Who gets to play? Promoting participation in ECE for all children
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Cover artwork by Sienna Provoost (lion) and Millie Torbit

Please note: The opinions expressed by contributing writers for Children may be the opinion of the writer and/or their organisation. These opinions are not necessarily the views of the Children's Commissioner.
MOE to support partnership practices with whānau Maori through professional development which will "design and deliver a culturally responsive curriculum". Other identified barriers included access to services; affordability and adaptability of services and issues with provision of services, or availability in certain areas. Affordability for families remains a prevailing concern.

There is a discrepancy between what counts as ‘participation’ in early education. For example, enrolment data collected at school entry indicates that participation in early education is high by international standards. However, authentic engaged and sustained participation (engagement) rates for all children are unknown at a national level because this data is not routinely analysed for time spent in a service. Are children attending regularly? How long are they attending for? How are services actively engaging with parents/whānau/families and communities to support children’s participation in their services? And how well are ECE services following up children at risk of poor outcomes who do not attend regularly?

The cost of certain groups in our society missing out is now considered too high. In response to these concerns, the Ministry of Education has, for the past few years, prioritised participation in ECE services and the Minister of Education, the Hon Hekia Parata recently announced an increase in funding to ECE programmes designed to increase participation. Exactly how is the source of much debate, some of which is revealed here. Should ECE services be universally provided and, if so, to what extent? Or should these services be targeted to groups currently not participating in ECE? Sir Peter Gluckman’s report (2011) recommended targeted investment in
“increased access to and increased quality of, early childhood education for Māori and Pasifika whānau/families and for low decile communities.” Ministry briefings to the incoming government also recommend targeting and, consistent with the current political message, are underpinned by the imperative for fiscal constraint (compared to other OECD countries, New Zealand’s investment in children is very low indeed). In this edition, contributors grapple with the question of universal provision as opposed to targeted funding. Complex questions like “who qualifies?” and “what criteria?” are discussed alongside rights-based justifications for acting in the best interests of all children. But, as Linda Mitchell puts it, “some services will require extra resources and support”. A consistent rights-based concern in this edition is to protect children from discrimination, or potential stigmatisation of targeted approaches. Anne Smith cites international research which demonstrates clearly that investment in universally provided high quality ECE can “eliminate the inheritance of poverty and low achievement from one generation to the next”.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) and in particular General Comment 7 details young children’s entitlements to a quality of life that, under Article 4, obliges States Parties such as New Zealand, to progressively realise the intent of UNCROC. That means that we should always be improving conditions for children. The implications of UNCROC for the ECE sector are not yet well understood: for example, the implications of Article 18 are that the State should support parents who work in their duties to raise families. While not the central focus of this edition, women’s participation in the labour market, and paid parental leave provisions fall under this ambit. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendations included the following:

“Ensure that all children have access to high quality early childhood education and care that, at a minimum, is free for socially disadvantaged families and children.” [paragraph 45(a)]; and,

“Invest considerable additional resources in order to ensure the right of all children, including children from all disadvantaged, marginalised and school-distant groups, to a truly inclusive education” [paragraph 45(c)]

Because ECE is not compulsory, questions of how much and who pays are important considerations. Also interwoven are complex questions about the role of ECE services: What are the goals for ECE? Is participation in ECE a labour market priority? Is it about academic achievement? Is it about creating a socially just, cohesive society? Is it about children’s cultural rights? The United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination’s call to States parties “to recognise and respect the indigenous distinct cultures, history, language and way of life as an enrichment of the State’s cultural identity and to promote its preservation”. There is a clear segue between these aspirations and Te Whāriki, the ECE curriculum which was the first ever internationally to use an indigenous conceptual framework. As Aroaro Tamati and Jan Tauoma note, valuing whānau and traditional cultural values are foundational to successful engagement. And the prevailing ‘golden thread’ linking these aspirations together is a completely consistent call for high quality services which attend to both process and structural quality measures (see Dalli & Rockel, Herczog, Mitchell and Smith), in this edition.

Artwork by Sienna Provoost
Improved parenting, enhanced connectedness to community for parents and their children, better understanding of the value and importance of education, based on good experiences in ECE are common themes reflecting positive outcomes of partnerships between ECE services, children, families and communities. But this can only be reified if there is engaged, meaningful participation in ECE services which are adaptable, affordable, accessible and available. That we have not yet got it right are questions raised in several of the articles, particularly for the home-based care sector. Similarly, maintaining respectful relationships between services in a very diverse sector has been an enduring challenge which needs to continue as multi-sector approaches are mooted in new, innovative services such as community hubs. The extent of the role of health professionals and social workers is not widely known in the ECE sector yet these knowledgeable adults form part of our communities and regularly engage with children and their families.

Increasing participation rates in ECE is only part of the picture. We also need to consider not only who gets to play, but also how well the rules are made, not just now, but in the long term. In other words, if we aspire, as the Government does, to a 98 percent participation rate in ECE by 2015, the messages of research as well as the voices of children, their families and the sector need to be heard.

References

1. Since writing this editorial, De Sarah Te One has left the Office of the Children’s Commissioner to take up a senior lecturer post at Victoria University.
3. ibid
4. MOE – educationcounts.govt.nz
11. Ibid, p. 2
13. Ibid. p. 16
15. UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 11 (2009). Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention) p. 4
He Tohu Aroha

Kua hinga he totara i te wao nui a Tane

A totara has fallen in the forest of Tane

"Haere te Papa, haere atu koe i te huanui, i te ara kua papatauria e te tapuwae kauika tangata. Takoto mai koe i te aroha o te atua. Whakangaro atu i te ara e kore e titiro whakamuri mai ano. Haere, haere, haere."

In memory of Dr Hone Kaa: 1941 – 2012

On 29 March, the Office lost a long-standing friend and the country lost one of its most outspoken and effective advocates for children.

After a short illness, Reverend Kaa died, bringing to an end the 50 year career of this man of many parts. This influential career included study – a BA in Maori Studies, an MA (Hons) in education and a doctorate in Ministry from Harvard University. It included ministry work – as an Anglican priest in Taupo and Hawke’s Bay and as minister of the Auckland Anglican Maori Mission. Dr Kaa was a teacher, a broadcaster and an activist. He was a strong advocate and leader, speaking out on indigenous rights and tino rangatiratanga.

Over a long period, successive Children’s Commissioners have enjoyed a close relationship with Dr Kaa. When he convened the Maori Child Abuse Summit in 2007, bringing together Maori to find ways to tackle high rates of child abuse in Maori communities, the then Children’s Commissioner was pleased to help by providing some of the required funding. From that Summit came Te Kahui Mana Ririki, an organisation chaired by Dr Kaa, dedicated to improving the care of Maori children and eradicating abuse and neglect. Since then, Te Kahui Mana Ririki has produced a range of resources, in high demand, distributed by the Office to individuals and groups around Aotearoa. These complement the hundreds of training sessions that have been delivered, to spread the messages of positive, safe parenting. Dr Kaa’s nephew, Anton Blank, steers the work of Te Kahui Mana Ririki and remains closely associated with the Office.

In 2011, the Office was pleased to fund a Te Kahui Mana Ririki publication, Traditional Maori Parenting: a historical review of literature of traditional Maori child rearing practices in pre-European times. Dr Kaa spoke at the launch of the report in our Wellington Office and those of us who were there will forever remember his words, delivered with passion and wisdom.

Our thoughts are with Dr Kaa’s whanau. Their loss is great. Along with so many others, we grieve the passing of Dr Kaa but value the wisdom he shared, and the time we had with Dr Kaa.
This edition of *Children*, with a focus on education, brings a bittersweet moment for Office staff. Having been with us as Principal Advisor: Education, for almost a year, Dr Sarah Te One has decided to leave the Office and return to academia. On 12 July, Sarah finished in her Principal Advisor role and took up a senior lecturer position at Victoria University. In the relatively short time we have worked with Sarah, we have appreciated her knowledge, experience and networks into the early childhood sector. She has spread that knowledge through speeches, presentations, workshops and training sessions and has worked to bring the voices of children and young people into every aspect of our work.

Donna Provoost has joined the Office as Principal Advisor: Social Sector. Bringing a wealth of experience in policy and analysis work, expertise in social research and, as an economist, Donna is well placed to coordinate the work of the group focusing on solutions to child poverty. The staff who make up the secretariat to the Expert Advisory Group have worked to prepare the background papers that advise that Group, steered by Donna and led by the Deputy Commissioner, Dr Jo Cribb.

Our small team that monitors services delivered under the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act has seen a change as well. Tom Ratima has returned to direct work with families at Child, Youth and Family in Levin and is replaced by Jay Ikiua, another experienced Child, Youth and Family social worker.

The Office has continued its focus on child poverty, child health, education and abuse and neglect. The consultation document: Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand: Issues and Options Paper for Consultation is available at [www.occ.org.nz](http://www.occ.org.nz). Partner agencies have been secured to work with us on the Scorecard on child health. Our identified projects in the education area will be picked up by a new Principal Advisor: Education. And our monitoring team has been active in assessing services to children and young people under the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act. The team have recently visited Child, Youth and Family sites on the West Coast of the South Island as well as in Tokoroa/Taupo, Clendon and Manurewa, speaking with Child, Youth and Family staff, children and young people in care and a range of stakeholders. They have also visited four residences – Whakatakapokai, Te Poutama Arahia Rangatahi, Te Puna Wai O Tuhinapo and Epuni – where they met with staff, managers, grievance panel members and children and young people and assessed the quality of services provided to children and young people in care.

**Correction**

The previous edition of CHILDREN (80: Autumn 2012) contained an error in the article submitted by Inspector Tusha Penny, NZ Police, when she inadvertently omitted reference to Puawaitahi multi-agency centre. A correction has been made to the on-line version of the journal and is repeated here. We apologise for this error.

Multi Agency Centres have begun to be established around New Zealand. The first, Puawaitahi, was launched in Auckland over a decade ago and paved the way for recent centres that have opened in Counties Manukau, Wellington and Bay of Plenty Districts.

Applications to apply to the Children’s Commissioner’s Young People’s Reference Group are now open. Dr Wills is looking for young people, aged between 12-16 years or Year 9 to 11, who are interested in speaking about issues that impact on children and young people, to apply. They don’t need to be academic; they need to be young and passionate about making New Zealand/Aotearoa a better place for children and young people.

Visit [http://www.occ.org.nz/yprg/how_to_apply](http://www.occ.org.nz/yprg/how_to_apply) to find out more about the group and to download an application form.

We have a flyer you can download and display so young people are aware of this opportunity. We are grateful for your support around this application process.
News from the Child Rights Line
– call 0800 22 44 53 and press 1 or email advice@occ.org.nz
By Sheryn Elborn Child Rights Line senior advisor

The Child Rights Line receives over 900 enquiries each year. They mainly come from parents who are concerned that the rights and wellbeing of their children and young people are being breached. Of the calls we receive approximately 25 percent relate to education matters, including early childhood education.

Last year many of the enquiries came as a result of the release of the Office report on early childhood education for under twos: “Through their Lens”. Those calling advised us how much they appreciated the information in the report and how it helped them in their selection of a good early childhood service for their child, especially if their child was an infant or toddler.

However, on a less positive note were the enquiries received about things not going so well at an early childhood centre. A number of the early childhood education enquiries related to young children being asked not to come back to a centre due to their behaviour or their disability. As with most enquiries that come through the Child Rights Line, enquirers were advised to follow the centre’s complaints process. If that was not satisfactory the Office followed up with the centre to try to determine what was required for the child to be reinstated, sometimes with success.

Centres were doing lots to assist these children by engaging education support workers, (ESW). However, at times, the ESW hours did not cover the whole time the child was at the centre. One grandmother phoned expressing her concern about the inequities her twin grandchildren experienced in the local early childhood centre they attended. One of her twin grand-daughters could access the 20 free hours, but the other one, because of her disability and the lack of resources could not. The ESW was only funded for 15 hours per week and as the child needed full time ESW support she could only attend for 15 hours. In this case, the enquiry highlighted the conflicting policies surrounding the 20 free hours and the level of support that could be given by the ESW in Early Childhood Centres. ...

Please do not hesitate to contact the Child Rights Line if you have any ECE enquiries. You can make contact by calling...0800 22 44 53 and press 1 or emailing advice@occ.org.nz

Absolute Beginners
By Karen McKechnie,
Office of the Children’s Commissioner

From the moment a child is born
They’re becoming who they’ll be
If we love them we’ll do right by them
And ensure their ECE
In a world of hurry-skurry
Children’s souls and rights must fit
And the light turned on in brand new brains
Deserves the chance to be fully lit

A child is occupied with living
And all the colour that it brings
Activities, inventing games
And creating exciting things
If we stop and think about it –
They grow, they learn, they dare
We don’t say “Wow! You’ve done so well
You’ve learned to walk – stay there!”

To stir young curiosity it
takes more than toys and elves
Not just repeating words they hear
But what they think themselves
The ledger of their learning
Gives them imperatives of their own
It’s a comfort and a talisman
And informs them when they’ve grown

Young minds will trust – depend on us
Their future still unfurled
They need orderly minds and tender hearts
To prepare them for the world
The highest reward of an ECE
(on this critical truth we sit)
The results show in the children
What they BECOME because of IT
Participation rates in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services across Aotearoa New Zealand are at an all-time high. In June 2011, the enrolment rate for 0 to 4 year-olds was 61 percent. This included 14 percent of all under-one year olds, 40 percent of one-year olds, and 59 percent of all two-year olds. Between 2002 and 2012, the 0 to 2-year old age group showed the greatest growth in participation; hours of attendance also increased from an average of 14 hours to 20 hours per week (Ministry of Education, 2011).

These statistics mirror trends in other OECD countries (OECD, 2012; UNICEF, 2008) where, after years of ideological debates and scientific study about the effects of early childcare (e.g., Belsky et al., 2007; Vandell et al., 2010), there is agreement that good quality ECEC benefits children and families, as well as societies more generally. Social, economic and labour market dynamics have made “shared care” between home and group settings increasingly the norm and early childhood services an important aspect of contemporary life. Shared care synchronises care for children with care for families. The early days of childcare, which saw physical care and supervision as the priority in non-parental care, have given way to a focus on early learning. ‘Care’ is now understood to be inclusive of education, incorporating the moral and ethical responsibilities of teachers and parents to children and to each other.

At the same time, this new context of childhood raises questions about how to achieve good outcomes from early childhood settings for children and their families. Historically, New Zealand services for infants and toddlers have been under-funded and under-resourced, and often staffed by the least qualified of the early childhood workforce. Despite a curriculum, Te Whāriki, that identifies infants and toddlers as having distinctive and specific characteristics, until recently there has been little attention, in policy, research or teacher education, to resourcing the specialised nature of infant and toddler services. The recent publication of three reports highlighting the importance of the first two years of life (Angus & Carroll-Lind, 2011; Dalli et al., 2011; and Gluckman, 2011) together with the establishment, in February 2012, of a ministerial advisory group on Improving Quality of Early Childhood Education Services for Children aged Less than Two Years, have created a new opportunity to ‘get it right’ for infants and toddlers in this country.

In this article, we summarise our view that research is clear about what constitutes quality ECEC for under-twos and their families, as well as how quality may be achieved.

What constitutes quality ECEC for children under-two and their families?

The latest OECD (2012) report on early childhood education and care (ECEC) has reiterated the benefits of ECEC but also warned that these benefits are contingent on “quality”. In other words, lack of quality is not neutral in its outcomes; rather, it results in long-lasting negative effects.
about working with under-2 year olds, the study identified three key messages:

1. Early childhood settings for under-two year olds should be places where children experience sensitive responsive caregiving.
2. Early childhood settings for under-two year olds should be low-stress environments that actively avoid ‘toxic stress’ or are able to buffer children against toxic stress.
3. Quality early childhood settings for under-2s should be places where environmental conditions and teacher action interact within a broader supportive policy infrastructure.

We use these messages to structure the rest of this paper.

**Key message 1**

*Early childhood settings for under-two year olds should be places where children experience sensitive responsive caregiving* that is attuned to their subtle cues, including temperamental responses and age characteristics.

This message derives largely from child development research which has traditionally provided much of the knowledge base for early childhood practice. Continuing this tradition, current research increasingly illustrates infants’ competencies such as the complex meanings that under-1 year olds convey through the use of gestures (Crais et al., 2009; Matthews, Behne, Lieven & Tomasello, in press); the way that babies learn dynamic new faces faster than static images (Otsuka et al, 2009) thus paralleling the following of gaze for attentional orientation; and the complexities involved in toddlers’ prosocial behaviours such as helping, sharing and repairing social and emotional connections (Newton, Goodman & Thompson, 2012).

Child development research also shows that by the age of 5 months infants have learnt to use vocalisations for social purposes (Goldstein et al., 2009); that adults’ sensitive engagement with infants and toddlers is not only associated with secure attachment relationships (Gevers Deynoot-Schaub & Riksen-Walraven, 2008) but also has crucial significance for their cognitive and social learning, including early language development (e.g., Tomasello, Carpenter, & Liszkowski, 2007); and that infant temperament can mediate outcomes for children (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2005). In research on the effects of early childhood education and care, the well-known American longitudinal study sponsored by the NICHD (National Institute for Child Health and Development) has shown that for infants with a difficult temperament, quality of ECEC mattered more than for others: low quality of ECEC correlated with negative social functioning at age 15 years (Vandell et al., 2010).

Alongside these findings, neuroscientific understandings increasingly are providing a base on which to overlay pre-existing child development knowledge. In particular, neurobiological and translational research has clarified that cognition and emotion are interrelated, and share neural mechanisms (Bell & Wolfe, 2004). In other words, it is now accepted that early experiences of a social and emotional kind act to shape the “architecture of the brain”. They create mental models that act as filters for the way the infant perceives the world and responds to it. In Shonkoff’s words: “The brain and the social work together” (2004, p.2).

Clearly, these selected findings have implications for what quality practice in settings for under-two year olds should look like. They give a flavour of the expanding knowledge base about the nature of children’s learning and suggest that, contrary to existing stereotypes about babies needing only “someone to look after them”, babies need knowledgeable adults who are able to interpret their competencies in ways that can enhance them. In particular, the evidence points to the importance of sensitive and responsive caregiving, or caregiving that is characterised by “serve-and-return” interactions in which infants’ contributions are central to the adults’ response and intervention. Sensitive responsiveness signals to a child that they are understood and that their interests are taken into account in a consistent manner. External stability of this kind by responsive adults promotes predictability, which in turn promotes feelings of trust and security in the child. Internal regulation develops from sensitive external regulation and wires up the brain for learning (Campos, Frankel & Camras, 2004; Gloeckler, 2006). By contrast, lack of attuned responsive caregiving constrains the developing brain creating “black holes” (Turp, 2006, p. 306) in the architecture of the brain that can persist throughout a lifetime.
Key message 2

*Early childhood settings for under-two year olds should be low-stress environments that actively avoid ‘toxic stress’ or are able to buffer children against toxic stress “through supportive relationships that facilitate adaptive coping” (Shonkoff, 2010, p.359).*

This second message builds on the first. Research has shown clear links between children’s stress levels and the quality of their childcare setting (Gunnar & Cheatham, 2003; Sims et al., 2005), whether this be the home or an out-of-home setting. Stress can have a number of causes and is often assessed through saliva swabs that provide a measure of cortisol secretions, a hormone that helps the body to manage stress. Occasional surges of cortisol throughout the day are known to be beneficial and are associated with exciting events, including displays of affection. However, continuously elevated stress hormone levels in infancy become “toxic” and are associated with permanent “negative” brain changes that lead to elevated responses to stress throughout life, such as higher blood pressure and heart rate (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005). This response begins in the first months of life so that infants who are regularly exposed to stress will demonstrate higher, and more sustained, levels of cortisol secretions in response to stressful situations.

