

'It's not just money, but respect' - THE EX-TEACHER

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At the end of last month, **Carolyn Lunt** quit a pre-school in Northcote where she has taught in recent years. Wearied with conditions in the workplace and disenchanted with the government's failure to properly fund early childhood education, she leaves soon to visit China to "look at the world through other people's eyes" and hopefully gain perspective on her predicament. "It's too hard," she says, of a job that has brought a fortnightly gross of \$1276.46 for a 33-hour week. Among the problems she cites is inappropriate responsibility shouldered by parents on management committees that run most Victorian pre-schools. She sees inadequate pay as a reflection of attitudes towards a job that does not receive its due. Builder and carpenter. Gardener. Secretary. Nutritionist. Doctor. Seamstress. Architect. Plumber. Child development officer. Vietnamese and Croatian language interpreter. Miracle worker. These are among almost 50 vocational skills she reckons are needed in her line of work. Back when she was training she ruled out primary teaching because she did not favor a rigid curriculum. "For me, kindergarten was fantastic because you could work with each child in a child-centred program based on play." But the job has taken its toll. She says the government has given parent-run committees of management control to save costs. The workload is excessive, committee membership changes and newcomers have to learn the ropes. "There's no continuity often," Ms Lunt says, "which puts the pressure on the educator because you've then got to be assisting the parents." She questions the allocation of billions of dollars to the military and perceived benefits of defending a country dislocated by drug, employment and other problems, failing children at a crucial time in their learning. It's not just money but respect, she says. "I think that's why people want parity with primary teachers. So that I'm seen as an educator. Early learning is so important."