

Student teacher perceptions of early childhood care and education
issues and services:

A working paper

With growing numbers of mothers participating in the paid work force there has been a large increase in child care services and the numbers of children in long-term care. This rapid growth has meant that child care services, originally developed to improve health and welfare for the poor, increasingly provide high quality education programs for young children. This educational emphasis, together with growing recognition of child care as a community service for families from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, means that traditional views of child care are being challenged and the distinctions between the care and education foci of child care and preschool services blurred.

In teacher education programs though, we are still confronted by stereotypic and populist views of child care as a predominantly welfare issue. Incoming students (and sometimes our colleagues) bring with them negative images of child care centres gleaned from the community and media. The well documented, but isolated, horror cases of child abuse such as the "Mr Bubbles" incident remain fixed in people's minds (Hayden, 1994). And, continuing media speculation about the negative social and intellectual affects of "abandoning" babies to child care centres play on people's emotional vulnerability. Relatedly, some of our incoming students, their families, and our colleagues regard early childhood teacher education programs as "an easy option" that focus primarily on nappy changing and sand play. Too often, the image of early childhood teacher education is still associated with well meaning women who have pleasant dispositions, patience, and warmth, rather than a course of serious academic intent and scholarship.

Changing community perceptions about the image of child care is no easy task. It is important, however, that we quickly ensure early childhood students view child care and its users in a manner that will foster the highest professional standards of care and education. Optimum quality care and education for preschoolers depends on the value the community places on the goals and orientations of centre-based child care. This valuing is tied to the status of child care as an educational service and the associated demand for professionally qualified staff. Indeed, research has consistently established the relationship between appropriate professional qualifications in early childhood care and education and positive social and cognitive outcomes for children (Bredenkamp, 1990; Whitebrook, Howes & Phillips, 1989) .

The findings from this study generated considerable discussion amongst our friends and colleagues and we're grateful for the assistance we received in conceptualising ideas and executing data analysis. Extra special thanks to Laurel Bornholt, Andrew Martin, and David McKinnon.

The major purpose of the study reported here was to describe incoming early childhood teacher education students' perceptions of issues relating to child care and early childhood services. Because the students represent a cross section of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds we believe their attitudes reflect those of the wider communities in which they live, and particularly younger women who will be the major users of child care in the next few years. If anything, given students' selection of early childhood education as a career choice, we expected them to be better informed and somewhat more positive about child care services, than the wider community. Nevertheless, we recognised that lingering views of child care as a welfare service would be powerful determinants of attitude and

perceived occupational status.

The low status of child care has two major consequences. First, it continues to perpetuate the view that young children are best cared for by their mothers in their own homes. Secondly, it may serve to discourage early childhood graduates to seek employment in the child care sector. In the current climate though, with a high demand for qualified early childhood staff and the simultaneous need to reduce staff turnover in child care centres (Bredenkamp, 1990; Hayden, 1993; Kelly, 1989) graduates must be encouraged to see child care as an acceptable and preferably desirable career destination. A better understanding of base-line perceptions of child care and early childhood services will enable us to fine tune aspects of early childhood teacher education programs that deal with families and society, child development, quality learning environments, child and family advocacy, and early childhood policy.

The care-education debate

Traditionally negative community perceptions about child care have their origins in the care and education debate that has existed since the early part of the century. In Australia, as elsewhere, this debate emerged from the charitable orientation of early childhood services. Child care services were originally intended to "reform" children of poor and destitute families by countering evil habits and providing citizenship training (Burns & Goodnow, 1985; Kelly, 1988; Lever, 1993) and/or provide child care for women without family support who were forced into employment by economic necessity (Spearritt, 1979).

The welfare emphasis continued until World War II when creches were established to care for the children of women entering the workforce to take the place of men serving in the armed forces. With women's return to the home following the war child care centres were usually replaced by preschools. These developed largely as a service for middle-class women who wanted their children to have some preparation for school

(Sebastian-Nickell & Milne, 1992).