As we recognise the new “shared care” context of early childhood for increasing numbers of under-two year olds, these findings indicate the importance that children experience calm, quiet environments that avoid toxic stress, and in which it is possible for adult caregivers to provide attuned care. Attuned care buffers children against the damaging effects of environmental stress. This is especially the case for children living in multiple risk contexts such as poverty, father absence, large household size, low maternal education, high maternal depression, and high life stress generally. Research is clear that high quality early childhood environments act as a buffer against the damaging effects of adverse life conditions (Burchinal et al., 2006; Dearing et al., 2009; McCartney et al., 2007).

Key message 3

*Quality early childhood settings for under-2s should be places where environmental conditions and teacher action interact within a broader supportive policy infrastructure.*

Studies carried out in different contexts with different regulatory environments for early childhood services, ranges of childcare quality and a diversity of families have shown that contextual factors make a big difference to the quality of children’s and families’ experiences. For example, in a study that brought together research data collected in Sydney (Australia), Haifa (Israel), the NICHD longitudinal study, and in the evaluation of Early Head Start in the USA, Love et al. (2003) concluded that ECEC quality moderated the effects of quantity of care. Measures of quality included adult:child ratios (which varied between an average of 1:4 in the NICHD study to 1:8 in the Haifa study) and caregiver sensitivity.

Reporting recently on the Haifa study, Sagi-Schwartz (2012) commented that when quality standards are not regulated, or not met, relationships suffer. In other words, he argued that although there is generally a sense of calm. Offered regularly, it enables a child to look forward to the end of distress and to know that help is coming. By contrast, when stress persists – such as in environments that are consistently too noisy or overstimulating, or physically risky, and where adults are too busy to attend to individual cues that infants need soothing or protecting – children do not develop a history of responsive attuned care, leading them to remain on the alert to protect themselves (Tremblay, 2004).
relationship between high sensitivity of the mother and security of attachment, there are ecological constraints on the development of attachment relationships. In the case of the Haifa study, where the overall quality of the childcare centres was very low (including adult:child ratios as high as 1:20) this meant that for 46 percent of the children it did not matter how sensitive the mother was, as the conditions of the centres over-rode the sensitivity of the mother resulting in insecure mother-child attachment. Put differently, the intensity of the bad experience at the centre overwhelmed the effect of the sensitivity of the mother producing a much higher percentage of insecurely attached children than the 33 percent reported in the American NICHD study. The American figure of 33 percent insecurely attached children was considered to reflect the regular figure in the general American population, and thus did not cause undue concern.

Achieving good outcomes: Key messages for policy and practice

If we are serious about getting it right for under-two year olds and their families, what do these key messages mean for policy and practice?

Shonkoff (2010, p. 362) has stated that the path to quality ECS for children is “well marked – enhanced staff development, increased quality improvement, appropriate measures of accountability, and expanded funding to serve more children and families”. To this he added an injunction for further experimentation, innovation and research so that current best practices are seen “as a promising starting point, not a final destination” (p.362).

We could not agree more.

In the spirit of offering a “promising starting point” rather than “a final destination”, in this section we collate a selection of evidence-based pointers, based on the three key messages in this paper, about how quality in EC settings can be enhanced to achieve good outcomes for under-twos and their families.

Firstly, research provides clear guidance on structural elements of early childhood settings that can be enhanced through policy intervention. For example, regulations can set standards for adult:child ratios, group sizes and staff qualifications, three elements that are often referred to as the “iron triangle” of quality.

Secondly, specific guidance from research includes that adult:child ratios of 1:3 are ideal to enable the sensitive responsive style of caregiving needed for optimal outcomes for children (Expert Advisory Panel on Quality ECE and Child Care, 2009; Muenchow & Marsland, 2007; Munton et al., 2002). But ratios are only pre-conditions for positive interactions; group size and teacher knowledge or qualifications also impact the nature of the child-teacher interactions. Ratios also interact with higher levels of staff satisfaction, which interact with other factors like appropriate levels of remuneration (Goelman, et al., 2006; Milgrom & Mietz, 2004). Together, these factors help define the possibilities and limitations of experiences for children, staff and parents, including possibilities for stress reduction.
Thirdly, the ideal group size for under-twos settings is no more than 6 – 8 (Frank, Stolarski & Scher, 2006; Girolametto, Weitzman, van Lieshaut & Duff, 2000; Lee, 2006; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). Group size can be determined in a variety of ways, due to physical environments, children’s experiences and organisational priorities.

Fourthly, qualified staff should also have up-to-date professional knowledge that reflects what is known about infant learning and development (Elfer & Dearnley, 2007; Hallam, Buell & Ridgley, 2003; Macfarlane, Noble & Cartmel, 2004). Teachers with higher level qualifications have a more positive attitude towards infants and toddlers and their learning (Arnett, 1989; Kowalski et al., 2005) and use more inclusive practices (Hestenes et al., 2007).

Finally, other guidance on good practice comes from pedagogical research. For example, particular teaching practices have been identified as more effective than others to ensure that children have consistent access to responsive adults. This includes the use of some form of “primary caregiver /key worker” system that is understood and supported by all staff in a centre, including management. (Dalli & Kibble, 2010; Rockel, 2003; Shearsby & Thawley, 2002; Theilheimer, 2006). Ensuring continuity of familiar adults also assists parents in developing trusting relationships with the important adults in their child’s life.

Ongoing stable staff-child relationships, and knowledgeable sensitive responsive teachers can also be supportive for parents themselves, serving to share the burden of responsibility for a child’s care and making real the adage that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. Parenting remains extremely challenging in the 21st century, and often appears to be an isolated endeavour apart from the rest of society. To share the onus of this responsibility can be of enormous assistance to families creating what Hrdy (2001; 2009) has called allo-parenting – the idea of group care where the involvement of others becomes a protective factor that buffers infants against risk in their environments. Studies of early intervention programmes with at-risk populations have also found that the parents of children in the programmes benefit directly and indirectly from the support received by their child (Campbell et al., 2008; McCartney et al., 2007).

In concluding, we note Shonkoff’s (2010) injunction for continuing innovation and research. There are benefits and risks in increasing participation, along with the need for an expanding base of knowledgeable adults. There is much more yet to be discovered that will impact on policy and resourcing the specialised nature of infant-toddler services – but no time to waste in the life of an infant.

Artwork by McCartney family

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Artwork by McCartney family


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Rights of children to quality care

By Maria Herczog Ph.D.  Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

“Early childhood provides an unparalled window of opportunity to make a lasting difference – and we must seize it”
Antony Lake

There are different approaches to early childhood services. The most frequently heard argument is that, for sustainable and inclusive growth of the economy and society, the quality of education including early childhood education and care (ECEC) is essential. Lifelong learning, social integration, personal development, well-being, employability and participation and active citizenship are fundamental elements of its success and ECEC can contribute to the success of these. While the most often described rationale is the economic component of ECEC, there are several equally if not more important reasons for providing universal, free, high quality early childhood education and care for all. The social, cultural, political and environmental aspects can easily be explained but the basic, often undervalued, emphasis should be on the rights-based approach.

“The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) reaffirms that the Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects a holistic perspective on early childhood development based on the principles of indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights.”

A rights-based approach to early childhood recognises the special needs of young children. Their rights to their survival and development cannot be separated from the environments in which they spend time. In 2005, the UN CRC adopted a General Comment on implementing child rights in early childhood, including its consideration of rights for all children from birth, throughout infancy up to the transition to school, meaning that early childhood lasts until the age of 8 years:

“The Committee encourages State parties to construct a positive agenda for rights in early childhood. A shift away from traditional beliefs that regard early childhood mainly as a period for the socialisation of the immature human being towards mature adult status is required.”

“Young children experience the most rapid period of growth and change during the human lifespan, in terms of their maturing bodies and nervous systems, increasing mobility, communication skills and intellectual capacities, most rapid shifts in their interests and abilities. Young children form strong emotional attachments to their parents or other caregivers, from whom they seek and require nurturance, care, guidance and protection, in ways that are respectful of their individuality and growing capacities … Young children’s earliest years are the foundation for their physical and mental health, emotional security, cultural and personal identity, and developing competences. Young children’s experiences of growth and development vary according to their individual nature, as well as their gender, living conditions, family organisation, care arrangements and education system.”

The child-rights based approach focuses on the well-being of children and not only on well-becoming, therefore it aims at securing a joyful childhood, with special attention paid to the here and now. This includes provision rights, or rights to state supported services such as health, education and social security; protection rights i.e., the right to be safe from harm, abuse and exploitation and of course, children’s participation rights. Participation rights entitle children to be heard and to have their views taken into consideration in all matters concerning them. The benefits of such rights means that parents and caregivers can learn more about the needs of children from their perspectives as well as receiving feedback from them. Learning that their views have a place also contributes to active partnerships during their childhood and, later, as adults.

However, there are concerns regarding a possible conflict of interest between parents, caregivers and educators, if children are considered also as right holders. This requires that we seek partnership instead of the traditional hierarchical relationship between children and adults. There would be need for...
a lot of clarification and discussion to convince hesitant adults that child rights do not jeopardise adult’s rights. On the contrary, a rights-based approach helps children to express their views, and at the same time, learning not only about their own rights but understanding and respecting the rights of others. Acknowledging children have rights also helps grown-ups to defend their opinion, thinking over the rationale of their requests underpinned by a respect for children’s dignity and independence. Children-as-rights-holders only threaten those who are afraid of an open society and who do not see children as well-informed, active citizens who are capable of making good choices and decisions.

Research evidence shows the positive and life-long impact of early childhood interventions of good quality. Increasingly, this evidence suggests that integrated, holistic and universally provided high quality services result in a more equitable world. “The positive relationships between ECEC quality and virtually every facet of children’s development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science” 5 The reverse is also true: – if the provision requirements of ECEC services are of low quality, the impact is longlasting.

The list of positive effects of high quality ECEC, especially those targeted at vulnerable groups of children includes evidence of

→ A more joyful life
→ Increased well-being during the early years
→ Early detection of learning difficulties and disabilities
→ Early intervention to support children with learning difficulties and disabilities
→ Improved school readiness
→ Increased motivation and creativity
→ Improved achievement at school overall (including better grade retention over time and fewer drop outs)
→ Higher employment rates
→ Increased earnings
→ Better health
→ Less teen pregnancy and early marriage and
→ Less crime.

According to the research high quality ECEC enhances children’s resilience so that even low quality schools cannot weaken children’s motivation and openness to learning and, consequently, achieving success: “Like it or not, the most important mental and behavioural patterns, once established, are difficult to change once children enter school” 6 University of London. There are a number of indicators showing that high quality ECEC, with its focus on well-being and success, contributes to the well-being of families, communities and society. For example, ECEC supports increased participation of women in the labour market, which in turn potentially empowers women and their wages and salaries generate a higher income for families, thus decreasing risk of poverty. ECEC services helps reconcile family-life with working life, providing opportunities for a more equal and shared responsibility between parents in the division of labour at home and child rearing as well as confronting demographic issues, like the low birth rate and proportion of ageing population and tensions in the pension system.

Quality ECEC contributes to better parenting skills and strengthens family life. Family life has undergone major changes during the 20th century: gender equality means, among other things, more women are now
in work outside the home. Birth rates have declined internationally, and within families, the nuclear family structure which was originally based on the stay-at-home mother, have altered with fathers assuming more responsibilities for parenting. Increasingly, parents are experiencing increased demands as expectations have risen. Furthermore, the population is more transient and there is huge media pressure influencing people about parenting, what children need, what works and what doesn’t.

The changes generated by these factors mean that parents also need more information, skills and without “professionalising” them: according to UNCRC, they should be provided with support in their role as parents. Quality ECEC programs include active partnership and support for parents, guaranteeing on-going cooperation between families, ECEC services and other stakeholders working together for the well-being of children.

Quality ECEC services not only provide a safe place for children while their parents work, they also, in close cooperation with parents, share the responsibility for developing the evolving capacities of children.

During the last decades, the assumptions of care have changed dramatically both in the family and in ECEC services. Alongside the physical care needs of young children, their emotional, cognitive stimulation has become equally important. This has led to a need for more professionalism than traditional care work. High quality care provided by well-trained staff in ECEC requires qualifications and regular vocational in-service training opportunities, as well as supervision.

In a traditionally ‘women only’ profession there is a need for more men for several reasons. Considering the growing number of lone parent families where mostly mothers are the heads of the family, a father figure, male role model is essential for children. Changing roles in the family, community, and gender equality requires that more men are involved in early childhood education and care as well. Historically the value of services to young children has been very low and the level of prestige and payment for educators changes according to the level of education: for example, pay and conditions are comparatively low in primary education, higher in secondary and the highest at tertiary institutions. Recent outcomes of brain development research demonstrates clearly that most investments should be made in the early years and this could be achieved by providing, among other things, the best quality training, pay and conditions for those working with young children as well, and supporting parents to develop their own parenting skills.

“Rights from start” is the title of the report recently published by the Global Campaign for Education which argues for full recognition of the rights of all children to early childhood education and care. They quote the Jomtien Declaration affirming that “learning begins at birth” and every person, regardless of age, is entitled to care and education. In this context early childhood education and care is considered as a “right to education” and governments should ensure comprehensive and integrated services for young children – including care, health and education – that are regularly monitored to ensure high quality. It would be logical to acknowledge early childhood education and care as part of the education system and implement the same entitlements as for the primary and (in most countries) secondary sectors to universally provide free ECEC of high quality.

Looking back at the history of compulsory, free education we can see how, since the introduction of rights to education for all, the number of years of compulsory schooling has been extended. This is a welcome move. If we agree that more time spent at school guarantees the knowledge base and skills for children and contributes to their socialisation, why wouldn’t we agree to extending access to ECEC the same way? There are many debates about whether it is appropriate to provide free services for those who can afford to pay, and that this can limit access to quality ECEC services for those who cannot. The main consideration here is the danger of segregation and a two-tier system, one for the well off and another one for those who cannot pay. Limited access to ECEC for those children who would benefit the most needs to be addressed, particularly if mothers are not working. The most vulnerable groups of children – ethnic minorities, disabled, immigrant, refugee, children with other kinds of special needs, tend to find it most difficult to access high quality ECEC services. The most important argument in this respect is that no amount of early intervention can supplement the importance of quality ECEC for children in the early years. Children who are at risk for different reasons must have access to the best services possible,
free and at the time they are needed. This is also true when it comes to out-of-school-hours care and after school activities, which are often overlooked despite of their importance and relevance.

Targeted services are problematic as they can lead to stigmatisation. They are less effective and less well integrated when compared with universal services – an important point because they threaten social cohesion and equitable, socially just outcomes from the start.

While in most countries compulsory pre-school years have been introduced to prepare children for school, and help those who need to catch up, the optimum age to start ECEC has been widely debated. Many countries have none, or limited paid parental leave. If there are such provisions, children must be placed into some form of ECEC service, or one parent, usually the mother, must stay at home. Parental leave is offered primarily for mothers to recover from birth and does not take into consideration the developmental needs of newborns. Often the ECEC services do not serve the best interests of the child, are informal, family-based care or low quality nurseries and day care facilities which do not meeting the minimum standards considered integral to high quality ECEC. There is no agreement on the optimum length of time for mothers to stay at home with infants, although there are some indicators. For some stay-at-home parents, mostly mothers, attending an ECEC service is not a voluntary decision, as they cannot afford not to work and be ‘full time’ mothers. For some parents shared care between ECEC services offers essential support and respite from the 24/7 demands of parenting. According to the WHO recommendation⁹, infants need a minimum of six months exclusive breastfeeding. It is important that the primary caregiver, preferably the mother, is able to give her infant full attention and is available both physically and emotionally:

“At present there is little or no evidence that either family- or centre-based ECEC care is “better” for infants, but once again, we might expect that any effects of the type of care would vary depending on characteristics of the child, family, and setting … Overall, the empirical evidence reveals that enrolment in infant day care is problematic when it co-occurs with other indices of risk, including poor-quality care at home and unstable care arrangements.” ¹⁰

This means that the quality of care at home and in ECEC is critical. High quality early childhood education and care requires well-qualified, motivated and well-respected professional carers, who are aware of the developmental needs of children and who know how to provide emotional and cognitive stimulation in a safe, nurturing environment, where children can exercise their rights to development, non-discrimination and participation, taking into consideration their best interests.

Parents also need support and guidance and high quality services should partner with parents to involve them in their child’s ECEC experience and offer support if required. ECEC services need to be flexible and well integrated:

“The language used in discussing integration (and other policy changes) has socialised people to understand that care and education go together.” ¹¹ Integration also empowers parents to fulfill their primary role in their children’s life. Integration of children with special needs and different ethnic and social backgrounds is also essential. A smooth transition from early years’ services to school can ensure that children can be integrated into the school system in accordance with their developmental stage and readiness.
The CRC General Comment 7 Indicator Framework is a tool for monitoring the implementation of child rights in early childhood and can be a useful exercise to help all those interested and involved in early childhood care and education to measure the level of implementation and at the same time learn more about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its applicability in all areas of children’s lives.  

References


3. The UN CRC Committee has a function to undertake reviews of State Parties compliance with UNCROC. UN CRC Committee Day of General Discussion Recommendations (2004) http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/discussion/earlychildhood.pdf


Artwork by McCartney family
Eminent economists have argued that the public return on investment in high quality early childhood education (ECE) far exceeds the return on most projects that are currently funded as economic development, such as sports stadiums or relocating businesses (Rob Grunewald, Art Rolnick & James Heckman, cited by Calman & Tarr-Whelan, 2005, p. 15). Coming from a city that has just spent a great deal of money on building a stadium, I find it puzzling that it is so hard to persuade people that investing in children should be a high priority for public investment! Perhaps this is because the returns may take a dozen or more years to be realised, but that our election cycle comes every three years in New Zealand. Investment in early childhood education also brings greater returns than investment on later levels of education, which are much more costly (European Commission, 2011). A recent report sets out the cost-benefit evidence very clearly (Early Childhood Taskforce, 2011, p. 21), and concludes that “early childhood education represents a high-yielding social investment” (p. 28). Harvard University researchers argue that:

Inexpensive services that do not meet quality standards are a waste of money. Stated simply sound policies seek maximum value rather than minimal cost.


In this paper I will focus on the evidence that participation in high quality ECE has a long-term impact on children’s lifelong capacity for learning, forming relationships and contributing to society, and that it can equalize chances for children from different social and economic circumstances.

What is quality Early Childhood Education?

We are fortunate in New Zealand to have a proud history in ECE, since a systematic body of research has ‘directly influenced government policies towards increasing the status, recognition and funding for early childhood services” (Smith & May, 2006, p. 110). We were the first country in the world to integrate all ECE and care services in 1986, reflecting our understanding that care and education for young children are inseparable, and that quality services must incorporate both. Our early childhood sector is very diverse, including kindergartens, playcentres, education and care centres, kohanga reo, pasifika language nests and many others. But our curriculum, Te Whāriki, reflects a holistic, bicultural vision for children and provides a unifying philosophy for the sector.

Although the concept of quality has been much contested, and there is a large literature on this debate, I will define it here as “the essential components of early childhood environments that are valued in our society, and which support the well-being, development and rights of children, and support effective family functioning” (Smith, Grima, Gaffney & Powell, 2000, p. 44). While much of the child development literature is focused on assessing the effect of quality on measurable cognitive and social outcomes, it is important to note that quality is also culturally specific and its meaning varies according to different stakeholders.

