

I request the Commission to take into consideration the extensive literature on the importance of the period from birth through three when considering what education and care services should be available to children in this age group, and what qualifications staff working with this age group should have.

Birth through age three has been identified as the critical years when the brain is at its most malleable. Such plasticity helps to determine children's neuro- biological development and so also determines the implications of that development for life long learning, behaviour and health. (J. F. Mustard, 2007: McCain, M.N., and J.F. Mustard, 1999: Shonkoff, J. and Phillips. D. 2000).

Although the Commission's Draft Report supports universal access to one year of pre-school for four year olds and notes the value of such programs in facilitating transition to school, the importance of programs for three year olds is not directly addressed, although the evidence of their importance to subsequent literacy and numeracy development has been well documented. (National Governors' Association (2005) Report, *Building the foundations for bright futures* and Ontario (2011) Full Report. *Early Years Study 3*. Currently, in states such as Victoria, parents whose children do not attend childcare or special education services have to pay fees for their children to attend fee-for-service three- year -old groups offered by local kindergartens, private providers or play groups. Children's access to three -year -old programs is thus dependent on their parents' capacity to pay fees or eligibility for financial assistance. Provision of three- year -old programs is thus both inequitable and haphazard. This is not appropriate for such an important developmental period.

The importance of quality programs for very young children in shaping their subsequent development highlights the need for suitably qualified staff to design and offer such programs. Developing appropriate learning experiences for very young children requires detailed developmental knowledge as well as understanding what activities contribute to fostering early language development, pre-literacy and early mathematical understandings. In order to have such skills and understandings, staff working with very young children need to be experienced in locating and accessing relevant professional literature, be familiar with relevant pedagogy and developmental psychology, as well as be able to conduct detailed curriculum planning based on appropriate observations. These are all requirements of early childhood teacher education programs . They are not normally all requirements of Certificate 111 programs.

The results of the United Kingdom EPPE longitudinal study that evaluated the outcomes from various types of early childhood settings are relevant to issues pertaining to staff qualifications. This study found that services that were integrated and had well paid graduate level staff did best. As Kathy Sylva, (2006) a lead researcher in the study noted in a recent interview, “ In the early years you get what you pay for”. The Guardian . Tuesday 21 Nov. 2006.

Thank you for considering this submission.

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