Early Childhood Learning Industry Training Needs Study

By

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A study of the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care Industry

Institute of Health & Nursing Australia

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Abstract

Aim: This paper is a report of a training needs analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care facilities conducted between June and August 2015. Seven leaders in Early Childhood Education and Care from the Melbourne and Geelong regions were interviewed to ascertain their learning and development objectives for children and their workforce needs to provide these services.

Method: We visited five well established and flourishing Early Childhood Education and Care facilities in the Melbourne metropolitan area and interviewed senior staff. The dialectic approach to interview was used to seek meaning. Thematic analysis was then employed to determine themes. The manual approach to thematic analysis as described in Research in Nursing and Health Care: Evidence for Practice 3rd Ed, (Taylor, B. Kermode, S. & Roberts, K.) was used as the principal guide.

Findings: The findings were that: a) employers seek educators with the skills and knowledge to encourage children to explore their world, work with parents & children from many backgrounds and ensure inclusiveness for all children, b) currency in First aid, Anaphylaxis, Asthma Management and CPR skills are seen as essential requirements for Early Childhood Education and Care sector educators and c) qualifications are a strong determinant of employability in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector.

Conclusion: There is a strong need and demand for high quality training and education in this sector

Contents

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to assess the demand for educational services in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. The study includes a review of the ECEC sector and a survey conducted at five childcare centres. The outcomes of the study will be used to guide the Institute of Health & Nursing Australia in the establishment and delivery of an education and training program for the ECEC sector.

Early childhood education in Australia is voluntary and delivered through a range of settings, including childcare centres and pre-schools (also known as kindergartens). The ECEC sector is regulated by various State authorities (table 1) who are responsible for service provider approval, supervisor certification, assessing and rating services against the National Quality Standard and the National Regulations, monitoring and enforcing compliance with the National Law and National Regulations, investigating incidents and complaints and working with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). The ACEQA promotes national quality and continuous improvement, guides the implementation of the National Quality Framework and ensures consistency in delivery[i].

Table 1 – State Regulatory Authorities

New South Wales	Early Childhood Education & Care Directorate, Department of Education
Victoria	Department of Education & Training
Western Australia	Department of Local Government & Communities, Education & Care

2.0 The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Industry

The entry level qualification for working in the ECEC Industry is a Certificate 3 in Early Childhood Education and Care. This qualification meets the requirements of the Education and Care Services National Regulations and the National Quality Standard for working in the ECEC sector. A list of persons qualified to work in the ECEC sector is maintained by ACECQA[ii].

2.1 ECEC Literature

The literature review was conducted between June and August 2015. The short time frame may have precluded identification of all relevant high-quality literature; however it was apparent that while there is a number of excellent books published for ECEC there are few Australian, published papers. A review of ECEC literature by the Centre for Community Child Health found few Australian ECEC programs have been studied using rigorous research methods[iii]. The Institute of Health and Nursing Australia (IHNA) has created an ECEC Reference Centre to collate the available references and foster further contributions to ECEC literature.

2.2 Entry level training and employment

The Certificate 3 in ECEC course is typically of six to nine months duration and priced at around $3000. Expected Job openings over the next 5 years are expected to be high with greater than 50,000 vacancies available. Of people who were unemployed before starting the course 56.2% were employed after completion[iv]. After the successful completion of the program the candidates may gain employment in the Early childhood Education Industry in such settings as Child Care Centre's, Kindergartens, Pre-school programs, After School programs, Family Day Care Centre's, Play Groups and other community settings and clients' homes. From 30 September 2015, all early childhood educators will be required to register with the Victorian Institute of Teaching[v].

Industry consultation conducted between June and September 2015 found the following positions available:

- Childhood Educator
- Childhood Educator Assistant
- Early Childhood Educator
- Family Day Care Worker
- Nanny
- Outside School Hours Care Assistant
- Playgroup Supervisor
- Preschool Assistant

2.3 Training Providers for the Certificate 3 in ECEC

The Australian Government, Department of Education and Training list 425 ECEC training providers ranging from small Registered Training Organisations (RTO) to large Universities. Perusal of the list indicates that the majority of training is provided by RTO's and TAFE Institutes[vi]. A number of Bachelor and Masters level programs are provided by universities.

