Emotional wellbeing and related domains of infant/toddler experiences in child care: Observing, reflecting, improving children's learning

Magdalena Janus University of British Columbia, Canada

Peter Humburg UNSW, Australia

Kate Williams USC, Australia

David Chan UNSW, Australia

Linda Harrison Macquarie U, Australia



WAIMH, Toronto, 3 October 2026

Early Childhood Education for Under 3's

High income countries, average enrolment in ECEC in 2018

(OECD, 2020)

34% 1-year-olds

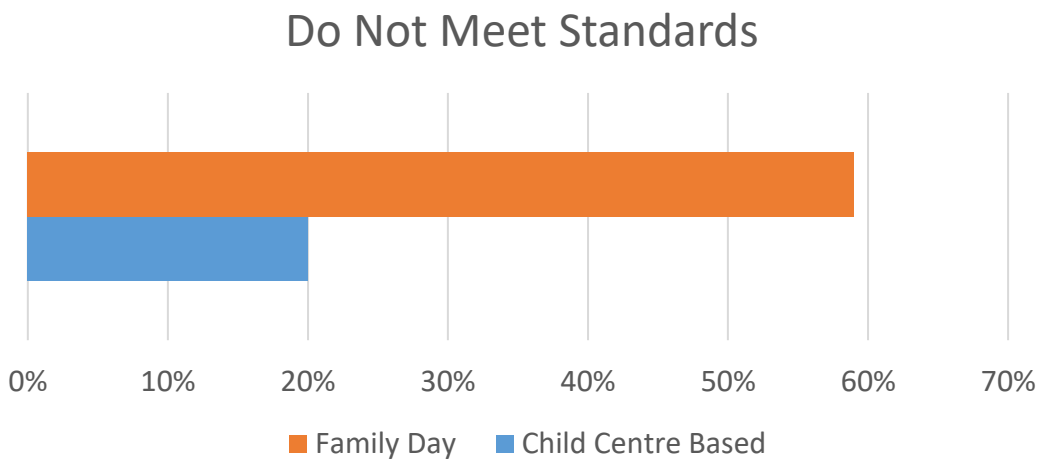
46% 2-year-olds

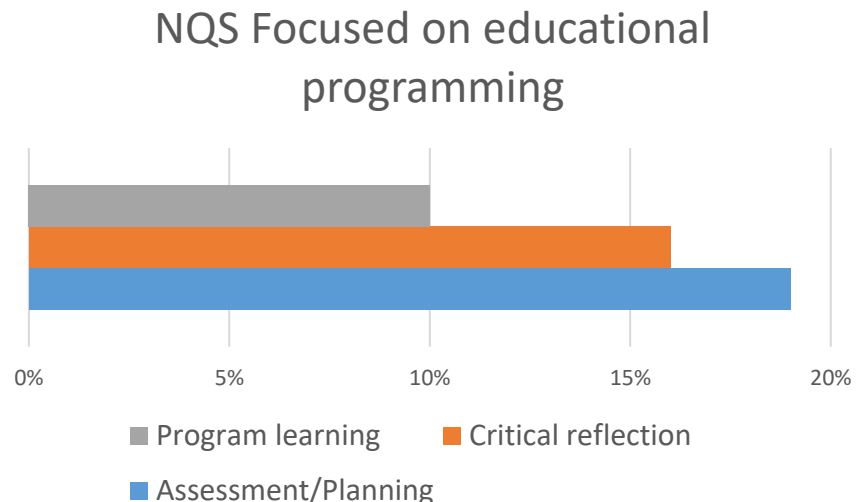
High quality learning and positive interactions with educators in early childhood services are key contributors to healthy developmental trajectory

Early Childhood Education for Under 3's

- Australia: National Quality Standards NQS (ACECQA, 2020)

- Particular area of weakness: NQS focused on educational programming





Early Childhood Education for Under 3's

- The underestimated capabilities of infants and toddlers
- Limited understandings of what constitutes education for birth to 3 years.
- How educators can be best prepared, supported and sustained to provide high quality ECEC

