Organizational Culture, Workload and Burnout Among Preschool Intern Teachers in Taiwan:A Comparative Case Study of Two Preschool Teaching Internships

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ABSTRACT

Preschool teaching placements combine professional learning with work that sustains everyday education and care. Whether participation becomes a source of development or disillusionment depends partly on how placement organizations allocate tasks, provide guidance, and recognize interns. This article examines these relationships through a comparative qualitative case study of two preschool intern teachers in Taiwan, drawing on existing semi-structured interview materials. Case A1 is documented through an interview transcript embedded in a research report; Case A2 is documented through responses recorded alongside an interview guide. Within-case analysis and cross-case thematic comparison examine role positioning, workload, organizational relationships, professional learning, and experiences relevant to burnout. A1 described extended working days, unpredictable responsibilities, unclear standards, and difficulty accessing the guidance expected from a well-regarded preschool known for its curriculum practices. A2 regarded workload and available rest as reasonable and described respectful relationships, yet also reported unstructured mentoring, routine support work, limited professional growth, and declining enthusiasm for a preschool career. Both accounts therefore connect disappointment with the educational value of work, although their experiences of workload differ. The comparison suggests that relational support and manageable demands can coexist with an insufficiently developed learning environment. Emotional exhaustion is more extensively documented in A1, whereas concerns about professional accomplishment and career commitment appear in both cases. Situational frustration toward children or families is interpreted cautiously and does not establish pervasive depersonalization. The article proposes assessing placement quality through the relationship between work demands and supported learning opportunities. It recommends explicit learning agreements, protected mentoring time, transparent task allocation, and independent avenues for raising concerns. Findings are exploratory, reflect uneven documentary depth, and do not establish clinical burnout, causal effects, or subsequent occupational exit.

Keywords: Preschool Intern Teachers; Organizational Culture; Workload; Burnout; Case Study; In-Depth Interviews; Professional Learning

INTRODUCTION

A preschool placement can be busy, socially welcoming, and educationally disappointing at the same time. This possibility matters because aspiring teachers enter placements to develop the judgment and confidence needed to assume professional responsibility. They also contribute to classroom routines, preparation, supervision, and care. Their participation is therefore situated within two overlapping arrangements: a professional education program and an organization that must complete its daily work. When the educational purposes of participation are hard to identify, an intern may question the value of the placement even when the assigned workload seems manageable. Conversely, a challenging placement may remain worthwhile when responsibilities come with useful guidance and visible progress.

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This article examines that relationship through two accounts of preschool teaching internships in Taiwan. Both participants described a gap between contributing to the organization and learning to become a teacher. The gap was especially distressing for A1, who linked a demanding work environment to unpredictable expectations and insufficient instructional guidance. A2 described more reasonable demands and positive interpersonal contact but also reported limited growth and an uncertain professional identity. Their accounts provide a basis for examining how workload and organizational culture operate together without assuming that supportive relationships automatically produce effective professional preparation.

Early childhood education and care depends on work that is physically, cognitively, and emotionally demanding. Educators attend to children while coordinating routines, preparing environments, responding to families, and making decisions that cannot always be postponed. Research has increasingly treated educator well-being as a condition of sustainable service provision. Ng, Rogers, and McNamara's (2023) systematic review links burnout to both individual circumstances and service conditions, including organizational coherence, professional relationships, status, and development opportunities. OECD (2020) likewise connects workforce quality with staff preparation, working conditions, and leadership. These sources support attention to the organization of professional work; they do not establish the prevalence of burnout among Taiwanese interns.

Interns warrant separate consideration because they have not yet acquired the professional resources associated with an established teaching role. They may need help interpreting classroom events that experienced staff handle through accumulated judgment. They may hesitate to question assignments because the people allocating work also influence their assessment. They may receive permission to act without understanding the limits of that permission. These possibilities matter most when their place in the organization is neither clearly that of an observer nor that of an autonomous teacher. The issue is not simply whether interns perform difficult work. It is whether the organization makes that work understandable, proportionate, and productive for professional learning.

The two cases illustrate different configurations of this problem. A1 entered a well-regarded preschool known for its curriculum practices to learn its approach to classroom learning areas. The placement's reputation helped shape this expectation. The participant later described substantial routine work and difficulty obtaining guidance on precisely the practice that had attracted her. A2's recorded responses do not establish the ownership, reputation, or resource level of the placement site. They do establish that teachers enjoyed instructional freedom, leaders interacted respectfully with interns, and the participant nevertheless found mentoring insufficiently structured. These distinctions prevent a comparison based on assumed institutional prestige or public–private differences.

Here, the term organizational culture refers to how participants interpreted recurring expectations and relationships. Relevant features include what counted as acceptable commitment, how responsibility was delegated, whose judgment was heard, and whether learning needs were treated as legitimate. Because the material consists of intern accounts, the article does not reconstruct a complete organizational culture independently of those accounts. The analysis addresses perceived practices and the meanings attached to them. This distinction lets the study retain participants' organizational explanations without presenting their perspectives as comprehensive descriptions of every classroom or staff member.

Workload is similarly treated as more than a count of tasks or hours. Time availability, assignment complexity, uncertainty about standards, and the opportunity to learn from an activity all shape how work is experienced. Preparing materials may support curriculum understanding when an experienced teacher explains the intended use and subsequently reviews the activity. The same preparation can become repetitive service work when it occupies most of an intern's day without discussion. A sudden invitation to lead a class may communicate confidence, but it may also produce anxiety if responsibility arrives before adequate preparation. The educational meaning of work therefore shapes how we interpret its burden.

Burnout offers a useful framework for identifying depletion, distancing, and reduced accomplishment. It also requires careful limits. These interviews were not clinical assessments, and neither participant completed a standardized burnout instrument in the materials supplied for this analysis. Descriptions of tiredness,

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frustration, or uncertainty cannot be converted into diagnostic categories or ranked as numerical severity. The article therefore examines burnout-related experiences while retaining their specific context. The study particularly distinguishes between uncertainty about one's present competence, dissatisfaction with learning opportunities, and diminished enthusiasm for a future career. These experiences may overlap, but they are not interchangeable.

The study addresses four questions. How do the two interns describe the tasks and responsibilities of their placements? How do organizational expectations and relationships shape access to guidance and participation? What experiences relevant to exhaustion, interpersonal distancing, and professional accomplishment are present in each account? Finally, what can comparison reveal about the relationship between manageable workload, supported learning, and future career commitment? These questions prioritize interpretation over measurement and define the study's scope at the individual placement level.

The article offers an exploratory account of internship quality that distinguishes three often-grouped factors: the amount of work assigned, the availability of supportive relationships, and the quality of the learning arrangement. The comparison is informative because favorable statements about workload and relationships do not eliminate A2's dissatisfaction with professional development. A1's account also resists a uniformly negative description: helpful teachers elsewhere in the preschool and positive engagement with children remained important. Acknowledging these mixed experiences offers a more precise explanation than categorizing one organization as harmful and the other as supportive.

LITERATURE AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Burnout as a Contextual and Multidimensional Experience

Maslach and Leiter (2016) describe burnout through exhaustion, cynicism or distancing, and reduced professional efficacy. Their review also emphasizes the relevance of workload, control, recognition, community, fairness, and values. This framework encourages attention to the relationship between a person and the work environment rather than equating burnout with individual weakness. For the present study, the three dimensions serve as interpretive reference points. They help distinguish energy depletion from relationship frustration and from doubts about the value or effectiveness of one's professional contribution.

