

# Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

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From the Selected Works of Jen Jackson

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## Building a supportive professional learning community

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jen-jackson/18/>

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# **Building a supportive professional learning community**

Early Learning Association Australia Conference  
Together We Grow  
25-26 May 2018

Jen Jackson  
Andrea Nolan  
Stephen Lamb

## Research questions

What are the **general characteristics** of people who work in ECEC in Australia?

How do these differ for educators with **different qualifications**?

How might these characteristics **affect educators' ability to deliver quality programs**?

How can professional learning communities in ECEC services  
**make the most of what every educator has to offer**?

## Quantitative research

**Characteristics** of educators  
at different qualification levels

## Qualitative research

**Experiences** of educators  
(barriers, opportunities)

# Who is in the Australian ECEC workforce?

Imagine choosing someone at random from the total Australian workforce. Find out their highest qualification.

Now imagine choosing an educator from the Australian ECEC workforce, who has the same level of qualification.

What characteristics would the educator be more likely to have?

The educator is:

- Much more likely to be female
- Likely to earn less (even if both are female)
- More likely to be young (unless you are comparing two people who both have a degree)
- More likely to have had children, at a younger age
- More likely to provide unpaid care to other children

*Based on analysis of ABS 2011 Census data*



## How might educators' characteristics make a difference for their practice?



CHALLENGE

Our backgrounds, knowledge and characteristics are like a **suitcase** we carry around with us all the time.

They can be **baggage** that weighs us down, making challenges harder to overcome.

But suitcases can also hold a lot of **useful** things!

It all depends how we think about them...

# Finding 1: Educators' educational experiences

ABS 2011 Census data

**Many educators did not complete school, especially among those with certificates, or with no qualification.**

**Degree-qualified educators are most likely to have completed school... but less likely than other Australian workers with degree qualifications.**

LSAY case study data

**Many young people who go on to study ECEC qualifications have not been high academic achievers at school.**

**These young people are also less confident in their ability to learn.**

**Despite this, a very high proportion of educators are engaged in further study.**

# Possibility 1: Helping each other

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“[When I was studying], I had help from one lady at work. Not one, two. And they helped me a lot. One she make me how to start to learn, and the other one, she helped me when I stuck with little things. She told me what to do, where to find which make it much easier.”



## Finding 2: Cultural and linguistic diversity

ABS 2011 Census data

**Educators are generally more likely to have been born in Australia, compared to all Australian workers.**

**This is very different, for educators with non-ECEC qualifications.**

**Among educators with degrees in a non-ECEC field, almost two-thirds were born outside of Australia.**

ABS 2011 Census data

**The highest proportion of Indigenous Australians is found in the unqualified educator group (3.4%).**

**The unqualified group also has the highest proportion of educators who are migrants from less wealthy countries.**

**All these educators have valuable knowledge, beyond their qualification.**



## Possibility 2: Baggage...or springboard?

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“For parents to feel comfortable with the educator because I was same... because English was my second language I never felt very comfortable, me to approach to educator.”

“I can understand parents because I couldn't speak English, so I talk slowly and explain more, and they trying, so we can understand each other.”



# Finding 3: Stress

Degree-qualified educators might have strong educational backgrounds, but....

They are the most likely to say that their work in ECEC is stressful (in preschool and long day care).

They are also least likely to say that they receive positive recognition for their work in the community.

**Despite some high stress levels, overall job satisfaction for educators is high.**

**Educators are also generally positive about relationships with their colleagues.**

## Possibility 3: Changing perspective

“I never get everything done.”

“I am very behind though on this kind of admin-y stuff.”

“I would like to not worry about things so much, after hours. I’ve been up since 4:30 this morning thinking about some of the children and getting some things done.”

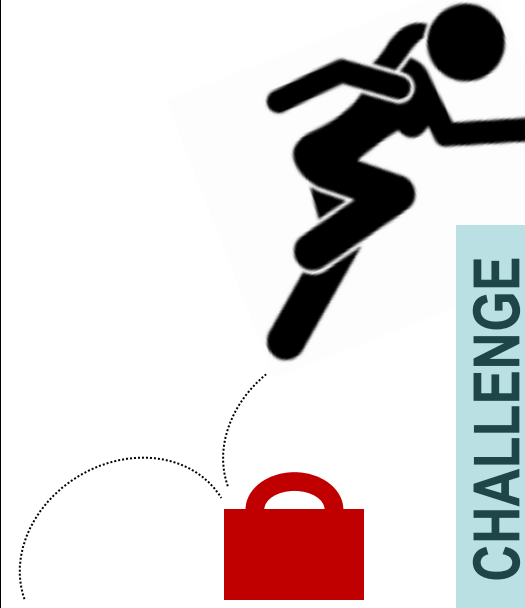


# What other possibilities are available?

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Helping  
each other



Baggage or  
springboard?



Changing  
perspective



# Reflective questions

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What do you have in your suitcase?

What do your colleagues have in their suitcases?

What challenges do you need to overcome?

Is there anything in your suitcase that might help?

What about your colleagues?

How could you help them?

How can you use these ideas for reflective practice with your colleagues in your centres?



