

I am 26 years old and I have been working in early childhood education and care since I was 18. I worked a long day care centre while studying my diploma through TAFE at night, and was employed full time in the industry for five years until I decided to further my education at university. I have continued working in the industry while studying full time, and I am now in my final year of Bachelor of Education- The Early Years at the University of Wollongong.

I have been engaged in the early childhood education and care industry for my entire working life and I am extremely passionate about the importance of the early years. From reading the draft report it appears that the Commission is well aware of the research into early brain development and the rigorous longitudinal studies which have been conducted in Australia, the US and the UK. So I will simply be addressing two aspects of this investigation that I find alarming. In chapter 7 of the draft report (July 2014), the Commission indicates that they are considering changes to the qualifications necessary to work with children under the age of three and the child to adult ratio for children in this age group in early childhood education and care services.

In arguing for the reduction of educator qualifications for those working with under the age of three it is claimed that 'little compelling evidence' has been found by the Commission to suggest that it is necessary for educators to hold higher qualifications. This section of the report then continues; 'Australian and international research indicate that the impacts of attending ECEC services on the development and early learning outcomes for children aged birth to 36 months are not as consistently positive as the impacts for children aged three years and older' (p277). This seems illogical to me. If there is no conclusive evidence about the impact of early childhood education and care for children under the age of three, or if the evidence suggests that there may be less positive outcomes, surely it makes sense to be engaging highly qualified educators who have considerable knowledge and children's learning and development during the first three years of life to work with children in this age group. Surely it makes sense that these educators have an extensive theoretical and pedagogical knowledge, including the importance of positive attachments and the impact early experiences have on the development of the brain.

The draft report states that 'the Commission considers that early childhood education and care for children aged birth to three should focus on quality care and not be required to include a significant education component' (p277). This statement shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of children's learning and development during the first three years of life. This is the most rapid period of learning and development in a person's life. Through every single interaction, children are learning. When an adult engages in a 'babble conversation' with an infant, that child is learning. When an educator patiently encourages a toddler to put their shoes on themselves, offering assistance when necessary, that child is learning. And educators need to be aware of this. There are many fantastic educators who hold a certificate III qualification, however I believe that it is important that children under the age of three are also cared for and educated by educators who hold a diploma or bachelor degree.

From my own experience, undertaking further study has significantly shaped and influenced the educator that I am today; the way in which I interact and engage with children, observe, plan for and understand children has been driven, shaped and improved as a result of

undertaking further study. Looking back on the educator I was two, five, eight year ago, I cannot even begin to describe how much I have grown, learnt and improved as an educator. Part of this is due to age and experience, but most of it is the result of undertaking further study. My diploma gave me knowledge of children and development, how to recognise and support children's learning through the provision of the learning environment and both planned and spontaneous interactions and experiences with children. My university degree has built on this knowledge, but more importantly it has taught me to engage in reflective practice, to become aware of the extensive research surrounding early childhood education and care, to be aware of issues of social justice and to advocate for those who feel that they do not have a voice. I cannot even begin to describe how much I have grown since undertaking further study, and I believe that I am now a far better educator than I was previously. And I am so excited to continue my career in early childhood education and care. So excited.

I am excited to work in a poorly paid, poorly esteemed industry. An industry where I have a huge responsibility in caring for and educating other people's children, while being paid less than someone who works in retail with minimal responsibility. An industry that is seen as inferior to primary and secondary education and teaching rather than an integral stage in children's education. An industry which is full of passionate educators who are experts in the field of how children learn and develop from birth to five, but is seen by many as simply a 'baby-sitting' service. An industry which provides valuable support to all families, especially those who are at risk of 'falling through the cracks.' Why am I excited about my career in this industry? Because I believe that it is important. Because I am convinced to my very core that *all* children and *all* families deserve the highest quality education and care possible. And this includes children under the age of three. Reducing educator qualifications and increasing the child to adult ratio is not acceptable. If someone were to propose that school teachers no longer need to undertake a four year university degree to become qualified because a six month course would suffice, there would be an uproar. So why is this acceptable for our youngest and most vulnerable children?

I do not know the background of everyone who is part of the Commission but for those of you who do not have experience in early childhood education and care I can assure you that one educator to five children is ridiculous and completely unrealistic. It is not possible to meet each child's 'basic' needs (such as sleep, feeding, and nappy changing) as well as spending quality time interacting with each child. Time and again research has shown the importance of relationships and positive attachments during the early years of life. How are educators expected to build and maintain these relationships and attachments with very young children when each educator has *five* children under the age of two to care for?

I realise that the Government has stated that options will be considered 'within the current funding parameters' i.e. 'we will not be giving any more money or resources to the sector despite the fact that further investment is needed to simply meet the current demand for early childhood education and care, let alone insuring that the education and care provided is of an acceptable standard.' Quite frankly, I find this extremely alarming and I am disappointed that this is the Government's attitude. More funding is needed, not less. While I would like to think that logic and research based evidence will win the day, I confess that I expect that it will instead be the Government's desire to 'save money' that comes out on

top. But I do implore the Commission to listen to the voices of those who work within early childhood education and care. Listen to the experts in *this* field. Look at the international examples of investment and success in early childhood education and care. Look at the big picture and the long term benefits of investing in early childhood education and care rather than the short term financial 'benefits.'

I argue that reducing the qualifications for educators working with children under three and increasing the child to adult ratio is *not* conducive to 'maintaining quality outcomes for children' as is claimed in the draft report (p277). The proposed changes to ratios and qualifications are *not* the way to invest in the future of this nation. While the rest of the world is making forward progress, is Australia going to shut its eyes and ears to the extensive research and long term cost benefits to society for the sake of short term financial savings? I certainly hope this is not the path Australia is headed down.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my submission.