Applying those dimensions to interns requires attention to their developmental position. Experienced teachers can assess a disappointing day against an established record of competence. Interns may not yet possess that record. If feedback is vague or absent, they may struggle to decide whether difficulty reflects an ordinary learning stage, unrealistic expectations, or their own inability. A perceived lack of accomplishment may therefore concern the failure to acquire skills as much as the failure to perform successfully. An internship analysis needs to ask what the participant expected to learn and what evidence of progress was available.

Exhaustion also needs to be interpreted in relation to exposure and recovery. An intern may report fatigue during especially demanding classroom events without describing continuous depletion throughout a placement. A1's repeated crying and linking distress to unclear demands provide a different evidential pattern than A2's concise account of tiredness when unable to support children effectively. The distinction concerns the narratives' detail and content. It does not justify a clinical comparison, particularly because the documentation for the two cases differs substantially in length and format.

Interpersonal distancing presents a further challenge. Preschool educators may experience frustration when classroom efforts do not appear to be reinforced at home. Such frustration can indicate strain, but it does not by itself show persistent detachment from children or a generalized devaluation of families. A1 continued to describe children positively; A2 associated discouragement with specific difficulties in coordinating educational approaches. The analysis must therefore consider both distancing thoughts and continuing engagement. Otherwise, a theoretical category can overwhelm the account's complexity and produce an exaggerated portrayal of the participant.

Career intentions belong alongside this framework without being absorbed into it. A participant may reconsider teaching because of workload, expected compensation, perceived social respect, alternative educational interests, or a mismatch between preferred and available work. Declining enthusiasm is consequential, but it is not proof that burnout caused occupational exit. The present study treats career reconsideration as an expressed outcome of reflection on the placement and the profession. It does not infer subsequent employment behavior or make claims about the retention rate of an entire cohort.

Demands Resources and Access to Professional Learning

Job demands–resources theory distinguishes work conditions that require sustained effort from resources that help accomplish tasks, manage demands, or support development. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) discuss both an impairment process associated with demanding work and a motivational process associated with resources. The distinction is useful here because interns may lack resources even when their task volume is acceptable. Mentoring, informative feedback, opportunities to observe expert practice, and protected preparation time can all support the educational purpose of a placement.

The analytical question is how those resources become usable. A preschool may have knowledgeable teachers, but an intern may not have dependable access to their knowledge. A supervisor may offer encouragement without explaining how to improve an activity. A meeting may include an intern without giving the intern sufficient context to participate meaningfully. The presence of a resource at the organizational level therefore differs from its availability within the participant's immediate learning relationship. This article uses the cases to examine that difference rather than assuming that resources are distributed evenly.

The distinction also clarifies why responsibility can be experienced ambiguously. Autonomy is often treated as a desirable resource, but an unfamiliar responsibility delegated without explanation may feel like abandonment. For an intern, useful discretion requires understanding the decision at hand, the available alternatives, and when to seek help. Appropriate guidance can change as competence develops. An early need for explicit instruction does not imply that the intern should remain dependent throughout the placement. It indicates that independence requires a developmental sequence rather than a sudden transfer of responsibility.

A1 and A2 allow demands and resources to be considered separately. A1 described long days and uncertainty, while A2 explicitly judged workload reasonable and resources or rest sufficient. Both nonetheless reported mentoring that relied heavily on self-initiative. Their similarity on professional learning, alongside their difference on workload, raises a question for theory development: can insufficient developmental resources weaken commitment without pronounced overload? The two cases cannot establish a general answer, but they make that question empirically meaningful and help specify what a future study would need to measure or observe.

Organizational Relationships and the Educational Value of Participation

For this analysis, culture is approached through practices visible in the interview material. Over time, responses to requests for guidance, classroom boundaries, and meeting participation are more directly supported than broad cultural classifications. A1's account indicates that collegial cooperation elsewhere in the preschool did not consistently become guidance within her assigned classroom. A2's account indicates that cordial interactions and invitations to contribute ideas did not amount to an organized mentoring process. Both patterns highlight how learning is arranged within everyday work relationships.

This focus avoids interpreting every routine duty as inappropriate. Early childhood education includes care, environmental preparation, and transitions; separating all of these activities from teaching would obscure the nature of the work. For an internship, what matters is the distribution and explanation of responsibilities. A learning-rich task connects action with educational judgment. An intern can understand why a routine is organized in a particular way, consider a child's needs, receive feedback, and try a revised approach. Without these connections, a necessary activity may contribute little to the intern's professional development.

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Nor does a friendly environment guarantee that this connection will occur. Warmth may make a difficult day bearable and permit informal questions. It can also coexist with an expectation that the newcomer will identify learning opportunities independently. A2's account is important because it combines positive relationships with uncertainty about becoming a teacher. The distinction implies that placement evaluation should ask both whether interns feel welcome and whether they can explain how their participation has developed specific professional capabilities.

A1's description adds concern about uneven access within a single organization. The participant perceived experienced teachers as having established patterns of cooperation while her classroom teachers were newer to the site. These observations suggest that an intern's experience may depend more on the immediate team's capacity to learn than on institutional reputation alone. They do not show deliberate exclusion or establish that newer teachers are inherently less capable mentors. They identify a possible organizational responsibility to support mentoring where local experience or connections are limited.

Early Childhood Workforce Research and the Transition into Teaching

Workforce studies provide context for these concerns. Whitebook, McLean, Austin, and Edwards (2018) document compensation and employment conditions in the United States, while OECD (2020) examines staff preparation and working environments across participating systems. These are contextual sources rather than evidence about the two Taiwanese placements. Their relevance lies in treating professional development and employment conditions as connected aspects of workforce quality. Internships sit near the beginning of that connection because they expose candidates to the everyday organization of professional work.

Research in Taiwan also highlights demanding work and emotional strain. Hung, Chang, and Hsiao (2025) report associations among workload, emotional demands, burnout, and turnover intentions in a two-stage survey of 200 preschool teachers. The respondents were employed teachers, so the statistical relationships should not be applied directly to interns. The study provides a local point of comparison, while the present analysis examines meanings and organizational encounters that a survey relationship alone cannot explain.

The empirical gap addressed here is thus specific. The article does not claim that the field lacks all research on preservice well-being or mentoring. It examines how two interns make sense of contributing to preschool work when the learning arrangement is insufficiently explicit. The comparison brings a manageable-workload case into dialogue with a more distressing account. This helps identify professional learning as a separate issue in discussions that might otherwise focus primarily on reducing the amount of work or increasing general emotional support.

METHODOLOGY

Comparative Case Study Design

The study uses qualitative case analysis and in-depth interview material to examine two bounded placement experiences. The case is the intern's experience within the placement, not the entire preschool as an independently observed organization. Baxter and Jack (2008) explain the importance of defining the unit of analysis and its contextual boundaries. Here, the boundaries are the activities, relationships, and interpretations each participant describes regarding a preschool internship. A1 explicitly refers to a semester-long placement; A2's exact placement duration is not documented.

The comparison draws on existing qualitative materials originally collected by trained student investigators under faculty academic supervision within the authors' university department as part of a structured research project on preschool internship experiences. The primary corpus comprises two archived Chinese research records transferred to the present authors for extended comparative analysis: a research report containing an interview guide and a verbatim interview transcript for Case A1, and a parallel document recording Case A2's written responses alongside the same interview guide. All analytical claims in the present study are grounded directly in these two primary Chinese participant records.