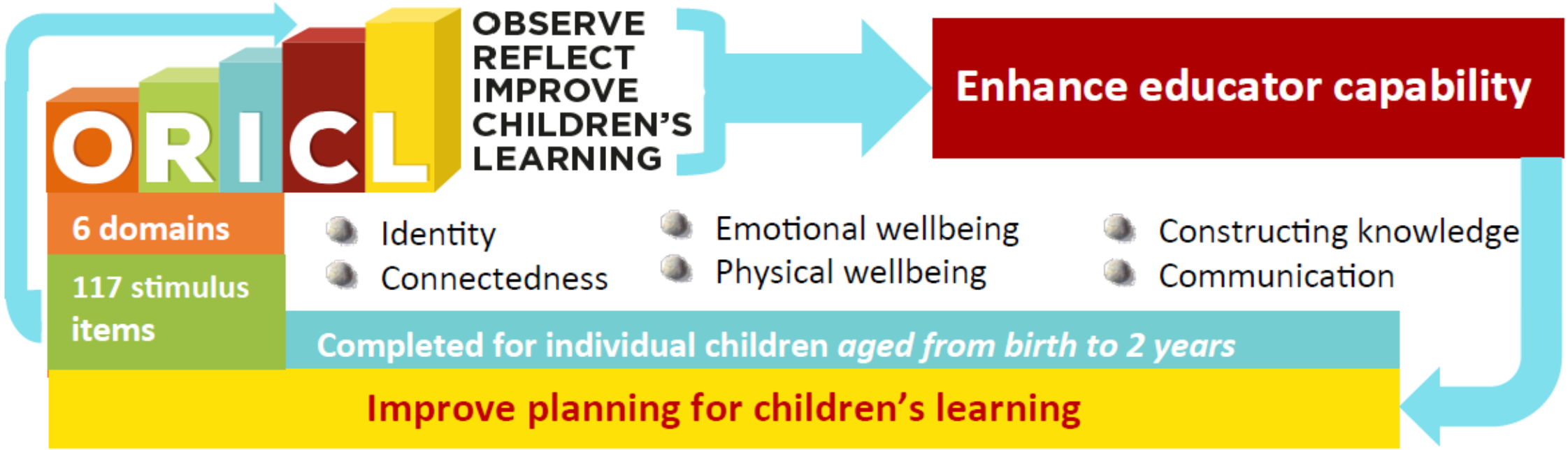
- There is a lack of tools **for supporting educators** working with children under 3 years

What is ORICL

A tool to support infant-toddler educators to

- **Observe**,
- **Reflect** on,
- assess and **Improve** the quality of
- individual **Children's Learning** experiences

by considering the unique contextual factors in the education and care setting that impact each child's development, learning and wellbeing



https://oricl.org

ORICL content - 6 broad domains

Domain number	Domain name	Number of items
1	Identity, belonging, sense of self, family and culture (ID)	23
2	Connectedness with others (CON)	16
3a	Emotional wellbeing (EM)	18
3b	Physical wellbeing (PH)	25
4	Constructing knowledge and understandings (CK)	18
5	Communication (CO)	16
TOTAL		**117**

Within each domain

Items that focus on

- The child's own **efforts, actions and initiatives (in EM – 10)**
- The **acknowledgement and support** from educators (in EM – 7)
- **Peer responses** to the child (in EM -1)
- Response scale: no opportunity/not yet to Rarely (1), sometimes (3), always (5)

Within Emotional wellbeing domain

Focus	Example
Child's own efforts, actions and initiatives	When this child is **experiencing negative emotion** (s), they have clear ways of showing these emotions that are easy to interpret
	When in their usual group, this child **shows they understand the emotions of other children or their educators**
Acknowledgement and support from **educators**	This child's key triggers in terms of becoming distressed **are well known by the** educators.
	When this child is expressing emotions (facial expression, bodily movement, actions), educators **use words with this child to describe the child's feelings.**
Peer responses to the child	When this child is in their usual group, the child's peers **seem to read the emotional cues of the child well and respond with an attempt at support.**

