

## **Career Paper**

### **Part II**

Career Paper:  
Pre-Kindergarten Teacher

Student's Name  
HMEC 1550  
Instructor's Name  
Term/Year

Preschool teachers and child-care workers care for and teach preschool children, age five and younger, in child care centers, nursery schools, preschools, public schools, and family child care homes. These workers play an important role in a child's development by caring for the child when the parents are at work or away for other reasons. Although preschool teachers spend most of their working day with children, they do maintain contact with parents or guardians to discuss each child's progress and needs. They do this through daily informal meetings or scheduled conferences (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 1998-99).

Preschool teachers develop and lead activities which are prepared for specific age groups and the needs of those children within those groups. Because of the ages of the children in question, a preschool teacher's first and foremost responsibility is the fostering of their social development as well as the health and physical well-being of each child. These teachers plan and actually put to use activities which enhance the children's present abilities and help them to acquire the skills and abilities that will help them grow. It is therefore necessary that a preschool teacher pay special attention to the child's individual needs and it is sometimes necessary to modify these activities to meet the child's needs. It is also very important for the teacher to be aware of the various stages of development that children go through and plan activities according to these stages (Hopke, 1993).

A combination of basic care and teaching duties are performed by most preschool teachers and child-care workers. Preschool teachers and child-care workers provide opportunities for children to learn through many of the basic care activities. Even the simple task of tying a child's shoe can create an opportunity for the child to learn. Children learn about trust and gain a sense of security through their experiences in preschool and child-care programs. Learning, for children this age, is mainly through play. By recognizing the importance of play, preschool

teachers and child-care workers build their program around it. Thus, a less structured approach is used to teach preschool children, including small group lessons, one-on-one instruction, and learning through creative activities, such as art, dance, and music. Preschool teachers and child-care workers prepare daily and long-term schedules of activities which ensure a well-balanced program for the children in their care. Each day's activities balance individual and group play with quiet and active time (BLS, 1998-99).

Wholesome meals and snacks are served by preschool teachers and child-care workers. They also teach children good eating habits and personal hygiene. They see to it that children have appropriate rest periods. They are able to recognize children who may not feel well or show signs of emotional or developmental problems. If any problems are discovered, they will discuss these matters with their supervisors and the child's parents (BLS, 1998-99).

There are many types of preschool facilities, including the ones found in private homes, schools, religious institutions, workplaces where employers provide care for employees' children, or private buildings. State regulations require certain adult to children ratios. The ratio varies with the age of the children. Child development experts generally recommend that a single care giver be responsible for no more than three or four infants that are less than one year old, five or six toddlers that are one to two years old, or ten preschool-age children that are between two and five years old. The working hours of preschool teachers and child-care workers vary. Most child care centers are generally open year round and have long hours so that parents can drop off and pick up their children before and after work. Public and many private preschool programs operate during the typical 9-10 month school year. Family daycare providers have flexible hours, but may work long or unusual hours to fit parents' work schedules (BLS, 1998-99).

About 40 percent of preschool teachers and child-care workers, are self-employed and most are family daycare providers. Greater than 50 percent of all salaried preschool teachers and child-care workers are found in child care centers and preschools. More than 15 percent of the remaining preschool teacher and child-care workers are employed in religious institutions. The rest work in government and other community organizations. A growing number of companies operate on-site child care centers for the children of their employees (BLS, 1998-99).

The training and qualifications required of preschool teachers and child-care workers vary greatly from state to state. Each state has its own licensing stipulations that regulate care giver training, ranging from a high school diploma, to college courses, to a degree in child development or early childhood education. Continuing education is required of workers in this field by some states (BLS, 1998-99). Requirements also vary depending on the facility's specific guidelines. Most of these facilities, preschools and child care centers, demand a bachelor's degree in education from preschool teachers. Some, surprisingly, accept a high school diploma and documented experience working with children. Those facilities that do accept just a high school diploma often present the opportunity for on-the-job training to the teachers until they are skilled at a satisfactory level to work alone in the classroom. The Childhood Development Associate program, or CDA for short, is just one of the several groups that offer this type of on-the-job training (Hopke, 1993). The CDA credential is recognized by 46 states, of which some prefer that preschool teachers and child-care workers have this credential. To be qualified, candidates must have 120 hours of training, a high school diploma, and 480 hours of experience. If candidates lack the required experience, they may participate in a one year child development training program (BLS, 1998-99).

The opportunity for advancement is somewhat limited in this occupation. However, as preschool teachers acquire experience, some may advance to supervisory or administrative positions in the larger child care centers or preschools. Often these positions require additional training, such as a bachelor's or master's degree. Others move on to work in resource and referral agencies, consulting with parents on available services for their children. Preschool teachers may become certified to teach in public schools with a bachelor's degree. Some workers go on to set up their own child care businesses (BLS, 1998-99).

