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Our service is a small non-profit centre run by a parent committee of management and a coordinator. The building from which the service operates is owned by the local Council and they maintain the physical building and associated structures of the Centre.

The centre caters for forty-seven children in three rooms. The centre employs seventeen educators eight of whom work full time, the remainder part time. The centre is known for its long standing retention of employees with five of the current staff being employed for over ten years at the centre and another two over five years. The qualifications of the staff in the centre are as follows-

One educator- Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (funded Kindergarten program)
Ten educators with a Diploma, two of which are currently studying a Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies.

Six with Certificate III, five of which are studying for their Diploma.

The centre is open from 7:00 am to 6:30 pm and is unique in that it has a sessional kindergarten next door which enables parents to have the choice between sending their children to the sessional kindergarten and having them dropped off and picked up by staff from the centre, or using the funded kindergarten program available at the centre.

What role, if any should the different levels of government play in Childcare and Early Childhood Education?

As stated above the building from which the centre operates is owned and maintained by the Local government and the centre has a "not for profit model". This frees up resources, meaning there are more funds for improved staff ratios, more physical resources (books, equipment etc) and better pay and conditions for employees. This in turn contributes to the high staff retention as mentioned above which is proved to result in better outcomes for children (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Forbes, 2004; OECD, 2012; Rush, 2006).

Early Childhood Education and Care needs to be government based, (similar to the government school system). This is not something that can be done "within current funding parameters" (Hockey, 2013). Early Childhood Education and Care needs to move away from the private- for profit model that dominates the industry (Brerran, 2007), because it is this private for profit model that has created an industry with a high staff burnout rate and high staff turnover (Caulfield & Kataoka-Yahiro, 2001). Which can result in poor outcomes for children (Productivity Commission, 2011; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001).

I am speaking from experience I have previously worked for private- for profit centres in which cost saving measures included:

- relying on staff to provide resources for the children (books, paper, drawing materials play-dough) from their limited, award salary.
- moving children from one room to another in order to be on ratio so children were with unfamiliar educators, and not able to participate in a program appropriate for them.
- putting staff in positions that they are not qualified for (ie Cert III running rooms)
- not providing adequate time for educators to plan for the children's education

- not working to ratios
- making educators responsible for cleaning duties while they are meant to be caring for/educating children
- Educators having to attend staff meetings and do auxiliary work outside of rostered hours, unpaid.

These points have a negative impact on the children's development and undermine the educators role, reducing job satisfaction, and causing staff migration (Caulfield & Kataoka-Yahiro, 2001). Which also has a negative effect on children's development (Forbes, 2004; Rush, 2006)

I discovered that these cost saving strategies are not unique to my experience of working in for private-for profit centres but are "common practice", when in discussion with other educators through my studies with Monash University.

What outcomes from ECEC are desirable and should be made achievable over the next decade

All children regardless of their socioeconomic status should have access to quality early childhood education and care. This will aid the future productivity and economic viability of Australia (OECD, 2012; UNICEF, 2012) After all-

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men". Frederick Douglass

The key barriers that are inhibiting and expansion in ECEC services where demand is highset, development of more flexible ECEC, or alternative models of care.

Our centre has an extensive waiting list, not because there are no alternatives but because we have a reputation for providing quality care. We have this reputation because of the professionalism of the staff, (high level of qualifications) and because we retain our staff so children get continuity of care. The most appropriate alternative model of care would be to not have private for profit centres. If a centre is not concerned about making a profit they would be able to employ qualified educators and retain them with respectable wages. If all centres had quality care the waiting list would be reduced.

The effect of increased staff ratios and qualifications requirement on outcomes for children

I work in a room that caters for children aged six weeks to two years. This is an age range that needs constant monitoring and attention for example-

- Children under one will generally require two to three bottles a day this can take an Educator between five minutes to an hour to provide depending on the child. While doing this very vital activity an Educator can only visually and verbally monitor the other children in the room, they are not in a position to physically prevent age appropriate issues such as eye gouging, hair pulling, biting or a child lying on top of another child. (Hoffnung, Hoffnung, Smith, & Hine, 2010).
- Children of this age need changing four to six times a day, this also removes the Educator from the room.
- Educational experiences that are appropriate and beneficial for this age are by nature messy ones, sensory experience such as finger painting (fine motor development), play dough (finger strength), and water play (maths skills), all require constant monitoring for the children's safety and to ensure they fully benefit from the experiences, ie- an Educator to talk them through the experience to enhance the children's understanding and language development (Eggen & Kauchak, 2010).

In our room we struggle to do these activities with the improved staff ratios to one to four, (one to three would be more appropriate for this age group). If ratios were to go up again children would suffer, they would have to wait for prolonged periods of time to be changed and fed. This not only would affect the children "now" (ie get nappy rash and be hungry), but also research shows that if a child's needs are not met in reasonable time they can feel insecure which can have a profound effect on their long term social and emotional development (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Hoffnung et al., 2010). Also the opportunity to provide educational experiences would also be reduced or nonexistent.

The case for greater recognition and assessment of competencies as an alternative in some cases to additional formal training and qualifications

As you can see above -our centre values and supports professional development of its staff in Early Childhood Education. This has not just been to meet the requirements of the NQF, but because the committee of management is aware of the importance of qualified staff and the positive impact they have on developing children. It takes more than experience to be a well informed professional. Study gives professionals knowledge that experience does not. I can speak from experience here, I have worked with children for over 20 years and did not get a qualifications until 2009 through studying Certificate III, and in 2012, studying Diploma while studying my degree. Before I began to study I thought I knew it all, I was good at my job and thought that when studying, I would just be putting what I knew on paper, I was very wrong. Studying has enhanced my knowledge of child development thus improving my practice. I was good at my job then, now I am beginning to know why, which makes me even better.

The impact of changes to staff ratios and qualifications requirements on the cost of employing ECEC workers

There would be an impact on private- for profit centres, profits. But we should not be making a profit out of children. Children are not a commodity like a pair of shoes, if manufacturers cut the cost on a pair of shoes, the shoes break, it is annoying, but you just go out and buy another pair of shoes. if we cut costs on children, their future and the future of Australia is a stake (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; OECD, 2012).

Are there areas currently regulated that would be better left to sector self-regulatory codes of practice or accreditations schemes.

Private for profit centres already stretch the regulations - (see above under "What role, if any should the different levels of government play in Childcare and Early Childhood Education?"). The only way to keep them honest and to protect the future of the children is to have government regulations.

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