Respondents

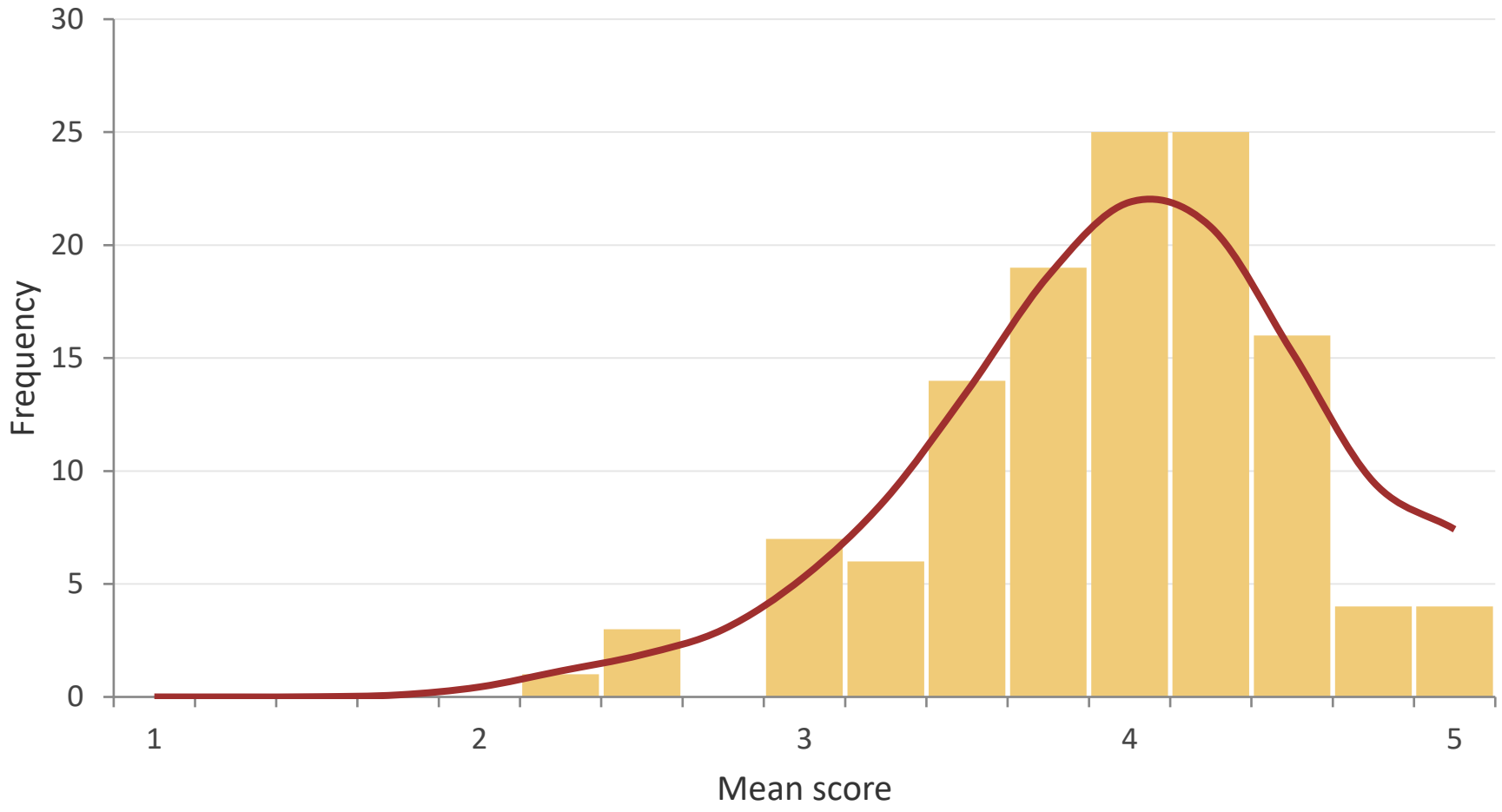
- Child care settings recruited through 11 partner organisations with funding from the Australian Research Council.
- The educators in the study had from 1 to over 12 years' experience in the field; and had completed at least a certificate.
- Child sample N= 125
- Most of the items had less than 5% missing responses.
- In the Emotional wellbeing domain, most items were completed.
- One item with 5.5% missingness concerned the child's peers' ability to read the child's emotional cues.