The potential earnings of an employee will depend on the employer and the educational achievement of the worker. Although pay is generally very low, more education often means higher earnings. In 1996, The average weekly earnings, in 1996, of full-time, salaried child-care workers were \$250. The middle 50 percent of these workers earned somewhere between \$190 and \$310 with the top 10 percent earning at least \$390, and the bottom 10 percent earning less than \$140 per week. The earnings of self-employed child-care workers will vary depending on the hours worked, the number and ages of the children, and the location (BLS, 1998-99). Full-time preschool teachers, including those with a college degree, can earn anywhere from \$16,000 to \$20,000 a year to start (Hopke, 1993).

Job opportunities for preschool teachers and child-care workers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2006. High turnover, combined with rapid job growth, is expected to create many job openings for preschool teachers and child-care workers. Qualified persons who are interested in this type of work should have little trouble finding and keeping a job. A demand for additional preschool teachers and child-care workers could be possible due to the recently enacted welfare reform legislation, which is requiring more mothers of young children to enter the workforce (BLS, 1998-99).

Preschool teachers and child-care workers must be able to predict and prevent problems, deal with disruptive children, and provide fair but firm discipline. They must be enthusiastic and constantly alert. They must be able to communicate effectively with children and their parents, as well as other teachers. Teachers should be mature, patient, understanding, and have energy and physical stamina. Child care work requires creativity, an ability to nurture, motivate, teach and influence children. They also need leadership, organizational, and administrative abilities (BLS, 1998-99).

Professional or trade publications for this occupation include the following, but are by no means a complete listing: Child Care Information Exchange, Child Care Quarterly, Children Today, Childhood Education, Journal of Nutrition Education, Young Children, and Early Education and Development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC for short, is a professional organization in which every future teacher should become a member. NAEYC offers information on careers in educating children and issues affecting preschool teachers and child-care workers.

After gathering the information and conducting an interview to complete this assignment, I have reached the conclusion that I have chosen the right path to follow. Being a preschool teacher is definitely what I envision myself doing in the near future. My values and beliefs are very strong in regards to children. I believe that children are our most valuable asset, and therefore, a very important part of our society. With this in mind, I feel that they should start out with the best care, knowledge and skills that they can possibly receive. In my opinion, the best time to reach and influence children are when they are very young. I can only hope that I will be able to make a difference in the lives of these children. I know they will make a difference in mine. This profession will afford me the time necessary for my family. It would allow me to

spend quality time with my family during the weekends and holidays. The only disadvantage of this career, which I have discovered thus far, is the fact of not being able to attend my daughter's daytime school functions. An alternative or an extension of this career would be to continue my education and become certified to teach elementary school, preferably kindergarten or first grade.

I conducted an interview with Maria Grischow, a child care coordinator and preschool teacher in the early intervention program at Fairhaven School in Niles, Ohio

Question:

How long have you been an early child care professional or teacher? Where and when did you receive your degree? What type of degree do you hold?

Answer:

I have been in this profession for eight years. I received my Pre-K associate degree from Youngstown State University in 1996.

Question:

What are the advantages of this job?

Answer:

Caring for children, especially children with special needs. It can be both rewarding and challenging. By assisting the development of the children with special needs, I feel my job is a worthy one. Sometimes the children's achievements are small but overall by the end of the school year I can always see some changes and improvements.

Question:

What are some of the disadvantages of this job?

Answer:

Even though one might feel fulfilled doing this job it can be totally exhausting. Sometimes the challenges are great especially when children are ill or new to the program.

Question:

Has there ever been a child that you could not get along with or handle?

Answer:

No, not really. Sometimes we don't care for a particular child, but as professionals we need to get past our personal feelings and care for the children.

Question:

How does this career affect you family life?

Answer:

My work hours are within my children's school hours, so in that way it's good. It has organized my life at home, letting me know what a priority really is.

Question:

Is it difficult when you become attached to a child and then they progress to another room or class?

Answer:

No. I miss them especially those I have become attached to, but know like our own children we must let them go and grow.

Question:

Are there any suggestions that you could give me upon entering this field?

Answer:

Be flexible, open-minded, caring and loving. Do your best and always expect your work to be hard yet fulfilling.

References:

Hopke, W.E. (1993). Encyclopedia of careers and vocational guidance.Vol. 2. Chicago: J.G. Ferguson.

U.S. Department of Labor. (1998-99). Occupational outlook handbook. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics. 333-335

Interview: Maria Grischow, personal interview, 24 May 1999.