

# Shining a light on early childhood educators' work: A report from the Australian study exemplary early childhood educators at work <sup>[1]</sup>

A multi-level investigation

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## AVAILABILITY

[Access online](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

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## Excerpts

### Foreword

The site of early childhood education sits at the intersection of other policy objectives: parental workforce participation, mitigating education disadvantage, access to early intervention, school readiness, and importantly the cultivation of community – both for children and their families. However, these objectives and the aim of increasing children's access to early childhood education are all too frequently undermined by shortages of appropriately qualified and skilled educators.

Too often proposed responses to this issue are simplistic and potentially damaging - for example, reducing qualification requirements, requiring fewer staff with higher-level qualifications, diluting early childhood specialisations in tertiary education courses. Such suggestions are underpinned by a belief that working with young children is easy, requiring nothing more than a kind disposition and a watchful eye.

However, early childhood education is complex work. It requires a caring and informed pedagogy, tailored to the exploring, developing child, and always with an eye to the present and future communities in which children, their families live and desire.

The *Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work* three-phase study helps us understand the unique nature of early childhood educators' work. Using time use data, focus groups and case studies, the research sought to understand the everyday work of early childhood educators in high-quality settings, and the knowledge, skills and understanding that underpin this work.

Importantly, the study recognises that great pedagogy is not just predicated on the skill of the individual, but blossoms within a context of collegiate relationships and organisational support.

Pay and work conditions that recognise, and are commensurate with, the skill and expertise demanded of educators are an important aspect of attracting and retaining a well-qualified early childhood workforce. Another is understanding and articulating the complex and distinct nature of the work. Early childhood education has a long history. Its knowledge and practices are informed by educational theorists and philosophers, and in the past half-century, an ever-growing body of research.

This study draws a picture of educators who have at the forefront of their actions and decision making a vision for their centre (or early childhood service) that is focused on what makes for a good childhood experience in their early years settings. These educators are actively engaged in professional learning, conversations and networks that support ongoing reflection and evaluation. This study focused on the work of educators in high-quality early childhood settings. It did so deliberately, to draw out the best of what we know about high-quality pedagogy and practice. By developing a deeper understanding of what 'exemplary' educators do, and the ways in which this work is organisationally supported, the report aspires to inform preservice training, professional support, policy and practice. At its heart, the report draws together evidence to garner early childhood educators the recognition that they deserve and honours the body of specialist expertise that underpins this work.

Professor Frances Press Head of Department, Childhood Youth and Education Studies (CYES) Manchester Metropolitan University

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### Why this research?

The Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work study, examined in depth what it is that exemplary early childhood educators do, what informs their practice, and how workplaces support educators to be exemplary in the care and education of young children.

We focused on high-quality settings, because research has clearly shown that it is the quality of children's and families' experiences, in and with these settings that make a difference, both to how children experience their day and outcomes for children over time (e.g., Burchinal et al., 2009; Degotardi, 2010; Slot et al., 2018).

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## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What constitutes the everyday work of educators? How does work vary across qualification levels, position and service types (long day care and preschool)?
2. What personal, professional and organisational resources support the work of exemplary educators?
3. What are the professional relationships and communication that support the day-to-day work of educators?
4. What knowledge, skills and dispositions underpin the work of exemplary educators? How does this differ across qualification levels?

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**Source URL (modified on 29 Aug 2023):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/23/08/shining-light-early-childhood-educators-work-report>

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