December 2018

Thank you to everyone for your support and contribution to the Exemplary Early Childhood Educators At Work research project this year. We have over 3000 hours of data to analysis from the RTSTUD from over 260 participants, and we have had over 100 educators share their understandings in our focus group sessions.

Extension of RTSTUD data collection

Our project has gained a lot of attention on both the domestic and international stage. A recent announcement of a comparison project in New Zealand has allowed us to extend the timeframe for collecting data from the RTSTUD app. This means that we will update the app so that it is compatible with iOS12 in early 2019 and continue to collect data until the end of March 2019.

We hope that educators who tried and weren’t able to access the app will contribute to this amazing and unique data set in 2019. We will email all eligible services in the new year with details.

Preliminary Findings from the RTSTUD

We know that many of you are interested in our work, so we would like to take the opportunity to share some of the interim findings with you.

The interim findings have revealed interesting results, such as what constitutes an average day’s work for exemplary educators, how it varies across qualification level and service type, and how satisfied exemplary educators are with their work from hour to hour. The study also revealed rich responses from the focus groups around what makes an exemplary educator.

What do exemplary early childhood educators spend their time doing and are they satisfied with their work?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, educators spend most of their time across the day ‘being with children’, switch tasks rapidly and perform simultaneous tasks frequently.

Participants recorded a high level of job satisfaction across the day, and relatively low level of feeling rushed or stressed. There were fluctuations recorded, with higher ratings for feeling rushed and stressed indicated at the beginning and end of the day for some participants.

Where do educators spend most of their time?

*Being with children* was identified as the task that educators spend most of their time on, followed by *routine care/transition** and *intentional teaching***

*Being with children encompasses watching/supervising children, playing with, listening and responding to children.

** Routine care/transition activities with children includes hygiene (handwashing and toileting), nutrition (mealtimes), health (sun protection), sleep/rest, organising all the daily transitions, and dealing with injuries or illness

***Intentional teaching is described as providing teaching and learning experiences that are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful (with intent) and either planned or spontaneous.

The activities that educators spent the least amount of time was *professional learning* which included self-educate, attend PD/in-service, support/mentor others, receive support/mentoring, pedagogical leadership, and reflection.

Performing simultaneous tasks occurs during all activities

Working on a secondary activity was identified as occurring for every primary activity at some stage and occurred within 50% of participants’ records.

Educators switch tasks frequently

47% of all recorded activities took place for less than 12 minutes, with almost a quarter of all activities being recorded as less than 6 minutes in duration.

Some tasks are focused around particular times of the day

Intentional teaching was most likely to take place mid-morning between 9am and 11.30am, while routine care and transition spiked across the middle of the day.

Planning and professional learning, while taking up less of the day, occurred throughout the day.

How educators feel about their work throughout the day

At the end of each recorded hour, educators were asked to choose from a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) in relation to how they felt about the following questions:

- How rushed they felt
- How satisfied they felt
• How stressed they felt
• Whether they were required to meet multiple demands

A whopping 79% of responses for ‘rushed’ were recorded as a ‘5’ or below, with 31% of responses being low, and only 2.6% of responses high.

The average ratings were as follows:
• Rushed: 3.5
• Stressed: 3.3
• Satisfied: 7.3
• Meeting multiple demands: 4.3

Does job satisfaction and stress level vary by role?

Those with room leader or teacher roles were likely to respond with slightly higher ratings for feeling rushed, stressed or having multiple demands to meet.

Assistants and educators were likely to record a slightly higher rating for feeling satisfied, although ratings were high across the board.

Preliminary Findings from the Focus groups

Focus group discussions are being held with educators at each level of qualification. The focus groups are still ongoing and are being used to probe deeper into the data and for the researchers to gain a better understanding of the nature of educators work at their qualification level, and the skills, knowledge and organisational conditions that help them to be ‘exemplary’.

Rapid changes

Discussions suggested that the rapid changes recorded by some respondents may be down to the age of children (rapid change seemed more prevalent for educators working with infants and toddlers), size of groups, ratios and staffing models.

Multi-tasking

Participants viewed multi-tasking as ‘the nature of the work’ and acknowledged that there will always be interruptions to deal with.

Satisfactions ratings

Focus groups revealed that satisfaction ratings were often related to work environment, flexibility and the philosophy of the service.

What makes an exemplary educator?

In the eyes of educators, a broad range of professional traits and environmental factors supported their work, including:
• Prioritising/decision making
• Leadership
• Teamwork
• Communication
• Passion
• Critical reflection
• Advocacy
• Autonomy
• Mentoring/coaching
• Professional development
• Favourable work conditions (ratios/staff models/non-contact/programming)
• Professional networks
• Intensity of the work – sustainability for educators

Next steps in this study

Case studies are yet to take place and are scheduled for late 2019.

In the meantime, the RTSTUD app will remain accessible into the new year. We will work on updating the app to ensure that it is compatible with recent upgrades to operating systems.

Focus group data collection and analysis will also continue.

We look forward to reconnecting with you all in the new year. Wishing everyone a safe and wonderful holiday season.

Warmest Regards

The Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work Research Team

“Early childhood educators and advocates know that the work they do is skilled, important and complex. This study is helping us understand the distinct nature of early childhood education and importantly what it takes to be a great educator in a high performing service” - Professor Fran Press