2.4 Career Pathways for Certificate 3 in ECEC graduates

Potential career pathways for Certificate 3 in ECEC holders include at Certificate 4 level, Outside School Hours Carer and at Diploma Level, Childhood Education Manager and Outside School Hours Coordinator positions. Diploma graduates can gain entry with advanced standing to a number Bachelor programs at Australian Universities.

3.0 Methodology, Methods and Design

In order to augment the paucity of literature available at the time it was decided to interview a number of senior ECEC educators. Between June and August 2015 the investigators consulted with a range of purposely selected industry representatives. Discussion with the industry representatives was held on location with senior staff at ECEC centres.

3.1 Methodology

Critical Realism (CR) offers a methodology that reconciles positivism with the acquisition of social knowledge and understanding[vii]. Critical Realism offers a practical approach to combining information from different sources. Application of Critical Realism for this study facilitates the ability to provide an appreciation of the complex interplay between individual, socio-cultural and organizational factors in open systems.

3.2 Methods

A number of Melbourne Metropolitan ECEC facilities were purposely selected for their reputation as established industry leaders. Each facility was contacted and asked if a senior staff member would agree to discuss their educational and training needs with an IHNA researcher. Of the facilities listed, five facilities agreed to participate and a total of seven senior staff members volunteered to participate in semi-structured Interviews.

Data collection was at a location convenient to the participant and at a mutually agreeable time. Semi-structured interviews permitted frank and open discussion of the specific issues of interest and provided flexibility to proffer additional questions to explore any issues raised by the participants of which the interviewer was previously unaware, or required further clarification. An aide-memoire (Appendix A) was used to guide the semi-structured interview process but caution was taken not to unduly influence in anyway the participant's responses.

The participants were all female and their ages ranged from mid-20 to mid-60. All participants involved in this study were currently qualified ECEC workers with a Diploma in Early Childhood Education & Care or higher qualification, aged 25 years and over, currently working in Child Care and have been employed continuously in Child Care since 2006 or earlier.

Participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the study and advised their involvement would involve an interview of one to two hours duration and questions related to the training and operational needs of the Early Childhood Education and Care Industry. Participants were informed that notes would be taken and used to inform the study. All participants indicated their consent to take part in the study (Appendix C).

3.3 Design

An interview guide was framed to elicit information through a combination of open ended and dichotomous questions. The purpose of the interview guide was to assist the researcher to gain a full account and not to direct the interview process. In order to avoid the contribution of ill-considered or superficial information participants were encouraged to take as long as they needed and not to rush with their accounts.[viii]

Interviews with seven people were conducted. Thematic analysis of the Interviews resulted in the identification of five prevailing themes. A contextualist style of thematic analysis was used to analyse the Interview data. Manual searching of the data to identify recurrent patterns and a closer understanding was employed. A final analysis (Appendix B) resulted in the synthesis of five definitive themes.

4.0 Findings

Five themes emerged from the data:

      A.   Encouraging children to explore their world

      B.   Working with parents & children from many backgrounds

      C.   Inclusiveness for all children

      D.   Further Education

      E.   Employment Opportunities

4.1 Theme A - Encouraging children to explore their world

The aims and objectives of ECEC centre leadership as expressed by the participants expressed that they wished to facilitate children's innate desire to explore and learn through providing opportunities and encouragement. Victoria's Department of Education and Training highlight that there is compelling Neuroscience evidence that the first years of life are crucial to brain development, and that a child's early experiences have long-term effects[ix].

> *"The children are competent explorers, imaginative thinkers and creative problem-solvers."* - Participant A

> *"Initially, some children need a lot of encouragement to get out and explore the surroundings but we have to encourage this"* - Participant G

4.2 Theme B - Working with parents & children from many backgrounds

Eliciting parents' opinions and concerns and encouraging parents to discuss their desires for their child's development were considered essential. Victoria's Department of Education and Training stress the importance of parental support as partners in their children's education[x]. The participants indicated that the needed staff that were skilled not only at working with children but also their parents.