We have to ask the question of what we want for our children in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Our New Zealand vision of quality is not identical to that of other Western countries. For example cultural values and languages are an essential aspect of quality for us (Ministry of Education, 1996). Our early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, emphasises the role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships with people, places and things. The essence of quality lies in the nature of the interactions between children and adults. This is known as ‘process quality’ and it includes:-

→ Reciprocal, responsive and warm relationships
→ Adults who listen to and engage with children
→ Adults who engage with children in shared thinking
→ Adults who support children’s learning and encourage exploration
→ Adults who affirm children’s culture, language and identity, and engage with their families. (Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008)

‘Structural quality’ is necessary in order to achieve ‘process quality’. Structural quality includes adult/child ratio, group size, teacher qualifications, staff turnover,
staff wages, and curriculum. It makes sense that it is not possible to provide responsive and reciprocal relationships when the group size is too large, when there are not enough adults per child, and when the adults are not trained to work with children. If there is a constantly changing staff (common where wages and working conditions are poor), then it is impossible for children to form strong secure relationships with them.

The reason that we must consider quality, when we consider the effect of ECE, is that its effects depend on quality. Educational policies sometimes concentrate on increasing the number of children attending early childhood centres (participation), without considering quality. Indeed there is evidence that participation in low quality ECE is harmful for children, and that the risks of harm from low quality are greater for children who are exposed to other risks (such as poverty) (Hausfather, Toharia, La Roche & Engelsmann, 1997; NICHD, 2000, 2003). The benefits of quality have, however, also been shown to be greater for children from low-income families (European Commission, 2011; Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008). The Strategic Plan for ECE (Ministry of Education, 2002) aimed to increase participation and also to improve quality, so our ECE system has greatly benefitted from these policies. Between 2004 and 2009, not only did rates of participation increase, but the number of ECE staff with qualifications greatly increased, there was better access to and provision of professional development and educational innovations, and improved understanding and implementation of Te Whāriki (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Mara, Cubey & Whitford, 2011).

Why does quality ECE make a difference?

It is indisputable that early experiences have a major impact on development. The quality of the experiences that young children have during the early childhood years (from birth to five) are of crucial importance. During these early years children are amazingly receptive to the benefits of positive learning opportunities, but at the same time vulnerable to stress and lack of positive learning opportunities. Children’s experiences in their family/whānau setting are, of course, the primary influence on their future development, but ECE can make a difference for children. Children’s participation in high quality ECE has a direct effect on their learning, strengthening their sense of belonging and well-being, their ability to communicate with adults and peers, their curiosity and exploration, and their persistence with solving tricky problems. ECE can also help children indirectly through the support that services can give families for their important parenting role. ECE centres can relieve parents of some of the stress of continual child care, model effective adult-child interactions and rich learning environments, and enable parents to be part of the workforce so that they can provide financially for their children. Since parental income is a major determinant of child development outcomes, increasing it is desirable for children, though not at the expense of quality family time (Esping-Anderson, 2008). There is some evidence, however, that parents whose children attend early childhood centres compensate for the time away from them by increasing the intensity of their interactions with children while together (NICHD, 2005).

During infancy babies show a predilection for social interaction, and form attachments to caregivers who are responsive and sensitive. Attachments have lasting implications for children’s lifetime social and cognitive development. While primary attachments are usually with family/whānau, attachments also form with substitute caregivers, such as early childhood staff. These early relationships have an important influence on the brain, as the circuits involved in social interaction are tightly linked to circuits that integrate other important functions, like creating meaning, moderating emotion, organizing memory and regulating body states (Siegel, 1999). Social experiences and sharing of attention between adult and child, in engaging activities within close relationships, are a strong catalyst for learning (Dalli, White, Rockel & Duhn, 2011).

Young children, whether at home or in ECE, suffer when they experience prolonged exposure to stressful situations...
that they cannot control (‘toxic stress’), and when they
do not have adequate support and comfort from an
adult. Such toxic stress is harmful to brain development,
seemingly as a result of persistently high levels of cortisol
on the brain. Hence abusive or neglectful care, especially
during infancy, have lasting implications and risk of
negative outcomes (Meade, 2002; Dalli et al, 2011).

There is no room here for a detailed coverage of research
on early brain development, but there is now very strong
evidence that optimal brain development is connected
to sensitive and responsive caregiving and that lack of
attuned caregiving creates persistent ‘black holes’ in
the architecture of the brain (Campos et al, 2004, cited
by Dalli et al, 2011, p.60). The research on early brain
development is one of the reasons that there is so much
concern for under two year-olds in ECE, since they are so
vulnerable to negative experiences (Carroll-Lind & Angus,
2011). During the first two years, however, children
are also highly receptive to positive experiences both
with family caregivers, and from ECE staff. It is possible
therefore that children in high risk home environments,
to benefit considerably from experience in high quality
ECE environments. Nevertheless there are strong
arguments for ensuring that parental leave policies
enable parents to spend the first year at home caring for
their babies.

What is the evidence for long-term outcomes of ECE?

In this brief paper I can only briefly summarise the
extensive research literature on the outcomes of ECE,
but these have been covered in depth in recent reports
(Dalli et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2008; Carroll-Lind &
Angus, 2011). In a review of research commissioned by
the Ministry of Education, Mitchell et al. (2011, p.2) found
“consistent evidence from a large body of international
and New Zealand” research that participation in ECE
was associated with positive cognitive outcomes
including gains in mathematics, literacy, school
achievement and intelligence. The strongest effects
came from participation in good quality ECE combined
with parenting support, but significant though weaker
effects were associated with everyday ECE experiences.
Some studies have showed positive impacts from ECE
experience on task orientation, assertive social skills,
frustration tolerance and social adjustment to school.

There are many studies showing that positive outcomes
from participation in ECE are not just short-term.
For example the New Zealand Competent Children,
Competent Learners has followed children after
their participation in a range of ordinary Wellington
preschools, from the age of five to 20 years. The study
showed that high quality ECE was associated with better
reading and literacy achievement at age 14 years, and
these effects were independent of parental education
or income (Wylie, Hodge, Ferral & Thompson, 2006). In
a US study based in Chicago, low-income children who
had participated in community based, high quality public
preschool programmes (Child-Parent Centres) between
the ages of 3 and 5, achieved significantly higher test
scores in reading and mathematics, and lower grade
retention and special education placement at 13 years of
age, than a comparison group (Reynolds & Temple, 1998).
A recently published follow-up study of the participants
at the age of 26, demonstrated a remarkable 18 percent
return on investment for the initial cost of the preschool
programme (Reynolds, Temple, White et al., 2011).
University of London.
aggression, antisocial and worried behaviour, associated with a very early start and long hours in low quality ECE. Generally, however, there are positive social and emotional outcomes for children participating in high quality ECE (Mitchell, et al., 2008). Policies that reflect the urgency of ensuring that children (especially under-twos) do not experience mediocre or poor care have been recommended by several reports recently (Carroll-Lind & Angus, 2011; Early Childhood Taskforce, 2011).

Universal or Targeted Services?

As mentioned earlier the positive impact of participation in ECE is greater for children from low income families, but there are robust arguments in favour of universal rather than targeted services.

There is clear evidence that universal access to quality ECEC is more beneficial than interventions targeted exclusively at vulnerable groups. Targeting ECEC poses problems because it is difficult in practice to identify the target group reliably, it tends to stigmatisate its beneficiaries and can even lead to segregation at later stages of education. Targeted services are also at more risk of cancellation than universal ones. (European Commission, 2011, p.5)

US researcher, Steve Barnett (cited by Calman & Tarr-Whelan, 2005, p.19), reported larger economic gains and greater cost effectiveness when all socioeconomic groups participated in quality preschool. Swedish sociologist and economist Gosta Esping-Anderson (2008), found evidence that provision of universal quality early childhood education has greatly diminished the gap in income and educational achievement between high and low socioeconomic status children in some European countries, such as Sweden and Denmark. He shows that investment in universal high quality ECE can eliminate the inheritance of poverty and low achievement from one generation to the next. He opposes targeting, because of “the high transaction costs and difficulty of identifying need”, recommending instead universal levels of coverage with graduated subsidies, consistent with New Zealand’s Twenty Hours policy and Work and Income subsidies (Esping-Anderson, 2008, p.41).

Conclusion

There is incontrovertible evidence, widely accepted amongst social scientists, that experiences during the early years of life have a profound effect on life-long learning. Family/whānau environments have the most powerful effect, but research shows that ECE experience can also contribute to either a strong or fragile foundation for later learning. It can also reduce inequalities resulting from children’s different family backgrounds. Strong foundations are laid when ECE is of high quality, while weak or fragile foundations are laid when children are exposed to mediocre and unresponsive ECE. Participating in high quality ECE is of benefit to all children, so it is important to retain policies that allow universal access to these services. We have high rates of participation in ECE in New Zealand. The challenge is to maintain and improve quality, and to ensure that those children who cannot now access these services, gain access. It is worth investing time, effort and money into accessible high quality ECE, as this will help build a prosperous sustainable democracy.

References


1. I draw on several recent New Zealand reports on ECE, in this paper. They are referenced at the end of the paper and include reports led by Professor Carmen Dalli, Associate Professor Linda Mitchell, Dr Janis Carroll-Lind, as well as the 2011 ECE Taskforce Report. For further details readers should access these reports.
A substantial body of research evidence shows the very significant benefits for children of participating in high quality early childhood education (ECE), not only at the time that they attend, but later through schooling and into adulthood. Together with Margaret Carr from the University of Waikato and Cathy Wylie from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, I wrote a review of international and New Zealand literature of outcomes of ECE (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008). We found that high quality ECE experiences were associated with positive gains for children in mathematics, reading, and general cognitive or school performance. Notably, these quality ECE experiences were also associated with positive outcomes for learning dispositions (called ‘key competencies’ in the school curriculum) which refer to the competencies and skills that enable children to keep learning. The idea of learning dispositions and key competencies is about identities that are positive about learning, and therefore able to support further learning, such as children developing a ‘mastery orientation’. Iram Siraj-Blatchford, one of the project directors of the UK longitudinal study of the Effective Provision of Preschool Education, describes ‘mastery orientation’ as children tending, after a setback to ‘focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent’ (Siraj-Blatchford, 2004, p. 11).

Learning in the early years is vitally important because as Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, and Masterov (2005) point out, skills that develop in the early years, both cognitive and non-cognitive, are self-reinforcing into the future – ‘skills beget skills’ – especially when followed up by facilitating environments in school and home. The outcomes occur for all children across all socioeconomic groups. But children from low income groups and children for whom English is an additional language may make greater progress and extra gains from attending high quality ECE. Evidence shows 2 or 3 years ECE participation before school is especially valuable. So what does high quality ECE look like? Our literature review emphasised that positive outcomes for children and families participating in ECE depended on the following features: the quality of staff-child interactions, the learning resources available, programmes that engage children, and a supportive environment for children to work together. New knowledge about brain development points to the significant role of sensitive, responsive and stable caregiving for the developmental process, particularly in the earliest years – what the National Council on the Developing Child (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007) terms ‘serve and return’ interactions between children and significant adults in their lives. ECE services that contribute to positive child outcomes provide opportunities for ‘sustained shared thinking’, rich teacher-child interactions, peers learning together, and assessments with valued outcomes in mind (Mitchell et al., 2008, p. 7). Children need to make sense of social networks at home and ECE, and working together teachers and families can reinforce and support each other. High quality ECE settings engage families in the education programme, building on social/cultural capital and interests from home so there are connections between the home and ECE settings. The curriculum is complex and children are active in their own learning and the learning of others.

In a recent policy evaluation published by the Ministry of Education, attributes of a “very good” quality kindergarten where children were active in their learning were highlighted:

Programmes were tailored to the interests and needs of the children in each kindergarten. Teachers were responsive to children and extended their learning and this was evident in the children’s high levels of persistence and engagement in their play, with high levels of co-construction apparent. For example, in one kindergarten a group of children had taken the initiative to make their own pizzas. A teacher was making suggestions but not doing the work for these children. Another child was designing her own costume to sew on the kindergarten sewing machine. Children cooperated in many ways, invited children into their play and led Māori waiata with confidence (Mitchell, Meagher Lundberg, Mara, Cubey, & Whitford, 2011, p. 24).
Not all children in New Zealand are accessing ECE and not all ECE is very high quality. Ministry of Education statistics on prior ECE participation of children starting school shows much lower participation rates for Māori (90.3 percent) and Pasifika children (86.2 percent) than children who are Pākehā/European (97.9 percent). The Ministry data shows that children are over-represented in the most deprived localities in New Zealand, and children from these localities have lower rates of ECE participation. This situation is inequitable. Also inequitable is the fact that some ECE services are low quality, and children attending these are unlikely to gain the benefits that quality brings (Mitchell et al., 2011). University of London.

So should ECE services be universally funded or should funding be targeted to children who are missing out? From a human rights perspective, it is a widely supported principle that all children should be entitled to high quality early childhood education, no matter their circumstances. Arguments for early childhood education to be accessible to all children and universally available are based on research evidence on the benefits of early childhood education and that the fundamental human rights expressed in key international instruments, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, provide a justification for taking a rights-based approach. And to ensure access for all children does require a universal approach or children who miss out are discriminated against.

A targeted approach to funding would not serve the best interests of ‘priority’ children, and does not address the needs of children who are not deemed to be ‘priority’. In setting criteria for ‘priority’ and assessing these, children outside the designated groups or at the margins who do not meet criteria miss out on eligibility and access but nevertheless have a right to access ECE. Targeting can be stigmatizing. Nevertheless, within a universally funded system, some services will require extra resources and support as is offered through the current Equity Funding system which recognises additional costs of service provision in low income and isolated communities, in services that have a high number of children with English as an additional language and children with special needs, and in services offering education in a language other than English.

So what needs to happen to change the discrepancies in ECE participation rates so that all preschool children can access ECE? A main requirement is for ECE services to be locally available and planned to suit the aspirations and needs of communities – in their enrolment policies, their hours of operating, and in their responsiveness to community language and cultural aspirations. Many ECE services traditionally have been rigid in their enrolment policies – children are expected to attend for sessions that are prescribed in their hours or for a whole day even if the family wants something a little more flexible. NZCER’s 2007 national survey (Mitchell & Hodgen, 2008b) found 31 percent of families stated that they used more than one ECE service because the times or days of one or the other service were not suitable, suggesting ECE services were not suited to the context of family lives. Since then, some kindergartens have started to adapt their operation to be more responsive, partly because they were enabled to do this by improved funding (Davison, 2012), but the issue of inflexible enrolment policies for the whole sector remains. In some communities, especially rural communities, there is little choice of provision. High waiting lists is another barrier, preventing children from attending when their parents want them to.

Cost is a significant barrier to participation in ECE. The evaluation of Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki found that the 20 hours ECE policy aimed at making ECE for 3 and 4 year-olds free or almost free was the catalyst that prompted some families to participate in ECE. But some corporate private providers have increased their fees outside the 20 hours and insist that families enrol in the extra hours (Mitchell, et al., 2011). In this way the policy intention is being subverted and the 20 hours ECE policy does not reduce costs for parents.

These are the key reasons why it is in the best interests of the child to move away from a market approach to planned provision of quality ECE services that are
responsive to the context of family lives. 20 hours ECE needs to be extended, so that ECE as a child’s right is not dependent on the capacity of parents to pay. The intentions to provide free or almost free ECE need to be protected by closing loopholes that enable providers to charge high fees outside these hours. And quality needs to be upheld by ensuring features that we know to be crucial are regulated – that qualified teachers, who are professionally supported and well remunerated are employed to staff teacher-led services.

In 2008, a group of national organisations with an interest in community-based early childhood provision met together to appraise the impact of policy and make recommendations on how to strengthen community-based provision. One recommendation was to establish policy for nationally planned provision so that community-based services are strengthened and accessible. The group upheld the value of collaboratively planning provision at local and regional level, and argued for a staged plan leading to free ECE for all children appropriate to their families and whānau (May & Mitchell, 2009). The development of integrated ECE services as ‘hubs’ that are a meeting place for families, and connect with a range of opportunities and professional support for families and children were supported by the group. These have much that is of value in meeting the complex variety of family needs and aspirations. Some wonderful integrated approaches are happening now, such as in Taitoko Kindergarten in Levin, where a range of opportunities for parent support and development are on offer alongside a curriculum that is open to the contributions of families. Writing of Taitoko Kindergarten, Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips and Margaret Carr stated:

Locating Parent Support and Development projects – together with research that focuses on the principles of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) (relationships, empowerment, family and community and holistic development) in early childhood centres not only provides support for enabling parents and whānau to transform their lives, it also has the capacity to affect children’s learning and lifelong learning dispositions (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2009, p. 15).

Planning provision and thinking imaginatively about broad goals for children, families and community offer opportunities to develop vibrant and responsive ECE services, and a genuine sense of local commitment to the quality of ECE provision in a community.

References


Early childhood education and parental employment

**Simon Chapple**

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Dr Simon Chapple works as a Principal Advisor in the new Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. He has worked for the OECD on child well-being and family policy, and on social indicators. Simon has degrees in economics from Auckland, Cambridge and Victoria Universities. He has worked for a range of other national government agencies, including the Reserve Bank, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Labour and the Ministry of Social Development, as well as the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research.

**Introduction**

There are direct benefits from early childhood education in terms of cognitive development and behavioural outcomes for children, and further indirect benefits to children through providing support for parental work. Thus from a child well-being perspective, issues of early childhood education policy cut across several traditional policy silos. Consequently the issue is a matter of interest to policy agencies which take an interest in education, as well as the labour market and the social welfare system.

Much of the focus of policy discussions regarding early childhood education is about directly improving outcomes for children, and in particular for children from relatively disadvantaged home environments. The evidence underpinning such discussions shows that good quality early childhood education of disadvantaged children can foster improvements in cognitive, behavioural, physical health and other valued outcomes for children who attend, compared with the counter-factual of being raised in their home environment.

In turn, by improving these outcomes during early childhood, early childhood education can lead to important complementarities in improving the ability of disadvantaged children to take better advantage of currently offered universal education opportunities in compulsory schooling and thereafter into post-compulsory education (Cunha and Heckman 2010).

There is good overseas evidence, when considered within a traditional cost-benefit efficiency framework, that investment in early childhood education for disadvantaged children pays off for society as a whole. Such investments pay largely by improving long term employment and earnings prospects of the children as adults, and reducing the chances of costly anti-social behaviours, including criminal offending (Karoly 2010).

On top of the efficiency rationale, a further argument is that provision of early childhood education opportunities towards children with a relatively disadvantaged home environment can create a fairer society. Since fairness is in the eye of the beholder, direct individual value judgments are required at this point to take matters further. The issue is noted as important, but because of its subjectivity is left to readers to pursue. If one’s fairness concerns place a weight on those who are less well off, and on those who have fewer choices about their trajectories, early childhood education could be one of those few public policies which are both equity and efficiency-enhancing.
The evidence also suggests that it is essential for positive child outcomes that hours spent in out-of-home early childhood education need to be appropriate to children’s developmental needs, and these needs are age-dependent. In particular, too long hours too early during early childhood can be developmentally detrimental under some circumstance. As the child moves through early childhood, the hours which are developmentally appropriate increase.

Acknowledging this primary role of early childhood education, this article focusses on another primary role – effectively as free or subsidised childcare – which enables parents to obtain paid employment. It analyses the extent to which paid employment of parents can further promote child well-being outcomes and situations where there may be trade-offs between the pro-employment role of early childhood education and the pro-child well-being role.

**Early childhood education and the labour market**

The impact of provision of free or subsidised early childhood education on labour supply of couples and then sole parents is considered in turn.

Childcare costs and availability for young children is often cited as a key barrier to secondary earners in couple households – typically but not universally women – returning to paid work following time out from paid work raising infants. The nature of New Zealand’s Working for Families package means that the family may lose a considerable amount of in-work benefits if the secondary earner returns to work, so a return to work may pay poorly. Hence, if this inefficiency is seen as a problem, provision of subsidised child care can be an offset, promoting secondary earner employment.