While child care services were traditionally aligned with the welfare sector, the preschool services, mirroring school hours and organisational patterns, promoted an educational agenda. Historically, preschool teachers were an elite group, supporting traditional family values, promoting child development, especially social development, protecting children's rights, and preparing children for the academic years ahead. These emphases led to the close association with education rather than care (Lever, 1993) That the preschools also provided "care", albeit for a limited period during school hours, was not widely acknowledged.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, women's increasing work force participation meant that child care provision was an important political and social concern. In order to support women's workforce participation the Commonwealth directed additional funding to child care provision and changed its funding arrangements for preschools. This has resulted in substantial increases in child care places, from 46, 000 in 1983 to approximately 270, 000 in 1995.

As Sellstrom (1993) suggests, however, increases in government funding for child care services are a response to parents' need to participate more effectively in the labour market, rather than a concern for children's development and learning. Yet, children below five years-of-age are at a critical developmental period, and many will spend more time in care than at school. Clearly, services providing

care for up to 12 hours per day, five days per week for five years, must provide a strong educational component.

According to Kelly (1980) though, both society and government pay lip service to the value of quality care and education for children prior to their entry into school. They consider services for the under fives to be of lower status than services for over fives. This view according to Honig (1990) is consistent with the generally lower status given to traditional women's work.

The reality is, that care and education for young children are inextricably entwined. However, the care versus education debate constitutes a continuing problem for planning quality service delivery at both the policy and practical levels (Hayden, 1993).

Clearly, the charitable origins of child care have shaped its image as a welfare service. When this is coupled with media images of mothers "abandoning" babies to "institutional" care, and a widespread community belief that children will be disadvantaged by non-maternal care the public perception of child care becomes negative (Hayden, 1994; 1996; Kelly, 1989). Indeed, child care centres are still seen by many people

as institutions to avoid.
Teacher education issues

Integral to the care-education debate are issues relating to the appropriate professional preparation for people employed in early childhood services (Elliott & Irvine, 1986; Gifford, 1992). While it has long been accepted that children over the age of three should be educated by preschool "teachers", there has been less certainty about who should care and educate children under three. Indeed, there has been a popular community and political perception, despite compelling evidence to the contrary (Bredenkamp, 1990), that the development of children under three years of age can be adequately fostered by anyone who has had "experience" with children.

In Australia it's generally accepted, given the critical developmental periods between birth and five years of age, that preparation for teaching and caregiving roles in child care centres should be conducted at a university level. The move of early childhood teacher education programs to the University sector in the late 1980s provided a strong impetus to focus on the complementary relationships between care and education from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Further, overt university-wide goals such as the pursuit of knowledge and excellence, conducting research, training new researchers, and disseminating research findings have impacted positively on early childhood teacher education programs by informing their structure and pedagogy.

Given the relatively low community image of careers in education in general, and specifically in early childhood education, many talented students are lost to the profession as they seek admission to more highly regarded courses. The growing demand for early childhood teachers though, together with Faculty demands to fill general quotas means that more of the lowest ranked students are admitted to teacher education programs (Barbour, 1990). This has the dual consequence of depriving the early childhood field of the most academically talented graduates and threatening the long-term development of future scholars in early childhood education.

If, as proposed by Hayden (1994), the dichotomy between care and education ensures that services perceived as providing "education" and "teaching" to young children enjoy a higher status within the community

than those labelled as providing "care", then graduates of early childhood teacher education courses may, wherever possible, be more inclined to choose the higher status options of school (K-2) or preschool teaching. In reality though, the strongest demand for early childhood staff, especially in fast growing areas such as Western Sydney is in the child care sector.

Perceptions of early childhood services as a workplace

Related to the image of early childhood services is the perception that student teachers have about teaching as a profession. Teaching personnel develop their own value systems and set of beliefs about the workplace, best teaching practice, and the status and worth of their chosen career. These ideas tend to reflect their experiences and preferences, culture, level of education and personal philosophy of life and teaching (Connell, 1985). They evolve and change as insights and understanding grow, but are influenced by wider community perceptions (Sebastian-Nickell, 1992).