Results

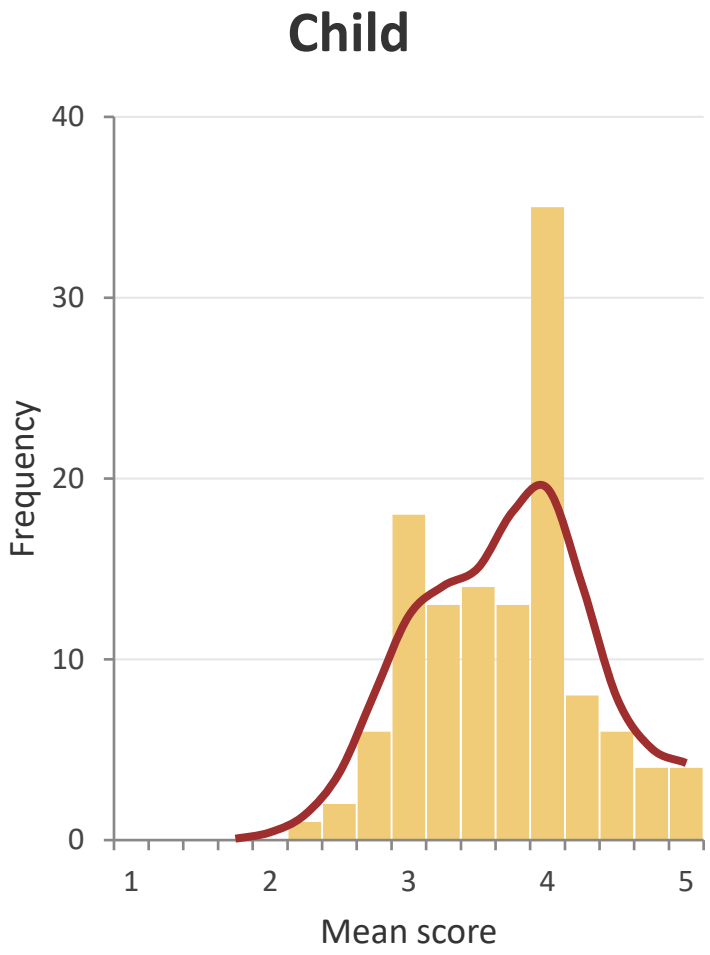
- Small to moderate correlations (rs = .31 to .54) between domains and age
- Limited correlations with gender (rs = .04 to .27)

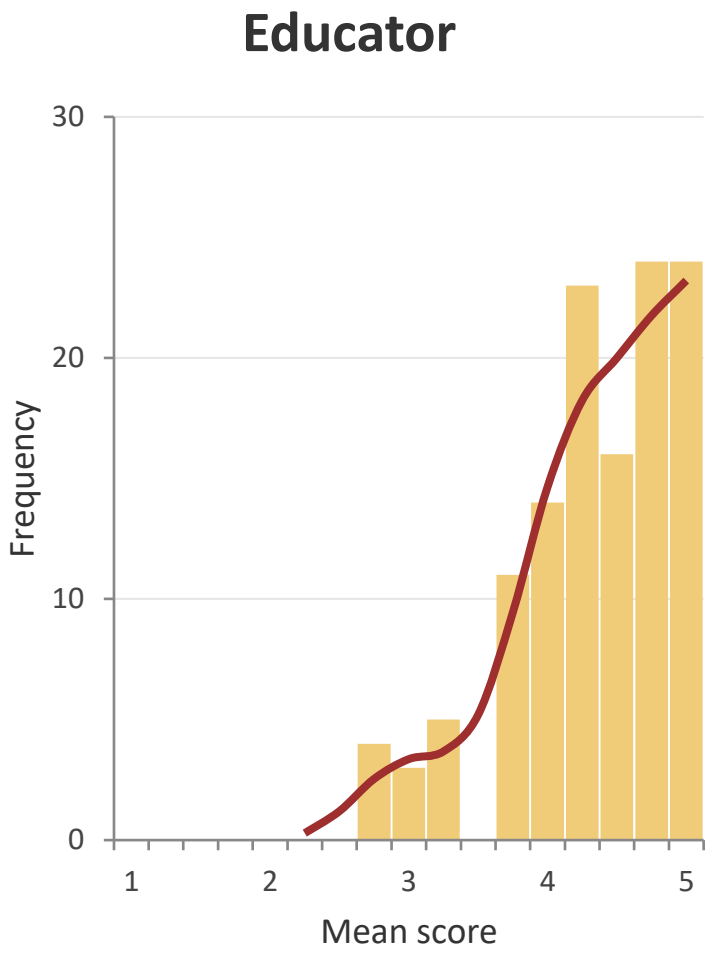
	Emotional wellbeing	Physical wellbeing
Age	0.31	0.31
Gender	0.27	0.23
Physical wellbeing	0.77	

