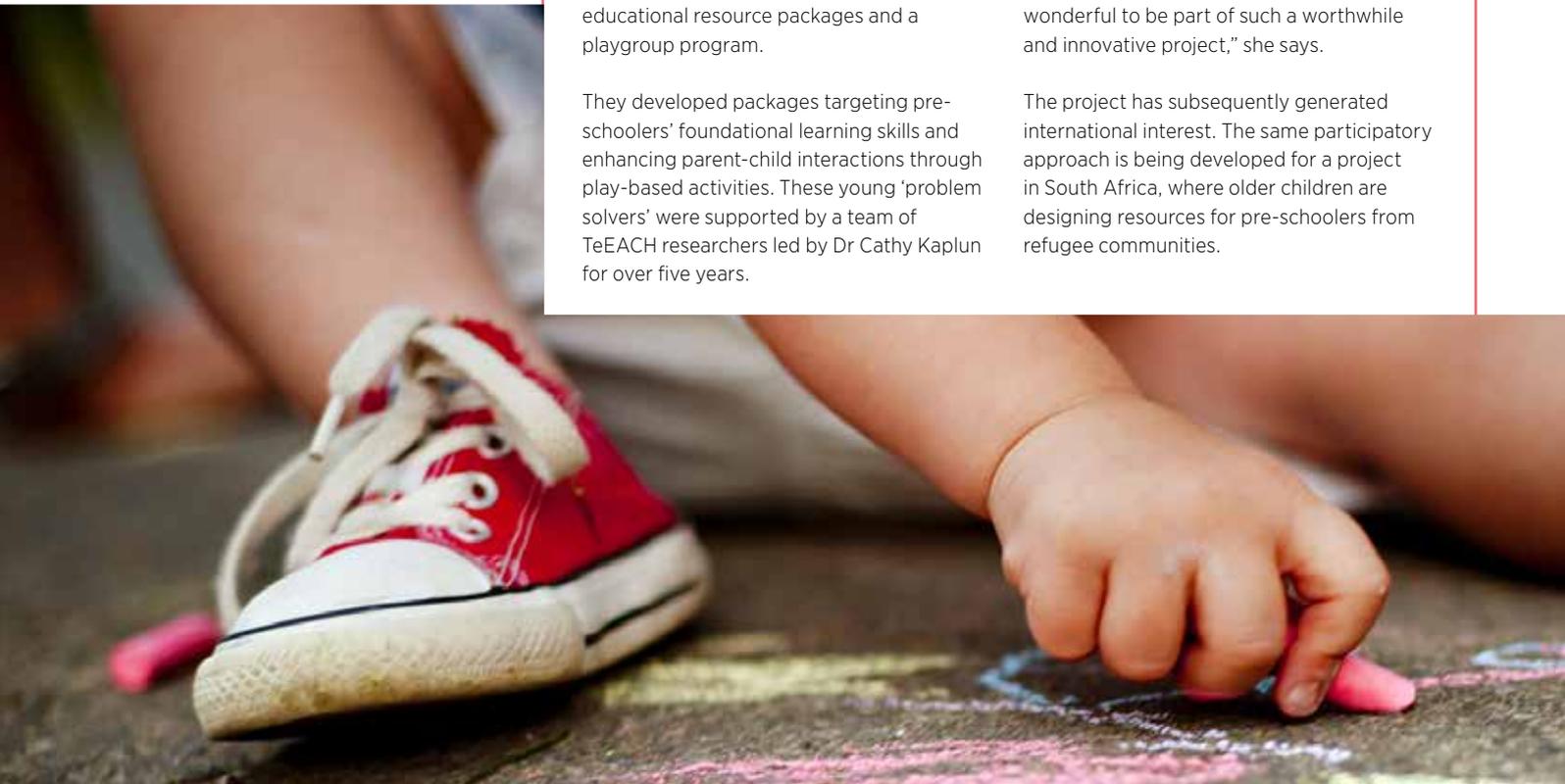
It started when Year 5 and 6 students at a school in South Western Sydney became aware that pre-schoolers were not starting school with the pre-academic skills they needed. The older children led the design of a school transition program, including educational resource packages and a playgroup program.

They developed packages targeting pre-schoolers' foundational learning skills and enhancing parent-child interactions through play-based activities. These young 'problem solvers' were supported by a team of TeEACH researchers led by Dr Cathy Kaplun for over five years.

TeEACH's involvement has been instrumental in demonstrating the impact that children can have as active change-makers. Dr Kaplun's research has informed a holistic approach to program expansion including access to a speech therapist, occupational therapist and a trauma psychologist within the program.

"Not all children have the same experiences and opportunities to learn. This school empowered older students to help pre-schoolers on their learning journey. It is wonderful to be part of such a worthwhile and innovative project," she says.

