

career center

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Focus On... CHILD CARE PROFESSIONAL



As part of her studies, TTC student Michelle Martin plans activities that will help children learn and develop age-appropriate concepts and skills.

By CHRISTINE RANDALL McGEE

One of the best ways to make the world a better place is to help children achieve their potential, and you can do that by becoming a child-care professional.

Tonya Misuraca, department head for child and youth studies at Trident Technical College, has always had a passion and a desire to work with children, although the path to her current job was a twisted one. While working as a sheriff’s deputy, her work with children who were in domestic violence situations made her want to learn how to communicate better with them. Later, while working as a police dispatcher, a co-worker with a speech impediment led her to earn a bachelor’s degree in speech pathology from S.C. State University. A few years later, she received her master’s from Columbia College and began working at TTC about 10 years ago.

“My parents always pushed us to go above and beyond what they did. I always wanted to make sure I had a passion and desire for whatever job I took on,” she says. “I love what I do now. I tell all my students that they set the foundation as to whether our children stand on the street corner and watch a plane go by or whether they work on the line assembling the plane or even become the pilot flying it. Here at TTC, we prepare the professionals to help that child aspire to be something higher, instead of listening to the status quo and becoming a statistic. It is our duty to make a difference.”

It goes without saying that individuals interested in becoming child-care professionals must have a love of children. But they also need a strong understanding of what is developmentally appropriate and age appropriate, Misuraca says. “You cannot just come in, say you love working with children and expect to get a job in the field. You have to be prepared for the hard work and the rigor that it takes to actually work with children.”

She says a successful child-care worker needs to be well versed in a child’s brain growth and development, as well as creating a safe and healthy environment for children that promotes social and emotional well-being. “Also important is developing a strong curriculum that will enhance a child’s learning,” Misuraca says. “If reading is not fundamental to you, this is not the career for you. You will be doing a lot of reading, a lot of writing and a lot of critical thinking in order to work with children from birth to age 8.”

Child-care professionals work in any number of settings, ranging from Head Start programs to public and private schools and pre-schools. They may also be employed by individuals or in a corporate environment. For those with an entrepreneurial spirit, there is even the option of opening their own child-care center.

Depending on the job, duties of child-care professionals can include supervising and monitoring the safety of children in their care; preparing meals and snacks; helping children keep good hygiene; implementing a curriculum to allow children to learn about the world and explore interests; developing schedules for physical activity, rest and playtime; watching for signs of emotional or developmental problems and bringing them to the attention of parents; and keeping records of children’s progress.

Preparation for a career in this field is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, as children have different needs and capabilities at various stages in life. To best educate child-care professionals, Misuraca says TTC offers an associate degree in four different career paths that specialize in different areas dealing with early care and education: Child Care

Professional, Child Care Management, School-Age Youth Development and Special Education.

“We encourage those individuals who are interested in becoming a director or owner of a child-care center to take the Child Care Management career path,” she says. “In those classes they will get the skill set they need to fulfill DSS requirements for a child-care center director. Another career path is special education, and those individuals will get the skill set they need for working with children with special needs in a school system or in a child-care facility. We offer five certificate programs that take about two semesters each for those who don’t want to spend two years on an associate degree. But the more certificates you earn, the more you strengthen your qualifications when you go into a particular classroom or work setting.”

Courses in the various career paths include child growth and development, introduction to early childhood, exceptional children (an introduction to special education), language arts, creative experiences, music and movement, and principles and ethics in early childhood education. “Those are some of the courses everyone would need to take prior to completing their supervised field placement,” Misuraca says. “That’s where they will actually go either into a classroom or a preschool setting and put into play everything they have learned. They will spend time observing the teacher at work and seeing how the curriculum is set. Then for one week, they will teach the course while being observed by their cooperating teacher as well as one of our instructors to make sure they are doing everything that is required of them.”

TTC currently has approximately 400 students in this associate degree, with the majority being female. Misuraca says students’ ages range from 18 on up. “A lot of our female students are what you would consider non-traditional,” she says. “I think our oldest was in her 70s.”

Misuraca says the demand for qualified early child educators has definitely increased, especially for individuals who are looking for at-home or small group-care settings. “The outlook is very good for our students,” she says.

Physical working conditions are good for child-care workers as the buildings they work in must meet DSS guidelines, but work schedules may vary widely. Many child-care professionals work full time but more than a third worked part time in 2012, according to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. Child-care centers are generally open year-round with long hours so that parents can drop off and pick up their children before and after work. Some centers have staggered shifts to cover the entire day.

Misuraca advises anyone interested in the child-care field to spend time volunteering in a child-care setting. “If you are interested in working with a particular age group, volunteer a few hours a week in that setting so that you can see how children grow, how children learn. See what developmentally appropriate practices are so that you will be prepared. Children are not just the statistics that you see on paper or the scenario you read in a book,” she says.

