

I have been working in the early childhood education and care sector for the past 22 years. In fact all of my working life, and it's only now after those 22 years that I am considering a sideways career change, to that of teacher of the early years based in a school environment. For the past 12 years I have been a manager of two separate ECEC services and am still there today.

I began my career completing my Associate diploma in children's services. Years later I went on to complete my Advanced Diploma of children's services. Now I am in my final year with one semester to go of completing my bachelor of teaching (early childhood). I didn't continue my studies for something fun to do, I continued my studies because I am passionate about ensuring that quality education and care is delivered to children in my care, and that families feel supported in their journey of parenting. People often say to me "why do you do it, you have three young children you manage a service full time and still have time to be successful in your degree studies?" My reply to them is that: it is important for the future of the children I have every day to ensure that their whole needs are being met, that their safety is paramount, that they are given opportunities to grow and develop in happy and stimulating environment with nurturing and dedicated educators who take their jobs seriously. Trust me; we don't do it for the money! We do it because we care what kind of society we grow old in.

So why am I considering a side-step professionally? As a manager I will take a pay drop in pay as a first year teacher, but that will increase steadily and in just a few years I will be at my current rate of pay. There will be no 6 a.m. phone calls saying telling me that educators can't come to work because they are unwell - because tell me, where will I get good quality relief or permanent educators from? You know the ones. The ones that I wish I could clone. The educators who work hard to create best learning outcomes for children. The ones who are collecting resources on their own family outings because their children at their service will find it fascinating, and there is learning that can come from it - yes LEARNING even for the under threes!

The ones who volunteer for professional learning days because they know they can use it to implement new levels of understanding and fresh research to create better learning spaces for children. The ones who gravitate to children and whom children gravitate to them - unconsciously and innately in both professional context and out of hours in public places. You know the ones, the ones that even when they have sung the wheels on the bus a thousand times because of a two year old requesting "more?" they sing it one more time, but more likely two. The ones that can sooth a parents nerves at commencing care, and 6 months down the track are showing their colleagues at work the video you have just emailed them of their child crawling for the first time so that they can share the moment. The educators who, after completing their certificate three in children's services, gain a hunger for more learning knowing that the skills and knowledge they acquire will go on to complete their diploma. These are passionate people. They are valued by the children, their parents, myself, and by the

organisation I take pride in working at. But clearly not valued by the current Government. If the current Government can't find value in the work and study we do, how can society? If the attitudes do not change from above, how can society's? Give us the credit due for the tireless work we undertake with dedication, and commitment. How does the Government expect to retain quality educators or attract them in the first place, if not for a wage fitting for the responsibility of ECEC educators? A call centre operator earns more than a certificate three educator. Now I'm sure that a call centre operator is very important in society, who else would call you after hours after a busy day at work? But their responsibility lies in ensuring they have pressed the right numbers and said the right blurb. Compared to an ECEC educator who is responsible for the health, safety, routines, of our youngest members of society. Responsible for ensuring that they are given healthy meals throughout the day, and not giving foods that cause anaphylactic reactions to the growing cohort of children with life threatening allergies. Responsible for ensuring that food safe requirements are current and applied. Responsible in maintaining current first aid qualifications. Responsible for being an advocate for the vulnerable who don't have a voice in an adult environment. Responsible for ensuring that the rights of the child are upheld. They are responsible to detecting potential developmental delays in children so that can be addressed early knowing that early intervention is going to create the best learning /quality of life outcomes for children.

“Early childhood intervention is essential for students with behavioural problems. Today, many of these students are identified in early childhood settings, and interventions are put into place at that stage.....Although some behavioural problems do not appear in the early years, the vast majority of them do, and without early attention, students and teachers can expect a worsening of the behaviour patterns, particularly in cases of conduct disorder.” (Conway, 2012, p. 146).

They are responsible in ensuring that the children are leaving the service with people nominated by the service. They are mandated by law to report suspicion of abuse or neglect. They are responsible for ensuring age appropriate equipment and resources are available to children.

It is ludicrous to think that ratios should be decreased or indeed averaged over a week! Ratios are put in place to ensure safety for the children, support for the educators and peace of mind for parents.

But what really boils my blood is the suggestion that there is no need for educators to hold a diploma or teacher qualifications for the under threes.

“From birth to age 5, children rapidly develop foundational capacities on which subsequent development builds. In addition to their remarkable linguistic and cognitive gains, they exhibit dramatic progress in their emotional, social, regulatory

and moral capacities. All of these critical dimensions of early development are intertwined, and each requires focused attention” (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 5).

Research is telling us that critical development happens in the first 5 years of life, so surely to have educators who themselves are well educated and certified in the development and creating authentic learning are the best practitioners to care and EDUCATE children from birth to 5 years, and provide that focused attention that is so desperately required?

Yours sincerely,

Theresa Blizzard

Conway, R. (2012). Behaviour support and management. In Ashman, A and Elkins, J (eds.). *Education for inclusion and diversity* (4th ed.). Australia: Pearson Australia.

Shonkoff, J.P., & Phillips, D.A. (2000). *Neurons to neighborhoods [sic]: the science of early childhood development*. Washington, D.C.: National Academics Press.