

Early childhood pre-service teachers' career intentions: Chalk and cheese?

Inspiring early childhood pre-service teachers' career intentions

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THIS IS CHILDHOOD Pedagogy and practice
in the early years

The Study

This pilot study investigated pre-service teachers' choice of the early childhood/primary degree, and career intentions for early childhood (EC) work at two NSW universities.

The Australian Government's significant investment in training EC teachers is a priority of the National Quality Agenda for better quality early childhood education and care. Attracting university four year trained EC teachers to work in EC settings (prior to school) is essential.



The National Regulations have improved the standards for provision of the quality of ECEC environments, particularly the relational environment, by reducing child-to-staff ratios and by increasing the qualification requirements of the early childhood workforce, making the workforce a cornerstone of the ECEC National Quality Agenda (ACECQA, 2012).

Extra staff, and specifically extra suitably qualified staff, will be required to implement the Government's early childhood agenda.



- Productivity Commission reports into the early childhood workforce (2011, 2014) identified that current and future demand and supply of the early childhood workforce is influenced by low status and poor working conditions
- Difficulty building ECEC workforce because of low recognition, high stress, administrative burdens, with no career pathways - 'skills cul-de-sacs' (Bretherton, 2010, p.1), coupled with relatively low pay and work conditions (Productivity Commission, 2011)



- The Australian Government aims to build a highly skilled, capable EC workforce to foster high quality education to achieve best outcomes for young children.
- Allocated expenditure of \$75.5m on additional university training, HECS assistance, and recognised prior learning indicates the Australian Government's investment in training this workforce.
- The attraction and retention of university trained EC teachers are cornerstone to EC workforce strategy.



Watson (2006) identified:

Until the wages and working conditions in childcare improve, the pathways to university in early childhood will remain pathways out of childcare, rather than career pathways within the profession of ECEC as a whole. (p. 15)



Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has identified priorities for future research one was to investigate the dynamics, including motivations, expectations, entry pathways and career trajectories of the ECEC workforce (Harrison, et al, 2011).

Therefore, considering all of the policy, and research conducted this research project is timely and of key significance to future research priorities in Australia.



Aims of the research

- To investigate pre-service teachers' intentions, reasons, expectations and motivations for enrolling into the early childhood/primary degree, and their career intentions for EC.



Underlying questions

- Are there tensions in undertaking Birth-12 degrees?
- Do students prefer 0-5 qualifications?
- What are the priorities for pre-service EC teachers?

Is this true?:

“Primary + EC = chalk and cheese” (4th year graduand)

It seems like the uni wants a one size fits all degree, no doubt to maximise their profit margins (1st year preservice teacher)



This research: preservice teachers' views on programs and career intentions

Questionnaire asked reasons for studying EC/Birth-12, views on current programs and plans for future work. intentions, reasons, expectations and motivations for enrolling into the early childhood/primary degree, and their career intentions for EC. Both four year Bachelor of Primary Early childhood 0-12 years degrees

Southern Cross	Newcastle
Survey distributed to the whole EC student cohort (n=256). Response rate of 33% (n = 75) SCU Human Ethics Committee approval No. ECH-14-170	Fifty two questionnaires distributed to final (4 th) year students in birth-12 degree. 100% response rate

Demographics varied across universities

		Newcastle	SCU
Age	<24 years	75%	46%
	25-29 years	0%	19%
	40+ years	2%	17%
Gender	Female	90%	97%



Preferred career sector

	Newcastle	Southern Cross University
Long day care	0%	9%
Prior to school	12%	29%
Early primary	49%	49%
Primary	35%	11%
Primary destination	84%	60%



Career intentions: Why 0-12 years teaching course?

The largest number of students identified

- their enjoyment of working with children
- career suited their interests and skills
- want to make a difference in children's lives
- hours of work,
- fits with having a family, and good work conditions.



Why choose to study an EC/Primary degree?

