How does policy construct early childhoods in contexts of precariousness?

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Workshop aims

• To open a conversation about the framing of service provision for families in **precarious circumstances** and what that means for policy advocacy and further research.
What is the problem?

Statistically speaking

Children living below the poverty line in Australia comprise

- 18.9% Australian children
- 32% in NT

- Comparatively low take up rates by low income families (SCRGSP, 2014; Baxter & Hand, 2013) but considerable benefits of high quality ECEC for children from disadvantaged contexts (OECD, 2011; Gambara, Stewart & Waldfogel, 2014)


- Middle class claims directly inserted into policy debates, while ‘perceived needs’ of low income families often mediated by ‘expert’ analyses (Brennan, 1998)
Who are these ‘others’ speaking for families in high poverty contexts?

Research on families experiencing economic adversity is
• always conducted by the ‘other’,
• backgrounded by media and policy discourse (Struggle Street 2 is in production as we speak).
The ‘other’ Jen
Nebulous welcomes
SBS fast-tracks Struggle Street, threatens Blacktown Council with legal action

SBS has been forced to fast-track its controversial documentary Struggle Street, combining the second and third episodes into a two-hour special to air next week.

"To best understand Struggle Street, you need to see the three-hour observational documentary as a whole as it unfolds over the six months and we decided to make it available sooner in order to do that," the broadcaster said in a statement.

"I do feel better," she said. "But now I just got to work on the damage that the process has done. That’s another issue."
Politics of language: ECA conference titles

- Innovation
- Multidisciplinary
- Diverse
- Inclusion evidence-based collaboration
- Partnerships with families
- Engaging or connecting

- With Community
- Displaced children and families
- Sustainability in action
- Reconciliation
- Parents as first teachers
What language do we use to talk economic inequality?

Precariousness

Dictionary: A state of being uncertain or unstable

Guy Standing
Precarious employment
Precarious housing
Precarious situation

High Poverty Context
Focus and language of ECEC and of child protection

- Children or families?
- Parents or families?
Belonging:
Marginal, unintentional, accidental, incidental
Politics of language (Giselle Wilson, 2016)

• Inclusion
• Embedding
• Incorporation
Embedding work with children and families in precarious contexts

Politics of “inclusion”

Politics of entitlement to
• Redistribution
• Recognition
• Representation
(Nancy Fraser)
Recognition in ECEC practice

• Are service systems set up to recognise and respond to the complex conditions of families who experience persistent economic adversity and multi-dimensional challenges?

• How do parents recognise their practices and priorities in ECEC everyday setting?

• Are their funds of knowledge about schooling and survival recognised?
Critical Policy Analysis

How effectively do the NQF, EYLF and ‘universal’ preschool provision capture best practice and support the needs of families in precarious circumstances?

How do these policies interact with policies platforms like

• Keep Them Safe
• Jobs for families
Minor key

Good Face

Interactions with families?