The project has subsequently generated international interest. The same participatory approach is being developed for a project in South Africa, where older children are designing resources for pre-schoolers from refugee communities.



“ONE OF TeEACH’S STRENGTHS IS A WAY OF WORKING WITH PARTNERS THAT’S DIFFERENT. WE DISTINGUISH OURSELVES AS ENGAGED COLLABORATORS AND BEING IMPLEMENTATION SCIENTISTS, WORKING ON THE GROUND TO EMBED GOOD RESEARCH IN SERVICE DELIVERY, FROM THE DESIGN OF GOOD POLICY THROUGH TO PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, PLACE-BASED IMPLEMENTATION, AND HIGH QUALITY EVALUATION.”

Our research focuses on children from pre-conception to eight years old – the crucial early years that set the trajectory for life.

Social change and the growing loss of connection to local community, along with significant system change and barriers to service engagement, can lead to the isolation and marginalisation of families when they are most in need of support. Our research aims to directly engage with services and systems to ensure that they can better provide what children and families need to negotiate their worlds and challenges.

We use a participatory approach, and partner with children, communities, government, health services, early education and care services, schools, not-for-profit organisations, professional bodies and philanthropic organisations to change the lives of children for the better.

Our research is applied, directly informed by and seeking to inform current policy and practice. We bring expertise in a wide range of methodologies, we are innovative in our approach to service and system co-design, we deliver high quality inter-professional training, and we specialise in the development of data-driven approaches to service decision-making and system design, delivery and improvement.

Our focus areas include:

- Maternal, child and family health services and systems
- Optimal child development
- Early years education
- Family engagement
- Perinatal mental health
- Early childhood transitions
- Culturally meaningful approaches to service design for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Mobilising communities to support families living with adversity

OUR COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FACILITATE DIRECT IMPACT ON POLICY AND SYSTEM DESIGN, AS WELL AS PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

When three large not-for-profit organisations lost government funding to support their volunteer home visiting service for families of young children, researchers from TeEACH were invited to join their alliance and take the lead in providing the research evidence they needed to re-attract support.

Volunteer Family Connect is a community-driven, research-based home-visiting program that mobilises volunteers to provide support for parents of young children who are isolated or feeling overwhelmed by their parenting role.

It was developed in an alliance of TeEACH researchers, The Benevolent Society, Karitane and Save the Children Australia.

Associate Professor Rebekah Grace led a randomised controlled trial that demonstrated the effectiveness of the Volunteer Family Connect program for families. The trial found the program had positive impacts on the families, as well as producing positive outcomes for those who volunteered to deliver the program.

“It’s a program that is bigger than helping individual families, it’s about strengthening whole communities,” Associate Professor Grace says.

To run a rigorous trial in a social service setting required buy-in across every level of the partner organisations and at every stage of the research. This was made possible by TeEACH’s unique approach and commitment to partnership research.

“It is no small feat to run a randomised controlled trial in a social service setting where this method typically sits very uncomfortably. I am proud to have been part of such an effective partnership, and to have been able to show that it is possible to do highly rigorous research with community services,” she says.

“One of TeEACH’s strengths is a way of working with partners that’s different. We distinguish ourselves as engaged collaborators and being implementation scientists, working on the ground to embed good research in service delivery, from the design of good policy through to program development, place-based implementation, and high quality evaluation.”

WE ARE EXPERTS IN COMPLEXITY: UNDERSTANDING HOW PARENTS NAVIGATE THE NDIS.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), with its move to individualised funding, brings with it great optimism and possibilities for individuals with disability. However, it is a complex system and navigating it successfully can be difficult; especially for families with a young child just beginning what may be a life-long journey. If they are to have “choice and control”, which is the stated aim of the NDIS, they need not only to have access to information to make sound decisions about services, but also be confident in their ability to advocate for their child and family.

Associate Professor Christine Johnston’s program of research gives focus to family-centred practice and ways of supporting family capacity. Her work has informed policy and led to the development of training packages and programs for families and professionals. She is currently working with Kerry Staples and Associate Professor

Danielle Tracey to explore the experience of the NDIS from the perspectives of children, parents, therapists and teachers. An early finding is that those families who have prior, positive experiences with early intervention are better able to develop capacity and make informed choices.

Associate Professor Johnston says understanding the perspectives of families is crucial amid an international shift toward individualised funding models. “This research supports the importance of family-centred approaches and engaging families in meaningful partnerships,” she says.

The current study is to be scaled up and conducted in other parts of Australia and will provide a strong evidence base for determining the processes that need to be followed to ensure best outcomes for children and their families.

Want to know more about our research?
westernsydney.edu.au/teach

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