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This design is exploratory and interpretive. It reconstructs each case before comparing common themes and differences. It does not test a causal model or use the two participants as representatives of distinct organizational types. In particular, the available material does not support claims that A2 attended a less prestigious institution, that the two sites were in the same municipality, or that the cases were recruited prospectively to achieve maximum contextual variation. Such characteristics are neither required for the analysis nor introduced to strengthen the appearance of its design.

Participants and Documentary Coverage

The original project describes purposive selection of interns whose placement experiences were relevant to the research questions. To prevent indirect identification, participant and site attributes are reported in generalized terms. The record identifies A1 as a female intern in her early twenties (aged 20–25) with a university education. A1 discusses a well-regarded preschool known for its learning-area curriculum and an assigned classroom whose supervising teachers had relatively short tenure at that site. A2 reports a mixed-age preschool classroom, involvement in teaching assistance and support for children with additional needs, and no current preschool work or internship at the time of the recorded response. A2's record does not document specific demographic ranges, site ownership, or recruitment details.

The corpus consequently has unequal depth. A1's transcript allows attention to incidents, qualifications, comparisons with other classrooms, and the interviewer's prompts. A2's responses are concise and already organized under the questions. The latter document is an interview-response record rather than a verified verbatim transcript. It supports analysis of the positions explicitly recorded but not reconstruction of the conversational sequence, omitted elaborations, or the intensity of an experience from response length alone. Table 1 summarizes this evidential distinction.

Table 1. Case coverage and limits of the available evidence

Feature	A1	A2
Empirical record	Interview transcript in a research report	Responses recorded in an interview guide
Background	Female intern aged 20–25; university education	Demographic details not documented
Placement context	Curriculum-focused preschool; semester-long placement	Mixed-age classroom; duration not documented
Unverified information	Interview date, duration, and audio	Recruitment, date, duration, audio and site type

Source: Analysis of the two supplied Chinese research records. Missing information is not inferred.

Table 1 also establishes what remains unknown. No interview dates, durations, complete recruitment histories, or audio files are available in the corpus used here. The report describes recording and transcription as part of the original approach, but the present analysis cannot independently inspect the recordings. Therefore, asserting that both interviews lasted a specified number of minutes or underwent the same transcription procedure would be unwarranted. The analysis relies on the documented responses and available transcript, rather than assumed symmetry in collection.

Interview Domains and Analytical Procedure

The interview materials cover background and placement duties, the intern's role, organizational relationships, workload, emotional exhaustion, interpersonal distancing, professional accomplishment, and future career intentions. This shared structure permits comparison while also creating an interpretive limitation: the guide explicitly asks about burnout-related experiences. Responses should be understood partly in relation to that framing. A1's interviewer sometimes paraphrases earlier statements or offers a proposed interpretation. The analysis privileges the participant's substantive response and does not count the interviewer's formulation as additional evidence.

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The materials were read in Chinese, and case summaries were prepared in English. Analytical paraphrase was used throughout the findings; transcript extracts are neither reproduced nor appended. Meanings were retained at the level warranted by the record. Terms referring to children needing additional support were rendered descriptively rather than as verified diagnoses. The participant's interpretation of limited parental cooperation was preserved as an interpretation, without endorsing an assessment of the family's motives or parenting quality. These choices support readable English while maintaining the limits of the original evidence.

Thematic analysis informed the organization of the material. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a flexible approach to identifying and developing patterns of meaning. For this manuscript, the process involved familiarization, case-level coding, construction of comparative categories, review against the source records, and development of explanatory themes. Deductive categories addressed workload and the burnout dimensions; inductive categories addressed the educational value of routine work, access to guidance, differences between sociability and mentoring, and the meaning of autonomy during an internship.

Within each case, task descriptions were separated from evaluations of those tasks. Statements about professional support were separated from statements about friendliness or belonging. Career reconsideration was coded independently of the burnout dimensions. A comparative matrix then examined whether a theme appeared in both cases, how its meaning differed, and what contrary evidence limited the explanation. Table 2 presents the principal analytical categories. The table is a summary of the interpretive approach, not a standardized instrument or a claim of quantitative reliability.

Table 2. Categories used for comparative analysis

Category	Analytical focus
Role positioning	Responsibilities, authority and identification as a learner or teacher
Work demands	Routine duties, sudden assignments and perceived manageability
Access to support	Relational welcome, practical resources and professional guidance
Burnout-related experiences	Depletion, situational distancing and uncertain accomplishment
Career reconsideration	Expressed intentions distinguished from subsequent employment

Source: Authors' analytical organization of the supplied interview material.

No saturation, intercoder agreement, member checking, or independent observational triangulation is claimed. The original report's interpretation of A1 and its appended transcript are related representations of one source, not independent witnesses. Similarly, comparing the two participants does not verify the accuracy of either account. The value of the comparison is analytical: it examines whether an explanation remains plausible when reasonable workload and favorable relationships coexist with disappointment about learning. Transparent reporting of these limits aligns with O'Brien et al.'s (2014) emphasis on explaining the research context, methods, and basis for interpretation.

Research ethics and confidentiality

The primary interview materials were originally collected by trained student researchers under faculty supervision within the authors' academic department, using structured interview protocols that provided explicit assurances of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity. Following completion of the initial course-based research inquiry, the de-identified records were archived with the supervising faculty and obtained by the present authors for secondary comparative analysis. Prior to journal submission and publication, the authors confirmed authorization from the original data contributors and secured supplemental participant confirmation permitting the secondary analysis and anonymized scholarly publication of the synthesized case findings. In accordance with national research ethics regulations governing non-clinical educational inquiry and secondary analysis of fully de-identified archival records involving no additional intervention, formal institutional review board (IRB) registration was not required; the study was conducted in full compliance with departmental ethical standards and the Declaration of Helsinki.

Because confidentiality in small professional communities cannot be guaranteed merely by removing names,

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the authors implemented rigorous secondary de-identification across both cases. Participant codes (A1 and A2) are retained while preschool names, geographic locations, institutional affiliations, and personal identifiers are omitted. Potentially identifying participant characteristics (such as exact age), site-specific prestige markers (such as university affiliation or visitor categories), and distinctive classroom incidents have been systematically generalized so that the combination of remaining contextual details cannot allow insiders to identify either participant or placement site. Furthermore, to protect participant privacy, raw interview transcripts and response records are not publicly released.

Interpretive scope

The analysis concerns the participants' accounts of experience. It cannot determine staffing compliance, employment status, the actual balance of activities across a semester, or the quality of teaching observed by others. Nor can it separate organizational effects from personal expectations through controlled comparison. Its contribution lies in documenting a plausible distinction between manageable work and educationally productive work, and in developing questions about how guidance turns participation into learning. These boundaries inform every comparative statement that follows.

FINDINGS

Case A1 Demanding participation with Uncertain Learning Support

A1's account begins with an interest in acquiring a particular form of preschool practice. She chose a well-regarded preschool setting partly because of its perceived strength in organizing classroom learning areas. This motivation matters: the participant did not describe entering the placement expecting minimal effort. She anticipated a demanding environment and hoped that the effort would yield substantial learning. Her subsequent dissatisfaction concerned the relationship between the demands she encountered and the guidance available to make those demands educationally useful.

