This year has seen our country endure incredible hardship and uncertainty; from the bushfires earlier in the year to the continuing threats to health from the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Exemplary Early Childhood Educators At Work (EECE@W) research team would like to thank all early childhood educators for their continued commitment to children and families especially during this time.

Your work and dedication do not go unnoticed by us. Our team will continue to advocate strongly for the important work that you do. This research project’s intention remains unchanged: To showcase the complexities, intensity and challenges that you face as an early childhood educator.

What’s happening with the project

Case Study Visits
In February we commenced the final phase of the project: Case Studies. This final phase involves members of the research team visiting 10 early childhood centres across NSW, Qld and WA. The services we approached to participate in this phase are in metropolitan and regional areas of these three states, and are operated by a range of providers, including by some of our Partner Organisations. Data collection during the visits includes interviews with the Centre Directors and exemplary educators, nominated by their directors. We also ask all educators to complete the SEQUAL survey. The visits also include a novel method, shadowing one of the nominated exemplary educators, for a day.

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, we were able to visit four of the ten centres: two in NSW, one in QLD and one in WA. These visits were a chance for us to see the wonderful work of exemplary early childhood educators in situ, as it was happening. Stand out observations from these visits include the humble nature and collegiality of the nominated exemplary educators, and the inspirational work of Directors and educational leaders.

Unfortunately, we had to suspend the case studies visits in March, but we will continue to work closely with these four centres and the other six services to negotiate the full round of visits when the time comes.

Extension to the end of 2021
The suspension of our research activities in early 2020, with no clear idea of when it will be safe to return, meant we had to rethink the timeline for the completion of the study. We applied for and were granted a year’s extension by the Australian Research Council. Having this extra time will mean we should be able to complete the case study visits as planned, as well as undertaking additional comparative data analysis across our datasets.
Data analysis
The suspension of our case study visits has given us an opportunity to continue to look at the incredible sets of data that educators have shared with us through the use of the RTSTUD app and the Focus Groups. The data sample that we have collected is extensive with close to 4000 hours of reported time on the Time Use Diary record of educators’ daily tasks, and over 40 focus groups and interviews.

Megan and Tamara are working with Mandy and Sue to analyse focus group data using the theory of practice architectures. Using this theoretical lens will help us unpack what makes ECE practices exemplary, and what conditions enable and constrain these practices. We also intend to apply the same theoretical lens to the case study data once data collection is complete.

We are also starting to look at the data we have collected so far in 2020 in the initial case study visits. We are working with our international colleagues at Berkeley, University of California, to review educators’ responses to the SEQUAL survey. We are also reading and interpreting the information provided in our interviews with directors and educators.

Dissemination
The team is very committed to the dissemination of this work and have a very comprehensive publication plan. Some of the preliminary findings have been shared at ECA conferences (2018, 2019), AJEC Research Symposium (2018, 2019, 2020) and British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2019). Presentation notes and videos (from BERA presentation) are on the blog.

Our HDR students have also been busy publishing and presenting work from their doctoral studies. Recent publications and presentations include:

Presentations

Publications
- Gibbs, L. (In press). That's your right as a human isn't it? “ The emergence and development of leading as a socially-just practice in early childhood education Australasian Journal of Early Childhood Education (Special Issue; Children’s Rights)
Many more publications are planned or in progress. If you would like to review some of the work already published, please visit our blog site for past newsletters, academic papers, media and presentations.

What’s happening for the research team

Welcome to the team
Sene Gide joins our team as a PhD candidate. Sene’s project explores the leadership experiences of Early Childhood Education (ECE) directors from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds in high quality ECE settings. Sene has been working in the Early Childhood field for the last 20 years.

Sene has also presented her leadership experiences and findings of her master project at multiple symposiums and conferences, with her most recent presentation being at the EECERA conference in Greece in 2019. Sene’s Master of Research thesis was about leadership practices in high quality early child services. She also has a chapter in the book ‘Talkin’ Up and Speakin’ Out: Aboriginal and Multicultural Voices in Early Childhood (Authors: Kerry Mundine and Miriam Giugni).

This PhD study is an extension of our project. In multicultural Australia, the needs of CALD children and families in ECE settings have been examined by researchers, however, the needs or challenges of the CALD ECE workforce are yet to be considered. Sene’s study seeks to address this gap and aims to explore the experiences of directors from CALD backgrounds by investigating the specific issues this minority group have been facing and dealing with, and the enablers and barriers for them in becoming a leader and enacting leadership in their current high quality rated ECE settings.

A new baby
Congratulation to Salima (our Sydney based research assistant) on the birth of her first baby boy, Morgan. Both Morgan and Salima are well and enjoying their time together.

Life in lockdown
The research team meet regularly via Zoom. Did you know that the team are located across 3 different countries (UK, USA and Australia) and in 4 states across Australia? These meetings are the backbone of our project; they allow us to connect fortnightly to discuss strategies, analysis and dissemination of the project work. Whilst working from home has many challenges, we are all enjoying the extra time with our pets who now appear regularly at our meetings to walk across a keyboard, bark at inappropriate times or just get up to mischief during a conference call!

Please continue to look after yourself and your colleagues during this time. We hope that you are keeping well.

Thank you for your dedication and continued exemplary practices in early childhood education and care.