MORE than a thousand childcare professionals and early childhood educators around Australia stopped work early to protest their pay rates as part of International Women’s Day.

Their rates of pay are appallingly low and challenge a standard of living, longevity in the profession and the ability to be granted a mortgage.

These staff are nurturing our children at a critical time in childhood, yet, they are paid less than cleaners.

They earn half the national average wage, just above the minimum wage – as little as $20 an hour.

These staff have at least a Certificate III.

How is it that the government is satisfied that a male metal fitter and machinist with a Certificate III qualification can earn $37.89, compared with the $20.61 earned by the Certificate III-qualified early years educator?

Many early childhood educators have diploma qualifications, and bachelor degrees. And, their pay is only marginally better.

The government needs to get serious about its commitment to early childhood education.

Yes, the government has recognised the need for educators to have increased skills and qualifications. But, they are failing to give staff the professional recognition and the sort of pay and conditions that properly value the work they do and the benefit they bring to children’s development.

Current scientific knowledge proves the early years are a critical time for brain development.

Google it and read the science for yourself. Healthy early development depends on nurturing and dependable relationships with supportive and nurturing adults.

If your child is in a childcare setting, then the nurturing adults supporting your parenting role are childcare professionals.

Early experiences lay the foundation for learning in later life, affect the development of the brain and lay the foundation for intelligence, emotional health, and future well-being.

The emotional, social and physical development of a young child has a direct effect on overall development and on the adult they will become.

So, how can we afford to pay staff a pittance when so much is at stake?

It is time governments and communities recognised the significance of what this profession does.

Can we expect high-quality early education while handing out poverty wages for such valuable work?

Early childhood staff build strong, nurturing relationships with children which in turn are ensuring healthy development and well-being.

They are engaging in responsive care-giving interactions which bring to children a sense of belonging and a knowledge they are cared for, and can trust the world around them.

If we get it right in the early years, children thrive throughout school and their adult lives. I think that is worth a pay rise, don’t you?

**SCHOOL OF THOUGHT**

**DR ALI BLACK**

**UNIVERSITY OF THE SUNSHINE COAST**

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