> "One of our biggest challenges is the wide range of cultures we have to deal with" - Participant C

> "In order to get anywhere you have to work with the children and parents" - Participant E

4.3 Theme C - Inclusiveness for all children

Caring for children from different cultures and/or with physical or psychological disorders places additional demands on staff training skills. Bocock suggests that ECEC can narrow the achievement gaps faced by disadvantaged children[xi]. Victoria's Department of Education and Training are aiming for an increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in ECEC[xii]. The participants indicated that they needed well trained staff with the knowledge and skills to ensure inclusiveness for all children regardless of cultural backgrounds and/or with physical or psychological conditions.

> "There are children from many different cultures and our staff need to understand that". - Participant A

> "Including Autistic children in the activities with others can be hard" – Participant E

4.4 Theme D - Further Education

All participants stressed the need for ongoing training to update skills. The management of Anaphylaxis and Asthma along with First-aid and CPR were cited as core competencies for all floor staff. Participants cited Autism and Cultural Diversity as areas where additional training was highly desirable.

> "We all need Anaphylaxis, Asthma Management, CPR and First Aid but increasingly we also need Special needs training." – Participant G

> "We need educators with special training for CPR, Anaphylaxis, Asthma and First aid. Once a year, we to give PD training to all staff such as "Music, lifestyle, activities, webinars and online training ..." – Participant B

4.5. Theme E – *Employment Opportunities*

One participant, a facility manager described difficulties related to recruiting qualified staff. All participants indicated that employment opportunities were strong in the industry for both Certificate 3 and Diploma holders.

> "If you are qualified there is work." - Participant C

> "There is lots of work and good people are in demand" - Participant D

5.0 Conclusion

The ECEC sector is regulated primarily through various State authorities (Introduction, table 1). These State Authorities regulate service provider approval, supervisor certification and assess services against the National Quality Standards and Regulations in conjunction with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). The ACEQA promotes national quality and continuous improvement, guides the implementation of the National Quality Framework and ensures consistency in delivery[xiii].

The study found that there is a strong demand for Certificate 3 and Diploma qualified staff and for ongoing training to update the skills of existing staff. The management of Anaphylaxis and Asthma along with First-aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) were cited as core competencies for all floor staff.

Participants cited Autism and Cultural Diversity as areas where there exists a high demand for training. The study determined that training for ECEC workers must imbue in trainees an all-inclusive approach to ECEC that encourages children to explore and learn; that they must be able to work with parents & children from many backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children and their families.

Semi-structured interviews: June to August 2015.