All parents hold a variety of views about children, parenting and child care built up from direct personal experiences and cultural determined collective wisdoms (Goodnow, 1988). Chambliss and Melmed (1990) suggest that teachers who are also parents might have different perceptions about early childhood services, modified by experience, from those without their own children. Rolfe and Richards (1993) have found, for example, that mothers are generally positive about the child care arrangements for their children while they worked. They concede, however, that most mothers would probably have kept their infants at home if they had not been forced to take on full-time employment. The extent to which parenting modifies teachers' ideas about teaching and learning is not well understood.

Goodnow (1988) has suggested that a number of factors are evident in the "construction" of ideas related to child care and that it is difficult at times to determine links between these ideas and action. Indeed, Rolfe and Richards (1993) argue that regardless of the type of care chosen by mothers, they sought to rationalise and justify their decisions in order to reduce feelings of dissonance resulting from the anomalies they recognised between their own actions and stated ideologies. Relatedly, it could be expected that previous work experience with children might influence students' perceptions of early childhood services and their decisions about personal child care options and career choice.

Teacher's values and beliefs, whether parents themselves or not, are often transmitted through their daily interactions with children, parents and staff. The development of positive teacher attitudes toward the quality and affect of early childhood services, particularly child care, and the way they view their career and workplace role might be a major factor in dispelling the negative images of child care as a welfare service.

The care-education dichotomy and the quality of early childhood services continue to be the subject of community discussion and debate and a considerable research effort. There is little research however, on student teachers' perceptions of child care and preschool services yet, baseline information on knowledge and beliefs seems important to

efforts aimed at increasing the quality and status of child care provision.

The purpose of this study was to explore preservice early childhood teachers' perceptions of early childhood services, and particularly

child care, at the commencement of their professional education. We were specifically interested in entry level knowledge of early childhood services and to what extent views would reflect the current care-education debate, the generally negative community perceptions of child care as a service and a profession, and the widespread fears about mother-child separation in the early years. We felt that a significant indicator of the status of early childhood services would be students' projected child care choices for their own children and their preferred career destinations. Given the well publicised over-supply of primary school teachers and the high demand for teachers in the child care sector, career preferences should provide a particularly good indicator of perceptions of early childhood services. Importantly too, given previous research on the role of parenting we sought to investigate relations between experience with children and career and child care preferences and students' knowledge and perception of the early childhood field.

Method

In this study preservice early childhood teachers responded to a questionnaire that probed knowledge and perceptions of early childhood services, their future career destinations and child care preferences for their own children. Questionnaire responses were used to determine students' knowledge of early childhood services, their attitudes to the care-education debate, and their perceptions of the status of early childhood education as a profession and service. The responses were also used as a basis for determining relationships between career destination and personal child care choices and knowledge, status and perceived goals of early childhood services, previous work with children, and parenting experience.

The study is part of an on-going project examining aspects of early childhood teacher education including, student attitudes to early childhood service provision, student attrition, experiences of technology, and employer perceptions of graduates.

Subjects

Subjects for the study were 133 students (132 female and 1 male) commencing the Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) course at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean in 1994 and 1995. Most students (63.5%) were under twenty one years of age and most (82%) had completed their Higher School Certificate. The remaining students entered the program on the basis of other qualifications and/or experiences such as an Associate Diploma level qualification in Child Care, an overseas

qualification, or a Mature Age Entry preparation course.

Students at the University of Western Sydney Nepean are drawn from a wide geographic area, but predominantly the Greater Western Sydney region, and represent a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Most (58%) of the early childhood students lived in the Greater West, 25% lived in the Sydney Metropolitan area, with the remaining 17% coming from Regional areas. Some 17% of students spoke a language or languages other than English.

The early childhood teacher education program was the first and preferred course option for most (85%) respondents. A small group (10%) reported Early Childhood Education as their second choice (with Primary teaching their first preferred choice) and 6.5% indicated they would have preferred to undertake a degree in another discipline, such as Psychology. Comments by students in this latter group indicated that Early Childhood was viewed as a stepping stone to achieving their preferred career goal.