One could see the introduction of 20 hours free early childhood education for three and four year old children by the previous government, at an annual cost of about $700 million dollars, as being partly designed to achieve such an end. However, if that was one of the rationales, there is little evidence that it has made a big difference to secondary earner employment, probably because the intervention was poorly targeted and designed for the purposes of expanding paid employment of low skilled, largely female parents. Data on employment rates of women with a child in the three to four year age range shows little or no change following policy introduction compared to employment rates of a control group, women with a child up to two years of age and with a child age five or six years (data from Statistics New Zealand’s quarterly Household Labour Force Survey). If policy had been effective, one would have anticipated a rise in the relative employment rates of women with a child in the target age range. A similar result has been found for provision of universal child care in Norway, which had no labour supply effect but a significant positive effect on child development (Havnes and Mogstad 2009).

Couple families where there is a primary wage earner in a job and a secondary earner contemplating a return to the labour market are often relatively advantaged, and so too are their children. A second more disadvantaged group to consider are sole parents or parents on a welfare benefit with a young child. Such parents are frequently relatively low skilled, younger and with less labour market attachment and experience. In other words, they are more disadvantaged. Their children too are likely to be more disadvantaged and consequently likely to benefit more from high quality out-of-home learning environments. Provision of early childhood education can address the direct disadvantage of the child, as well the indirect disadvantage created by poor parental labour market outcomes.

Provision of free of subsidised child-care for sole parents who are on a benefit can help overcome moral hazard problems which arise in providing income support through the benefit system. In addition, if well designed, cheaper targeted childcare can aid in addressing some of the time constraints and lack of flexibility which are the inevitable consequence of being a sole parent and trying to juggle work and family life.

Overall, policy to provide early childhood education in order to support greater amounts of parental work needs to be carefully designed in order to focus on those parents whose supply response is the greatest.

**Complementarities between the child’s developmental needs and parental employment**

From a child’s perspective, encouraging child-age appropriate parental employment can also be beneficial, even on top of the positive effects of an environmental shift from the family to a quality centre-based learning environment.
First, there is evidence that employment may improve parents’ mental health outcomes. Better parental mental health is obviously beneficial to the child in terms of the quality of parenting which can be provided during non-work time.

Second, higher parental employment increases current family income, and may indeed be sufficiently large that poorer children’s family incomes are such that they exit child poverty. In fact, in a wide variety of countries, a parent gaining a paid job (especially full-time) is the event most likely to pull children out of poverty (Ballantyne et. al. 2004). OECD work suggests that New Zealand’s relative circumstances are particularly conducive to employment promotion, especially of sole parents, as an important part of solutions to child poverty (Adema and Whiteford 2007).

The evidence suggests that improvements in family income further contribute to better cognitive, behavioural and physical health outcomes, especially again for disadvantaged children (OECD 2009).

A very recent meta-analysis of 69 studies on the relationship between early maternal employment and child well-being (cognitive and behavioural attainment showed that there was not overall relationship. However, positive relationships were found for children of sole parents, children whose parents were on welfare and for children out of infancy, which further supports the above analysis (Lucas-Thompson et al. 2010).

Early reattachment to the labour market following child bearing, supported by appropriate child care, is important to ensure that the skills and behaviours which support successful parental employment are not lost over the child’s life course. Maintaining and enhancing these skills is positive for longer term family income and hence for the child (OECD 2007). If these behaviours and skilled are retained, the resulting longer term employment outcomes provide a positive long term role model for the child.

One way of considering early childhood education, which again focusses on complementarity, is as a two-generation policy – it is about enhancing the supply of labour and family resources now, by allowing parents to work, and enhancing them further also in the future by building strong long terms foundations for the supply of labour and family resources when the child becomes an adult.

Trade-offs between supporting parental employment and children’s needs

While there are important complementarities between parental employment and child participation in ECE which can and should be taken advantage of, there may also be potential policy trade-offs which policy makers need to face up to.

The most obvious trade-off is in terms of child age. There is broad agreement that centre-based early childhood education is not developmentally appropriate for an infant (a child under one year of age). However, from the perspective of parental employment, periods out of the labour market measured in months, not years, are sufficient for a deterioration in skills and behaviours that enable a parent to get paid work (OECD 2007). However, even when out of infancy, the evidence suggests that if hours are too long, children’s outcomes may suffer (e.g. Datta Gupta and Simonsen 2010).

Assuming a fixed funding budget to illustrate some of the further choices, suppose there was an additional $500 million available to spend on early childhood education. The parental employment-maximising structure of early childhood education will be a model where quality – in terms of supporting direct child cognitive, behavioural and health outcomes – might be sacrificed for provision of maximum total hours of child care. In addition to the quality of an average hour of child care potentially suffering for the purposes of maximising parental employment, the employment-maximising hours and time of day at which child care is provided may also be directly detrimental to child development.

However, simply because the direct effects of parental employment focussed early childhood education may be negative for the child, these are still capable of being offset by the indirect positive effects – higher family income now and into the future, for reasons already described. Thus the child’s outcomes could still come out on top after all.

While some of the important trade-offs can be clearly described, the evidence is not sufficiently rich to indicate the optimal degree of trade-off, if any, between early childhood education quality and hours provided to support parental employment.
Conclusion

Free or highly subsidised early childhood education can perform a number of important functions in directly and indirectly improving the well-being of children, in particular of disadvantaged children.

From a child well-being perspective, the indirect function that it provides in supporting early parental participation in paid employment needs explicit acknowledgment and policy consideration. This acknowledgement needs to address potential complementarities and trade-offs between promoting employment and promoting child well-being. If these two issues are considered, it enables policy makers to focus on designing policies which take advantage of all the complementarities and avoid, where possible, policies which trade-off parental employment and child well-being objectives.

At some point however, policy makers may however end up making decisions which trade-off outcomes for the parents against those of the child. Such a trade-off, if made, should be made explicit, involving as it does a strong value judgement.

References


In this article, I examine what counts as high quality and I share ideas for supporting high quality early childhood education (ECE) provision to children who currently miss out.

What counts as high quality?

Cryer (2012) says that quality in ECE is about ‘caring adults who are kind and gentle rather than restrictive and harsh and who protect children's health and safety, while providing a wealth of experiences that lead to learning through play.’ This applies equally at home and ECE.

Children need high quality care and education consistently through their first few years, no matter where they are or who is caring for them. Neither care nor learning are limited to any one setting. It makes sense then, to discuss quality both in the home and early childhood education setting, as well as looking at what happens between home and service.

A vital aspect of high quality that applies to both home and care and education settings is the quality of the young child's relationships with significant others. It is the key factor in creating a safe, happy, learning child who has good chances of becoming a successful citizen. Neuroscientists (e.g. Gluckman 2011) tell us that children's brains develop hugely in the first three years and that this development is shaped by the quality of a child’s relationships with significant others. For example, where relationships are poor, children do not learn self control and this is linked to risk taking behaviour such as suicide and accidents in the teenage years.

Children with poor quality key relationships are also likely to have behaviour problems. These not only interfere with other children’s learning and make life difficult for adults around them, they interfere with children’s ability to learn, thus handicapping them at school and in adult life (e.g. Wylie et al.).

A principles-based approach to quality allows flexibility for cultural difference. New Zealand’s early childhood education curriculum, Te Whāriki, is an example of a principles – based approach. Its four principles whakamana, kotahitanga, whānau tangata and ngā hononga can be used as indicators of quality.

In formal settings, further indicators of quality are needed for several reasons:

a) Safety. Research (Gravitas 2005) shows that children are safer in their parents’ care than in the care of others. Non-parental or whanau carers may need more incentives to develop the warm, consistent relationships young children need to thrive. Other safety issues include the suitability of the environment, the number of children and adults in the setting and the ratio of adults to children.

b) Accountability for public funds.

c) Expectations. Our early childhood education services offer both care and education, as do parents. However, parents are not held accountable for the education of their children. Early childhood educators are.

d) Self-improvement. Indicators of high quality are also needed as guidelines for self-improvement.

Organisations also have greater complexities. A failure of any aspect may lower quality. For example, ERO suggests that ‘high quality arises from the interrelationships amongst, leadership, philosophy, quality of interactions amongst staff, parents and children, professional development, environment, self review, assessment practices, and management that makes high quality’ (ERO 2010). There is also a strong emphasis on qualified teachers, with the knowledge of what children need to thrive.

New Zealand ECE has been through ten years of establishing a strong baseline for quality provision. We have regulations, a national curriculum, and mostly qualified teachers. The current challenge is to shift the focus from compliance to building quality. This will involve incentivising innovation, simplifying rules, reducing compliance costs to allow greater focus on the care and education of children, providing a guide to high quality ECE for parents as the complexity of the system means parents struggle to know what high quality looks like, and measuring outcomes so that we learn what produces high quality.

Letting In Children Who Miss Out

The Early Childhood Council, along with most early childhood education agencies, supports universal provision while also supporting targeting for those who need more support. We also recognise, however, that the current government is operating in an unstable...
financial environment. The challenge to the early childhood sector has been to find ways of cutting costs in one part of the sector in order to give more to those who need more. Australian academic, Margaret Sims, claims that providing sufficient care for every child under five in the world would only cost 5 percent of the world’s armament budget. Her point is that funding should not be taken from some young children to give to others.

So let’s look instead at some inexpensive changes that can be made to give more children an opportunity to experience high quality early childhood education:

Stop using deficiency models

The children who miss out now are known to be primarily from low socio-economic backgrounds and are often Pasifika or Māori (MoE). Implicit in the provision of social services is the idea that Maori and Pasifika families, along with other families with little money, are deficient in some way and need help to reach the levels achieved by richer people.

This approach denies cultural difference. It denies the effects of history, geography and genes on shaping the positions we occupy. And it doesn’t work. New Zealand’s government departments and social service agencies recognise this and, in theory, adopt a ‘strengths based’ approach. The practice has been slow to follow.

To escape from a deficiency approach, we need to realise that people are doing what they need to do to survive in the world. When there is little money, small things can be big disasters. A heater that stops working when there is no money to replace it is a big disaster. Poor people are less likely to have a car with a current warrant of fitness because it is expensive. If they are caught, the fines can be crippling. Then there are those with addictions, mental and physical illness, etc – no one chooses these – they are either born with them or they are survival strategies. To deal with these every person needs respect, safety, and a sense of belonging. As former Children’s Commissioner, Ian Hassall (2012) says, ‘we are social creatures and without a personal narrative in which we have a secure place we lack structure, purpose and restraint in our lives’.

Audit the regulations for blocks to participation

Early childhood education sector groups are clear that some regulations block participation. Examples are the ‘frequent absence’ rule and the ‘15 minute rule’. Where families are struggling, the children may attend erratically. These rules penalise centres for a child’s absence, making it difficult for centres to afford to have the child attend. Another example is the ECE government funding system, which is recognised as overtly complicated and which funds teachers for their contact time with young children, but does not fund for “non-contact time (planning etc), while the Regulations demand that teachers engage in such non-contact activities.

Measure outcomes

If early childhood education services monitor a child’s progress, as well as reviewing their functioning, we will be able to tell what needs to change to allow every child to experience high quality care and education.

Find out what quality looks like in different cultures

Quality is not an objective concept. It is culturally bound (Dahlberg). Te Whariki is an example of at least two cultural groups agreeing on a set of principles, as well as making space for appropriate interpretation of these principles. Most cultural groups can agree on some basic principles to guide practice.
For families and their children, 98 percent participation will mean more families feel they belong – that there is a place for them in our society. For the early childhood education sector, it means supporting diversity of provision, philosophy and cultural approaches.

References


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The Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector in New Zealand: opportunities galore?

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In June 2011, “An Agenda for Amazing Children; Final Report from the ECE Taskforce” was released. This document summarised the deliberations of the ECE Taskforce during 2010-2011 as well as a great deal of feedback received via written submissions and community visits. The Terms of Reference for this work stipulated fiscal neutrality, with a focus on how to improve the quality and ‘reach’ of the ECE in New Zealand – the latter due to under-use (read lost opportunity) of ECE by Maori, Pasifika and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. The report made many specific recommendations, some of which are currently being enacted (see the ECE report for more details). Importantly, it made in my view a compelling case for the importance of all key stakeholders ‘stepping up’ and doing their bit – the government, families and parents, ECE providers and employers – to make what is generally speaking a good system even better.

Why is this important for New Zealand?

The ECE sector is characterised by considerable heterogeneity, with at least eight different types of services currently operating (ie Kindergartens (12.26 percent of all ECE services), Playcentres (8.94 percent), Education and Care (centre-based) services (46.95 percent), Home-based services (5.95 percent), Te Kohanga Reo (8.98 percent), Casual Education and Care services (0.56 percent), Hospital-based services (0.21 percent); and Certified Group services, comprising mainly playgroups that are licence-exempted by the Education(Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1998 (16.12 percent)). Unsurprisingly such heterogeneity results in some variability in quality and accountability across the sector. An important aim is therefore to reduce this variability by driving quality up, across the board. This can be achieved by a combination of strategies including, but not limited to: clear regulatory and accountability frameworks (with meaningful consequences for substandard performance); increased collaboration/co-operation across the sector; support for increased professionalism among, and status of, the ECE sector; and a culture that encourages and equips for innovation.

The government currently spends $1.4 billion per annum on ECE on behalf of taxpayers. This is a substantial investment in our children and we are right to expect that it is a sound investment in terms of future benefits.

The science of human development and importance of ECE

There is now a mature scientific literature showing that high quality ECE has many benefits for human development. High quality ECE (here defined as a mix of well-trained, professional staff, optimal staff-pupil ratios and group size) promotes skill acquisition in both cognitive and ‘non-cognitive’ domains. The former refers to the acquisition of traditional academic skills that underpin numeracy and literacy. Perhaps less familiar, but equally (and perhaps more) important is ‘non-cognitive’ skill acquisition. Here ‘non-cognitive’ refers to skills like self-control and emotion regulation, interpersonal or social skills, sharing, leadership, and other forms of prosocial behaviour. Acquisition and/or consolidation of non-cognitive skills in the ECE setting are the raw material for positive human development. ECE (working in partnership with parents in the majority of cases), can equip young children with the building-block skills for life, and once acquired, establish a positive cycle of further skill acquisition (eg beginning with...
school readiness) that will continue to open doors in the primary, then secondary and tertiary sectors, by producing continuous incremental gains across each developmental epoch. The ‘reality’ of this unfolding of life trajectories is now well established by developmental science, and is nicely captured by Nobel Laureate James Heckman’s simple but important statement: ‘skill begets skill’ (and of course the reverse!). Insomuch as successful development entails providing children with the capacity to take advantage of opportunities as they present, then ECE, occurring as it does in the earliest years, stands out as a seminal opportunity in the lifecourse. Further, the earlier the investment the better, a point not lost on the ECE taskforce who stated ‘Investing in early childhood education generates higher returns than spending on education or social programmes in later life’. Importantly, although this applies most strongly for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, it also applies to children from high socioeconomic backgrounds (Wößmann & Schütz, 2006).

Why the Treasury should like ECE

It is even more telling then that in purely economic or investment terms ie benefit-cost ratios, the government can reasonably expect a return (eg educational achievement, reductions in antisocial behaviour) of between $3 to $17, depending on the type of service and length of follow-up, for every dollar invested in ECE. By anyone’s calculation, this is an outstanding return on investment.

The importance of ECE for the development of non-cognitive skills

New Zealand is lucky to have Te Whāriki as the ECE curriculum because it explicitly recognises the importance of non-cognitive skill development via its focus on wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration. The operationalisation of these key themes reveals a strong emphasis on non-cognitive skills (Ministry of Education,1996). Interestingly one of the core skills taught appears, to me at least, to be that of self-control (although it is not always described as such). Self-control is a psychological term that describes the ability to focus and persist in the pursuit of goals, whilst keeping emotions ‘in-check’ (e.g. Kochanska, et al, 2001; Mischel et al, 1989; White et al, 1994). Individual differences in self-control emerge very early in life and predict a surprisingly wide range of adult outcomes, from poorer health, to less wealth (e.g. Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Kern & Freidman, 2008; Moffitt et al, 2011). Indeed, one might speculate that the success of some well-known early intervention programmes from around the world, as well as from different eras (eg 1960s to the present), rests partly on the extent to which self-control skills were inculcated, either explicitly or more subtly. New approaches to promoting self-control are appearing and can be easily incorporated into ECE (eg Diamond & Lee, 2010; Yang et al, 2012).

Artwork by Millie Torbit

Encourage innovation – but with rigour and expectation

The ECE report recommended that Te Whāriki undergo systematic evaluation so we know what is working well, and what can be improved. Self-critical, high quality analysis is healthy and will result in improved outcomes for the ECE sector. However, more needs to be done to reach the hard-to-reach, precisely those who might benefit the most from high quality ECE. The ECE curriculum needs to be relevant and attractive to all families in New Zealand, thus diversity in approach is good (whereas variability in quality is not!). There are many examples of community groups doing innovative and in some cases, ground-breaking work in the
ECE sector (e.g. Te Kōpae Piripono). These initiatives deserve thorough evaluation so that innovation and discovery can be shared among the sector and benefit all children. This means seeing research as a core part of any service that claim benefits, not icing on the cake, an administrative burden, or the indulgence of quirky researchers. In this regard, academics and researchers need to be ready to join forces with those delivering services, to teach evaluation skills to the ECE providers. This process is a two-way street and can be very rewarding, as I have found, insomuch as the ECE providers have a lot to teach researchers about resilience and how to optimise child development. Yes, there are opportunities galore, and if well supported by research, these opportunities can be turned into tangible benefits for New Zealand children.

References:


Creating a work of art using sand, paint and wood. Understanding physics watching water flow down a hill and collect in a puddle. Discovering the meaning of words in two languages. Exploring numeric symbols. Filming a video. Negotiating a complex situation and finding an agreeable solution.

A day in the life of a child in early childhood education.

As part of the education system, early childhood education provides an optimal environment in which children can develop, grow and gain the dispositions, skills and knowledge to become confident and competent learners in their world. While research is clear about the value and benefits of early childhood education, the role of early childhood education has not always been well-articulated or understood. That is changing. More attention is being paid to what happens for children who participate in high quality early childhood education. There is no doubt that early childhood education is a smart investment which reaps educational, social and economic benefits. The government commissioned taskforce report on early childhood education, An Agenda for Amazing Children, concluded that “…investing in early childhood education can be thought of as one of the most effective uses of taxpayer funds” (ECE Taskforce, 2011, pg. 28).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) states that education should be focussed on “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”. Scientific researchers have shown that the earliest years of a child’s life are critical for building the brain “circuitry” which enables future learning and underpins how children relate within and to their world. (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007). Children’s learning starts long before they reach school and their participation in early childhood education is evident throughout their school years and beyond. In 2011, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that “Fifteen-year-old students who had attended pre-primary education perform better on PISA than those who did not, even after accounting for their socio-economic backgrounds” (OECD, 2011). [Findings based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey]. New Zealand research supports this finding in the local context.

The benefits of early childhood education go far beyond educational success. Research studies from the United States show that early childhood education is also associated with fewer negative social outcomes years later including a reduction in juvenile offending. Early childhood education includes benefits for parents: increasing their involvement with their child’s learning; establishing peer networks; and supporting parent training and education (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002 and Wylie (1994) as cited in Ministry of Social Development, 2005).

Early childhood education services in New Zealand are diverse with a variety of different service types and operational models: there are teacher-led services and parent-led services; community-based and for-profit services; some services catering to children from infancy, and others that are licensed for older children. Services include kindergarten, education and care, home-based, nga kohanga reo and playcentre. Whanau choose the service that best meets their needs and circumstances.

The benefits of early childhood education are well documented. They are long-term and wide-ranging; however, they are only realised when services are high quality.