Her classroom role combined instructional assistance and care. She helped the lead teacher attend to children, supported transitions, prepared materials, and maintained the environment. She also led teaching activities during designated practice occasions and, on at least one reported occasion, when a supervising teacher was temporarily indisposed. The account therefore contains genuine participation in teaching as well as routine support work. It does not support the claim that she was entirely excluded from instruction. Her concern was that responsibilities were assigned in ways that did not consistently clarify what she was expected to learn or how performance would be evaluated.

The division of authority was especially difficult to interpret. A1 understood that her teachers wanted children to regard her as an adult whose directions deserved respect. This conveyed trust and some classroom authority. Yet she also found teachers' responses to children's behavior inconsistent or difficult to read. She could be expected to manage situations like a classroom teacher while remaining unsure when intervention was appropriate. The resulting ambiguity was not simply a lack of permission. It was an uncertainty about the practical criteria governing the use of permission in particular situations.

Task delegation could intensify that uncertainty. When A1 was unexpectedly assigned lead teaching due to a supervising teacher's temporary indisposition, she interpreted the event as meeting an immediate staffing need. An unplanned teaching opportunity can have educational value, and the transcript does not independently establish that no supervision was present. Nevertheless, the participant emphasized its abruptness rather than discussing readiness or goals. In her account, sudden responsibility became part of a broader pattern in which she had to infer expectations after an assignment had already arrived.

A1 tried to make the arrangement more predictable by preparing a schedule of future teaching demonstrations. This was an attempt to negotiate the organization of learning rather than an avoidance of teaching. She reported that her proposal was judged insufficient without a clear explanation of how to improve it. Because she had used other interns' schedules as a reference point, the rejection also complicated her ability to calibrate

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expectations through comparison. The episode illustrates how evaluation without actionable guidance can increase uncertainty even when the intern takes initiative.

Errors were not necessarily treated harshly. A1 believed that her teachers allowed more room for mistakes because she was an intern. That qualification matters because it rules out a simple account of uniformly punitive supervision. The difficulty was that tolerance did not reliably produce a discussion of the error, its causes, or alternatives. An intern can be permitted to make mistakes and still be deprived of the explanations needed to learn from them. In A1's account, the absence of a review process made responsibility feel less like a planned progression toward competence.

The same concern appeared in her efforts to learn about classroom learning areas. The teachers in her assigned classroom were described as having less experience with the practice than teachers elsewhere in the preschool. Their responses sometimes suggested shared experimentation rather than definite advice. Collaborative inquiry can be educationally valuable, but A1 felt that a short placement left limited time for repeated trial and error without more expert guidance. Her dissatisfaction thus concerned the fit between her learning goal, the available supervisory expertise, and the duration of the opportunity.

The organization contained support that was unevenly accessible. A1 perceived experienced teachers as cooperating closely and described newer members of her classroom team as less connected to those relationships. She did not claim deliberate exclusion. Indeed, her closing evaluation included appreciation for help from teachers in other classrooms. The problem was that support beyond the classroom did not provide a dependable substitute for the guidance she expected from her designated supervisors. Asking another busy teacher for assistance could offer immediate relief while leaving the responsibility for coordinating her learning unresolved.

Interpersonal relations with the classroom teachers were also mixed. A1 described easy conversation and generally agreeable personal contact. Work-related discussions were less satisfactory, particularly when she raised concerns about temporary assignments or workload. She perceived casual encouragement to try a task as carrying an implicit expectation that refusal would disappoint the teachers. The tension therefore arose within a sociable relationship. It demonstrates why friendliness is an incomplete indicator of whether an intern can negotiate responsibilities or obtain a substantive response to a learning problem.

Leadership support was present but limited in its perceived effect. A1 recalled being offered a brief respite away from the classroom and a supportive conversation during a period of acute distress. She also described brief inquiries about her well-being. These actions cannot be dismissed as absent care. Her criticism was that they did not resolve communication difficulties with the classroom teachers or change the learning arrangement. The evidence supports a distinction between acknowledging distress and addressing the conditions associated with it. It does not establish the leaders' intentions or the full range of actions they may have taken.

The placement's work culture added pressure. A1 described a setting involved in multiple curriculum initiatives and subject to frequent external professional observation. She interpreted sustained effort as part of maintaining a strong public and professional image. She reported arriving in the early morning and leaving after children had departed, commonly around late afternoon or early evening. Other interns' later departures were mentioned as part of her perception of the environment. These are reported times, not verified attendance records, and the analysis does not calculate weekly hours or infer a legal violation from them.

Routine preparation occupied a conspicuous place in her account. She prepared visual supports for classroom spaces and processed instructional materials, alongside frequently performing routine classroom cleaning and maintenance. These activities helped the classroom operate, but A1 felt that their accumulation consumed the energy she needed to attend to teaching. The issue was not that a label or prepared material could never be educational. It was that she could complete many tasks without receiving enough explanation or reflection to connect that activity with the professional learning she sought.

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Support for children needing additional attention further complicated the workload. A1 believed that existing classroom staffing was insufficient for some children's needs and regarded interns as important sources of assistance. The transcript includes her own estimates and descriptions of children whose needs had not necessarily been formally assessed. Those observations identify perceived care demands, not clinical diagnoses or verified prevalence. The relevant finding is that she experienced the classroom as requiring continuous attention while preparation and other duties continued, reducing the time available for deliberate learning.

Emotional strain was closely associated with this combination. A1 reported frequent crying during a demanding period and repeatedly linked distress to unclear instructions and expectations that seemed too advanced for her stage of learning. The account contains strong evidence of perceived depletion, but it does not establish a continuous syndrome across the entire placement. Her own explanation places uncertainty and disappointing learning opportunities alongside hours and task volume. This provides a richer interpretation than treating exhaustion as a direct consequence of overtime alone.

Her response to children was not uniformly detached. She described some situations of resignation when classroom efforts seemed undermined by family practices, but she also identified children as a positive and restorative element of the internship. Adult relationships were more prominent in her account of what made the experience difficult. The findings therefore support situational frustration and a concern about emotional withdrawal under strain. They do not support a conclusion that she had broadly ceased to care about children or routinely provided indifferent treatment.

Career reconsideration emerged early in A1's retrospective account. She connected the prospect of becoming a lead teacher with memories of the placement and also mentioned perceived social respect, compensation, and the broader demands of the profession. She did not describe a verified permanent exit from early childhood education. Her statements indicate reluctance to enter preschool teaching immediately and diminished motivation relative to her earlier expectations. She also reported that many peers still intended to pursue teaching qualifications or positions. Her own experience therefore cannot substantiate a claim that most members of the cohort abandoned teaching.

A1 ultimately described a placement that involved substantial activity, moments of support, and positive contact with children, while leaving the central educational promise unresolved. This combination underpins the case explanation. Institutional reputation attracted the participant, but the immediate learning relationship did not reliably provide the expertise and clarity she expected. Repeated contributions to daily work then became difficult to interpret as progress toward becoming a teacher, and that disappointment was intertwined with considerable emotional strain.

Case A2 Manageable Demands With Limited Professional Development

A2's record is shorter and should not be made more detailed than its content allows. The participant described work in a mixed-age classroom, assisting instruction, supporting children with additional needs, helping prepare lessons, and completing cleaning or miscellaneous duties. At the time of the response, A2 was not working or interning in a preschool. The record does not establish whether this situation reflected career withdrawal, further study, an interval between positions, or another circumstance. It is background information rather than evidence of an occupational outcome.

