

I am a university student in my final year or a Bachelor of Education- The Early Years. I am also completing an Honours thesis on the topic of environmental sustainability in early childhood education and care. It can sometimes be difficult in this profession, when our role is not taken seriously... When people think of us as baby sitters and nappy changers... When people wonder why I am studying early childhood education and care at university. Yes, that is right, 'early childhood education and care'... It is a mouthful, but that is what it is. To call it childcare significantly undermines the responsibilities of professionals working within this field.

I am terribly concerned about changes that may be brought about as a result of the productivity commission's public inquiry.

Quality early childhood education and care is vital. We are no longer living in the 1950's. Many families still raise their children at home, many families choose to work... many families cannot afford to not work. There is a huge diversity of families and individual needs. We know there is a demand for early childhood education and care and this highlights the importance of ensuring early childhood education and care is of high quality- with qualified early childhood professionals working to provide that high quality.

This quality can only be achieved through appropriate ratios and qualified professionals. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory demonstrates the significance of having more adults available to scaffold children's learning, especially for children under 3.

I urge you to read a paper by Edwards, Flear & Nuttall 2008. It is called, "A Research Paper to inform the development of An Early Years Learning Framework for Australia."

This paper refers to research that proves the significance of the early childhood period for lifelong learning. Research shows that the first 5 years of life (the first 3 in particular) is when children are developing most of their required brain capacity for life. The first 3 years are the most critical for development... and if we do not have trained professionals working with children of this age, then I fear for their future.

The paper also talks about longitudinal studies that have shown that learning outcomes are maximised when adults have an active role in children's learning and that quality experiences in children's early years contribute to children's later life chances. The paper includes a lot of research relevant to the early childhood education and care sector and is worth reading.

I cannot stress enough how important the early years are. Investing in early childhood education and care is not only an investment in children's futures, but an investment in the future of society. Especially for children who have experience trauma in their early years, or children with a disability.. their chances are maximised through early intervention... and quite frequently, an early intervention is made accessible through going to an early childhood education and care service. The research is there, I see the results of my hard work every day that I facilitate children's learning. I think it is about time our job is taken seriously and that children are taken seriously. I know this would never happen, but maybe those of you within the Productivity Commission

could spend a few weeks in a high quality centre, to experience our responsibilities and consult with real professionals. To watch as children are grasping concepts and learning skills that they will need for the rest of their lives. You would see that having qualified educators increase outcomes for children, especially with high adult ratios. Then imagine what things would be like if they weren't qualified, if the ratios decreased. Imagine how stressful it would be for the educators and the children. This would highly reduce the quality of early childhood education and the impact would be appalling.

I have not been able to write this submission as eloquently as I would have liked. I feel so passionately about this issue that I cannot find the words to express it. I really hope you have consulted with empirical research that focuses on early childhood education and care and I hope that you consult with lots of different people working within the sector. Please ensure that your decisions are informed and when making them, think about the children, because ultimately, it is the children that your decisions WILL effect.