Kindergarten has a long and proud history in New Zealand, and is acknowledged as a leader in providing high quality early childhood education. Kindergarten services are as diverse as the communities we are a part of. We offer over 30 different operational models while maintaining our core values and professionalism. Almost two-thirds of kindergartens are in low and middle income areas. Among all Māori children enrolled in an early childhood education service, 18 percent attend kindergarten; among all Pasifika children enrolled 22 percent attend kindergarten. While several kindergartens have children of all ages, most children who attend kindergarten are age three or four. Over one-third of all four year olds enrolled in early childhood education attend a kindergarten (Ministry of Education, 2011).
A strong focus on engaging with families and whanau is fundamental to kindergarten. Placing children at the heart of what we do ensures that we maintain the conditions that best support effective teaching and learning. We recognise this learning is interwoven with the learning that happens outside kindergarten and in the home, and programmes that complement our partnership with parents and families.

All kindergarten teachers are qualified, the same requirement as for teachers in schools. They are skilled in working alongside children to build and extend their capability as learners, leaders, innovators and problem solvers, and to broaden their understanding of the world, and to enjoy exploring responsibility and independence. At kindergarten, children progress at their own pace in the context of their unique interests and world view. Te Whāriki, the early childhood education curriculum, informs teaching theory and practice and underpins the wide range of learning opportunities available. Te Whāriki links with the school curriculum and reflects the essential learning areas and essential skills.

Parents and whanau, communities and the government all contribute to the cost of ECE provision. Government provides a universal subsidy for children attending early childhood education which includes a higher rate for children under the age of two. For three to six year olds, the government covers the cost of 20 hours of early childhood education. Parent, whanau and community contributions including the payment of fees, donations, other in-kind contributions of time, governance and fundraising, and community grants all contribute to the cost of providing services. Government provides extra targeted funding to support specific groups or in recognition of circumstances such as rural or isolated services. How responsibility for the cost of early childhood education is balanced between contributors has implications for access to services and for the quality of services provided. For some families, the cost of early childhood education is already a barrier to participation.

The government has a goal of ensuring by 2015, that 98 percent of children starting school will have participated in early childhood education. While we have high numbers of children attending early childhood education, it is clear that more needs to be done to engage Māori and Pasifika children and children from low-income communities. Extra funding in the 2012 budget is a step along the way but this targeted funding alone will not reach all families. Bilingual services, services offering transportation, high quality home-based services and mobile kindergartens could all play a role in increasing participation. Community hubs that connect communities and include a broad range of services for families could be developed with early childhood education at the centre: families could meet with a health professional or take adult education classes while their child participates in early childhood education. Services that are integrated and wrap around families can grow and strengthen long-lasting positive networks within communities.

The implications of the government placing early childhood education at the top of its priority list are significant. Participation in high quality early childhood...
education has the potential to raise overall educational achievement, reduce the achievement gap, provide support for families facing complex challenges, and provide a catalyst for broader community development. Increasing participation requires early childhood education services to be responsive to the needs of every family and to recognise their aims and aspirations providing a model to the wider education sector.

Investing in our youngest citizens today is an investment for our future.

References


Children learn from birth, and are engaged in learning in every setting they are in, especially when with people who care about them and are attentive to them. Formal early childhood education (ECE) settings are environments specifically designed to foster children’s learning and development. Participating in ECE helps children to acquire some of the cultural knowledge important to our Aotearoa New Zealand society, and the particular aspirations which each community has for its children. ECE settings connect families with other people, both adults and children, with diverse experience and viewpoints which enrich children’s knowledge of human society. ECE can also have other benefits, such as providing parents with information and support and supporting parent’s participation in paid work and study.

Playcentres are licensed ECE centres which are run by groups of parents working together in a cooperative. They are founded on the philosophy that parents are their child’s first and best teacher, and provide a curriculum, environmental and support framework within which high quality education is delivered by the volunteer parents of children attending. The Playcentre Federation has developed its own diploma to support the delivery of Playcentre sessions which is equally focused on early childhood pedagogy and working within a cooperative setting. The Playcentre model is highly democratic, with a close connection between the aspirations of local parents, centre decision making, and enacting those aspirations in practice. This article explores some defining features of the Playcentre model of education and the benefits to children of learning alongside their parent in such a setting.

Defining features of parent-led ECE

Parent-led models of education recognise that parents are their child’s first teacher, and seek to provide structures which will build on parent’s expertise to produce enhanced outcomes for children. Playcentre philosophy values parents for their work with, and knowledge of, their children. In addition, it actively promotes a culture of enquiry where all children and parents are seen as learners. In reviewing international longitudinal studies into ‘regular style’ (ie, not deprivation-based) ECE programmes, Farquhar (2008) found that the impact of the family was greater than the impact of the ECE programme for children’s long term outcomes. The Playcentre model also recognises that what occurs within the ECE setting is only a part of a child’s learning. The Playcentre community actively encourages parents to make the most of all learning opportunities for their child, and provides role-models and suggestions to help them do this, for example by providing suggestions on how learning opportunities in the home can be enhanced. This has been shown in the literature to result in good outcomes for children, as involvement in parent/whānau-led centres leads to improved parent-child interactions and home learning environments for those families (Mitchell, Wylie and Carr, 2008).

Playcentres provide a curriculum, environmental and support framework to enable high quality education for children to occur. All licensed ECE services provide a programme based on the national ECE curriculum framework Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). Te Whāriki is composed of principles, strands and goals which services ‘weave together’ in a distinctive way to reflect their own philosophy and community aspirations for its children while ensuring that key areas of learning are covered for all children (Te One, 2003). Te Whāriki defines curriculum as “the sum total of the experience, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning” (1996, p. 10). Therefore, a centre’s approach to time, choice, and participants are part of the curriculum structure.

The Playcentre philosophy of curriculum is based on children being able to choose from a wide variety of learning areas, with high-quality resources and free access to both the indoors and outdoors (Education Review Office, 2009). Children are able to stay at one learning area until they are satisfied with their own work, and parents – either the child’s own parent or other community parents – are encouraged to pose prompting questions and comments and assist in the learning, but avoid taking over from the child. When several ECE service types were compared in a longitudinal study which began in the 1990s it was apparent that children who received their ECE experience in Playcentre...
had education and social outcomes equivalent to the highest quality provided to children in teacher-led services (Wylie et al., 1996; Wylie & Thompson, 1998). Habits of Playcentre practice, such as providing a rich learning environment and warm, involved interactions between adults and children, provide a framework whereby new parents learn appropriate pedagogical behaviours before they engage with the theory about why these practices are useful to children’s learning.

The opportunity to be involved in a learning session with other parents provides a support framework of real-time role modelling. Parents can observe others interacting with children and with materials and learn from them if they wish. When reflecting on this informal support in a Playcentre setting, parent educators commented that they “valued the opportunity to watch other ways of working with children: ‘You pick up so much from others’ modelling. You do get drawn into it. You see the skills and techniques’” (van Wijk, 2007, p. 59). Any group member may be able to learn from this informal support given by others, including experienced parents learning from newer members. Reflecting on the learning for parents in a session for first time parents and their infants, Podmore and Te One (2008) noted: “The SPACE sessions1 were designed to foster a culture of care amongst all participants. ... What has become evident during this research is the importance of role modelling. Parents acted as role models for one another, and the facilitators, and the guest speakers also became role models” (p. 76). Adults in a parent-led setting have a wide variety of background experience, and a culture of life-long learning fostered within Playcentre promotes attention to new ideas.

Adults working in parent-led ECE services need information and qualifications which are tailored to the needs of those services. Playcentre has a licensing agreement with the Ministry of Education which requires sessions to be staffed by a group of adults who collectively have achieved specific combinations of courses leading to the Playcentre Education Diploma. The principles behind Playcentre’s licensing agreement are that it is the group which holds the formal knowledge to support quality sessions, rather than any one individual, and that Playcentre-specific qualifications are necessary to support quality in a parent-led setting. The Playcentre diploma is designed so that each course focuses both on early childhood pedagogy, and mentoring and working with other adults in a cooperative setting. Because parents may have any level of prior education success, the introductory courses of the Playcentre Diploma are designed to be achievable by all, with more academic study occurring at the higher courses. A high proportion of parents complete at least the introductory courses.

As well as the programme of activities designed to foster children’s learning, the manner in which a learning community conducts itself also constructs the expectations that children and adults have of society, and therefore is part of the curriculum. Playcentre embraces a highly democratic model of management which is responsive to parent aspirations for their community. In a Playcentre, every family is part of the decision making body. Monthly business meetings, at which all families can be represented, decide on centre policy and the particular focus of that centre, within regulatory and national Playcentre philosophy guidelines. Decisions are
made by consensus, which involves a high commitment to sharing good information with members (Burke, 2011). This structure is an example of what Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) refer to as the ECE institution being a ‘public forum’, where children and adults meet as equals, and the interests of the community members can be expressed in centre practice. These practices also directly engage parents as advocates of their own child’s learning, and empower them to remain engaged with the child’s learning through compulsory educational settings.

The current Government has announced a target of 98 percent participation by four year olds in ECE prior to school entry, to be achieved by 2016. As a principle, Playcentre is highly supportive of this goal. It is a Playcentre belief that every family needs to be connected into their community in some way, for support and information, and to enable both parents and children to exercise citizenship rights and responsibilities. An isolated family is a vulnerable family. ECE services are an excellent way to connect with communities. Therefore Playcentre supports some level of universal provision of access to ECE services of their choice as a citizenship right. While a very few families may prefer to not be involved with formal ECE settings, other community groups, such as marae and church groups, can form a similar network of support for those families.

Whānau tupu ngātahi – families growing together

Participation in high-quality ECE is not only beneficial for children, it is good for their families as well. The defining feature of Playcentre is that it achieves good child outcomes by focusing on learning for the whole family. Parents are supported to run a high quality programme through mentoring and a formal adult education programme, which has been specifically designed for a parent-led cooperative-based context. Families in Aotearoa New Zealand have a right to choose the best form of ECE for their family, and Playcentre offers parents a choice to become more involved for those who want it.

References


1. SPACE sessions are half-day programmes for infants and their parent, facilitated by a Playcentre-trained supervisor.
Mary-Louise Stocker has worked for the Education Review Office since 2002. She has been a Review Officer and is now the Project Manager, Early Childhood Education Review Methodology, a role Mary-Louise has held since 2011. Before joining ERO, Mary-Louise worked in both community and private early childhood education services in the Auckland area. Mary-Louise has a Masters in Education Administration.

**Introduction**

High quality early childhood education can make a positive and lasting difference for children, including those at risk of poor educational and life outcomes.

The Education Review Office (ERO)’s new approach to reviews of early childhood services considers each service’s capacity to promote the wellbeing and learning of all children. Our focus is increasingly on provision for those children traditionally least well served by the education system. These include many Māori, Pacific, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and children with special learning needs. ERO also has a particular focus on the quality of provision for children up to the age of two years.

In this article we talk specifically about how ERO’s methodology promotes quality for Māori and Pacific children in early childhood services.

**ERO’s role and approach**

ERO is an independent external evaluator. The role of ERO is to provide assurance to the government and the community on the quality and effectiveness of schools and early childhood services.

From July 2012, ERO has implemented a new approach to how it undertakes reviews of early childhood services. The focus of ERO’s reviews in early childhood services is now on the capacity of the service to promote positive learning outcomes, with the purpose of contributing to improved learning and wellbeing for all children. This is a broader and more flexible approach that allows ERO to more readily take into account each service’s context, performance and self-review capability.

One of the Government’s education targets is that by 2016, 98 percent of all new school entrants will have participated in early childhood education.1 Māori and Pacific children currently participate at lower rates than other groups; 91 percent and 85 percent respectively, while the national participation rate is 95 percent. ERO is interested in ensuring that Māori and Pacific children experience high quality early childhood education and care that promotes their wellbeing and learning, and recognises their identity, language and culture.

**ERO’s review framework – Ngā Pou Here**

The new review framework is called Ngā Pou Here (the connected structures). The framework is made up of four Pou that contribute directly or indirectly to creating the conditions that promote positive outcomes for children.

The use of Māori terminology and concepts in Ngā Pou Here is one strategy that ERO is using to challenge the status quo and realise its commitment to social justice for Māori.

ERO intends for review officers and early childhood services to use the Māori terminology and increase their understanding of the Māori world view as expressed in Ngā Pou Here.

The use of Ngā Pou Here will help services and ERO to foreground success for Māori children in each evaluation.2

**Ngā Pou Here**

- Pou Whakahaere – how the service determines its vision, philosophy and direction to ensure positive outcomes for children,
- Pou Arahi – how leadership is enacted to enhance positive outcomes for children,
- Mātauranga – whose knowledge is valued and how the curriculum is designed to achieve positive outcomes for children,
- Tikanga whakahaako – how approaches to teaching and learning are responsive to diversity and support positive outcomes for children.
Within these areas ERO considers the effectiveness of self review and partnerships with parents and whānau. ERO evaluates how well placed the service is to make and sustain improvements for the benefit of all children at the service. At the heart of the Pou structure are tamariki and tamaiti. Reviewers will use Ngā Pou Here to design and undertake the review according to each early childhood service’s context, while ensuring that the focus remains on the service’s capacity to promote the wellbeing and learning of all children.

How responsive is the service?

ERO is interested in the extent to which services sustain and continue to improve the quality of provision for all children. We want to know how responsive services are to the groups within their community, and especially to the priority learners attending their service.

ERO knows from its evaluations that a service’s responsiveness to children and their families aids and supports their successful participation in early childhood education. We want to know how the service is working in partnership with whānau and aiga (Pacific families) and how effective this partnership is in promoting positive learning outcomes for children.

Self report –reflecting on provision for priority learners

The new methodology focuses more closely on what early childhood services are doing to respond to the languages, cultures and identities of Māori and Pacific children.

Early childhood services are now asked to complete a Self Report prior to their ERO review. In this Self Report they are asked questions about the strategies and initiatives they have in place to support their priority learners. They are also asked to report on what they know about the impact of these initiatives on children.

Examples of questions in the Self Report

- How do you consult with parents and whānau of Māori children about their aspirations and expectations for their child’s learning?
- How do you use this information?
- Please describe any specific strategies or initiatives implemented to ensure Māori children experience success as Māori.
- What do you know about the effectiveness of these?
- Please describe any specific strategies or initiatives implemented to ensure success for Pacific children.
- What do you know about the effectiveness of these strategies?

ERO is finding that services are beginning to carefully consider these questions. There is a sense that the early childhood sector is ready to accept that in order to achieve equitable outcomes for all children, differentiated inputs are required. The sector is moving away from the stance in which they treat all children the same, toward a more responsive and personalised approach which places children and their families at the centre of practice.

Working in partnership with whānau

Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success’ proposes that better outcomes for Māori learners are likely when the language, culture and identity of Māori children is acknowledged and a productive partnership is forged by the sharing of power between Māori learners, whānau, iwi and educators.

ERO’s information suggests that the extent to which services are implementing a bicultural curriculum, working in partnership with whānau Māori and supporting Māori learners to realise their potential is highly variable. ERO’s new methodology asks questions that require services to reflect on how they are making a difference for Māori children – and how they know their initiatives are effective.
EROs’ report *Partnership with whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services February 2012* highlights the need for early childhood services to move beyond building relationships to establishing culturally responsive partnerships with Māori children and their whānau.

*Culturally responsive partnership is characterised by the ability of managers and educators to:*

- listen to whānau Māori and respond appropriately to their aspirations
- recognise and respect the diverse and unique perspectives of whānau Māori
- involve whānau Māori in all aspects of management, programme planning, implementation and evaluation
- recognise that Māori culture is an advantage for children and their whānau
- use the knowledge of Māori children and whānau to develop rich learning
- appreciate that New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, is a document based upon the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and partnership with whānau
- use the skill and expertise that whānau Māori bring to the service.

The report contains Best Practice Indicators for services to use in their self review and examples of good practice.

**Working in partnership with aiga (Pacific families)**

The Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) sets out goals and strategies for improving the educational success of Pacific learners. For the early childhood education sector the focus is on building strong foundations for learning.

The three PEP goals for the early childhood education sector are to increase the participation of Pacific children in early childhood education, increase the quality of early childhood education experiences for Pacific children and increase the effective engagement of Pacific parents in early learning and in early childhood services.

*Evidence shows participation in high-quality early childhood education provides the foundation skills to succeed at school and in life. By realising this vital first step, further progress can be made across the education system.*

Everyone involved in the education sector needs to accept responsibility for improving outcomes for Pacific learners. ERO’s role is to work with early childhood services to evaluate the quality of provision for Pacific children and their aiga in order to establish what is working well and what can be improved.

**Outcomes for children**

The valued outcomes of early childhood education vary from one family to another depending on cultural, educational and religious beliefs, as well as views on early learning. There is a broadly shared expectation, however, that early education will contribute to the growth of a secure, confident child who can communicate, learn and work with others.

How an early childhood service nurtures and promotes each child’s growing competence to communicate, participate and learn about the world should be different for each child. The service’s capacity to promote the wellbeing and learning of all children relies on a respect for and responsiveness to each child. ERO believes that the extent to which the service provides for the individuality of each child is likely to be a measure of the commitment the service has to equitable outcomes for all children.
**Priority questions**

ERO's methodology, evaluation indicators and professional practice refer to research information on how different factors and features of early childhood practice contribute to positive learning outcomes for children.

The indicators are organised under the four Pou of Ngā Pou Here. The priority questions that introduce the indicators ask the following questions:

What does the service know (through its self review) about the effectiveness of pou whakahaere, pou ārahi, mātauranga and tikanga whakaako in:

- supporting Māori children to achieve success as Māori?
- supporting Pacific children to achieve success?
- promoting partnerships with parents and whānau?

These priority questions help to focus reviewers on the quality of provision for priority learners and their families/whānau/aiga.

**Outcomes for Māori children**

Educational opportunities and outcomes for Māori are a focus in ERO’s evaluation work. In early childhood services, ERO reviews how well services promote participation and engagement of Māori children and their whānau. ERO looks for evidence that Māori children are actively engaged in their learning, are progressing well and succeeding as Māori. This requires reviewers to have an understanding of the diverse identities of Māori. The methodology document, *ERO’s Approach to Reviews in Early Childhood Services*, discusses this in detail.

Penetito states that there is no such thing as the Māori identity, there are only Māori identities. In addition, Māori children live in and between at least two worlds. While they may position themselves differently in these worlds they are Māori, by virtue of descent and whakapapa.

The wellbeing and learning of Māori children is located in their culture, language and identity. A child’s culture, language and identity are places where concepts of mana, wairua and mauri exist. Mana is the power and potential the Māori child brings with them. Wairua is a concept linked to the child’s spirit and emotional stability. Mauri is observable. It is the life force and energy of the child which enables energy to be expended; the mind to think and have some control over how the body behaves. It enables the child to be vibrant, expressive and impressive. ERO continues to build its own understanding of Māori knowledge, pedagogies, and perspectives to help realise its commitment to improving education success as Māori.

**Outcomes for children of Pacific heritage**

To improve outcomes for children with a Pacific heritage it is important to understand that Pacific children are far from homogeneous. While some Pacific children are born in New Zealand, others may be new arrivals to the country. Their families hold different belief systems about the place of culture, faith, family, and education among others. Pacific children are drawn from diverse groups and from different cultures and languages. Understanding the diversity of Pacific children is integral to understanding them as individuals.

In responding to Pacific children attending early childhood services (both Pacific services and mainstream), educators cannot simply create broad strategies or approaches to improve outcomes for these children. Educators need to be able to work with individual children and use the culture, knowledge and understanding of Pacific children, their families and communities to design a meaningful curriculum and relevant experiences.

