

**Dr Karen Martin****Associate Professor of Early Childhood, Griffith University (QLD)**

I'm the youngest of seven children who grew up in a working class suburb of Brisbane (the capital city of Queensland). By the time I was 10, I cared for my three nephews and one niece. When I became a mother at the age of 15, I wanted more for my son and so, I completed a teacher assistant course in 1981. I'd found my niche. Over the following 12 years I obtained a Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood) and a Bachelor of Education. I taught in Aboriginal EC services; developed policy and curriculum, and provided professional development to EC educators. In the late 1990s I worked in Indigenous education so my PhD is in Aboriginal knowledge and research.

In 2003 I returned to ECE and in 2008 became Associate Professor of Early Childhood. Currently I teach post-graduate students and undertake research in the areas of ECE and Aboriginal ECE, particularly curriculum and workforce. I am often invited to present at major conferences on these topics. This aligns with my roles as Deputy Chair of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children Steering Committee and of the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee.

What are some of the key challenges you encounter in your job as an academic?

A key challenge I face constantly is the marginalisation of my work and knowledge as only being relevant to Aboriginal education, or Aboriginal people. Too often, people see my colour and not my credentials, my culture and not my scholarship, even though my PhD earned a university medal.

When thinking about EC leadership, what qualities matter most?

Insight and foresight. Insight is the ability to understand and work within micro levels and their contexts. Foresight is the ability to work at a macro level and make connections to the micro contexts. Both enable you to see the little picture and the bigger picture at the same time.

How did you acquire your knowledge, skills and understandings about leadership?

I learnt mostly by calibrating my own ideas of leadership in observing others and by engaging in leadership roles. You soon learn about your own nature and that of others this way. I learnt that leadership is not uniform and to develop my own style over time.

Looking back at your career achievements, what are you most proud of as an EC educator?

I'm proud of being a leading educator in my own right and not simply because I'm an Aboriginal person. I'm proud of the recognition given to my work through awards and that it is often cited by others. I'm proud of now being at the level of my career that I can give back to the Aboriginal ECE sector. I call that my 'heart business'.

What advice would you offer those aspiring to become university leaders in EC?

Be clear about your reasons for taking the journey and be prepared for the challenges of working in higher education. Develop an expertise in more than one area within EC so you don't get marginalised. Have a network of respectful alliances as it can get lonely at times. Don't forget your EC values and push others out of your way. Your network is just as important as your scholarship, but, what's your 'heart business'?

How can we build the knowledge, skills and capacities of future leaders in the EC sector?

It's a lifelong journey that must include post-graduate studies—even better if this entails research. That's how you build your scholarship. Look for opportunities, big or small, to flex your leadership muscles and develop your own style of leadership. It's about transformations, not transactions. Transactions are encounters with ideas or people or places that do have some value, but it's not likely to be sustainable and or benefit a lot of people. Transformations are more powerful because they bring particular challenges to be considered, not merely addressed. The impact is not instant because change evolves, but it is sustainable. Leadership isn't always evident in leaders. Leaders are not always in the top roles.