

I am an educator at a large not-for-profit childcare centre and am currently completing my certificate III.

At most childcare centres I have had experience with, the staff are predominantly a mix of first generation immigrants and young people just out of school who have had a difficult relationship with the formal education system. The design of the now mandatory certificate III is ill-suited to these demographics and is a major cause of demoralisation of excellent staff who lack the literacy skills it requires. This is especially true when the certificate is administered by private training providers who tend to provide little or no face-to-face interaction.

I have seen many gifted educators humiliated and demoralised by their training experience. For example, a skilled educator in the infants room of my current centre who has been working in childcare for almost a decade and was recently forced into completing her certificate III was thrown into an extended period of self-doubt about her own competency and seriously considered leaving the sector because she was struggling so much with the requirements of the certificate. The insignificant pay rise upon completion of the certificate merely rubs salt into the wound. Meanwhile, I have seen poor and mediocre staff who have been most in need of training finish the certificate (at a not insignificant cost to the taxpayer), yet not improve in the least.

Instead of basing the training system on a dumbed down version of the school or university model, centred as they are around linguistic skills and theoretical knowledge, a far more effective model would be the adoption of an apprenticeship style system where highly skilled practitioners provided one-on-one support for new educators. This has always been a core component of teacher training, and there is no obvious reason why the same or a similar model could not be applied in childcare.

My suggestion for the shape of such a scheme would be as follows:

Each new educator would be paired with an experienced educator at their home childcare centre. The experienced educator (with oversight by the centre director) would guide the initiate through each of a flexible checklist of skills (a combination of core skills and centre-specific skills) and provide regular critical feedback sessions. Importantly, the experienced educator would be incentivised with a pay rise as well as time off from other duties to facilitate this.

After the initiate has acquired and demonstrated the required competencies, they would then be required to undergo several 'practicals' where they are assigned to an experienced educator at a different centre for around a fortnight. This would allow educators to be exposed to a variety of educational settings and methods as well as foster transferability of their skills.

This system would not only provide much more useful training to new educators, it would also provide a much needed reward to highly skilled educators and thus help stem the current loss of talent from the sector.