ERO’s report *Improving Education Outcomes for Pacific Learners May 2012* concludes with next steps for the school sector to have a collective national impact on the achievement of Pacific learners. These next steps apply to the early childhood sector. For example, ERO recommends that school leaders:

*build teachers and boards’ knowledge of Pacific students, and determine how best to use this knowledge in learning programmes that reflect Pacific students’ voices and aspects of culture language and identity relevant to their learning.*

The early childhood sector can use these findings to evaluate and improve provisions for the success of Pacific children.
ERO wants to know the ways in which early childhood services are building strong foundations for learning for Pacific children and recognises the need to undertake some focussed national evaluation work in this area.

Conclusion

ERO is interested in how the early childhood service constructs its curriculum in response to the values and goals of its community, and in particular its whānau and aiga. We want to know how each service is responding to children’s diverse languages, cultures and identities. ERO aims to work in partnership with early childhood services by taking a complementary approach to internal and external review. We ask questions that encourage services to reflect on their practices and consider the evidence and rationale for change and improvement.

ERO acknowledges that we have a role to play in addressing disparity of educational outcomes for Māori and Pacific children, and we express this commitment in our new approaches to the reviews of early childhood services.

References

By Jan Taouma  Manager A’oga Fa’a Samoa.

A bit of History
The A’oga Fa’a Samoa was the first established Pacific Island language centre in New Zealand, beginning operation in 1984. It was the first licensed and chartered Pacific Island centre (in 1990).

Te Kohanga Reo Inspired Beginnings
In 1983 there was over 800 Kohanga Reo operating throughout New Zealand.

The Kohanga Reo has brought together the child and a wide range of caregiver teachers, and opened doors to the exciting possibilities of management and administration skills for the child’s family. The language is us it is ours (Tilly Reedy, Keynote speech 6th ECE convention).

Pasifika families who had immigrated to New Zealand in the 1950s viewed the beginnings of the Kohanga Reo movement in the early 1980s with interest. They now had second-generation children – often growing up in families that had assimilated into becoming good New Zealand citizens and in so doing, had encouraged their children to speak only English thus losing their Samoan language and aspects of their culture.

Children’s heritage language (Samoan) was shown to be important for cognitive learning. The vision of the Samoan grandparents who had the idea of establishing the A’oga Fa’a Samoa centre, the language and cultural immersion policy at the centre, and international research findings on bilingualism, all support the importance of young children learning to communicate competently in their mother tongue or heritage language.

The A’oga Fa’a Samoa approached Richmond Road Primary School to see if a prefab was available for use for an Early Childhood Centre. The school already had a Bilingual Samoan class operating and a Kohanga Reo established and so were keen to assist the A’oga to transfer to the school and so provide a means for children to have Samoan Language continuance. In 1989 the A’oga moved premises to Richmond Road primary School and in 1990 became the first chartered and licensed Pacific Island Early Childhood Centre.

Philosophy
The A’oga Fa’a Samoa will:

→ Promote Samoan language and culture, so nurturing the positive identity of the children
→ Employ trained educators and encourage further training, so that quality care and education is provided
→ Encourage a family atmosphere for parents and children so children feel secure and loved.
→ Emphasise enjoyment of learning through the medium of Samoan language.

Immersion in the Fa’a Samoa
The children of the Aoga Fa’a Samoa are immersed in the Samoan language and culture. The language building is encouraged and supported in small group interactions using meaningful conversations. They are praised and encouraged to use the Samoan language for communication and to associate the use of the language with the relationships they have with the faiaoga (teacher). They also come to associate the use of the language with enjoyment – enjoyment of activities with their peers, and enjoyment of learning.

A centre of Innovation
In 2003, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa was selected as one of the six initial early childhood education Centres of innovation in New Zealand. The early childhood centres of Innovation (COI) programme was part of the New Zealand Government’s 10-year plan for early childhood education policy: Pathways to the Future/Ngā Huarahi Arataki (Ministry of Education, 2002). Like all COIs, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa was engaged in a 3-year action research project to show how the centre’s innovative practices influence learning and teaching. The COI research, tracking the children’s transition to school, shows that physical location (the A’oga Fa’a Samoa is situated in the grounds of Richmond Road primary school which has a bilingual unit) and transition practices, together with the language immersion policy at the centre, supported and strengthened the confidence and Samoan language competence of the children making transitions. (Cited in Podmore, Wendt Samu, and the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, 2006).
Benefits for Pasifika Children attending Early Childhood Centres

The research undertaken at the A’oga Fa’a Samoa showed that children who are immersed in their language and culture are confident in who they are.

School-based research by Tuafuti and McCaffery (2005) affirms the importance of immersion and bilingual Pasifika languages programmes for children’s self-esteem and identity, and for effective learning in their first language (L1) and then in their second language (L2). (Cited in Podmore, Wendt Samu, and the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, 2006).

Collaboration within the Centre and its Community:

The Aiga Concept

The A’oga Fa’a Samoa community has many parallels with the fundamental traditional Samoan institution of the aiga – or the extended family. The A’oga Fa’a Samoa, like the aiga, is a cultural and social institution that has key positions, each with important roles and responsibilities in relation to the others. The positions or groups that are a part of the A’oga Fa’a Samoa are: the teachers, the management committee; families and their children. (Samu 2005 cited in Podmore, Wendt Samu, and the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, 2006)

Values

The values that underlie our interactions as families, teachers, and children inform our actions within our different aiga. Our values include, for example:

- service and responsibility (tautua),
- love and commitment (alofa) and
- respect (faaaloalo).

(Taouma, Wendt-Samu, Podmore, Tapusoa & Moananu 2003, p 5)

We want our children to have a specific, rich cultural heritage through which their own unique identities can develop, and from which strong and powerful foundations for learning can be made.

These principles or values have informed recent research approaches. The Pou Tu model (adapted from Samu, 2005) demonstrates the central role of these principles. A traditional Samoan building (fale tele) is constructed around three or more centre posts (pou tu). The centre posts are constructed and placed first—they are like the cornerstone of a large European style building. The vaulted roof is built on top of and around the centre posts. Posts are constructed around the rim of the fale. However, the most unique feature of the structure of a fale tele is that the posts around the rim are not a structural necessity for holding the vaulted roof up. It is the centre posts—or the pou tu. Samu (2005) has argued that the potential success of Pasifika research and education projects lies in the extent to which Pasifika values have informed both the design, structure, and implementation of the project.

The Pou Tu model (adapted from Samu, 2005)

Details of the three values or principles have informed our research project are:

- **Alofa:** love and commitment. The relationships or the members of our COI (i.e., the A’oga Fa’a Samoa) are familial relationships. Being involved with the COI research project is a specific, shared commitment—it is a make-or-break commitment for us all.

   Children—it has been a journey of discovery for the COI team members (parents, teachers, and researchers) who have discovered or learned new knowledge of our children, the ways that they learn, or have been learning. The research has provided us with different set of lenses in which to see our children.

- **Faaloalo:** respect. Hierarchies are non-existent within the relationships that have been formed between those involved with this COI project. For example it is incidental that our lead researcher happens to have a title, a professional title (Dr), from a world we collectively respect (i.e., academia and education). But the primary source of our respect
for her is the form and the manner in which she has contributed to our community, our A’oga Fa’a Samoa. She has shared her knowledge and expertise with us, provided guidance and leadership in terms of research.

Faalalo also applies to the respectful and ethical involvement of our children in this research project. Such a relationship is not alien to our day-to-day practice, but very much a part of our centre’s philosophy.

→ Tautua: service. Service for us is about the contribution of time, resources and knowledge and expertise. Reciprocity is an essential feature of our notion of service. For example, the focus group, for many of the participants, particularly the parent members, has been an opportunity to serve the A’oga community (teachers and children) via advice, provision of feedback for milestone reports, assisting with the preparation of presentations, and so on. There is also the perspective that this research project is a way that our centre the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, can serve other groups—other cultural groups, e.g., Pasifika immersion centres, and professional groups.

These principles have informed the COI research process that we, A’oga Fa’a Samoa, were immersed within for the duration of the project. The "connections" that we have made (in terms of new knowledge, understandings and perspectives, and relationships with others) are as a consequence of principles that have informed our research practice. This has made this research ours. The western methodological framework (including, for example, the action research and the action research tools) has become ours—we have clear, unwavering sense of ownership of this project as a consequence of these principles. This research is ethical because our values flavour it in deep, meaningful ways. The research is still valid, and legitimate and robust research—it is still action research, and still informed as well by socio-cultural theory and related constructs (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings of the research show how the centre practices and relationships reflect Samoan cultural values. The A’oga Fa’a Samoa places a strong emphasis on the aiga (extended family) in regard to relationships. In this research project, the observations of young children making transitions show how both the children and teachers demonstrate the aiga principle in action. Among the children, this is apparent through their supporting others in the group and actively contributing to their well-being. (Podmore with Samu & the A’oga Fa’aSamoa 2006).

Influences of Government Policy

The current Pasifika Education Plan for early childhood targets participation as its main goal. It also targets qualified teachers and involvement of families in their children’s education. The policy around language is non-existent favoring instead the emphasis on Pasifika children learning English (Ministry of Education 2010).

While it is admirable to strive for 100 percent participation in early childhood education, it has to be in high quality education and, if taking into consideration recent research in this area, in the language of their home.

“Immersion programmes at ECE in the HL are important in developing maximum language ability in children prior to starting school and in orientating children to who they are in the world (their identity). ECE is not the place for dual medium two language programmes (L1 & L2) for children from families and communities seeking to maintain and revive their languages in minority threatened language settings.”

(Podmore, with Samu, & the A’oga Fa’aSamoa, 2006).

Involving families in their child’s early childhood education will assist confidence in being part of their continued education into the primary school. The development of bilingual units in primary schools that have a high proportion of Pacific children is of utmost importance to language continuance and family involvement. The language loss of some Pacific Island groups is of major concern especially for Pacific Islands that are under New Zealand jurisdiction e.g. Niue, Cook Islands.

Tagoilelagi-Leota, McNaughton, MacDonald, & Farry, S. (2005) in NEW ZEALAND showed that by age six, the first language and literacy skills of Pasifika children who had attended Pasifika ECE was largely replaced by English. In the Cook Islands the introduction of English into ECE and year 1-3 of primary schools has led to widespread language loss (McCaffery & McFall- McCaffery, 2010) and
led directly to a generation of young parents who are no longer speakers of the language and unable to raise their children in any dialect of Cook Island Māori in the Cook Islands, or in New Zealand. Fewer than 5 percent of Cook Island children in New Zealand can now speak their language/s and its loss from New Zealand and probably the Cooks themselves is imminent (McCaffery & McFall- McCaffery, 2010).

This research supports the need for Pasifika early childhood centres to develop immersion language programmes so that these children will keep their sense of identity and culture.

**Governance**

This is an area that is often misunderstood and mismanaged in many Pasifika centres. Those centres managed by a Church Trust often blur governance with management. In some cases the board does not have a parent representative meaning that the board is removed from the centre and has little knowledge of early education. If the supervisor or centre manager does not feel empowered to develop policy or develop budget to meet the centre needs it can lead to frustration for the teachers, which has an impact on children's learning. It would be great to see training on governance for these centres such as boards of trustees receive in Primary schools. The area of financial management is of huge importance and like in mainstream centres needs personal with financial ability.

**Conclusion**

The benefits for Pacific children attending high quality early childhood centres can be huge as shown by the research the A'oga Fa'a Samoa undertook. Growing in self-esteem and confidence paves the way to enjoyment of learning and to become future leaders. The Government initiative to increase participation for Pasifika children is important but only if it is into high quality centres that have fully registered teachers able to communicate in the language of the centre. Pasifika centres must maintain their philosophy so that their aims and goals are not diluted by English medium. The cutting of resources in Pasifika language for early childhood centres and bilingual language primary school classes has hindered access to literature in Pasifika languages. This needs to be a Government priority if the goals for achieving children who are literate and communities who are involved in learning are to be met.

At the A'oga Fa'a Samoa we continue to strive to achieve our philosophy in creating a place where children, families and community can enjoy a place of learning and being Samoan.

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The Significance of Place: Putting Whānau at the Heart of Early Childhood Education

By Aroaro Tamati Pipiri. Tumukūru (‘co-director’) – Te Kōpae Piripono Centre of Innovation

Introduction

Early childhood communities have in recent years sought to debate and consider the concept of ‘place’ in early childhood education and its central connection to participation of parents and families in early childhood education. This article teases out the idea of a sense of ‘place’ in relation to a Māori immersion early childhood centre and considers the significant role ‘place’ has in whānau participation both at the centre and in their children’s early childhood education.

A Sense of Place

To have a sense of place is to feel you belong. The name of ‘our place’ is Te Kōpae Piripono. We are a Māori language immersion early childhood centre based in New Plymouth. For us, a sense of place begins with whānau – a term that describes both the concept of family, individual families, and the wider collective of family groupings that comprise Te Kōpae Piripono. Ours is a modern day construction of whānau. So, rather than being whānau through whakapapa (genealogical) links, we are dynamically connected through a shared vision and kaupapa (philosophy) – the cultural and educational revitalisation of our people.

The entire whānau of Te Kōpae Piripono – whether that be parents, grandparents, children, siblings, or teachers – is central to this kaupapa. Right from inception, in 1994, our kaupapa has been about whānau development. Whānau Development at Te Kōpae Piripono is about the development of the whole whānau. It is about valuing and acknowledging the individuals who comprise our whānau and the wealth of contribution they make to the collective. Every whānau member has an important contribution to make. Individual contribution is valued in its own right and everyone benefits in some way. The Kaitiaki (teachers) contribute their time, professional expertise and knowledge of reo and tikanga (language and protocols), and in return they are respected and honoured as professional leaders. Whānau contribute to their children’s early childhood experience through their own strengths, knowledge and leadership, the children contribute with their energy, their heritage and their potential. They are viewed holistically, as whānau members with their own mana, unique qualities and abilities.

Whānau Development at Te Kōpae Piripono can be seen as a rotating and ever-evolving wheel. The individual whānau are spokes of the wheel, the outer protective rim is our shared kaupapa and the central core of the wheel – the hub – represents the whānau development strategies we devise ourselves, as a whānau, based on the needs and aspirations of our whānau.

Creating a whānau wheel provides us with a fascinating cross-section of the intricate and dynamic fabric of our whānau. It shows easily how expertise within the whānau can be utilised for the benefit of the whānau. We are able to see the powerful resource that is the collective. Over the years, we have found that noticing and recognising whānau contribution fosters a culture of valuing whānau and, as we have discovered, this in turn creates a strong sense of belonging among whānau – a sense of place. Remarkably, we have also found that this sense of place plays a central role in whānau participation at Te Kōpae Piripono and also in their children’s education.

Paradoxically, for many families enrolling their children at Te Kōpae Piripono, our total immersion Māori environment can be a scary prospect. Tragically, te reo o Taranaki – the unique language and dialect of the iwi (tribes) of Taranaki – has been a significant casualty of the muru raupatu, the massive colonial land confiscations of the 19th century which decimated our people economically, politically, socially, and culturally. The effects continue to reverberate to the current day. So for many of our families with little Māori language, enrolling their children in a Māori medium early childhood education environment can be terrifying. However, in many cases Te Kōpae Piripono has been the only
educational institution whānau have experienced, that has not held a negative, deficit view of them. Through whānau Development we are reclaiming our culture, our historical knowledge, our identity, our self-worth, our sense of place. Our kaupapa whānau (whānau philosophy) is both a guide and a support. Therefore, while for many new whānau, Te Kōpae Piripono is initially a daunting journey, the power of our kaupapa whānau is compelling and infectious. Over the years we have found that the degree of sense of place that whānau have at Te Kōpae Piripono directly relates to their level of participation within the whānau and the authenticity of engagement, particularly their active involvement in their children’s learning. Over the years, we have seen consistent, sustained whānau participation across all levels at Te Kōpae Piripono.

Now, it may sound that Te Kōpae Piripono is a perfect place where everyone is in harmony with each other and the world is wonderful. Ah, no! This is the real world. We are dealing with real lives and lived realities. Kaupapa whānau is something that we have to work at every day. There are times when we hiccup, when we stumble and when we make mistakes. But it is how we learn from our mistakes and how we strive to genuinely view whānau positively, whatever the circumstance, that is so important. Staying true to our kaupapa is imperative. It is about keeping whānau at the heart of learning. We acknowledge whānau struggle. We acknowledge that it is hard, difficult and scary at times but we don’t let ourselves stay in that space. We simply cannot afford to. We continually challenge ourselves to keep moving forward on our poutama – our upward journey of learning as whānau. It is about re-establishing for whānau a sense of place, not only at Te Kōpae Piripono but also in the world.

**Conclusion**

The significance of ‘place’ in early childhood education is a concept that cannot be ignored if we are to truly make a difference for Māori children and their whānau. Getting this part right brings positive outcomes in terms of whānau participation and partnerships within early childhood settings, and also whānau engagement in their children’s learning. Having the metaphor of a whānau wheel may be helpful for early childhood settings to get to know the whānau who attend their services. The mere process of creating a whānau wheel will acknowledge the skills and contributions of individual whānau members, and begin to build positive relationships with whānau. To create a whānau wheel requires you to truly know each other. Every early childhood setting is able to build its own whānau wheel. Just how vibrant and moving the wheel is depends very much on the nature and level of relationships each setting has with the families who attend. But there is a strong caveat. If we subconsciously view whānau negatively, we will have already ‘told’ them their place. And the whānau wheel will be for nothing. It is about remembering the significance of place and putting whānau genuinely at the heart.

**About Te Kōpae Piripono**

Te Kōpae Piripono is Taranaki’s only Māori immersion early childhood centre, set up in October 1994, by a diverse group of parents, educators and other prominent individuals, all committed to the retention and enrichment of te reo Māori me ngā tikanga (Māori language and customs) in Taranaki. In 2004, Te Kōpae Piripono was named as a Centre of Innovation and carried out a three-year research project, funded by the Ministry of Education, about the role of whānau and leadership in enhancing young children’s learning and development. Elements of this article have been drawn from Te Kōpae Centre of Innovation research report.

**Glossary of Terms**

- **Iwi** Tribe
- **Kaitiaki** Teacher at Te Kōpae Piripono
- **Kaupapa** Concept, Paradigm, Purpose
- **Kaupapa Māori** Māori paradigm
- **Kōpae** Nest, Circle
- **Pipiri** June
- **Piripono** Everlasting Embrace
- **poutama** Symbolic learning and developmental staircase
- **Reo** Language
- **Māori** Indigenous people of New Zealand
- **Muru Raupatu** 19th Century Colonial Government Land Confiscations
- **Whānau** Family; Socio-political family groupings
Is it time to look at alternative models of Early Childhood Education (ECE) to meet the needs of vulnerable children?

Traditionally formal early childhood education in New Zealand has been promoted and thought of as kindergarten, childcare centres and play centre and in recent times, increases of children participating in home-based education and care. Continued promotion by government to increase ECE participation to 98 percent for young children may be realistic, but is mass education the key to providing successful and quality outcomes for those most in need and missing out on the fundamental skills they require to succeed later in life?

Very little research is available in New Zealand on the benefits and outcomes of traditional home-based ECE, and even less for children from disadvantaged and adverse backgrounds. There is limited New Zealand research into the effectiveness of interventions that support positive outcomes for ‘at risk’ children and this mainly centres on parenting programmes. The Families Commission released a review of parenting programmes that looked at government funded initiatives, voluntary/community sector initiatives and key issues associated with their provision (Kerslake Hendricks, Balakrishnan, 2005). This document explored the importance of early intervention, targeting the early years, having programmes that have a strong theoretical base, setting goals or aims and flexibility of delivery methods. Further literature reinforces the effectiveness of strength-based perspectives that harness the strengths of the families. (Connelly, 2004). Strength-based concepts are significant in relation to the socio cultural theories and practices within early childhood and the early childhood education curriculum, Te Whāriki. The importance of trained providers was mentioned, with a supportive management structure and service provider to back up the programme.