She adds that child-care professionals have to be accepting of all children, regardless of their abilities, and have a strong desire to become an advocate for children and families. “You have to keep in mind that these are children you are working with and that these children are our future,” she says. “How you model your behavior and your love and search for learning with them is critical to whether or not they will be successful themselves.”

Career Cluster

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QUICK FACTS

Skills

Successful child care professionals must have patience, possess a genuine concern for children and have a strong desire to help them learn and succeed. They must also have good communication and decision-making skills and be able to work well with people to develop good relationships with parents, children and colleagues.

Education and Training

Schooling

Child care professionals must meet education and training requirements, which vary by state regulations. Trident Technical College offers associate degrees in four career paths: Child Care Professional, Child Care Management, School-Age Youth Development and Special Education. TTC also offers five related certificate programs and a diploma program.

Financial Aid

Grants, scholarships, loans and work/study programs are available for college students. S.C. lottery-funded tuition assistance, which can pay more than 50 percent of tuition costs, is available to TTC students. For most of this aid, high school students must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is available online at www.fafsa.gov. For more information on federal financial aid programs or to apply online, visit the U.S. Department of Education website at www.ed.gov.

Opportunity

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of child care professionals is expected to grow by about 14 percent during the current decade, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Parents will increasingly need assistance to care for their children during working hours. The number of children requiring child care is expected to grow; therefore, demand for child-care workers will grow as well.

Working Environment

Although the workplace can vary from a school district to commercial day care to corporate settings to private homes, the environment is generally very comfortable with heating and air-conditioning. Some outside work may be required in supervising children outdoors on the playground.

Q&A



Richard Latham
Child and Youth Studies Program Coordinator

Q. What is a child care professional? What does a child care professional do?

A. A child care professional is a person who cares for and educates young children. Using knowledge about child growth and development, he or she plans and implements activities that will help children achieve their full potential.

Q. Where do most child care professionals work?

A. Child care professionals can work in a variety of places: child care centers, private schools, in-home care or as nannies. Trident Technical College’s Early Care and Education associate degree also qualifies people to work as teacher assistants in the public schools and Head Start programs.

Q. How do you get started in a career as a child care professional?

A. You can get a job in a child care center if you meet the minimum requirements set by DSS. Some child care centers may require an associate degree or, at the very least, the Early Childhood Development 101 course. Once hired, child care workers must receive 15 training hours a year; the classes at Trident Technical College can help the child care professional meet these training requirements.

Q. What characteristics and skills does a successful child care professional need?

A. A successful child care professional needs to be compassionate, to care about children and their successful development and to be interested in watching children learn new things. A successful child care professional needs to be an intentional teacher, meaning that he or she knows the reasons for doing certain activities and how those activities will help children learn the desired concepts and skills. The successful child care professional values learning and is always trying to learn new things. Patience and stamina are also good qualities for a successful child care professional to have.

Q. What are some of the benefits of working in this field?

A. The joy that children have is infectious, and when you work in this field you get to experience it on a daily basis. Also, you lay the foundation for a child’s later learning, so in a way you can shape and influence their future.

Q. What is the employment outlook for a child care professional?

A. There will always be a need for highly qualified, educated people to care for and educate young children.

Q. What advice would you give to someone considering a career in this field?

A. Understand that you are more than a warm body watching the children so that they don’t get hurt. You are an educator, and the things you do will have an impact on children in their later lives. This isn’t an easy job—you need to be able to be actively involved with the children and to have knowledge about many different topics. Education in child development and best practices in methods and materials is also very important. Remember, you are taking care of and educating other people’s children.

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For information about Career Center, contact
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Want more info?

ONLINE:
National Early Childhood Program Accreditation, www.necpa.net
National Association for the Education of Young Children, www.naeyc.org
Council for Professional Recognition (Child Development Associate), www.cdacouncil.org
Child Care Aware (Child Care Providers and Resources), www.childcareaware.org

Jobs in this field:

| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Wages by Area*</u> |
|---|---|
| Childcare Workers | U.S. \$16,400-\$29,800+ S.C. \$15,900-\$24,000+ CH \$16,000-\$30,300+ |
| Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education | U.S. \$18,400-\$49,700+ S.C. \$16,500-\$49,700+ CH \$16,900-\$92,600+ |
| Education Administrators, Preschool and Childcare Center/Program | U.S. \$28,900-\$87,600+ S.C. \$19,500-\$81,500+ CH \$17,300-\$91,600+ |

*Source/Note: Wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and SC Department of Employment and Workforce. Wage levels vary by skill level, tenure, and geographical areas. For more occupational information, contact Gary Crossley of LovetoWork.org, LLC at lovetoworkorg@yahoo.com or 843/452-4121.