DEGREES THAT WILL HAVE YOU WORKING WITH KIDS

How to make children the center of your career

Let's not kid around. Some people love children so much that a child-centered job is their undisputed career choice.

"Anyone who wants to pursue a career working with kids should really enjoy play," says Paul Thayer, director of the Child Life and Family Centered program at Wheelock College in Boston. It prepares students to work as child health and development specialists in healthcare settings, such as emergency departments, community hospitals, primary care clinics, day surgery units, and community health centers. "All of these positions have one common reward, the satisfaction of assisting children and their families," says Thayer. In addition to the healthcare arena, Wheelock offers degrees in Early Childhood Education, Elementary and Special Education, and Parenting Education, all of which focus on child learning.

Other programs to consider:

• Given the growing population of Hispanic and Asian children, which now accounts for almost half the U.S. population under 18, there is an increasing demand for English as a Second Language (TESOL) teachers. Boston University's School of Education offers two programs in this field, one for certification, required for teaching in public schools, and one that allows graduates to teach at primary, secondary, college, and adult programs abroad.

• At Simmons College in Boston, students who have achieved a master's in children's literature from the School of Library and Information Science have gone on to become literary agents, managing editors, children's librarians, teachers, and professors.

• At UMass Boston, a master's of education degree program in vision studies leads to state licensure as a teacher of students with visual impairments.

• At Boston University's School of Public Health, a concentration in maternal and child health equips graduates for careers in community organizations, advocacy groups, and other agencies.

Whatever your child-orientated career choice, what Paul Thayer of Wheelock College says holds true: "Child-life specialists experience the joys of connecting with children." And that's not child's play.