The participant's account of role identity was notably unsettled. A2 did not feel like a learner but also did not identify as a fully recognized worker. Mentoring lacked a clear structure and largely encouraged the intern to request opportunities independently. The prevalence of cleaning and miscellaneous tasks weakened identification as a teacher within the classroom. This is an explicit finding in the record and contradicts any characterization of the case as an example of consistently structured professional preparation.

Classroom circumstances helped explain the assigned role. A2 reported that several children required additional support and that the placement coincided with a period of classroom transition. Maintaining classroom order was therefore prominent. The participant understood the intern as another person assisting that work rather than being treated as a formal teacher. No verified count or diagnosis is provided. The analytical

point concerns role positioning during a demanding transition in classroom organization, not a judgment about the children or the adequacy of staffing under a particular regulatory standard.

Recognition was selective. A2 felt trusted when asked to gather reference materials to assist lesson preparation, whereas suggestions about curriculum design were sometimes not adopted. The latter experience does not establish that suggestions were dismissed without reason; the record provides no examples of their content or the teachers' explanations. It does show that contributing to preparation could be easier than influencing pedagogical decisions. This distinction helps explain why participation in work did not necessarily create a stable sense of professional standing.

A2 described several positive aspects of the organizational environment. Teachers had freedom in their instructional work, children’s enjoyment of learning was emphasized, and most teacher–parent interactions were viewed favorably. Leaders were described as respectful and approachable. Administrative responsibilities could be assigned to interns to expose them to a wider range of activities, even though classroom teachers were said not to share such duties. The account thus includes administrative work rather than supporting the claim that interns were exempt from it.

Relationships with formal teachers were generally good, but hierarchical distance remained. A2 felt part of the classroom and described teachers as willing to share educational ideas and provide feedback. Meetings included interns and enabled exchange. These observations support a finding of social and participatory inclusion. They do not establish the frequency, content, or developmental sequence of feedback. An intern can be welcomed into a discussion and still lack a planned course of observation, supported practice, and review.

Unlike A1, A2 directly judged the workload reasonable and stated that sufficient resources or rest were available. The additional activities included cleaning, administrative assistance, photocopying, and support for events. Because no time record is provided, the analysis cannot determine how much of the placement these activities occupied. The participant's judgment nevertheless deserves full weight. It is not necessary to reinterpret acceptable workload as hidden overload simply to align the case with an anticipated relationship between demands and burnout.

A2's principal moments of strain concerned professional capability. Feeling dissatisfied with teaching or curriculum design could produce low mood and self-criticism, followed by continued effort to practice. Tiredness also occurred when the participant could not adequately support a child's daily functioning or learning. These experiences indicate the emotional significance of competence and perceived effectiveness. They do not demonstrate an absence of commitment: the record explicitly includes continuing practice in response to uncertainty.

The participant also recalled a period in which cleaning dominated the perceived role and professional support seemed limited. This statement sits alongside favorable judgments about colleagues and workload. The combination is analytically important because the descriptions are not necessarily contradictory. Some feedback and positive exchanges can occur within a placement that still lacks an organized learning structure. Likewise, available rest can make work manageable without making that work educationally fulfilling.

Interpersonal frustration was directed toward situations in which families were perceived as failing to coordinate approaches with the preschool. A2 questioned the effectiveness of classroom effort under those conditions. The record documents discouragement about the relationship between effort and outcomes. It does not establish pervasive detachment from children, actual neglect, or unwillingness to engage with every family. The study consequently interprets this material as situational frustration relevant to strain, with insufficient evidence to characterize a generalized depersonalization pattern.

A2 reported declining enthusiasm for an early childhood career and uncertainty about remaining on that path. Perceived changes in the social value of teaching were part of the explanation. The participant's overall description of the internship as relatively relaxed was accompanied by a feeling that little had been learned and teaching ability had not markedly improved. Relaxation in this context meant relief from some pressures, not

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satisfaction with professional preparation. The case shows that an internship can be tolerable as daily work yet disappointing as an investment in becoming a teacher.

A2 therefore offers a particularly useful contrast with A1. The record supports greater satisfaction with task demands and day-to-day relations, but no clear evidence of systematic mentoring. Professional confidence and career enthusiasm remained unsettled. The case cannot establish that stronger relational support prevented burnout, nor can its brevity be used to infer less serious distress. It can establish that reasonable workload and positive interactions did not fully meet the participant's expectations for professional development.

Cross Case Comparison

Table 3 compares the cases across the dimensions most clearly supported by the material. The comparison preserves differences in documentation and avoids assigning burnout scores. A1 provides more extensive accounts of long days, sudden assignments, and distress. A2 provides a direct favorable judgment about workload while describing professional stagnation. In both, participation was more readily identifiable as assistance to the classroom than as a consistently guided progression toward professional competence.

Table 3. Comparison of the two placement experiences

Dimension	A1	A2
Workload appraisal	Long days and unpredictable responsibilities	Reasonable workload and adequate resources or rest
Mentoring	Unclear standards; limited actionable guidance	No structured mentoring; initiative expected
Relationships	Friendly contact; useful support beyond the classroom	Respectful leaders; collegial feedback and meeting inclusion
Professional learning	Desired learning-area expertise difficult to access	Limited perceived growth and unsettled teacher identity
Exhaustion evidence	Frequent crying during a difficult period	Tiredness and low mood linked to competence concerns
Distancing evidence	Situational resignation; continued enjoyment of children	Frustration about perceived family cooperation
Career intentions	Reluctance to enter preschool teaching immediately	Reduced enthusiasm and uncertainty about continuation

Source: Case analysis. Entries summarize participant accounts; they are not diagnoses or severity ratings.

The first common theme is responsibility without a fully intelligible learner role. A1 had opportunities to act like a teacher but lacked clarity about when and how to exercise judgment. A2 contributed to teaching and classroom maintenance but did not consistently feel recognized as a teacher or as a systematically supported learner. The two forms differ: one emphasizes uncertain authority under pressure, while the other emphasizes a peripheral identity within manageable work. Both raise questions about whether the placement had made its educational purpose visible in everyday assignments.

The second theme is the separation of sociability from professional guidance. A1 could converse comfortably with supervisors and receive help from teachers elsewhere; A2 described friendly leaders, willing colleagues, and meeting participation. Yet both identified insufficiently structured mentoring. This is the strongest comparative insight because it appears alongside positive interpersonal evidence in each account. It suggests that improving collegial atmosphere alone may leave the organization of learning unchanged.

The third theme concerns the meaning of accumulated effort. A1 experienced extensive activity without the learning expected from a demanding placement. A2 experienced relatively relaxed participation without a strong sense of increased teaching capability. The cases therefore point toward an evaluative question that is distinct from the amount of work: what professional development does the intern perceive that participation

makes possible? The comparison identifies this question; it does not measure an effort–learning relationship or establish how much practice would have been sufficient.

Finally, career uncertainty cannot be attributed to one factor. Both accounts combine placement experiences with views about the social standing of preschool teachers. A1 additionally discusses compensation and sustained work demands. These statements concern anticipated professional conditions as well as the internship itself. The case comparison supports an interpretation in which learning disappointment contributes to career reconsideration, while leaving open the relative influence of occupational expectations and individual alternatives.

DISCUSSION

Internship Quality as a Relationship Between Contribution and Learning

The findings suggest that internship quality can be examined through the relationship between the work an intern contributes and the learning that the placement makes available. This relationship is organizational because teachers and leaders allocate responsibilities, provide explanations, and decide whether learning time can compete with immediate service needs. It is also interpretive because participants evaluate effort against their expectations and experience of progress. The present cases show both sides: duties sustained preschool activity, while the interns questioned whether those duties helped them become capable teachers.