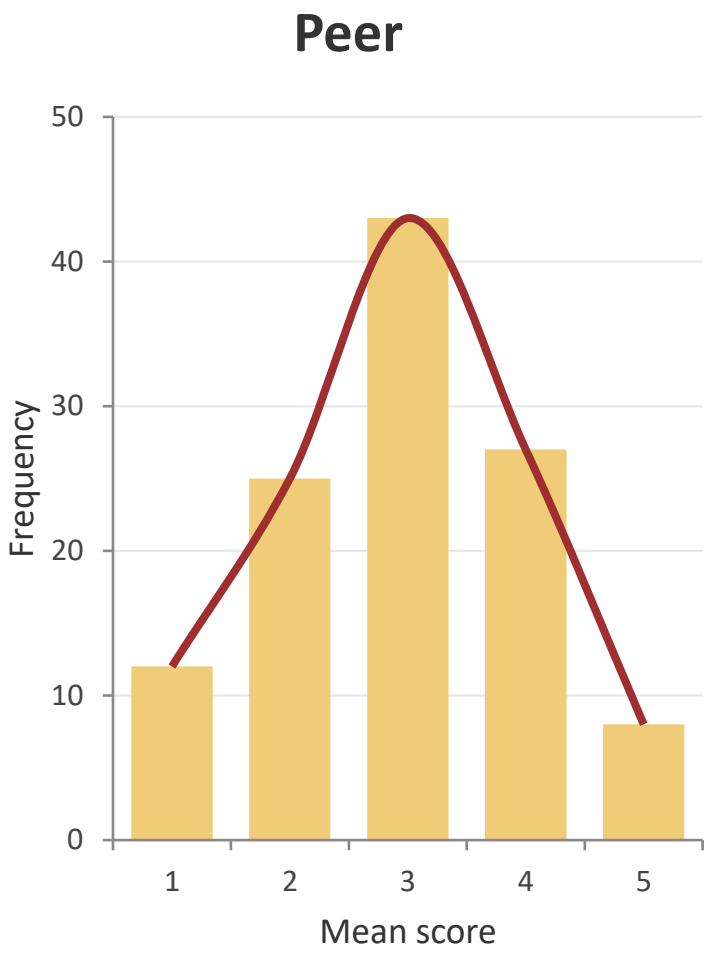
Emotional wellbeing domain – all responses



