Hello from the Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work Research Team

The project is going national!

There has been considerable ongoing interest in the Exemplary Educators Study. Recently, a decision was made to extend our research to all states and territories of Australia. Our first centres were invited almost 12 months ago and we will continue to rollout our invitations to exemplary services throughout Australia over the coming months. This is great news as it means that the data will represent a wider and more diverse group of early childhood educators.

If you have received this newsletter, it is because your centre meets the strict criteria to participate in this project (invited centres need to have exceeded every Standard in each Quality Area, in their NQS Assessment and Rating since 2014).

If you are a new director or educator at your centre and/or are hearing about the project for the first time, please get in touch with us and we can provide you with the information you need to join the project.

Similarly, if you did not participate when first invited, please remember that your invitation remains open and you are welcome to get in touch to come on board now.

Why did we choose your centre?
Basically, you are the superstars of exemplary early childhood education.

Being invited into this study is an extraordinary achievement. There are approximately 10500 centre based children’s education and care services approved to operate under the NQF (Long day care and Preschool/Kindergarten), yet only 600 centres across Australia have met the criteria for this project.

Time Use Diary results so far…

Exemplary Educators are Busy Educators
Over 200 exemplary educators has participated in the project. We know from our analysis of 2,500 hours of RTSTUD data uploaded by educators that your day is busy and complex.

From these diary entries we can describe ‘busy’ in terms of the large number of different activities exemplary educators do in an hour. This means that educators are making frequent changes of work activity throughout the day.

We describe ‘complex’ in terms of multi-tasking, which is when educators report doing two different activities at the same time. This pattern is also characteristic of what educators in exemplary ECEC centres are reporting about their day.

Although exemplary educators are busy, our data shows that in general they do not feel rushed or over-burdened. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), about half of educators gave a rating of 3 or less to the question “How rushed did you feel during the past hour?”, and a rating of 4 or less to “Were different things being demanded of you?” There were variations, however, across the hours of the day. Ratings were higher at the beginning and end of the day, with about 20% of educators giving a rating 7 or above for feeling rushed or having multiple demands.

Exemplary Educators are satisfied with their work
On average and for most hours of the day, about 60% of educators gave a rating of 7 or above to the question “How satisfied did you feel during the past hour?” on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high).

Thank you to all of the educators who have already participated in the project and given us insight into your exemplary practices.
What’s happening next in the project?

Analysing the RTSTUD data
Our next step for the Time Use Diary is to explore the ratings for ‘feeling rushed’ and “different things being demanded” at different times of the day to find out what activities educators were doing when their ratings were higher than average.

We are also planning to explore ratings and work activities for educators holding different qualifications: degree, diploma and certificate. Our latest findings will be used to promote discussion in the Focus Group sessions.

Focus Groups are starting soon!
We have started to invite eligible centre from Sydney and Brisbane to join us for stage 2 of the project. We will roll out focus groups according to location and qualifications over the coming months. The focus group meetings are designed to discuss the findings from the RTSTUD app and to ‘dig deeper’ into your understandings and insights about being an exemplary educator.

These focus group sessions will be a valuable opportunity for educators and directors to share their thoughts and reflect on the roles undertaken by early childhood educators.

Focus groups will include up to 6 educators with the same qualification level. They may be done face to face or via online video conference (you will be able to specify a preference on the consent form) and will take between 1-2 hours. These sessions will be facilitated as an open discussion and will be a wonderful opportunity to hear from other exemplary educators.

Please note:
You are able to participate in Focus Groups regardless of whether you participated in the use of the RTSTUD app

Common Questions about using the RTSTUD app

Am I too busy to do this?
We know that your day is busy, complex and often challenging, and ‘busyness’ is the main reason that many services have been reluctant to participate.

But, that’s exactly why we need you – your ‘busyness’ and activities during the day will illustrate the demands of your work.

To date there has never been an undertaking of large scale research of this kind in Australia. The more educators we have participating, the larger and more robust our research becomes. The more robust, the more significant the findings. Please get on board, invite those at your service who didn’t participate, or consider participating even if you declined earlier. Your participation is so valuable and we are still a fair way off our target participation. There are just over 200 exemplary educators participating, but we are hoping this number will be higher.

How does this study benefit us?
This is your opportunity to have a voice in a project that will significantly impact future improvements to early childhood education and our workforce.

However, from a ‘short term’ point of view, many services have spoken about the benefit of incorporating the RTSTUD app into their curriculum and learning and engaging the children in research and ‘data collection’. This has proved very successful as the children become ‘active researchers’. Educators who embedded the app into their curriculum told us that it became a STEM learning experience rather than ‘another administrative task’.

Other educators and centres have used the app as a critical thinking / reflective tool and been able to share their thoughts at staff meetings. They have been able to incorporate some of their discussions and finding into their teaching reflections and Quality Improvement Plan, particularly when reflecting on Quality Area 7. As one of our participates said “Doing this made us so mindful of our practices and where we were focusing our energy. It was great for us to be reflecting on our practices during the day”.

Being a centre that is involved in large scale research shows that you are committed to quality early childhood education and can assist centres in their application for an excellent rating.