This interpretation does not require a distinction between inherently educational and inherently noneducational tasks. Helping a child manage a transition can develop observational judgment, communication, and anticipation of needs. Preparing a visual prompt can develop understanding of how classroom environments support participation. Cleaning may provide insight into safety and routine organization. Those opportunities depend on how the activity is explained, shared, and reviewed. When an intern repeatedly performs the activity without access to its professional rationale, participation may remain practically useful but developmentally thin.

A1's unmet expectation concerning learning areas illustrates the specificity of the issue. The participant was not simply seeking praise or fewer duties. She wanted access to a practice associated with the placement's reputation. The available guidance in her classroom did not consistently address that goal. A2's uncertainty illustrates a broader version: the record does not identify a single specialist learning objective, but the participant could not clearly perceive an increase in teaching capability. These forms of disappointment imply that placements should establish both individual goals and general developmental expectations.

Supported learning also provides a way to understand apparently opposing experiences. A demanding internship can be worthwhile if responsibility is proportionate, feedback is useful, and progress becomes visible. A relaxed internship can remain disappointing if opportunities to develop professional judgment are scarce. The two cases occupy different positions on that distinction but share concerns about learning. They therefore challenge the use of workload satisfaction as a sufficient proxy for placement quality. A satisfactory amount of work answers one question; it does not answer whether professional preparation is occurring.

The interpretation should remain provisional. Neither case includes systematic observation of learning, an assessment of competence before and after placement, or the mentors' account of what was intended. The participants may have acquired skills that they did not recognize, and some expectations may have required adjustment. Nonetheless, perceived learning matters in its own right. If an intern cannot identify what has improved or how to improve further, the placement may struggle to build confidence even when some unrecognized development has occurred.

Distinguishing Relational Developmental and Operational Support

The comparison identifies different functions of support. Relational support concerns welcome, respectful interaction, recognition, and emotional encouragement. Developmental support concerns explanation, observation, guided practice, and feedback that helps the intern improve. Operational support concerns time,

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materials, manageable duties, and resources needed to complete work. These are analytical distinctions drawn from the cases rather than a validated typology. They are useful because the participants' accounts contain different combinations of the three functions.

A2 offers the clearest evidence for this distinction. The participant reported favorable relationships and reasonable workload while also describing unstructured mentoring. Relational and operational support therefore appeared more satisfactory than developmental support. A1's account includes all three concerns, but relational support was present in some encounters, especially outside the assigned classroom and during acute distress. Its presence did not resolve unclear expectations. The finding is that support may be available for one problem and insufficient for another, not that any particular form of support is worthless.

An organizational response needs to match the identified problem. An informal conversation may help someone who feels isolated but may not clarify the learning goal of a teaching assignment. A break can restore energy but cannot explain an assessment standard. A written plan can clarify goals but may not provide enough staffing to make the plan feasible. These examples are implications of the analytical distinction, not incidents established beyond the source records. They show why a general commitment to supporting interns needs to be translated into specific practices.

This distinction also changes how evidence of a supportive culture is interpreted. Leaders can reasonably point to an open office, friendly staff, or meeting invitations while an intern continues to report inadequate guidance. Both descriptions may refer to real aspects of the same environment. Placement review should therefore ask what each activity accomplishes. If meetings mainly convey operational information, attendance may support coordination without supporting pedagogical reflection. If feedback remains general encouragement, the intern may feel welcomed while lacking an actionable account of progress.

The cases also caution against judging mentor quality solely from personal warmth or seniority. A1's newer classroom teachers were described as approachable, and A2's colleagues were willing to share. The question is whether mentors have the time, knowledge, and educational structure needed for the role. More experienced teachers may also need support in explaining tacit judgments. An institutional mentoring arrangement should consequently develop capacity rather than assume that professional competence automatically includes the ability to teach a newcomer how that competence is exercised.

Organizational Culture Operates Through Local Access

Organizational resources reach interns through immediate relationships and assignments. A1 described a preschool with experienced educators, substantial activity, and a strong reputation, yet her classroom did not consistently connect her with the guidance she sought. The account suggests that the immediate team can be an important point of access or blockage. A school's overall strengths do not guarantee that every intern encounters those strengths through a coherent learning arrangement.

Local variation is especially important in interpreting claims about culture. A1 explicitly distinguished her classroom from other classrooms and acknowledged assistance elsewhere. Treating the entire preschool as uniformly isolating would erase that evidence. A2's account, meanwhile, combines general teaching freedom with a less clearly defined intern role. Teachers' autonomy does not tell us how autonomy is extended to newcomers or whether newcomers receive the explanations required to use it. Organizational culture becomes meaningful through the position of the participant within it.

Reputation may create a further tension between expectation and access. An intern attracted to a respected institution may expect that expert practice will be easy to observe and discuss. If expertise remains distributed through established networks, the newcomer's assignment can provide access to work without access to the reasoning behind it. This interpretation is suggested by A1's account, not verified as a policy of the preschool. It identifies a possible problem of institutional coordination that leaders could examine through placement records and conversations across classrooms.

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The implication is that mentoring should not depend exclusively on the chance fit between one intern and one classroom. A designated supervisor remains necessary, but a placement can also arrange access to other teachers when the intern's goal requires different expertise. Such access should be scheduled and accountable rather than left entirely to the newcomer's ability to ask busy colleagues for help. This would preserve the benefits of a wider professional community while reducing the uncertainty about who is responsible for supporting learning.

Workload Uncertainty and Professional Agency

The cases suggest that workload becomes more difficult to manage when the intern cannot anticipate assignments or interpret their standards. A1's abrupt responsibilities and unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a teaching schedule provide concrete evidence of this experience. A2's acceptable workload demonstrates that uncertainty about learning can remain even when operational demands are less problematic. Workload analysis should consequently distinguish task quantity, complexity, predictability, and developmental relevance rather than combining them into a single impression of busyness.

Professional agency is also more complex than being allowed to act. A1 received classroom authority but lacked consistent criteria for intervention. A2 could request opportunities and participate in conversations but still felt unable to establish a clear teacher identity. Agency in an internship requires access to the knowledge needed to make a choice and an opportunity to discuss the choice afterward. This argument arises from the cases; it does not assert that a particular level of autonomy will prevent burnout in all placements.

A greater amount of structure is not automatically the solution. A2 associated the lack of a rigid mentoring arrangement with fewer pressures, and A1 wished for clearer tasks while already feeling burdened. A heavily documented program could increase administrative work without improving learning. The more precise implication is that structure should reduce uncertainty about professional expectations while protecting opportunities for responsive practice. A short agreement about goals and review occasions may be more useful than an extensive portfolio assembled primarily for compliance.

The relationship between agency and guidance can also change over time. Early in a placement, an intern may need explicit examples and direct explanation. Later, the same intern may benefit from proposing alternatives and defending a pedagogical choice. Neither record provides a complete longitudinal account of such change. Nonetheless, their descriptions of self-directed learning and sudden delegation make progressive responsibility an appropriate practical consideration. Its success would need to be evaluated through learning evidence rather than assumed from a schedule alone.

Burnout Related Experiences and Professional Commitment

A1's account provides extensive evidence of emotional strain and uncertainty about immediate entry into teaching. A2's record places more emphasis on self-doubt, limited development, and reduced enthusiasm despite reasonable demands. These patterns suggest that professional disappointment can be important alongside fatigue. The analytical distinction matters because a placement intervention focused only on reducing duties could leave doubts about competence and professional value unresolved.

