

Blue Gum Community School

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Early Childhood Development Workforce Study
Productivity Commission
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Our message from the coalface – the canaries aren't surviving, nor thriving!

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

This submission will be brief. However, we must express our very serious concern about the state of the Early Childhood workforce in the ACT where we operate. It is in crisis mode.

For the past 13 years, we have operated a highly-regarded Early Childhood service for 3 and 4 year olds – approx. 85 children now attend weekly. We have long Waiting Lists. But our ability to continue to operate is currently hanging by a thread. Instead of expanding our services (which families and other regions are pressuring us to do), we are on the verge of having to close our doors, if we were to lose just one more key educator. This knowledge is placing all of our staff under enormous pressure and inducing high levels of stress.

The irony is that we are ready, willing and able to employ and train up the highest quality Early Childhood educators within our service. We can produce outstanding education professionals. Yet we are increasingly having difficulty finding candidates. Even our attempts to offer paid work-related-learning opportunities – which have been welcomed by university students - are then thwarted by the regularly-changing, irreconcilable university timetable. **It seems that the university timetable is the only 'untouchable' in teacher education!**

We are now encouraging our staff to enrol in the Online Teaching Course offered by Curtin University in Western Australia – not exactly a local solution! But we are desperate – desperate to find quality staff; desperate to find ways they can intertwine theory and practice through relevant paid work while they study; desperate to support and mentor them so they can attain a professional standard in the minimum of time (so they don't lose heart and change professions); and desperate to retain them in an extended-hours Early Childhood setting once qualified (when primary schools and traditional limited-hours preschools will offer them higher pay, fewer hours of face-to-face work, longer holiday periods etc).

Governments mandating higher qualifications and introducing new frameworks do not produce quality outcomes; people do. The problem is we don't have the people.

We need a new type of 'apprenticeship' model for teachers. Writing essays at university doesn't produce quality teachers; working alongside quality teachers and learning 'how to' on the job is the best way to produce quality teachers. The 'Teach for Australia' model shouldn't be limited to 'high fliers'; it should be an option open to anyone who is passionate about teaching and willing to go through a competitive interview process run by university-accredited teaching schools. Student teachers have been seeking this for decades. When will we start listening to them (rather than accept the university timetable as sacrosanct)?

This isn't rocket science, but it needs to happen NOW, before the community loses more good teachers to burnout, thereby closing down high quality Early Childhood services. Educators who are still committed are getting older and their goodwill and energy are dissipating. Younger educators will turn to other careers, as their life demands increase. So we urge this Workforce Study to recommend real solutions now – solutions that can be implemented immediately, if universities are willing to think outside the (timetable) square.

Yours sincerely

Maureen Hartung
Executive Director
21 August 2011