I want to participate, so what do I do?
Please return your signed consent form to kim.crisp@qut.edu.au and we will send you the relevant information on how to participate. If you do not have the original consent form, please let us
know and we will forward one to you. Once you have consented, you will receive instructions on how to download and use the app as well as access to a demonstration to try the app out before you start.

Remember, once you agree to participate, you are able to decide the best time to start the app. Some centres have the whole team start together, while others have ‘staged’ the rollout. We are happy for you to find a way that suits your centres and educators needs and can support you through the process.

Sharing our research

The Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work research team are committed to sharing the project, as it unfolds, including conference presentations, publications and media releases.

Conferences
Over the past few months the research team has taken the opportunity to share this study at a number of local and international conferences.

Preparing, Retaining and Sustaining the ECEC Workforce Researchers’ Forum
In February the research team joined over 30 academics at QUT, Brisbane to showcase contemporary early childhood workforce research. A panel of “critical friends” from ACECQA, ELACCA, ECA and United Voice provided feedback and critique of the research project, with this process promoting the authentic application of projects – research to policy to practice. A key outcome of the February Forum is to develop a National ECEC Workforce Research Agenda. It was exciting to be part of collective voices to promote the message that the ECEC workforce matters.

OMEP Worldwide Assembly and Conference: Conditions of Early Childhood Education Today: A Foundation for a sustainable future
In June, members of the team travelled to Prague where they presented on the project and the innovative use of the RTSTUD app.

AJEC Research Symposium
Following on from the ECEC Workforce Forum, the research team again presented on the study. This time the presentation was part of a panel where three early childhood workforce studies were showcased. Poignant questions put to the panel included how to keep research “real” so that it has meaning for educators working in centres. Again, this AJEC Symposium presentation reiterated the growing bodies of ECEC workforce research in Australia, that collectively is gaining momentum and showing impact – with policy, and with educators themselves.

Look out for us at the upcoming ECA National Conference in September.

Publications
The research team are working on journal articles that will see this research shared on an international level. You may already have seen the project highlighted in a number of professional journals, magazines and online newsletters.

Media activity | Celebrating your achievement
One of our participant centres was so inspired by the Exemplary Educators Study that educators and the parent committee approached our research team to develop a local media release.

We are thrilled that the study was profiled in a local newspaper, and excited that the educators at the centre are gaining the validation that they, as exemplary early childhood educators, warrant. They even made the front page!

Our annual partner meeting
In June, we held our annual partner meeting in Sydney. This was an opportunity to meet with representatives from partner organisations to discuss the project rollout, the initial findings and strategize for the next phase of the study.

Partner organisations
- Child Australia
- Community Early Learning Australia
- Inner West Council
- Crèche and Kindergarten Association
- KU Children’s Services
- Independent Education Union (QLD & NT)
- Independent Education Union (NSW/ACT)
- United Voice
- Rutgers University (USA)
Meet the Research Team

Our research team bring with them extensive expertise, experience, and skills. They all have a strong interest in the early childhood workforce; and a strong track record of collaboration with the early childhood field. You are welcome to contact our researchers at any time.

Chief Investigator
Prof Frances Press
02 6338 4287 | fpress@csu.edu.au

Frances' teaching and research interests cover the areas of early childhood policy, the sociology of early childhood, and the leadership of early childhood programmes. She has worked extensively with academic, government and non-government bodies on issues related to child and family policy and has a particular interest in examining policy and practice from the stance of children's rights.

Investigator
Prof Linda Harrison
02 9850 6567 | lharrison@csu.edu.au

Linda is an early childhood educator and researcher with varied interests and expertise, most particularly in large-scale longitudinal studies and the development of innovative methodologies for studying children's lives, experiences, and perspectives as they move into and through early childhood settings and schools.

Investigator
A/Prof Sandie Wong
02 9850 9844 | sandie.wong@mq.edu.au

Sandie has a PhD in early childhood education and has worked as an academic, manager, researcher, evaluator, educator, consultant and nurse, within a range of early childhood, academic and health organisations. Sandie’s research interests include early childhood education and intervention, particularly in regards to the role early childhood education and intervention have in ameliorating disadvantage and reducing marginalisation.

Investigator
Dr Megan Gibson
07 3188092 | ml.gibson@qut.edu.au

Megan is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education. Megan’s key areas of higher education teaching and research interests are informed by her expansive work in the field, and focus on preparing and sustaining the early childhood workforce.

Project Manager
Lesley Stoneman
lstoneman@csu.edu.au

Lesley has taken on the role of Project Manager for the project. She has along affiliation with Charles Sturt University, including her current role as coordinator of two distance education subjects in the Bachelor of Education (Birth to 5 Years). Lesley strongly supports the need for Australian government and society to recognise the importance of early childhood education.

Research Assistant
Kim Crisp
0468 358 364 | kim.crisp@qut.edu.au

Kim has worked in early childhood education, in a variety of teaching, assessment, management and research roles. Currently she divides her week between this project and working as an early childhood teacher. Kim has an active interest in the sustainability of the early childhood workforce and in raising the profile of early childhood educators.

Have a question?

Please contact our Research Assistant for a chat or more information about the project. Kim is available on Mondays and Tuesdays.