The evidence concerning interpersonal distancing is weaker and more situational. Both participants discussed discouragement in relation to perceived family cooperation, but neither record establishes sustained withdrawal from children. A1's continuing enjoyment of children is particularly important contrary evidence. The article therefore retains the burnout framework without forcing a complete syndrome onto either case. It treats exhaustion, distancing, and accomplishment as domains for examining experience, with different levels of support in the available material.

Reduced commitment should likewise be interpreted as an expressed reconsideration. Both participants connected the placement with views about the social standing of teachers, and A1 added concerns about compensation and work demands. These concerns may reflect experiences, broader beliefs, or changing preferences. There is no follow-up record demonstrating whether either participant entered teaching, delayed

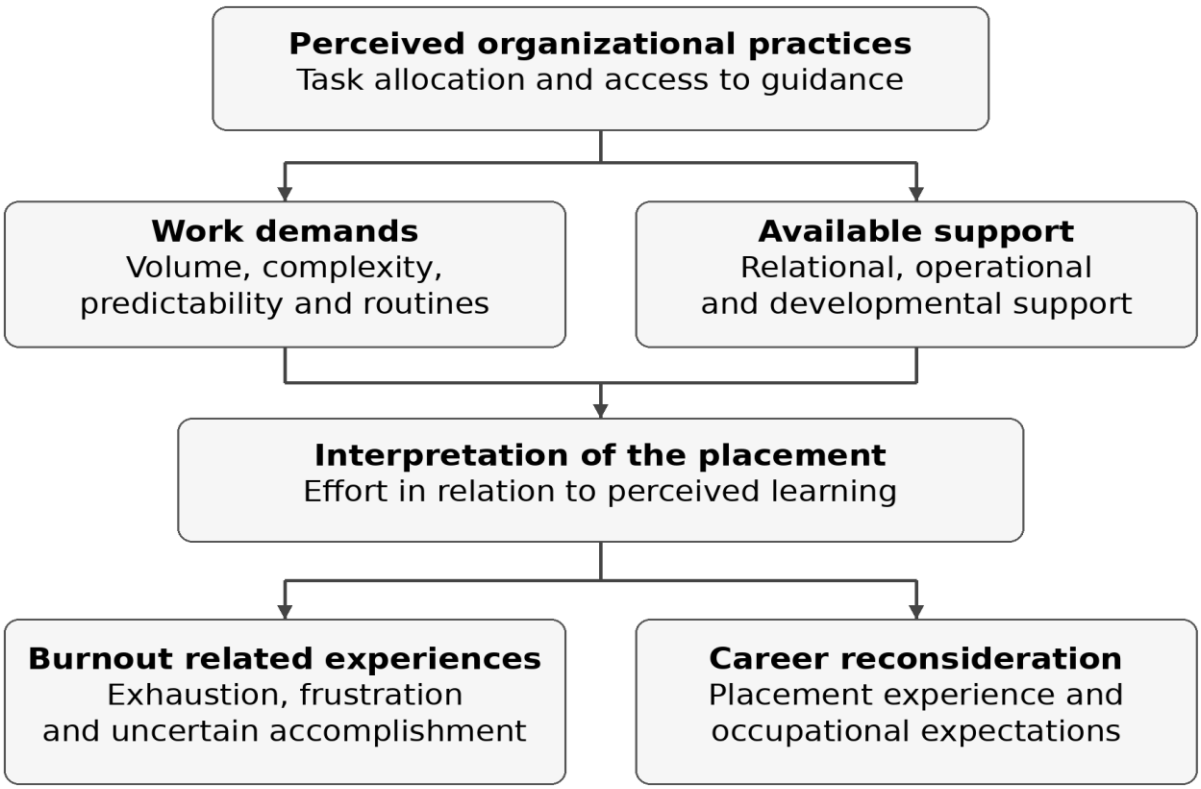
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entry, or selected another profession. The finding is important precisely at the level supported: internships supplied information and experiences that made the anticipated career less attractive.

An additional consideration is that career choice can be rational rather than pathological. A candidate may decide that the conditions observed do not suit their goals without suffering clinical burnout. Recognizing this possibility does not diminish the significance of strain. It avoids treating every departure from an intended occupation as an individual health failure and directs attention to what the placement communicates about the profession. The practical concern is whether that communication reflects unavoidable work realities or preventable deficiencies in learning and support.

Figure 1 summarizes the interpretation developed from the comparison. Perceived organizational practices shape the demands assigned to interns and their access to different kinds of support. Interns evaluate these experiences through both effort and perceived learning. Emotional strain, uncertainty about accomplishment, and career reconsideration may then be connected in their accounts. The relationships are proposed avenues of explanation, not estimated pathways, tested mediators, or a temporal sequence established by these interviews.

Figure 1. Proposed relationships between work learning and career reconsideration



Source: Authors' interpretation of the two cases. Arrows indicate proposed analytical relationships, not causal effects or an established temporal sequence.

Implications For Placement Design

Establish Learning Agreements that Guide Everyday Work

Placement agreements should identify what the intern is expected to learn, the responsibilities through which learning will occur, and the occasions on which guidance will be provided. This need not become a lengthy compliance exercise. A useful agreement can specify a small number of professional goals and connect each goal with observation, supported practice, and review. A1's interest in learning-area organization, for example, could have required explicit access to a teacher able to explain that practice. A2's broader uncertainty could have benefited from clearer milestones for teaching and curriculum development.

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A learning agreement should also clarify the status of routine duties. The objective is not to remove care or environmental work from preschool teaching but to prevent a sustained imbalance in which interns repeatedly assist without gaining access to pedagogical reasoning. Mentors can explain what a routine reveals about children's development, invite the intern to identify a concern, and discuss how the routine might be adapted. When repeated duties no longer offer new learning, task allocation should be reconsidered. The educational value of participation should remain visible rather than inferred from attendance.

Reviewing the agreement early can reveal mismatch before distress accumulates. The review should ask whether the intern can describe what has been learned, whether assignments are proportionate to current preparation, and whether guidance is actually available. It should also permit revision when a classroom's needs change. A plan that cannot be adjusted during an unforeseen staffing or classroom difficulty may create additional pressure. An adaptable agreement can retain clear expectations while recognizing the variability of preschool work.

Protect Mentoring Time and Distribute Expertise

Mentoring requires time that competes with other responsibilities. Institutions should therefore establish opportunities for mentors and interns to discuss practice within the placement's ordinary schedule. The cases suggest that general willingness to help does not always create such opportunities. Brief, regular discussions linked to specific events may be more effective than occasional reassurance without an agreed professional focus. The relevant standard is whether feedback enables the intern to understand and improve a choice, not whether a meeting has merely occurred.

Mentors also need support when an intern's goals exceed their immediate expertise. A1's classroom teachers were still becoming familiar with the setting's practice. A wider arrangement could connect the intern and the teachers with a colleague who possesses relevant experience. Such collaboration avoids treating the issue as a newer teacher's personal failure. It also prevents the intern from carrying sole responsibility for locating help. Leaders should make the distribution of expertise usable through agreed opportunities for observation and discussion.

Feedback should distinguish an acceptable attempt, an area requiring revision, and the next step. Telling an intern that a plan is insufficient without identifying the reason leaves the standard obscure. Conversely, allowing an error without discussion forfeits an opportunity for learning. A concise explanation of what happened, why it mattered, and what to try next can provide direction without requiring a large volume of written assessment. The approach should be proportionate to the intern's stage and the stakes of the task.

