

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS GO TO WORK:

Where do they work and why?



Research Team

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Project Summary

There is significant mismatch between early childhood graduate teacher employment destinations (and aspirations) and Government policy imperatives, with the majority of early childhood graduates appearing to preference teaching in primary school. The **Early childhood teachers go to work** study draws on an innovative research design, including an Australia-first longitudinal data set, to illuminate where, why and who graduates choose to work with – capturing both career aspirations and employment destinations and factors influencing these. The study is a transdisciplinary collaboration across two Australian universities. Significantly, the study leverages off existing strong alliances with National partner organisations.

Alignment

The study addresses international priorities for the EC workforce (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011; Graue, 2005), National EC policy reform, and State policy workforce agendas which all identify the imperative to have EC degree qualified teachers in prior to school settings (ACECQA, 2017). Given the reluctance of EC graduate teachers to choose to work in prior to school settings, research that attends to factors influencing graduate career pathways and aspirations is of critical importance.

This research will provide timely, important longitudinal data that explicitly examines early childhood teachers' career pathways into and out of a range of early childhood contexts (e.g. child care,

kindergarten, lower primary). This research complements a growing number of funded research projects (e.g. *Exemplary early childhood educations at work: A multi-level investigation*, ARC – LP160100532, Press, Harrison, Wong, Gibson & Ryan; *Identifying effective strategies to grow and sustain a professional early years workforce*, ARC – LP140100652, Thorpe, Irvine, McDonald, Brownlee & Sumsion) that focus on issues of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce. It is anticipated that approaches that aim to influence career aspirations from an early stage in preservice teachers' careers will be required if targets for the provision of degree-qualified educators in prior-to-school settings are to be met.

Research Context

In Australia, a four-year degree qualification in early childhood education provides graduates with several potential career pathways. Each of these contexts provides diverse working conditions, with ECEC teachers generally working longer hours with more contact time and receiving lower pay (approximately \$20 000 per annum less than primary school colleagues) and fewer leave provisions (approximately six weeks less annual leave per year than primary school colleagues) (Bretherton, 2010; DETE, 2014).

Although government policies increasingly require prior-to-school settings to employ degree-qualified teachers in efforts to improve educational outcomes for children, a growing body of research is illuminating preservice teachers' reluctance to engage in these settings as a desirable career option. Not only are degree-qualified staff leaving prior to school settings (Watson, 2006), or some the profession altogether, many preservice teachers in early childhood degree programs already have an aversion to working in these settings and with young children (Gibson, 2015; Thorpe et al, 2011, Thorpe et al, 2012; Zollo, 2017).

Project aims

- Investigate the discourses that influence ECEC career choices
- Investigate the practices that support these choices – course design, professional

experiences & mentoring beginning teachers into the profession.

Research questions

The research question that guides this study is:

Where do early childhood graduate teachers work and why?

The following sub-questions provide further layers of understanding:

- What are the career aspirations of early childhood graduates and what factors have shaped these?
- How do graduates' places of employment align with their career aspirations?
- How do we organise early childhood practices, including course design and professional experience, to optimally prepare graduates to work in prior to school settings?
- How are early childhood graduate teachers most effectively mentored into the profession?

Research Design and Methodology

In 2017 a validated survey instrument was developed through a Delphi process with an EC field of experts and pilot testing with EC pre-service teachers. This online survey tool will measure EC pre-service teachers' career aspirations and influencing factors across 12 items.

The survey is designed to be administered across two cohorts of pre-service teachers, with the aim to generate two 3-year longitudinal data sets:

Cohort 1:

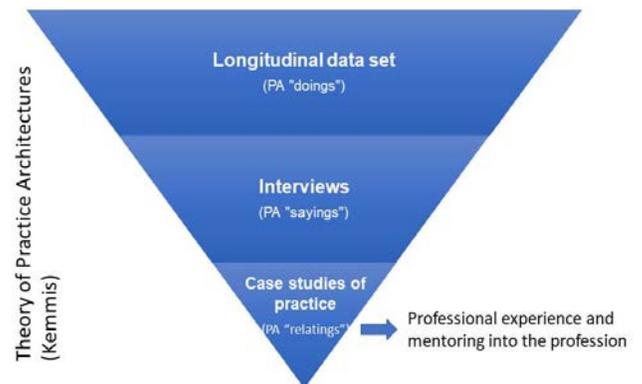
Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) – follow 2nd year students in multiple universities with survey administered every 6 months across degree course.

Cohort 2:

Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) – follow 4th/final year students with survey administered every 6 months in degree course and two years post-graduation.

The research design for the **Early childhood teachers go to work** study draws on a conceptual framework, the Theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008), that will enable

rich understandings across multiple of levels of the complex factors that shape and inform early childhood graduate teachers' career pathways.



Research Significance and Impact

The **Early childhood teachers go to work** study will:

- Develop understandings of the ways early childhood teacher employment destinations and career aspirations are shaped
- Inform government policy; key stakeholder workforce policies; and initial teacher education (ITE) practices and course design.

The research is important because it will identify the factors that shape the career aspirations of preservice early childhood teachers' careers over time, and develop understandings of the ways in which graduate employment destinations align or misalign with career aspirations. In doing so, the research findings will inform future workforce policies and teacher education approaches aimed at addressing the growing need for degree-qualified teachers in prior to school settings.

Next steps

The project team are currently inviting collaboration research partners and are working on the development of an Australian Research Council grant application.

For Further Information

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