Early childhood education in New Zealand has been implemented based on Western tradition, where the environment has been specifically designed and where children go to engage in a range of experiences, deemed by the providers as suitable or appropriate. New Zealand ECE legislation around funding narrows the options for providers to be flexible to meet the needs of vulnerable and priority children. Flexibility of funding and legislation within the current early childhood education sector may be the key to producing new possibilities and opportunities for this group of vulnerable children. Carrol-Lind, Angus, (2011) support this in their recommendation to provide for greater flexibility in the provision of Education and Care Services to meet the interests of infants and toddlers in part-time use or formal early childhood services. They state that there is some evidence that the current set of policies, regulations and funding incentives are leading to rigidity in provision and less choice for parents rather than flexibility. This is also reflective to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children.

Home-based care (or family day care), which is described by the Ministry of Education as ‘an early childhood service provided for preschool children either in their own home or that of another adult caregiver’, challenges many of the norms that surround the provision of early childhood care and education. (Wright, 2004). Should the provision of in-home early childhood education and care be available to not only caregivers (educators), but to parents, particularly those deemed priority by government? For the adults in the child’s life, being exposed to ECE in the home offers another way that they may not have been exposed to before due to the dysfunction they may have experienced themselves. Often the adults have no understanding of even how to play with their children. An ECE service working collaboratively with others in the home often provides the basis for empowering the adults to know their own capabilities. Efforts supporting parents and families to build learning in the home may make a greater difference to children’s immediate and long-term developmental outcomes. This is particularly relevant for those families who have not experienced positive parenting themselves. Parenting skills are a learned skill, taught by families. If positive skills have not been observed then the expectation for parents to instinctively know how to parent is unrealistic. Understanding the importance of play to a child’s development is fundamental to their growth and holistic development. If a parent has never been exposed to a ‘play’ environment then they will not have the skills to pass on to their child. This of course goes against what is currently available in the traditional early childhood education sector, as funding is not available to work with and alongside parents. Currently these children are not fitting into the ‘standard’ ECE model. Building learning in the home for
children taken into care and for those children deemed ‘at risk’ provides not only support for those caring for the child, but gives the child choices and life skills that they may not have been exposed to prior to their placement or intervention. The complexities that children from adverse backgrounds face are numerous and require added attention and skills.

Educational policies tend to uphold the notion of ‘mass education’, dating back to the eighteenth century. Meaningful participation for children in early childhood education in a home environment reflects social and economic changes in society. A good quality home-based education and care service has the ability to implement real, meaningful and holistic opportunities around the caregiver (educator) and child. It has the opportunity to ensure that all those involved with the child are able to participate. It allows the teachers to know and build real relationships with the child, educator, parents, guardians, social workers and anyone else who influences the child’s multiple environments. This is a platform for ‘real’ learning, rather than in an environment created specifically for learning. This real learning is what happens around the child, in their community and with those that are in the child’s everyday life. It takes into account the holistic environment surrounding the child. This is particularly relevant for infants and toddlers, for foster children who often come into care with issues and for children who are living in at-risk situations. In home education and care allows for a 1:1 to a maximum of 1:4 ratio ensuring the child’s needs, routines, abilities and interests are met.

Dr Bruce Perry (2001) stresses the critical need for intervening early, as he states “the first three years are critical to brain development”. This reinforces the importance of providing support to children in their own home environment, supporting their specific needs in their early childhood years.

It is apparent that vulnerable children are not fitting into the current early childhood education box – perhaps new opportunities and outside possibilities should be explored to meet the child’s needs rather than the systems needs.


Artwork by Millie Torbit


Wright, Lyn (2004) – Spotlight on family day care – A window into home-based pedagogy – Early Childhood folio 8, Pg 9 -13
Quality ECE in Home-based Settings

By Carol Stovold, President of the New Zealand Home-based Early Childhood Education Association and owner of Quality Kidz – Homebased Childcare, Nanny and Babysitting Agencies.

Home-based Early Childhood Education has become an increasingly popular option for parents and whānau as seen by the increase in enrolments by 74 percent between 2006 and 2010. Despite these increases, the sector has long been neglected by research (Mooney & Statham, 2003) and can be labelled as the “Cinderella” of child care, where the work takes place in the shades of the homes (Peeters, 2008).

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Change 2006 - 2010</th>
<th>% change 2006 - 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>44,435</td>
<td>43,695</td>
<td>41,487</td>
<td>39,346</td>
<td>37,600</td>
<td>-6,835</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playcentre</td>
<td>14,888</td>
<td>14,664</td>
<td>14,929</td>
<td>15,171</td>
<td>15,049</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; Care Service</td>
<td>86,059</td>
<td>91,733</td>
<td>97,756</td>
<td>101,424</td>
<td>109,204</td>
<td>23,145</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-based Service</td>
<td>9,802</td>
<td>11,073</td>
<td>13,065</td>
<td>15,054</td>
<td>17,084</td>
<td>7,282</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Kōhanga Reo</td>
<td>9,493</td>
<td>9,236</td>
<td>9,165</td>
<td>9,288</td>
<td>9,370</td>
<td>-123</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence School</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>165,254</td>
<td>171,138</td>
<td>176,993</td>
<td>180,910</td>
<td>188,924</td>
<td>23,670</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Education Counts [www.educationcounts.govt.nz]

Home-based ECE provides a childcare service which incorporates every day activities and events into intentional learning experiences for children. With the regulated small group size of no more than two children under the age of two at any one time and up to a total of 4 children with 1 adult, the Educator can provide ample opportunities for one-on-one learning and primary care. These relationships are supported by current theories that ‘secure attachment and associated emotional development is the basis for other aspects of development’ (Brainwave Trust, 2012 pg. 4.)

The consistency of one adult ensures that children:

- have the opportunity to learn at their own pace rather than following the cycles of a busy environment
- settle quickly and easily through meaningful real life activity which takes place in a familiar setting in a home.

Having low adult to child ratios ensures that children:

- are not exposed to as many illnesses due to smaller numbers as infants developing immune systems
- have safe regulatory environments meeting health and safety requirements
- have teachers that demonstrate practices and background knowledge of the educator themselves
- have teachers who are supervising caseloads
- develop respectful, responsive relationships
- have the time to develop supportive parenting advice programmes and
- have the ability to be culturally responsive.

These are all factors which contribute to process and structural quality in Home-based ECE.

Educators play an integral part in supporting families, by building stable relationships and providing quality educational experiences, whilst meeting each child’s
individual needs through providing activities and experiences designed to cover all areas of the curriculum. Educators are able to continue with usual family activities and routines, or seize the moment and take advantage of weather changes, local happenings and outings or important events in a child’s life which enable children to participate in invaluable, meaningful, learning experiences. Visits to playgroups, gym classes, music, parks and storytelling at the local libraries encourage children to mix with larger groups of children and develop social skills and behaviours in their local community. Opportunities are provided for children to learn to relate to other adults in supportive environments alongside their consistent Educator. The opportunity for children to receive a pre-school education in a natural and familiar environment such as the home and local community is a unique feature of home-based childcare.

Having regular routines enables children to experience a sense of security and stability; and ensures that children don’t miss out on the types of activities they would be engaging in if they were being cared for at home by their family. Educators provide individual programmes for every child according to their strengths and interests and plan just enough structure in their day for children to become aware of their boundaries and limits yet still know what they can look forward to. Children assume responsibility for their learning by being involved in making choices and decisions relating to their play which is purposeful and engaged. Parents/whānau are encouraged to be involved and are kept well informed by the provision of regular reports, along with portfolios (written observations, learning stories, art work and photos of children’s learning) which children love to share with all of their family every month.

Educators themselves come from a variety of backgrounds – mothers and increasingly some fathers at home with their own preschooler or school age children (what better opportunity to stay at home with your children and still earn an income), trained and qualified early childhood teachers wanting to work with smaller groups of children or even grandmothers wanting to give some of their skills to other families. All have a genuine love of children and often a desire to retrain into an early childhood career in a safe familiar environment. ECE qualification training is available and these can pathway to a degree of ECE Teaching. In some home-based services qualifications are compulsory for all Educators.

Qualified ECE teachers are employed in the Home-based sector to oversee the curriculum delivery by the Educators. The Educators provide and must be able to understand and demonstrate their knowledge of the mandated curriculum Te Whāriki, have an up-to-date knowledge of relevant theories and practice in ECE and engage in meaningful, positive interactions to enhance children’s learning and nurture reciprocal relationships (C3, C4 Licensing Criteria for Home-based Services 2008., pg 8.) The teachers have a significant role to play in ‘facilitating the Educators knowledge and understanding of how children learn and what they can do to foster this’ (Duncan et al. 2008, pg. 17 – 18.) Teachers provide support for educators in their delivery of curriculum outcomes through appropriate training and mentoring initiatives, research and resources for planning and delivery, reflecting on teaching practices, encouraging self review, leadership, governance and ongoing professional development. For many services these visits are conducted on a regular weekly basis or fortnightly basis to meet the terms of their license. ‘For those of you who teach adults you will know this is a particular skill that also requires a knowledge base’ (Duncan et al., 2008, pg. 17 – 18.)
For high quality home-based ECE services their aspirations are:

- To provide high quality care and education for young children through supporting the adults working with them to also learn and grow
- To provide a community of learners all aiming to achieve outcomes for children that include them being happy, competent and confident learners
- To provide children with the skills and thirst for knowledge that they need to acquire in order to achieve their aspirations and interests as they transition onto school and for later lifelong skills
- To be innovative in the field of home-based education continuously striving to improve.

Kindergartens and Childcare centres are now actively adding home-based ECE provision to their existing services finding that it meets a cultural and community need. Etu Ao – Pasifika home based education and care (Provided jointly by the Porirua East Community and Wellington Kindergartens – funded by the Ministry of Education) state on their website that the programme is ‘based on the Pasifika tradition of extended family caring for several children at home’. (www.wn-kindergarten.org.nz/etuao, 2012)

Educators, Teachers and Services have the opportunity to belong to the New Zealand Home-Based ECE Association, a national body which solely represents the home-based ECE sector in policy and decision making at local body and Government level. The NZHECEA fosters collaboration and support for services to provide quality ECE.

However, the ECE Taskforce in 2011 had other concerns about the provision of home-based ECE. "While home-based services have some strong quality characteristics, such as small group sizes and low ratios, they do not have a qualified, professional workforce, which we regard to be essential to good outcomes from early childhood education" (ECE Taskforce Report 2011 pg. 45).

In 2002 Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki had as one of its goals to improve quality by increasing the proportion of registered teachers in teacher led services. (Mitchell et al 2011.) Educators in home-based services were not included as part of the taskforce to improve quality through qualifications and as an ECE workforce have been largely ignored for 10 years. Proponents of the sector are questioning why they are now being castigated for not meeting an outcome that has never been set, received a lead in time to achieve or resourced as occurred for the centre based teacher led sector.

“Training encourages caregivers to value their role as a professional –without this; home-based early childhood programmes may suffer from common perceptions that staying at home with children is simply mother’s work for which there is no need for training”. (Foote and Davey 2003, pg. 2.) This raises the question of whether this is how home-based ECE is currently perceived.

In the 2009 monograph on home-based services the Education Review Office (ERO) found that there were concerns around compliances and the inconsistencies of application of the regulations in a third of services. (Education Review Office, 2009, pg 4 – 5.) Whilst there has been continued concern with regard to this, licensing and re-licensing of Home-based ECE services by the Ministry of Education has been able to address many of these concerns. The relicensing process has enabled the Ministry of Education to view services and practices and gain a deeper understanding of the sector. With this increased understanding some of the services that were licensed earlier may see the Ministry of Education revisiting to review their license status.

Actions of this nature can mean that children and their families receiving home-based ECE will be more assured that the service being provided is of good to high quality and that funding for the sector remains at a level that ensures this parental choice remains available universally and not just for those that can best afford it. Concerns exist amongst the sector that significant decreases in funding would drive the sector to a return of largely unregulated backyard care where children could potentially be at risk and impact on the participation targets for ECE set by the current government. Homebased ECE has the greatest potential to rapidly increase participation rates for children and families. It does not require large capital investment of the same level as a building does, is not restricted by land area, and can rapidly respond to a changing population, by easily moving to where the demand (or the people are) as has been evidenced in Christchurch since the earthquakes of 2011.

The Sector Advisory Group on improving quality for under two year olds recently called for an urgent review of Home-based ECE in ECE. (Minister of Education,
The sector is eagerly awaiting the outcomes for a research project “Quality early childhood education for under two-year-olds in home-based early childhood services” currently underway and led by Judy Layland, Teacher Education Fellow, Otago University. Projects of this calibre will improve the sector by providing clearer parameters around what quality Home-based ECE provides. The recommendation of the Sector Advisory Group on improving sector wide quality for current New Zealand based research of the Home-based ECE sector (Minister of Education, 2012) will also provide much needed evidence for policy decision making for the future of the sector.


http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/~/media/Educate/Files/Reference%20Downloads/Lead/FilesCriteria/2008LicensingCriteriaForHomeBasedEducationAndCareServicesBooklet1.pdf Ministry of Education, NZ


Introduction

Protecting the rights of every child to a quality, inclusive early childhood education (ECE) presents many opportunities and challenges for teachers, families, communities, policy makers and funders. The most significant barriers disabled children and people experience in education and society are based, not on their impairments, but on negative attitudes towards difference. The dominance and acceptance of deficit views regarding disability compromise the opportunities and lived experiences of many disabled children and adults in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Health, 2001). Deficit-based thinking and approaches get in the way of good teaching and influence many of the systems currently in place for ECE. They work in ways that deny some disabled-labelled children equal access to a Te Whaariki-based curriculum and relationships. In this article, I will address three current barriers to disabled children and their families' full participation in quality, inclusive ECE. These barriers are related to: structural and process quality factors in ECE and their impacts on the learning and participation of disabled-labelled children; restricted understandings about what participation in ECE means for disabled-labelled children; and the ways provisions for disabled-labelled children are currently identified and responded to through targeted funding arrangements in ECE.

Quality

Early childhood teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand is clearly based on principles and values that are guided by a holistic and competent view of children and learning (Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996). Well qualified early childhood teachers have the knowledge and skills required to understand and meet the needs of diverse learners and their families, including disabled or labelled children. Participation in good quality, inclusive ECE benefits every child, family, community and wider society. In teacher-led early childhood services, structural factors essential to the provision of quality ECE include funding directed towards high levels of qualified teachers, high teacher:child ratios, small group sizes, regular teacher non-contact time and professional development for teachers, and good remuneration and working conditions. Structural factors directly influence the capacity of teachers (and centre management) to work to the best of their abilities in response to the rights and needs of every learner and family. Factors such as qualifications, group size and teacher:child ratios influence the quality and nature of leadership and collaborative relationships within a centre, a culture of respectful and responsive interactions and relationships with children and families, clarity around the centre’s values, and vision and teacher’s ability to critically reflect on and enact the principles and pedagogy of Te Whānaki (Education Review Office, 2010). The impacts of less than ideal numbers of qualified teachers, particularly on children whose learning and inclusion requires careful consideration and on-going positive relationships with families and other professionals, are significant. Where teachers are not properly supported by structural factors to carry out their roles and responsibilities, they will work less well as a team and find it difficult to develop intimate relationships with every child, family and other services involved in a child’s education.

Participation

Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand has a long history of disabled children attending regular services. However, it is important to recognise that each child attending an education and care setting does not experience the curriculum in the same ways by virtue of sharing the same physical space. That is, being physically present does constitute experiencing equal opportunities to learn and participate (Mackey & Lockie, 2012). Even at the level of understanding participation as ‘physical presence’, there is evidence of early childhood centres making different rules regarding disabled children’s attendance. Disabled children’s presence can become conditional on available funding and/or whether teachers view the child as being their responsibility or someone else’s. Current rules making attendance conditional include: centres restricting the number of hours a child can attend to those offered by an Early Intervention Service (EIS) to fund an Education Support Worker (ESW); early intervention services removing ESW funding for the 12 weeks of school holidays per year when many centres remain open 48 weeks of the year; centres refusing a child’s attendance when their ESW is away on sick leave; requiring parents to pay for or top up ESW hours; and/or requiring a parent or whānau member attend alongside their child at the centre. There is also evidence of early childhood centres refusing to allow and/
or discouraging families to enrol disabled children in their service (Macartney, 2011; Purdue, 2004). This situation highlights problems with disabled children’s and family’s rights to equal participation in early childhood education alongside their non-disabled peers. It also demonstrates a troublesome relationship between targeted funding and exclusion.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, both early intervention (EI) and early childhood care and education services are responsible for supporting the care and education of disabled-labelled children. There can be tensions and contradictions in the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings and practices between early intervention services and early childhood centres (Dunn, 2004). These tensions can work in ways that impact negatively on a labelled child’s experience of quality ECE. Traditional approaches to early intervention have emphasised the individual in isolation and their perceived deficits as the focus of planning, assessment and intervention. Like all citizens, early childhood teachers are not immune to the circulating effects of deficit views toward disability (Ministry of Health, 2001). In centres that have difficulty recognising and responding positively to disability and difference and/or don’t have adequate structural conditions to support quality curriculum, a disabled-labelled child is likely to experience more limited access to a Te Whāriki-based curriculum (Gordon-Burns, Purdue, Rarare-Brigs, Stark, & Turnock, 2010). Rather than pathologising differences, to be inclusive the curriculum needs to be responsive to each child and family’s rights to be respected, heard, belong, experience meaningful relationships, to be viewed as competent and able to learn and have their unique contributions valued (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Funding
Every child in ECE has a right to have their needs to learn, participate and belong met and for this to form the basis of support from every person involved in their education. Funding arrangements need to be directed to this end. How to deploy resources so that we can be confident in saying that every child is assured equal opportunity to benefit from a good quality, inclusive education is not so straightforward.

Diagnosis and labeling linked funding
While there can be benefits, there are also negative outcomes associated with receiving a diagnosis or label and this makes the links between labeling and funding provision problematic. Should children be required to receive a deficit label in order for their centre to access funding directed at ensuring that the child and family experience the relationships, education and environment they have a legal and ethical right to? The over-use of special education labels, with their tendency to pathologise children and their behaviour, has become a widespread problem in Western-based education systems (Bishop, Mazawi, & Shields, 2005). Labeling is a subjective, culturally biased process. The over-representation of marginalized groups in special education figures (worldwide) demonstrates that labeling is neither objective nor benign. A child who is Maori, Pasifika, from a migrant family, male and/or poor
is more likely than a child from the dominant culture to be designated as having ‘special education needs’ (SENs). An ever increasing plethora of labels have and continue to be created to describe particular groups of children, their circumstances and/or behaviour. Some of the more recent descriptors, such as ‘global developmental delay’, ‘mild-moderate-severe intellectual disability’, ‘emotional behavioural disturbance/disorder’ (EBD) and ‘attention deficit hyperactivity disorder’ (ADHD), are very non-specific, but extremely powerful in terms of their effects on those who receive them. Being labelled makes it more likely a child will be perceived and treated primarily in terms of ‘deficit’ or impairment. ‘Early identification’ and labelling should also be approached with great caution because infants, toddlers and young children are diverse in the pace and nature of their learning and development.

Current application criteria, and the provision of additional resources to disabled children in ECE are deficit focussed. Criteria for decision making about additional resources are based on assessments of what a child is unable to do in comparison to expectations for ‘normal’ behaviour and development. Therefore it is necessary to describe a child in deficit terms in order to have a chance of receiving funding. Families in particular often find the application, diagnosis, and labelling process upsetting and stressful. A child may be discernibly different from many other children in terms of the pace and nature of their development, how they behave, their ways of being or kinds of needs. They may need additional support to access the curriculum. But perhaps we need to be asking the question: ‘Is it helpful, necessary or fair to categorise and understand particular children in deficit terms in order for their early childhood centre to access the resources they need to support the child’s learning, participation and contributions?’

