Early Childhood Career Panel
Thursday, Nov. 2nd 2017, 4:00-5:00pm
Sweeney Hall (SH) Room 106

Panelists:
Kimmy Nguyen, Professional Development Specialist
Adele Cruz, Early Childhood Research Associate
Heidi Emberling, Parent Educator and Early Childhood Specialist at Parents Place
Danielle Webb, ECE Special Education
Sarah Henderson, Preschool Teacher
Buu Thai, Program Manager in Santa Clara County Office and Former School Board Member
Sara Tran, Volunteer Coordinator at Family Supportive Housing
Melissa Carrasco, Family Supportive Housing

Each panelist answered one of the questions below. Sarah Henderson, a preschool teacher on the panel, provided the following written responses to each question:

• Is there opportunity professional growth within your career?
Sarah started as a substitute, assistant teacher, master teacher/site supervisor and then became a director. There is only room for growth if you are still in school, and still need classroom experience, want to be a head teacher as your final career, or want to be a director as your final goal. Being a director can be achieved through obtaining a Master’s Degree. It is also important to have classroom experience if you want to be a director.

• What did you do to make yourself stand out from others in the field? (specific skills, abilities, and personal attributes)
Education is key, knowing developmentally appropriate teaching and classroom management. Be open and friendly! Be willing to learn and listen.

• What is the most rewarding part about your job?
Watching the children learn and grow, seeing the difference between the beginning of the year and the end of the year. It’s fun! You get to be a part of the first few years, and you are an instrumental part of helping children learn and grow. You get to work with parents and see how your support helps them to improve and learn along. You get to be creative and silly.

• What steps would you recommend to a person who wants to prepare on entering the field?
If you are an undergraduate: get an assistant teaching position, work in this position for a year, then apply for a teaching permit. Once you get a permit, look for a teaching position at a place that has a GOOD RATIO. There are some “preschools” that are actually more like daycares, the preschools that follow state standards will give you better support. I once worked at a 1:12 ratio school, and it was terrible. You want a 1:8 ratio preschool, typically a state preschool, that will give you the opportunity to prep for your class and work as a team with other teachers. Go in with the intention to learn. Being on the floor at preschool is different from a sterile lab preschool environment. The ratio is high and sometimes, it is impossible to go exactly by the book. Let the established teachers show you tricks and don’t feel as though your degree makes it so you know everything.

• What is your typical workday like?
A full day program would be different from my 4-hour position, but I usually come in during free play, facilitate clean up time, and then do a 15-minute circle. Then, we send the kids to set up their beds, helping where needed and have them sit on their bed when they are done. We all go to wash hands, then sit down for lunch. After lunch, we send the kids to the bathroom, have them wash hands, then lay down to go to sleep. During nap, we do prep work, paperwork, make phone calls to parents, have meeting with Danielle or other support staff, meet with parents, or do any work that is not possible with the kids awake. At 2:30, the kids wake up, we have them put away the beds, and we do another short circle time. Then we have snack and at 3pm, I leave. Usually this during snack time.
• How did you enter this field? (Describe your career path. How did each job lead you to your current job?)

Substitute teacher → ABA Therapist → TK aide → Lead teacher at a daycare → Grad school → 4-hour teacher

• What are the toughest problems you have to deal with?

Parents! Parents sometimes can be in denial about their child’s specific needs, or can have higher expectations of teachers than is what is in their job description. Some parents are inconsiderate or take things personally. It is important to be delicate with parents. Behaviors. A lot of the children coming in to the classroom have different parenting styles at home that do not always mesh with the expectations of school. It can be difficult to deal with some of the behaviors from the children and manage a classroom of 24 while some children need more one-on-one guidance.

Making professional decisions: It is important to have a very accurate professional compass, there are a lot of situations that occur in preschool that require snap decisions. It is important to be open with parents if a child is injured or something happens during the day. Parents do not like finding out from the child later that so and so pushed them, etc.

• What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?

Patience. Professionalism. Ability to mediate. Clam down strategies for yourself and the children class in the class. Teamwork, and getting along with other teachers in the classroom. Respect for each child’s and parent’s perspective and experience. Attention to detail, or at least one teacher in the class with this skill is necessary. There is a lot of paperwork for state preschools, and being able to have the paperwork completed by a certain time and done correctly is important.

• What resources would you suggest to find work in this career after graduation? (e.g., who are the best people to turn to?)

Indeed.com and Edjoin.org

Call directors at different state preschools and ask! Often, they are hiring for substitute positions, it not assistant teaching positions. If you have no classroom experience but have your units you may be considered starting as a substitute.

• Does this career provide the opportunity to balance time between work and life outside of work?

Yes - good preschools should allow you prep time during the school day, but sometimes work comes home with you via curriculum planning. Work comes home with you by accident because you are inspired for a new project or you’re at the beach and find something cool you want to show your students. IT becomes your personal life in some ways, but in a good way. It does require outside of work time except for when rating students twice a year through desired results developmental profile (DRDP), which measures children’s development.

Open Discussion

• Currently, there is a shortage on teachers.
  o Don’t be afraid to start small
  o Work your way up.

• How do you speak to parents of a difficult child?
  o Have empathy
  o Knowledge of ECE and share this knowledge with parents
  o Partner with parents and build a trusting relationship with them
  o Be open, transparent, and mindful of their situation – building a connection with parents
  o In certain situations, parents who pay expensive tuition for their children expect a lot from you
  o However, it is important to remember that parents are their first teachers

• How do you ensure that each child is cared for and not neglected?
  o Trial and error
  o Create a social emotional board
  o Have opportunities to work with the child’s behavior/disability
• **Would you still choose the current career you have now?**
  - Work can be sometimes overwhelming, but it’s about finding your “home”
  - Figure out what you want and what works best for you
  - “In-love with the field now” – able to apply ECE knowledge to my own children
  - “There is no set path” – ECE has board career paths
  - When starting off, people don’t expect you know to everything.
  - Keep track of your experiences → build your knowledge and resume

• **Did you complete your Master’s right after undergrad?**
  - “No, I waited” – wanted more experience
  - “Take your time, don’t rush”
  - Find a work place or an organization that will help you pay for school

**One Piece of Advice to your Past Self**

• “Don’t go to grad school right away” – find an organization to help you pay for school and also gain experience
• “Get involved as a student” – gain early experiences, know your professors, and be proactive
• “Don’t give up on your path”
• “Don’t pigeonhole yourself” – let yourself do things that you find challenging or do not like
• “Find a mentor” – working with a child can be complex and rewarding
• “Reassure yourself and push yourself” – don’t be too comfortable
• “Know your strengths and challenge yourself” – is the job helping you grow?