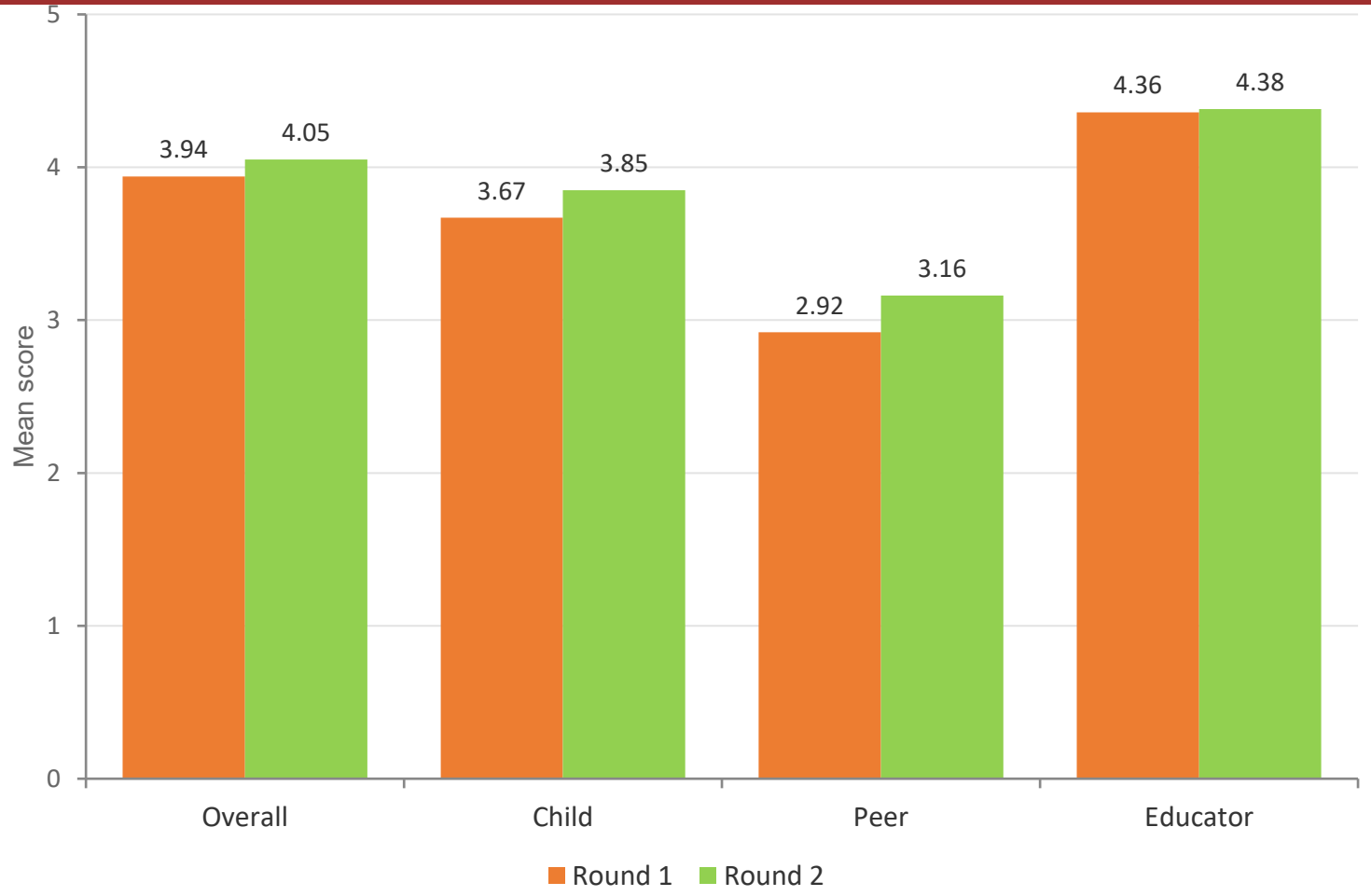
Emotional wellbeing domain – by focus







Emotional wellbeing domain – by Round



+0.2

Child and Peer scores each rose about 0.2 points

4.4

Educator scores were highest and nearly flat across rounds

2.9

Peer scores were lowest in both rounds, with the most variability (SD ≈ 1.1)

Note: Round 1 effective n ≈ 90–99; Round 2 n = 19

Next steps

- Response to ORICL
- Case studies
- Pedagogical Assessment Documentation Tool



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

A few quotes

"I feel like when completing the ORICL, you are really thinking about the child's emotional and social wellbeing and skills and abilities - it prompts you to think about how to support development"

"One child was dropping his playdough on the floor and I told him not to do it but then I realised he was using his shoe to make a print on the playdough. I thought of the ORICL and realised the child is exploring"

"It was interesting that questions focused on educators which prompted me to think about this"

"Appreciated the deeper awareness about what children are doing and learning from using the ORICL. The ORICL will lead to better quality experiences for children"



MACQUARIE University

QUT Queensland University of Technology

Charles Sturt University

UNSW SYDNEY

McMaster University

University of the Sunshine Coast Australia

UBC

Thank you to all the colleagues, partners, and educators

oricle.org

Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

C&K Childcare & Kindergarten
Early Learning since 1907

kids early learning blacktown city

Children's Services Since 1895

Family DAY CARE AUSTRALIA

sdn children's services

LIVERPOOL CITY COUNCIL

Uniting

NORTHSIDE COMMUNITY SERVICE

Gowrie New South Wales