Make workload and escalation procedures transparent

Workload review should consider more than the formal timetable. Interns may remain after children leave to complete preparation, may receive tasks at short notice, or may spend substantial time on repeated assistance. A short activity record can help identify these patterns, provided it is used for joint review rather than surveillance. The cases do not establish a universal threshold of appropriate hours or a fixed proportion of duties. They support monitoring whether demands crowd out preparation, feedback, and recovery.

The allocation of sudden responsibility should include a check on readiness and supervision. An unexpected absence or classroom need may require flexibility, but flexibility does not eliminate the educational organization's responsibility to support the intern. The mentor should clarify what the intern will do, what assistance remains available, and how the experience will be reviewed. This is especially relevant to lead teaching, individualized support, or situations involving safety. Responsibility should be intelligible at the moment it is assigned.

A separate route for concerns is necessary when the person assigning work also evaluates the intern. Universities and placement leaders can identify a contact who can discuss concerns without immediately framing them as deficient performance. The route should cover both excessive demands and disappointing learning opportunities. A2 shows why an intern may need help even when reporting reasonable workload. The

response should identify the relevant problem and document an agreed change where needed, rather than limiting support to emotional reassurance.

Evaluate placements through learning and well-being

Universities should review placement quality through the experience of specific classrooms and mentoring relationships. Institutional reputation is useful contextual information but cannot substitute for evidence that interns can access guidance. Reviews can ask about the clarity of expectations, the usefulness of feedback, opportunities to observe practice, and the perceived development of professional judgment. They should also ask about work demands and the ability to recover. These dimensions can identify distinct problems that a single satisfaction question would conceal.

Evaluation should preserve interns' freedom to report mixed experiences. An intern may appreciate colleagues while finding professional guidance inadequate, or value a demanding task while needing more preparation. Questions that require a wholly positive or negative judgment encourage simplification. Open prompts concerning a recent learning event, a difficult assignment, and an instance of useful feedback can reveal how the placement operates. These future review methods are recommendations, not procedures claimed for the present study.

Table 4 translates the case findings into practical review questions. The proposed responses are deliberately modest and have not been tested in these placements. They connect an identified problem to an organizational action whose implementation can be examined. Any larger policy change, including staffing or compensation reform, would require additional evidence and consultation beyond the two interview accounts.

Table 4. Proposed responses and placement review questions

Identified issue	Proposed response	Review question
Unclear expectations	Agree learning goals and task boundaries	Can the intern explain the current learning goal?
Limited guidance	Protect time for practice review	Does feedback identify a usable next step?
Uneven expertise	Arrange access across classrooms	Is relevant guidance reliably available?
Work displaces learning	Review duties and preparation time	Is supported practice being crowded out?
Concerns remain unresolved	Provide an independent contact	Was a practical response agreed and reviewed?

Source: Recommendations developed from the case comparison. Implementation and effects have not been evaluated.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has a small corpus and unequal case documentation. A1 is represented through a detailed transcript and a report that already interprets it; A2 is represented through concise written responses. The imbalance limits comparisons of frequency, severity, and chronology. A more detailed A1 account can contain more incidents simply because more text is available. Consequently, the article emphasizes the positions explicitly supported in both cases and treats the lack of detail in A2 as uncertainty rather than evidence that an experience did not occur.

The data are retrospective and rely on participants' perspectives. Memories can foreground especially meaningful incidents, while disappointment can shape how a placement is evaluated afterward. Mentors or leaders might offer different interpretations of the same event. The present study neither dismisses these possibilities nor uses them to discount the participants' experiences. It identifies the level of inference available: the accounts show how these interns understood work and learning, but do not independently verify every organizational condition they describe.

The study also cannot isolate culture from mentoring capacity, expectations, task allocation, or broader career preferences. A1's account includes supervisory transitions and differences in teachers' tenure, while A2's lacks comparable contextual detail. These features could be relevant but cannot be tested as competing explanations. The comparison therefore develops an interpretive argument about the usefulness of distinguishing support functions. It does not demonstrate that organizational culture statistically moderates workload effects or that mentoring mediates a causal relationship with burnout.

Burnout has not been assessed using an instrument or clinical procedure. The interview guide prompts discussion of its conventional dimensions, which may organize the responses in advance. Frustration and reduced enthusiasm are not equivalent to a complete syndrome. Future work could combine interviews with an appropriately validated measure while retaining distinctions between depletion, learning disappointment, and career choice. Such a design should avoid treating a scale as a substitute for understanding the organizational encounters through which participants interpret their experience.

Several missing contextual variables warrant future investigation. Financial circumstances, personal support, prior teaching exposure, alternative career plans, and the exact terms of the placement could influence how demands are perceived. Site ownership and geographical location are unknown for A2, so comparisons of institutional types are not possible. A larger study could deliberately sample across placement arrangements and examine whether different learning resources are accessible within comparable levels of workload. Prospective sampling would need to be documented rather than inferred after the cases are available.

Longitudinal research would improve understanding of professional commitment. Interviews before placement could establish expectations; interviews during placement could document how assignments and guidance change; later follow-up could examine actual entry into teaching. This would help distinguish a temporary response to a difficult period from a sustained change in career preference. It could also determine whether additional mentoring repairs a disappointing experience or whether broader occupational conditions remain decisive after learning support improves.

Future case studies should include mentors, leaders, and university supervisors and, where consent allows, observation of feedback and task allocation. These sources could show whether a learning plan is implemented, whether competing classroom demands interrupt mentoring, and how expertise is distributed across teams. They could also clarify the difference between an invitation to seek help and an arrangement that makes help reliably available. Such triangulation would strengthen organizational explanations without assuming that agreement among sources is necessary for an intern's experience to be valid.

Finally, because the study relies on secondary analysis of archived qualitative records within a relatively small professional community, strict de-identification required generalizing certain institutional and situational particulars. While supplemental authorization permitted anonymized scholarly publication of the synthesized case comparisons, raw transcripts cannot be shared publicly, and contextual abstraction inevitably limits fine-grained institutional description. Future prospective studies should incorporate multi-stage publication consent and multi-institutional ethical oversight from initial recruitment so that broader organizational and longitudinal data can be collected systematically.

CONCLUSION

The two cases show that contributing to preschool work and learning to become a preschool teacher can diverge. A1 associated extensive demands and unclear expectations with considerable distress and difficulty accessing the professional guidance she had sought. A2 described a reasonable workload and positive relationships, yet still experienced an unsettled learner role, limited perceived growth, and declining career enthusiasm. Their common concern was the educational value of participation, while their experience of operational demands differed.

This comparison suggests that placement quality should be assessed through task allocation, relational inclusion, and the organization of professional learning as distinct but connected matters. Reducing workload can address one source of strain; dependable guidance and intelligible expectations address another. A

placement that welcomes interns but leaves them to identify learning opportunities alone may remain insufficiently educational. A demanding institution with substantial expertise likewise needs to ensure that interns can access that expertise within their assigned relationships.

The findings remain exploratory and do not establish burnout diagnoses, causal pathways, or workforce attrition. They nevertheless identify an actionable problem: interns need to understand how the work they perform develops professional judgment. Learning agreements, protected mentoring opportunities, responsive task review, and independent communication routes are plausible ways to address that problem. Their value should be examined through whether interns can identify progress, obtain useful feedback, and make informed decisions about a future in early childhood education.

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