Instruments

Student perceptions of early childhood services and issues were probed using a 35 item questionnaire developed for the study. Questions focused on: (1) student characteristics, including ages, highest level of education, place of usual residence, University course preference, languages spoken other than English, parenting experience, and previous experience working with children; (2) knowledge early childhood services, including salary levels, qualifications required by teachers in each type of service, and service availability; (3) the image of early childhood as a profession, including public image and professional status, job satisfaction and career rewards. (4) personal child care preferences and employment choices while children are of preschool age, (5) expected career destinations, and finally, (6) perceptions of major care and education goals in each service type (child care, preschool and K-2).

Most questions probing student perceptions and beliefs were rated on a 5-point scale. Responses were scored as 5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree.

Students completed the questionnaire at the end of a lecture in the second or third week of their first semester in the Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) degree program. The questionnaire took about 15 minutes to complete.

Results

(1) Student characteristics

The 133 students who completed the questionnaire represented 3/4 of the first year preservice early childhood teacher education intake in 1994 and 1995. Nearly all the group claimed some experience caring for young

children prior to beginning the course, and for most this experience had been gained through babysitting (62%), care of their own children (20%) or care for younger siblings (4%). Nearly a quarter (22%) of the students had worked in child care or preschool centres with some of this group already holding a TAFE level qualification in child care. The experiences of remaining students were gained during school organised work experience programs in preschools, or as teachers and supervisors in Sunday Schools, Brownie Packs, or similar.

(2) Knowledge of early childhood services (including adequacy and cost of services to the community, salary levels, and qualifications required by teachers in each type of service.)

Overall, while there was considerable variation in students' knowledge of the adequacy and costs of child care services, teacher salary levels within each service, and perceptions of the status and rewards and satisfaction associated with early childhood jobs, views were generally consistent with community uncertainty about the changing role of child care and the negative images of child care perpetuated by the media.

Service provision and cost

Most students (62%) were aware that there were inadequate child care services to meet the community demand child care places, with a further 44% uncertain or undecided about adequacy of provision. Only about half the students (55%), though, appeared to have a reasonable idea of the cost of child care, believing that families paid between \$100 and \$150 per week (without subsidies) per child. The mean cost estimate was \$122 per week. Encouragingly though, most students were beginning to view child care as community cost, rather than the sole responsibility of individual families. They believed that Governments should provide the major proportion (56%) of child care provision expenses with parents assuming responsibility for about 30% of costs, and the remaining costs

(14%) borne by employers and other sources.

Salary levels

Again, lack of general knowledge about early childhood services was evident from students' limited knowledge of teacher pay rates in the educational sector. First, few students had a realistic idea of the salary scales for teachers in early childhood services, but most believed they were poorly paid (Table 2). Secondly most believed that salary scales differed by educational sector (Table 1), with teachers in child care earning 7% less than those in K-2 classes in schools and 19% less than secondary school teachers.

That students perceived salaries in early childhood services, especially child care, were considerably lower than those in primary and secondary schools is consistent with the lower status accorded to the early childhood sector by the community.

Table 1
 Means and standard deviations for estimated salaries at each educational level

	Mean	\$\$SD
Child care	23 640	7564
Preschool	24 454	6750
K-2	25 358	7312
Primary	26 893	5333
Secondary	29 166	5936

Degree level qualifications

There was strong agreement that all teachers, whatever their occupational destination (Child care- 82%; Preschool- 91%, K-2- 96%, Primary- 98% and Secondary- 98.5%) need a degree level qualification. Nevertheless, students' belief in the need for a degree increased with the age of children to be taught.

(3) Image and status of early childhood services,

Table 2 indicates students' perceptions of early childhood teaching as a profession on a range of occupational dimensions: image, stressfulness, and career rewards (emotional and financial).

