

## Where have the Very Young Children Gone in Mathematics Education Research?

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There is growing national interest in children's early learning competencies, and the impact context and curriculum have on enriching these. Recently-published documents and emerging initiatives point to stakeholder and political investment in the birth to 8 years period. These include the Early Years Royal Commission in South Australia led by Hon. Julia Gillard, NSW Early Years Commitment (2023), and the updated Early Years Learning Framework of Australia (EYLF2.0; AGDE, 2022). The Gillard Early Years Royal Commission focuses on the first 1000 days of a child's life, acknowledging their cruciality and reinforcing the salience of in-depth inquiry into this pivotal period. Considering this present and imminent attention, it is reasonable to ask about the contribution of mathematics research and the extent to which it is woven into such important conversations.

With this query in mind, we were curious about the presentation of early years research in Australia in the 2018-2022 MERGA conference proceedings. A brief analysis suggests that less than ten percent of presentations focused on children's early learning in mathematics. Of that ten percent, only one paper per year focused on very young children. We understand that in Australia, the early years of *school* have a strong presence in mathematics education research. However, there appears to be less research emphasis on very young children, aged birth to 4. Is this the case? If so, where have all the very young children gone?

As part of this round table, we invite MERGA members to contribute to our wonderings, including their research, experiences and ideas. In this process we would like to explore potential synergy between what participants share, and early years research.

Our focus questions for this session include:

- Are very young children the missing thread in mathematics education research?
- What relationships could be generated between early years mathematics research and the broader MERGA research?
- What might be the implications of a research gap?

### References

Australian Government Department of Education (2022). *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia* (V2.0). Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council.

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