**Funding use and allocation**

The deployment and use of Education Support Workers, alongside the provision of therapies, is one of the most common responses to funding additional support for disabled learners in ECE. There are problems with the ways the ESW role is currently used and interpreted. ESWs are usually untrained in ECE and receive low wages for their work. They are supposed to provide support to centre teaching staff. However, without strong leadership and guidance from within a centre, ESWs can and do work in ways that isolate labelled children from their peers and limit their access to the curriculum. ESWs being funded and employed through an early intervention service can contribute to confusion about who is/should be responsible for supervising and mentoring their work within the early childhood centre and how their role is perceived. Combine this lack of clarity with centres who have large group sizes, low teacher:ratios and some unqualified teaching staff and it is perhaps not surprising that teachers sometimes abdicate responsibility for a disabled-labelled child to an ESW, early intervention (EI) teachers and specialists and/or the child’s family.

**Conclusion**

Deficit responses to disability and difference underpin many barriers to the equal participation of disabled children and their families in ECE. Quality, inclusive education and teacher capacity is also supported or constrained by key structural factors such as levels of qualified teaching staff, small group sizes and high teacher:child ratios. When centres and teachers neglect to accept primary responsibility for developing responsive relationships with and planning for labelled children in their care, children’s learning, participation and equity of access to the curriculum and environment are restricted (MacArthur, Purdue, & Ballard, 2003; Macartney, 2011; Purdue, 2004; Rutherford, 2009). Problems within the current ECE and early intervention funding systems need to be acknowledged and addressed by the Ministry of Education and those working in the sector, in consultation with families. The discussion needs to focus on evaluating the extent to which funding arrangements and services are supporting disabled children’s learning and participation through access to a Te Whāriki -based curriculum.
References


“We like to play, like to play inside, like to play slides, like to play bikes”-
Voices from the children at an Early Childhood Centre

By Rebecca Blaikie,
Senior Advisor, Office of the
Children’s Commissioner

For this edition of CHILDREN, Dr Sarah Te One and I were privileged to talk to children at Toru Fetu Kindergarten. We see it as important for children to have a say about early childhood education so we wanted to ask them a few questions. Did they like it? What did they do all day? How was the food? What were they learning?

So we set off with pencil and pad, loaded with some fruit to share. We went down the Wellington motorway, around the Porirua roundabout, up the windy Cannons Creek Road, into the parking lot and through the gates to Toru Fetu. This is what we found.

First impressions as we walked through the doors were of an environment of openness, warmth, colour and smiling faces. We were instantly made to feel welcome with smiles and greetings by wider family members who were settling in for the parenting education sessions run at the centre. Toru Fetu is a multi-cultural early childhood education (ECE) centre in the heart of the community. It connects and provides early education services with and for local children and families. Toru Fetu operates under two licenses and over eighty children are enrolled. All the children and staff get to do activities together, which ensures collaboration and shared learning.

Those who work at Toru Fetu draw on professional multi agency expertise such as teaching, pedagogical leadership, health and social work experience plus cultural and community-based knowledge. The staff exemplify the tuakana/teina relationship as kaumatua and novice teachers are employed side by side, each bringing their own basket of skills, energy, passion and wisdom to their work with children. They reflect the aspirations of the respective communities through their connections to the cultures, languages and values that surround them.

Toru Fetu is a ‘true’ community-based ECE service. Many of the teachers live in the area and network with the surrounding community. There are strong connections to the surrounding churches. Toru Fetu collaborates with the health sector, attending network meetings at the whanau centre (which includes health and social services).

It is clear that the children are at the centre of policy and decision making at Toru Fetu and their needs and those of their whanau are explored and responded to. The needs of those that attend Toru Fetu vary, and Toru Fetu ensures families and children stay engaged and get what they are entitled to from the early childhood centre. For example, in the Cook Island ‘classroom’, monthly morning teas are run for families which helps keep their Cook Island language alive. This partnership has resulted in the production of a language resource for Cook Island families.

The best part of visiting Toru Fetu was being so welcomed by the children. They were so open to sharing what they liked and were learning at their centre. Sarah and I got to spend time in all the rooms and connected, albeit briefly, with many of the children. We asked them to talk to us about their favourite things at Toru Fetu.

I was lucky to be able to share several delicious cups of tea in the sandpit with two young boys. We had great conversations about all the things you could do in the sandpit – there were "truck, cups, sieves, boxes, animals, and spades". One of the boys was sitting in a wooden box, pretending it was his car. I asked him where he was going. They were in the "car, going shopping" to buy "lollies". Many of the children I spoke to told me how much they enjoyed the sandpit. It was a great place for "making sand castles". The sandpit was large and inviting, so there was lots of room for children to play together in the space. "I like the sandpit, I can hide in here, but you can’t you are too big!" The sandpit offered lots of different opportunities for learning too. "I’ve got soft sand and I’ve got wet sand" I saw two girls in the sandpit cupboard who were concentrating deeply as they spoke about "cleaning up the cupboard. We’re putting the sand back". The sandpit is shaded for those drizzly days and from hot summer days, protecting the children from the harmful rays of the sun.

Artwork by Sienna Provoost
Toru Fetu was filled with colour and creativity. Lots of the children spoke of enjoying and doing lots of "drawing, and painting and cutting." The walls are covered in their art work and learning. Many of the children were keen musicians, and two brothers and cousins played the Cook Island drums with the whole 1,2,3, crossing the sticks and then beating the drums. They focused on this activity for over 15 minutes. We spied some very interesting and passionate dancing. One of the children knew all the words to One Direction. Many learning opportunities at Toru Fetu were linked to the children’s culture, based on music and art. One of the children was passionate about performing and when asked what they enjoyed, responded immediately and very proudly with "I like poi".

I spoke with one of the teachers (that the children respectfully call ‘Aunty’) about her favourite activity with the children. She talked about the dancing and music times she spent with the children and how they loved putting on concerts. All the rooms had musical instruments for the children to use and they certainly were well used when we were visiting. Music was playing in one room with a few children dancing away and singing like true professionals.

A very common activity was to play families. Many of the children talked about this activity, "play with the babies and dolls. I really love playing with the babies." I had a great moment with two young girls, I asked them what they were doing. They were playing families: "This is my daughter", "I am the Mum, Sarah." I asked them what they were doing. They were in the kitchen baking. We talked about what you need to bake a cake and we made a list together of eggs, sugar, flour, and butter. This is her cake recipe.

We ate delicious imaginary cake out in the play area. Their generosity was amazing. I think I even got a cup of tea too.

There was so much to do at Toru Fetu, with easy access to high quality resources “playing on the trains, piling up the blocks”. I only witnessed a few tears, but I wasn’t surprised – they were cool blocks and train-tracks and sharing is really hard. There were lots of puzzles displayed, the best collection of animals I have ever seen, and the dinosaur collection was awesome. I wasn’t surprised by someone mentioning they were their favourite things "I like dinosaurs, I like the dinosaur puzzle".

Lots of the children spent time by themselves “practicing letters, writing stories, playing on the computer and keyboard.” One of the children wanted to copy us and make notes also.

Toru Fetu has a super easy flow to outside activities. I was lucky enough to be invited to stick my hands in the “mud-play” which was yellow glub – the texture and viscosity was rather intriguing. There was nice space to bounce the ball. Sarah asked “How did you learn that?” and the reply: “I practiced and practiced and practiced lots and lots and then I learnt!” Celebrating success is a big factor at Toru Fetu and the children have small successes every day. Simple pleasures from “I like running”, "I can help my hop. My big sister showed me" to “playing soccer, playing running, playing bikes” as well as more imaginative play such as "I’ve got the map and I going to take me to the river shark" were all part of a normal day at Toru Fetu.
Toru Fetu teachers take photos of the children doing a variety of activities to share with parents and display on the walls. They are patient and kind. I watched an under-two-year-old child at the centre being read to. We had a nice moment identifying eyes, ears, mouth, and nose – well maybe they just wanted to poke the newbie? The little girl was surrounded by books, babies and a watchful eye. She was happy, simulated and content.

Many of the children were happy to share their morning tea fruit and I was offered lots of bites of sandwiches. Toru Fetu was a place where everyone was treated equally and I was no different. The children ate together and the food looked tasty, lots of fruit, healthy sandwiches, and yoghurt. Lots of good practice at “washing our hands before food”. Many of the children proudly stated “I have friends, the teachers are my friends”.

Toru Fetu had a space and a place for everything, music, food, reading, writing, physical activity, team play, solo play, space to be messy, space to be clean. We left Toru Fetu as some of the children were going down for their nap. Many of the young children sorted out their own beds to have a sense of ownership and safety. I asked one of the children if they had sleep time, “NO sleep, sometimes I do, little aye”.

Mums, dads and wider family members all had a presence at Toru Fetu. I asked one of the children what their mum and dad did at Toru Fetu: “They bring you to school” and “Mum and Dad come and pick me up, write their names here”. There were family photos of the children with their mums, dads, uncles, aunts, and photos of grandparent’s days. Toru Fetu has an area totally dedicated to the families of the children at the centre as well as children and families in the wider community. It is a large sunny room to do activities in, meet, share and connect. All children were signed in and I witnessed so much collective caring as the children tried to escape through the doors to the car park.

Reflections from young people

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner also has a relationship with ten diverse young people from throughout New Zealand who form the Commissioner’s Young People’s Reference Group (YPRG). We recently spoke with them about Early Childhood Education, what memories they had from that time in their lives and what skills they thought they had learnt.

Of those young people who attended Early Childhood Education, memories of those times were rich. It was not surprising that their memories matched with the favorite activities the children at Toru Fetu shared with us. The YPRG had memories of “birthday cakes on your birthday, playing, sandpit, nap time, singing on the carpet, being with your family/cousins, listening to stories, and the craft table”.

They were aware that the early years were a “good time to learn things, as the brain is growing” and that ECE allowed children a space so they could be “developing life skills”, that good ECE centres were “safe place to go” and ECE was definitely an “educational environment” for young children to spend time in. They were aware that it allowed “parents to work” and viewed ECE as a “good investment”. When we asked the YPRG what they had learnt in their ECE days, it was interesting to see how it directly linked to the things the children shared with us. Digging deep into their memory banks they mentioned learning things such as “singing, music and rhythm”, “reading and half of the alphabet, Maori, learning shapes”, “sitting on the mat, confidence, sharing is caring, forgiveness, being careful, consequences, having turns, loyalty, friendship, learning in a group and how to be tidy.” These are all lifelong skills that support us to be active citizens.
I asked the YPRG why they felt that children might not be participating in ECE? They told me it could be that ECE was “not accessible, location, no way to get there”, that families may have “financial reasons” for their children not to be able to participate, that some parents/family/whanau may be wary of a different environment for their child which might range from “parents afraid of safety for their child, external influences on their children (different rules, values, language), exposure to illness”. The YPRG also thought there may be “cultural aspects, and language barriers” for children participating in ECE.

On the right track

The children at Toru Fetu were alive, kind, happy, generous, brave, clever, and cool. The families were confident and friendly and actively participating in the development of their children, family and the centre. The community in Porirua and the team at Toru Fetu have developed an ECE centre that addresses all the barriers that the YPRG have identified above. The partnerships and collective approach they take around supporting the children and their families allows for everyone to access and participate in Toru Fetu to the best of their ability, at their own pace and with the language, culture and values that are important to them.

On leaving Toru Fetu we had a great sense that it provided a safe, explorative, dynamic child centred space for the community that nurtures it. The community use the space in the weekends for family and community events as the children, team and families of Toru Fetu have developed a warm and loving environment – something all children, families and communities deserve.

One of the members of the YPRG remembered his early childhood as a time he learnt “what it is like to be valued.” In the small time we spent with the children at Toru Fetu it was clear to us that the children there are valued. They are gifts, to be treasured and nurtured. And they were thriving.

We thank all the children, their families, teachers and wider community for the openness and support we experienced when we spoke to, and recorded the comments made by the children of Toru Fetu.
News

National Civil Defence exercise – 26 September

At 9.26am on Wednesday 26 September [9:26-26:9], the first ShakeOut drill will be held nationwide in any country! The aim is to have one million participants in the New Zealand ShakeOut earthquake drill. Participants at home, work and school will practice “Drop, Cover and Hold”—the right action to take in an earthquake.

For more information please visit www.shakeout.govt.nz

Ministry of Education – Early Childhood section

Check out the Ministry of Education’s website for up to date information. From here you can access ECE Lead and ECE Educate, where you can find early childhood education information quickly and easily.


Office of the Children’s Commissioner

Last year the Children’s Commissioner hosted a seminar focusing on Early Childhood education. What do we want for our youngest children? Talking across boundaries.

Notes from this seminar are available here: http://www.occ.org.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/8567/CC_EarlyYearsseminarnotes.pdf

Key pieces of research were presented at this seminar:


Information

Prime Minister’s Youth Mental Health Package

Early this year the Prime Minister unveiled a package of initiatives focusing on youth mental health.

The initiative includes a focus on making primary health care more youth friendly, with interim support for Youth One Stop Shops. The finer details are still in development and the Ministries are consulting with key people in the sector. The initiative also increases the number of youth workers in low decile schools. Youth workers will be placed in schools in South Auckland, Porirua and Flaxmere that don’t already have Multi Agency Support Services in Secondary Schools.

Youth workers will be employed by Child, Youth and Family preferred providers who will be required to go through a tendering and contracting process. There will be 9 new youth workers in 2012/13 and 10 more in 2013/14. Youth workers will be required to have a level 6 qualification.

Full fact sheet information is available here:

http://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/all/files/Youth_Mental_Health_project-School_Based_Initiatives.pdf


http://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/all/files/Youth_Mental_Health_project-Family_and_Community.pdf

http://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/all/files/Youth_Mental_Health_project-Online_Initiatives.pdf

Events/Publications/Resources/Conferences
Research, Publications, Reports


For information from the Governments ECE Taskforce please visit http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/. You will be able to access the final reports and other useful information about Early Childhood policy directions.


Alcohol and Pregnancy: a New Training Resource for Primary Care Givers

The purpose is to enable primary care providers to talk more confidently with patients about the effects of alcohol during pregnancy. The training also provides participants with interpersonal skills to help carry out these often tricky conversations. Viewers can watch clinical scenarios played out online. To enrol for free and see the training module, visit http://akoaoetearoa.ac.nz/node/6285

Resources

New Zealand Blue Light is Proud to Announce a New Website

www.bluelight.co.nz

New Zealand Blue Light is a registered charity and community policing youth program. The new Blue Light website has a number of handy tools which include a newsletter sign up, events page, photo gallery, resources and more!

Child Matters – Safe Not Sorry publication

How do we ensure that the people working with our children are safe?

“Safe Not Sorry” is an essential guide for every organisation where adults are involved with children and young people, including schools, early childhood centres, sporting or cultural groups, after school care, youth groups, church group and more.

“Safe Not Sorry” is a practical, easy to use handbook, complete with sample application forms, checking forms and more, to help keep child abusers out of organisations responsible for children. It is an essential tool for all those involved with children.Order your copy from http://www.childmatters.org.nz/shop/item/display/1/2

Conferences, events

PHA Conference 2012

The conference will take place in Wellington (Pipitea Campus, Victoria University) from 3-5 September 2012 with the theme “Equity from the start “valuing our children.” A promising range of local and international speakers is lined up and are planning some exciting Gateway Events prior to the conference. Find out more at conference.pha.org.nz.
JustSpeak Camp

Friday, 21 – Sunday, 23 September 2012
Tapu Te Ranga Marae, Island Bay, Wellington

JustSpeak is a network of young people speaking to, and speaking up for a new generation of thinkers who want change in our criminal justice system. JustSpeak aims to empower young people from all walks of life to think independently and speak out about justice issues they care about or that affect them.

Young people are affected by injustices in the criminal and social justice systems. JustSpeak believes that through our imagination, innovation, enthusiasm and a belief in our ability to make positive change, young people can help create a more just Aotearoa.

Attendees at the camp will get the chance to connect with other young people (and some not-so-young people), learn about justice issues, develop a voice, get active and make a change together!

And it’s totally free to attend...

JustSpeak want people who’ve got the right attitude, who want to meet some new people, learn some stuff and gain a louder voice together!

Want to come? Or Want to find out more...

Check out the website:  
http://justspeakcamp.weebly.com/index,

Or Flick an email to justspeaknz@gmail.com

NZCOSS’s 2012 Biennial Conference
24 – 26 October 2012 in Taupo

New Zealand Council of Social Services (NZCOSS) is the national umbrella organisation for local Councils of Social Services (COSS’s), Community Houses, REAPS and other social service networks throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. The conference theme will be: Meeting the Future: Engaging Youth in the Community and Voluntary Sector. The conference will focus on engaging the next generation of community and voluntary sector leaders. Conference registration will open soon, and further information will be available on the NZ website at:  
www.nzcoss.org.nz

Jigsaw Maranga mai – let’s be awakend, rise up
10-12 October 2012, Te Papa, Wellington

Jigsaw national conference happens in October – a great opportunity to network, learn, and share. Full details will be available soon; in the meantime please feel free to email info@jigsaw.org.nz with any queries.

The Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA) warmly invites you to our upcoming conference ‘Improving Outcomes for Children and Whanau – Management and Practice Post the Green Paper’.

Our vision for tamariki and whanau is to support Member Service Providers to make a positive and significant difference in their communities through their work with children, young people and families.

We will achieve this by establishing strong regional networks of Social Service Providers, co-ordinating seminars, workshops and training opportunities and by bringing together best practice and management innovations and tools from around New Zealand and Australia.

For more information or to register visit http://www.sspa.org.nz/news/2012-sspa-conference

14-16 September 2012, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

The Forum programme will provide a superb list of plenary speakers and thought-provoking workshops across an array of topics associated with this year’s theme. If you are a Parents Centre volunteer or member, Childbirth Educator, Parent Educator or work for an organisation working with families of children pre birth to six years old then you don’t want to miss this event. The Forum programme will provide you with a superb list
of inspiring plenary speakers and an array of thought-provoking workshops and not to forget this evening of diamond and glamour as Parents Centres celebrate 60 years of supporting NZ families.


Ethnic YouthResource Kit—Helping young migrants settle in NZ

On the weekend of the 16th – 18th of March, The New Zealand Federation of Multicultural Councils (NZUEC) Youth Council launched its Ethnic Youth Resource Kit. The purpose of this resource kit is to provide a ‘one stop shop’ of all the potentially useful information necessary for ethnic youth; to live and thrive in New Zealand. This resource kit contains the basic information an ethnic migrant or refugee youth needs to know before they arrive and when they are living in New Zealand.

The main target audience for this resource kit is ethnic youth. It is designed to address the many different issues ethnic youth may face. The kit contains important information about things like how to open a bank account or join a sports team, where to get a cheap healthy meal, and how to apply for a visa or driver license.

There are twenty chapters; at the end of each is ‘more information’ with relevant website addresses and telephone contacts.


The NZFMC Youth Council has a Facebook page visit this at www.facebook.com/groups/51094528537/


It is hoped that the communities will utilise the resource kit to its full potential.

For more information contact:
Arish Naresh
Youth President
NZFMC-Youth Council
Email: acnaresh@hotmail.com
Ph: 0226248145
**CHILREN’S COMMISSIONER’S PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM**

Many of our publications are available for electronic download from [http://www.occ.org.nz/publications](http://www.occ.org.nz/publications)

Charges apply for some publications and prices are subject to change. You can make large or small orders. We may ask for a contribution to shipping costs for large orders.

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