Table 2
 Students' perceptions of occupational dimensions of early childhood services

	Child care		Preschool		K-2							
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low						
Status/image	20	20%	77	58%	49	37%	44	34%	63	47%	29	22%
Pay	12	9%	59	44%	29	20%	52	39%	21	16%	50	37%
Stress	45	54%	13	10%	51	40%	29	23%	66	50%	24	17%
Rewarding	114	86%	3	2%	107	88%	5	4%	117	88%	3	2%

As can be seen from Table 2 the majority of students considered all service types to provide a rewarding career but that image and pay were generally low. Less than half the students considered early childhood

to have a high public image. Further, perceptions of image clearly change between service types with more students regarding the image and status of preschool and K-2 services highly. Chi square analyses of observed and expected frequencies of response patterns indicated that preschool ($\chi^2 = 57.5$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$) and K-2 services ($\chi^2 = 16.73$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$) were more highly regarded than child care and that K-2 was more highly regarded than preschool ($\chi^2 = 65.8$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

While there is less apparent variation in students' views of the stressfulness of service types, about half the group considered early childhood teaching to be a stressful profession. Chi square analyses indicated that students' regarded child care teaching as a more stressful occupation than teaching in preschool ($\chi^2 = 57$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$) or K-2 classes ($\chi^2 = 25.04$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$), and that stress would be higher in K-2 classes than preschools ($\chi^2 = 76.15$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

(3) Personal child care choices

Student responses to questions about employment and child care choices when their own children were below school age suggested that most would not work while children were under three years of age, a finding consistent with previous Australian research (Rolfe & Richards, 1993), but if working would select home-based, rather than centre-based care options.

A summary of students' responses to questions about personal child care choice is presented in Table 3. As can be seen the perceived likelihood of working while children were below school age increased as children matured. Only 15% of students believed they would work when their children were babies with 78% agreeing they would be in the workforce when their children were 3 or 4 years old. The choice of centre-based child care remained low across all age group with most parents of babies and toddlers preferring home-based care with family members, Family Day Care services and Nannies.

Table 3

Students' projections for their employment status and child care options

Age of Children	Mother in Paid Employment %	Care Option %			
		Home-Based	Child Care Centre	Preschool	Other
Babies	15%	53%	13%	1%	33%

Toddlers	44	44	19.5	2.3	21
Preschoolers	78	18	14	50	19

The finding that working mothers would prefer to send their 3 and 4-year-old children to a preschool, rather than a child care centre, seems particularly indicative of continuing negative community perceptions of child care. Given that preschools operate only between 9

and 3 pm, and usually on a sessional basis, one can only assume that future employment will be in a 9-3 pm occupation, or in a part-time capacity; or that preschool care will be used in conjunction with home-based or centre-based child care. Interestingly, students' plans to work in the school or preschool sector, that does operate on a 9 to 3 pm schedule are consistent with this finding (see Table 4).

Given the inconvenience of preschool operating times for most working parents, it must be assumed that students' would use preschool, in preference to child care because they perceive it, rather than child care, to provide the "educational" preparation required for school. A related finding, students' belief that that most parents (74%) send children to preschool for "educational" purposes or for social interaction (16.5%), and to "care" (86.5%) because of work commitments lends support to this view.

Despite these responses, it must be noted that most students questioned were not parents. Their preferences, therefore, are an ideological projection into an unknown future. It is likely that these views will be challenged by the economic reality of needing to work and find child care while children are still infants.

Indeed, chi square analyses based on frequencies shown in Table 4 indicated that student parents and non-parents view child care choice differently. Non parents showed a stronger preference for home-based care for babies ($\chi^2 = 6.0$, DF 1, $p < .01$) and toddlers ($\chi^2 = 4.1$, DF 1, $p < .05$). Presumably, parents who may have already used child care and are much more aware of the realities of managing work and family responsibilities are more realistic about child care options and choices; hence are more accepting of centre-based child care.