Interview Guide

Introduction

• Thank you

• Introduce self

• Purpose

• Confidentiality

• Duration

• How interview will be conducted

• Opportunity for questions

• Consent

• Prompts for open-ended questions

Questions

1. Tell me about yourself, when did you start working in child education?

2. Can you tell me about educating children?

3. Can you tell me about working with parents & children?

4. How do you achieve Inclusiveness for all children of all cultures?

5. How do you achieve Inclusiveness for all children of all cultures?

6. How do you achieve Inclusiveness for special needs children?

7. Can you tell me about the education requirements and training needs at your facility?

8. What are the employment opportunities in the industry?

9. Is there any other matter relevant to this topic that you think we need to discuss, if so what would that be?

Appendix B: Thematic Analysis Data Summary

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
A. Working with parents & children from many backgrounds	*We aim to consider the views of others and collaborate with others*	*Our staff have to work with parents and children from many backgrounds*	*One of our biggest challenges is the wide range of cultures we have to deal with*	*The expectations of parents vary so much.*	*In order to get anywhere you have to work with the children and parents*	*We are getting children from many different cultures*	*Our staff have to be experts in multiculturism*
B. Inclusiveness for all children	*There are children from many different cultures and our staff need to understand that*	*Children with Autism provide a special challenge for us*	*We try to design activities that can include everyone*	Ensuring that all children feel included is very important to us	*Including Autistic children in the activities with others can be hard*	*We have to be on the ball with everything, allergies, asthma, everything*	*A lot of families are struggling and some children can stand out from the others*
C. Encouraging children to explore their world	*The children are competent explorers, imaginative thinkers and creative problem-solvers.*	*We aim to provide opportunities to make decisions, discoveries, express themselves, be curious and pose questions.*	*We have areas where they can experience growing and preparing food.*	*We encourage playing and doing outside activities.*	*A wide range of natural and recycled materials is used for art and craft activities.*	*Children like to explore so we have lots of plants and animals that the children can touch and feel.*	*Initially, some children need a lot of encouragement to get out and explore the surroundings but we have to encourage this*
D. Further Education	Anaphylaxis Asthma Management Autism training CPR Cultural Diversity First Aid	Anaphylaxis Asthma Management Autism training CPR Cultural Diversity First Aid Once a year, we to give PD training to all staff such as "Music, lifestyle, activities, webinars and online training … First-aid training is essential.	Anaphylaxis Asthma Management CPR Cultural Diversity First Aid	Anaphylaxis Asthma Management CPR First Aid Special needs training	Anaphylaxis Asthma Management Autism training CPR First Aid	Certificate 3 in early childhood services will get you a job but we need people with a Diploma & Advance diploma in Children services – for directorship and a Certificate 4 in training & Assessment for training activities	Three levels of Childcare worker are required 1) Beginners, Certificate 3 to Assist Diploma holders, 2) Diploma, to manage independently in the rooms and 3) Bachelor Of Education – teaching in kinder
E. Employment opportunities	High for Certificate 3 & Diploma	Cert III in children's services is must have qualification and it will be for 1 year. The cert 3's are assistants to the Diploma holder. We require at least one diploma holder for each room.	*If you are qualified there is work*	*There is lots of work and good people are in demand*	High for Certificate 3 & Diploma	Certificate 3 in early childhood services will get you a job but we need people with a Diploma & Advance diploma in Children services – for directorship and a Certificate 4 in training & Assessment for training activities.	High for Certificate 3 & Diploma

Appendix C: Information and Consent Form for Study Participants

Information to Participants:

The purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of Industry Training Needs for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Educators. This Participant Information and Consent Form are structured in keeping with the provisions of the Institutes policies and State and Commonwealth legislation. Your involvement in this study will involve an interview of about one hour duration. You will be asked questions related to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Educator, educational needs.

Any information obtained that can identify you will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study; it will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law. It is not anticipated that you will not receive any benefit from participating. In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. Data will be reported as grouped data, and no participant will be identifiable from journal publication or conference presentation. Pseudonyms will be used to replace individual identifiers. No identifying information will be included in any report or presentation. Notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office within the Institute of Health and Nursing Australia. Computer databases will be password protected. Only the researchers will have access to the data.

This project is being conducted by John Varghese as part of a Training Needs Study at the Institute of Health and Nursing Australia under the supervision of the Director of Studies Mr Russell J Freemantle. The researcher, John Varghese will be conducting the interviews and will be taking written notes of the interview. You will be given the opportunity to read the notes and make corrections to your satisfaction.

You will be provided the opportunity to have any questions answered and can withdraw from this study at any time; you may also request that data be withdrawn prior to analysis after the interview process.

Certification by Participant:

I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Educators, Industry Training Needs Study being conducted by the Institute of Health and Nursing Australia by: John Varghese and Russell J Freemantle

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the study, have been fully explained to me by John Varghese and that I freely consent to participation:

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation may be directed to Girija G Devi on 03 9345 4432. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact Mr Russell J Freemantle, Director of Studies, Institute of Health and Nursing Australia, Level 1, 76-80 Turnham Avenue, Rosanna, Victoria 3084 PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 3084; telephone (03) 9435 4406.

References

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