



# IMPROVING EDUCATION THROUGH RESEARCH

## SERA Early Years Network

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023, 4 o'clock, Lord Hope Building, University of Strathclyde

**De-privatising early childhood education; Opportunities and challenges**  
**Linda Mitchell, Professor of Early Childhood Education**  
**University of Waikato, New Zealand**

Neoliberalism and associated marketisation and privatisation of early childhood education (ECE) has become increasingly influential in many countries since the 1970s. This paper considers the inequities and problems that have resulted, particularly through the growth of publicly listed corporate ECE companies, where financial motives and gains for investors are prominent and have acted to distort the values and purposes of education. I use my research in New Zealand to exemplify these trends and to give contrasting stories of how the big for-profit corporate companies acted during Covid lockdowns compared with a large non-profit kindergarten association. I then draw on my recent co-authored book 'The decommodification of early childhood education and care' to discuss acts of resistance to neoliberalism, and advocacy to influence and bring about system change. My hope is that in my own country, ECE will come to be regarded as a human right and a public good, and the concept of education will be understood in its broadest sense.

Professor Linda Mitchell has spent many years researching early childhood education policy and practice and critiquing the marketisation and privatisation of early childhood education. She is currently Visiting Leverhulme Professor at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her writing on democracy and education includes '*Democratic practices and policies in early childhood education and care. An Aotearoa New Zealand case study*' and publications from her research concerning refugee and immigrant families in early childhood education. A recent co-authored book is: Vandenberg, M., Lehrer, J., & Mitchell, L. (2023). *The decommodification of early childhood education and care. Resisting neoliberalism*. London, UK: Routledge.

**Illuminating the complexity of early childhood educators' work: The Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work Study.**  
**Professor Fran Press**

**Dean and Head of School, Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University, Brisbane**

This paper reports the findings of a five-year study that investigated the work of educators in high quality early childhood programmes in Australia. The study was designed to address popular misconceptions that undermine the professional status of early childhood educators: that work with young children is, for its predominantly female workforce, instinctual and requires only a caring disposition; that play is 'natural' for children, therefore a play based curriculum only requires children's supervision; and that children's education only occurs with formal, teacher-directed instruction such as that found in school classrooms. To illuminate the complexity of early childhood educators work, the *Exemplary Early Childhood Educators at Work* study, examined in depth the daily work of early childhood educators, what informs their practice, and how workplaces support educators to be 'exemplary' in the care and education of young children.

Professor Frances Press has a long-standing interest in early childhood education and care policy, and the ways in which policy enables and constrains possibilities for children and families. Frances has written extensively on the impact of marketisation on early childhood education and care, and is strongly concerned with how early childhood systems honour the rights of children. Her most recent book (edited with Sandra Cheeseman) is *(Re)conceptualising Children's Rights in Infant-Toddler Care and Education*.

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