Table 4
 Frequencies for child care choices for babies, toddlers and preschoolers for students with and without their own children

Child care choice

Centre-based care Home-based care
 Babies Toddlers Preschoolers Babies Toddlers Preschoolers

Parent 8 12 16 9 85
 Non-parent 4 19 70 30 4217

Previous work experience in child care settings, however, made no significant difference to students' patterns of child care choice for babies ($C2 = .16$, $DF 1$), toddlers ($C2 = .05$, $DF 1$), or preschoolers ($C2 = .51$, $DF 1$)

4. Career choices

When asked to predict occupational destinations over the next two decades most students expected they would be employed in the early

childhood field, but indicated an overwhelming preference to work in preschools and schools, rather than child care centres. Table 5 shows students' predictions of their short and longer term career destinations and their intention to remain in the early childhood employment sector over a twenty year period.

Table 5
 Students' career projections over 20 years

Career Destination	5 Years		10 Years		20 Years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Child Care						
Teacher/Director	31	24	20	15	20	15
Preschool						
Teacher/Director	51	40	50	40	37	29
School						
Teacher/Executive	36	28	33	26	39	30
Further Study/academic	7	5	6	5	13	10
Home	1	1	16	13	9	7

Other 2 2 1 1 11 9

Table 5 indicates that most students expect to be employed in one of the three major early childhood services: child care, preschool, or K-2 classes, over the twenty years after graduation, but few see their preferred occupational destination in the child care sector. Students reporting occupations in the "other" category predicted they would be employed in positions such as Child Development Officer and residential care worker.

Given the widely publicised current and projected continuing oversupply of primary school teachers in New South Wales and the fact that nearly all early childhood graduates find work in the child care sector, students' preferred career choice is presumed to reflect the perceived higher status of the preschool and school sector. Complicating, but related to perceptions of service status, are pragmatic considerations of shorter working hours, lack of shift work, and longer holidays in the school and preschool sector.

Students' beliefs that child care pay rates are lower than those in other educational sectors, as shown earlier, might also be expected to affect career choices but analyses of relations between perceived salary levels and career destination indicated no significant associations. Similarly, in subsequent interviews with students, there was no indication that salary levels influenced career choice.

Encouragingly, many students saw themselves progressing from a classroom teaching role to an administrative or executive role over the 20 year period.

Chi square analyses indicated that neither previous work experience in the child care sector ($\chi^2 = 2.69$, $df = 1$) or parenting experience ($\chi^2 = 2.35$, $df = 1$) significantly affected patterns of career choice. Similarly, there were no indications of significant associations between occupational status, rewards or stress and career destination.

5. Perceptions of major curriculum goals for child care and preschool services

Students' perceptions of the importance of specific curriculum goals for each service are presented below.

Table 6
Students' perceptions of the major goals of early childhood services

Child Care	Preschool	K-2
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	Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
Social	106	91%	0		112	95%	0		58	94%	0	
Physical	100	86%	4		107	92%	2		59	95%	0	
Safety	114	97%	0		117	99%	0		64	100%	0	
Intellectual	91	78%	2		109	93%	2		59	95%	0	

Inspection of Table 6 indicates that most students regarded each of the major goals to be important for each type of early childhood service. Chi square analyses of patterns of responses to questions about each goal indicated no significant associations with career destinations, or with personal child care choice.

Given the findings that students clearly preferred to work in preschools and schools rather than child care centres and that there were no clear associations between knowledge and perceptions of early childhood services or previous experience with children and career choice we decided to interview a selection of students to help explain reasons for career choice. Twenty five students were randomly selected from student administration records and contacted by telephone. Of this group fourteen students were asked a series of open-ended questions probing their career destination plans and reasons for career choices.

Findings from the interviews confirmed that students overwhelmingly preferred to work in preschools and K-2 settings and for three main reasons:

1. a strong belief that schools and preschools were about "teaching" in an overt sense and that the ages of the children, the organisational patterns and infrastructure, facilitated this function;
2. less physically demanding and tiring work, and
3. shorter hours, longer holidays and no shift work- conditions more in tune with students' current social expectations and their future (or current) roles as mothers.

Students claimed that the perceived low status and pay associated with child care did not influence their preference for employment in the preschool and K-2 sectors. They strongly believed that it was the "teaching" rather than the "caring" role and the better working conditions that influenced their decision. While most students acknowledged they would find difficulty obtaining a job in schools or preschools they indicated that even if "forced" to begin work in a child care centre would aim to move as quickly as possible to the school or preschool sector.

