

LOVE THE WORK. HATE THE PAY.



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ATKINSON CENTRE FELLOW IN EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY

This is not another column about wages in licensed child care. Instead, we take a step outside that inner circle to consider the people who train early childhood educators.

College faculty are not a group that earns ready sympathy. Two months off in the summer! Time off at Christmas and mid-term breaks! Those breaks exist, but many college teachers spend them grading papers, preparing for the next semester, doing research to stay relevant in their field, or teaching an extra class. The job is year-round. The pay is not.

The high tuition students pay for higher education frequently buys them an instructor working on contract, moving from college to college, classroom to classroom, trying to make two or three sessional placements add up to a living wage.

Such are the conditions for an ECE instructor who wrote last week, asking us to shed some light on those in her position. "I work at two different colleges and three different jobs, and still do not earn a manageable living." She is happy to see her grads benefiting from government wage enhancements but would like equal consideration.

Unlike permanent faculty, she is only paid for time spent in the classroom. Students need more from their teachers than what is delivered from the lectern. Most students are very young: many are far from home. Teaching 90 students means 90 lives, many with problems: anxiety, depression, family deaths, homelessness, and assaults. A humane response takes more than a referral to student services.

Casual positions don't lend themselves to growing competencies. Teachers, like good wine, get better with time. Their courses become more productive and meaningful, based on the reciprocity that comes from being a part of an academic community of colleagues and students.

Many sessional instructors don't have the spare hours or money to earn the post-grad degrees that could lead to more secure teaching positions. Training institutions run on people with practical experience they can apply in the classroom. They get the last-minute calls to fill in around the teaching schedules of permanent staff. Years of part-time teaching is no guarantee of a call back. These positions are not unionized and [administrators have spent millions](#) of public dollars ensuring they remain outside collective bargaining.

Yet, [they are a growing sector](#). Postings for part-time and sessional faculty are expanding alongside the number of [private colleges](#). The same investors who see a future in for-profit child care are spreading out to train staff to fit their business models. [Unscrupulous recruiters](#) often don't tell students that graduating with a paper from their institution is not a recognized qualification for a job.

Which brings us to CWELCC, and its promise to build an early learning and child care system. System building requires consideration of all the components that contribute to achieving the intended goals. Addressing the pressing need for 32,000 ECEs to support CWELCC's five-year expansion targets, must also consider an aging workforce where one-in-five staff are expected to retire over the next 10 years.

Given such data, system builders would eschew measures such as one-off tuition grants. Just like money to parents doesn't create child care, short-term funding to ECE students doesn't grow the ranks and skills of the professionals required to prepare the next cohort of early childhood educators. It doesn't produce the conditions that will turn early learning and child care into a system.