- *We have the choice between Primary or EC(most frequent response)*
- *Doing a double degree increases number of job opportunities. Childcare is easier to find a job in, and get experience before moving to Primary.*
- *Liked the idea of learning about children's learning from younger age and having much broader understanding of where they've come from, how they learn etc*



Reasons, expectations and motivations for enrolling into the EC/primary degree,

- *Better working conditions in Primary, but prefer the philosophy of EC. Early Primary gives me better opportunities to combine both.*
- *EC work paperwork is greater.*
- *Better job position. Higher pay. More holidays. More focus on teaching rather than take care of children.*
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Factors influencing intentions to work in Birth-5 (five-point scale)

Factor	Average Value (Southern Cross)	Average Value Newcastle
Level of pay	2.50	2.12
Holidays	2.93	2.46
varying shifts	3.21	3.02
leadership	3.71	3.78
Daily hours of work	3.16	3.06
Status of early childhood educators	2.92	2.16
Play-based curriculum	4.34	3.88



Barriers and Incentives

Incentives	Barriers
<i>Availability of Early childhood teaching positions</i>	<i>I strongly agree Early Childhood is not real learning and education.</i>
<i>I already have expertise in Early childhood</i>	<i>Respect of Long day care teachers and pay is major.</i>
	<i>Government regulations heavily restrict education in EC</i>
	<i>How EC teachers are viewed in society - they are undervalued and seen as just carers.</i>

Rate how these factors affect your intentions to work in Primary school (SCU)

N=75	Barrier %	Unsure %	Incentive %
Holidays	10	27	63
Teaching hours are flexible	36	39	25
Opportunities for leadership	2	35	63
Primary school teaching is real teaching	27	24	49
Daily hours of work	8	25	67
Primary school teachers have good status	8	25	67



How do students see the need for change (Newcastle) in the course?

Content

- *More practical experience and leadership roles – budgeting, Director roles and responsibilities, management.*
- *More engaging lectures. Very theory based.*
- *Yes! Be more relevant. Look at programming.*

Balance within the degree

- *Allow students the choice of internship in a primary school.*
- *More even spread of EC and primary.*
- *Focus on EC, no just primary*



Students' comments

More professional experience

- *More prac work. More experience for students straight out of school. Yes, more primary pracs. I do not feel 100% prepared to teach in primary after this degree.*
- *Yes! In an ideal world only 'great' centres/CTs (support teachers) to be partnered with students as they are so responsible for negative/positive placement experiences.*
- *Primary lecturers need to be aware of EC expectations.*
- *RPL and experience.*



How do students see the need for change in the degree (SCU)?

No I don't believe it could be improved we are properly being set up to work in either sector.

Content

- *Incorporate early childhood information into more of the units across the degree.*
- *Opportunities to advocate for children, EC education, or complete pracs in cutting edge centres e.g. Mia Mia in Sydney.*
- *More practical components and more links to teacher pedagogy. As a kinaesthetic learner, more hands on and creative activities and assignments.*
- *Learn more about actually teaching students rather than being taught the concepts ourselves.*



Balance of EC and Primary

- *Yes take the primary out! Failing that ensure all the primary units have more EC content and that the assignments can be applied to EC settings.*
- *Ensuring EC students are placed in tute classes with other EC students, many times I have been the only EC student in a class which makes me feel excluded as it is difficult in discussions/activities/support.*
- *In the primary units give more range to learn about early childhood issues. Positive behaviour Support does this well as it offers a primary and early childhood assignments.*



What the early childhood units do that others don't is that they allow freedom to research our own ideas and this is acknowledged as part of our learning journey. Being told from the beginning that teachers are not there to fail you and are there to support you to be successful was the first time i heard this in the degree. Whereas in the primary you are constantly subject to the 'big stick' approach if you don't do you will fail as a result you subconsciously act according to fear of failure rather than a love of learning. The early childhood degree encourages an intrinsic love of learning.



Is the Australian Government's investment at risk?

The data indicate that most entrants into Birth-12 degrees are happy about the range of choices they offer. They see room for improvements in the balance, content and professional experience arrangements, but are overall very satisfied.

The majority of students want to work in schools. So while the Government is funding the training of early childhood teachers owing to it being tacked onto a Primary degree course the investment could be seen as being at risk



How can we inspire early childhood pre-service teachers into early childhood settings

What new pathways of thinking and knowing about early childhood teachers' preparation can you suggest?



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