

Early Childhood Development Workforce

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14 November 2010

Workforce demand:

If Australia follows international directions, then services will move progressively towards an integrated model of delivery. Our current, traditional, child-focused services such as child care, preschool, kindergarten etc, will continue to be offered but as part of a bigger suite of services. Integrated services may well operate from a physical space (or physical hub) within each community, but (particularly in remote areas) the hub may be virtual. Integrated services will include parent/family support programmes (such as playgroups, home visiting programmes, parent education programmes, parent support groups etc), child and family health services (physical and mental health programmes, immunisation programmes), community development initiatives specific to each community, early intervention, cultural programmes, Indigenous programmes and child-focused programmes (family day care, child care, kindergarten, preschool, transition to school etc).

Implications for workforce preparation:

Our current pre-service training for early childhood professionals is mainly focused around the knowledge and skills needed to work with children in child-focused programmes. Some contain elements of working with parents, but the focus tends to remain on the need to work with parents in order to achieve outcomes for children. Professionals working in integrated services need a much broader training to facilitate the partnerships that are needed for successful integrated service delivery. I argue that we cannot achieve the necessary preparation by tinkering with existing training. We need a two pronged approach to address new training needs:

1. We should offer a suite of postgraduate qualifications in integrated early childhood service delivery so that professionals who have different disciplinary backgrounds (eg child health nurses, child psychologists, social workers, family support workers, child care workers) can be given the opportunity to study across their discipline boundaries, and come to a common understanding on some of the key elements in integrated early childhood service delivery. These people are then positioned to become the leaders in developing new services as they roll out across the country. At UNE I have been working for the past 2 years on developing such courses (Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters and Professional Doctorate), with the support of a national consultative committee. The first of these, the Graduate Certificate, should be available in 2012. The courses will all be offered part-time, online only, and students will be required to be working in (or volunteering in) an integrated service so that they can continually intertwine practice with their learning.
2. We need to radically re-think how we prepare our 3 and 4 year trained early childhood professionals. I support the move in the national standards towards requiring 4-year trained teachers to work with young children but I think it essential that we have a vigorous debate around what that training should look like. I have an article coming out next week in the most recent AJEC addressing this: Sims, M (2010) What does being an early childhood 'teacher' mean in tomorrow's world of children and family services. *Australasian Journal of*

Early Childhood, 35 (3 Online Annex), pp 111 – 114. I will attach a copy of this article to the submission but draw your attention to copyright requirements: it is not appropriate to place this version of the article on your web – when the edition comes out there will be a link to the published version that could be placed on your website. Briefly, the argument I make is that we need to include in the undergraduate degree (the first 3 years) a range of generic skills that are essential for working with children and families across a range of roles including face-to-face work with children (eg in child care, kindergartens etc) and with families (eg in parent support and parent education). At 4th year students could specialize (for example becoming preschool teachers, family support specialists, managers, early intervention workers etc).