Conclusions and implications

Our findings suggest that beginning early childhood student teachers' views of early childhood services reflect many of those in the wider community. They believed work with young children to be rewarding but generally poorly regarded, stressful and poorly paid. In general child care was viewed less favourably than preschool or school settings but this did not generally appear to influence career or child care choice. Further exploration of student responses, including those from the 1996 student intake, will focus on more detailed analyses of patterns of relationships between variables.

Students' choice of careers in schools and preschools and their preference for home-based or preschool care for their own children appear consistent with the low public image of child care and perceived distinctions between care and education foci in each service type.

However, the development of beliefs about child care and the selection of career choice and child care options are complex processes affected by a variety of factors. Public image may well determine career and child care choice to some extent, but the appeal of shorter working days, longer holidays and the perceived association between the more formal structures of the school and "real teaching" are powerful determinants of reality and action. That "care" and "education" have traditionally been seen as two separate issues in the early childhood field has fragmented services, giving rise to differences in public image, government funding and perceptions of value and respectability.

Students' very strong preference to work in schools and preschools rather than child care has serious implications for early childhood teacher education and the child care sector.

The child care sector is the fastest growing educational area with considerable unmet demand for personnel and a high staff turnover. In early childhood teacher education programs we are well aware of the relationship between appropriate staff qualifications and quality outcomes for children and have a strong ideological sense of wanting to maintain and improve the quality of child care. Given the connection between staff qualifications and quality programs for children we feel obligated to ensure that early childhood graduates want to work and do work in child care. At the same time, we have no direct influence over industrial matters and day-to-day working conditions in child care.

The better understanding we now have of student teachers' perceptions of early childhood services and their clear preference not to seek employment in child care compels a new attempt to ensure that our programs encourage realistic views of child care as a critical educational service. Changing more negative community perceptions about

working mothers and the care and welfare orientations of child care is, of course, much more difficult. For example, strategies such as restricting admission to students with higher entry qualifications (eg. TER scores) while having some long-term impact on community perceptions of the value of early childhood, will do little to ensure even a modest supply of teachers. A major danger, too, is that continuing difficulties to find and keep University qualified teaching staff will result in child care services employing more staff without degree level teaching qualifications.

Ensuring the quality of child care services within our community is a major social and political concern. For economically advantaged sectors of the community, decisions regarding work and child care options are generally a matter of personal choice. For most families, however, there is little choice and child care services must be available to

meet both parents' and children's needs. Poor quality services with poor quality staff only serve to increase the guilt and discomfort many parents feel about using about child care. In turn, this serves to perpetuate continuing negative images of child care.

Students' career preferences and their apparent distinction between the "teaching" or educational role of preschools and schools and the "care" role of child care centres suggests that perceptions about the functions of each service will be transmitted to their work places, thus perpetuating stereotypic practices. Teacher attitudes can serve to devalue specific services within a community.

Ideally, many of the views held by students entering a teacher education program will be modified over the course of their enrolment. Unfortunately, there are some preliminary indications suggesting that this is not happening. Results from a survey of 1995 graduating students' career choices indicate the same strong preferences to work in preschools and schools. Given the close links between parenting and care of young children, graduating students' views are not really unexpected. Goodnow (1988) asserts, that the ideas most difficult to change are those that have strong links to the way a parent (or a prospective parent?) defines his or her identity as a parent. Indeed, she indicates that there are few differences between the way parents and non parents view aspects of child rearing and development.

Further complicating the picture is the unlikeliness of linking ideas and actions. For example, students' responses to questions about the respective goals of child care, preschool and K-2 (Table 6) indicating that social, physical, and intellectual goals were regarded as extremely important are consistent with the reported tendency to provide "socially desirable answers". Without internal or external demands for consistency "the individual may happily believe in one set of statements and act in a completely different fashion" (Goodnow,

1988, p. 300).

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