

Strengthening Community-based Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

Report of the Quality Public Early
Childhood Education Project

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FOREWORD

In 2008 the Quality Public Early Childhood Education (QPECE) project group was formed after national organisations with an interest in strengthening community-based early childhood education (ECE) provision were invited to attend a meeting. Part One of this report records the project group's first phase of work to:

- develop a shared vision for community-based early childhood education
- set goals towards realising this vision
- identify some strategies to inform policy development intended to strengthen community-based services as well as strengthen quality participation by children and families in early childhood education.

In Part Two of the report the authors:

- background the historical and policy context of community-based services and their backbone role in ECE provision in Aotearoa New Zealand
- summarise some of the current arguments and research relating to community-based services
- identify some international trends and initiatives towards strengthening community-based services.

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PART ONE: QPECE PROJECT REPORT

Introduction

Participation in ECE across all age groups and communities in Aotearoa New Zealand has increased over the past two decades, supported by a range of initiatives, plans and projects from successive governments as well as the endeavours of organisations and individuals who provide ECE services in this country. Over the past decade the policy emphasis has been on quality participation, particularly in the context of the 2002-2012 Strategic Plan, *Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002), with the intent to implement a fully qualified teacher workforce in teacher-led services, alongside additional funding and support for whānau/parent-led services. There are, however, still geographic gaps in provision where parents have little or no choice in the kind of early childhood education available to make participation for their children possible, or more supportive of their particular cultural identity or family circumstances. Unlike school-aged children, there is no right for children under the age of five years to a place in an early childhood service.

The QPECE project emerged in this environment, as an endeavour by a group of national organisations with an interest in community-based early childhood provision. Some of the organisations on the project group owned the services they provided; some were primarily home-based, or teacher-led or whānau/parent-led; some organisations represented a particular pedagogical view of ECE; some had a predominance of community-based members in their organisation. An early task of the group was to agree that the broad tenets of community-based provision are:

- the service is seen as a community asset and the children, parents, families and community benefit from it
- collectivity, partnership, and participation are hallmarks of decision-making
- the full funding from public resources goes into educating the child and supporting their family.

The project group that met during 2008 did not include local community-based organisations and nor did it, in this initial endeavour, have the full participation of every national organisation, some of whom had to prioritise other issues during the year.

It seemed timely, amidst the considerable policy initiatives of the past decade, for the project group to appraise the impact on community-based organisations and services, sometimes unintended, of a changing policy infrastructure. The project provided an opportunity to:

- reconsider the contribution and role of community-based early childhood education
- reposition these services in the changing landscape of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand
- identify the possibilities for realigning the existing partnership between Government, community and whānau in the provision of early childhood education services in this country.

There was a shared view across the contributing organisations that community-based early childhood services and organisations had been ill-placed in the policy environment of the past two decades to respond to the need for the expansion of provision in the sector and the increased participation of children in early childhood education. This was because they were not set up to raise funds in the same way as private companies and are reliant on limited Government grants and community funding. They were also not experienced in property development. The provision of new services had been more possible for private and increasingly corporate providers, but sometimes in geographic competition to, and occasionally at the expense of, community services. Yet there were still hard-to-fill gaps in provision in some regions and lesser participation amongst some communities.

After a series of meetings during 2008, the project group decided it was timely to produce a first report based on its discussions and deliberations, setting out an agreed long term vision and some goals and strategies towards strengthening community-based provision. We know there is a wider audience with interests in community-based ECE, including both regional and local groups and services. This report will provide a foundation towards galvanising a wider coalition of interest in community-based ECE. In the report the authors also include a more detailed background to the history, policy, endeavours, arguments and research relating to community-based ECE.

Terms of reference

The QPECE Group brings together national organisations with an interest in community-based ECE provision, to develop a plan to:

- ▶ promote and strengthen community-based early childhood education
- ▶ promote government policy for planned provision of ECE across service types locally and nationally
- ▶ advocate for the rights of the child as a citizen to free, high quality ECE
- ▶ build widespread understanding and support for its vision.

Group members

Barnardos

New Zealand Catholic Education Office

Christian Early Childhood Education Association of Aotearoa (CECEAA)

Early Childhood Leadership

New Zealand Playcentre Federation

New Zealand Kindergartens

Pacific Island Early Childhood and Care Association (PIECCA)

Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa – NZCA

NZEI Te Riu Roa

Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust was approached and expressed interest in the project but was unable to commit to it.

Meetings

18 April 2008

6 June 2008

19 August 2008

7 October 2008

21 November 2008

Quality Public ECE 2020 Vision

Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand is a public good which empowers adults and children to learn and grow together. It is a partnership between Government, community, whānau and ECE services, and a choice for parents, underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and reflecting the rich diversity of communities within Aotearoa.

Vision

- ▶ Every child has a right as a citizen to participate in free early childhood education.
- ▶ Every family that wishes to can access high quality, community-based early childhood education.

The project group advocates for Government policies to realise our vision by 2020.

Goals

1. Promotion of community-based ECE services including whānau/parent-led services through the development of a national plan for all ECE provision throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.
2. Provision of appropriate services to ensure every child can participate in free, high quality ECE.
3. Robust accountability to Government, parents, whānau and communities, linked to indicators that demonstrate high quality ECE.

Goal 1:

Promotion of community-based ECE services, including whānau/parent-led services, through the development of a national plan for ECE provision throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Strategies

We will lobby Government to:

1. Establish a policy for nationally planned provision of ECE so that community-based services are strengthened and accessible.
2. Promote collaborative relationships in planning for ECE provision at local and regional level.
3. Plan for the establishment of ECE services in locations that ensure efficient use of Government and community resources.
4. Improve the sustainability of the community-based services.

Goal 2:

Provision of appropriate services to ensure every child can participate in free, high quality ECE.

Strategies

We will lobby Government to engage with the ECE sector to:

1. Develop a staged plan of provision that leads to free ECE for all children appropriate to their families and whānau.
2. Develop mechanisms to identify communities of interest to protect and foster a diverse range of services.
3. Explore new forms of provision that foster collaboration between services, share co-locations and provide flexible services that incorporate different operations in a single service or can be relocatable.
4. Explore mechanisms to link stand-alone ECE services with an umbrella ECE community-based organisation.
5. Explore ways to support administration and management of services, including support to umbrella organisations.

Goal 3:

Robust accountability to Government, parents, whānau and communities linked to indicators that demonstrate high quality ECE.

Strategies

We will lobby Government to:

1. Fully implement the target for all teacher-led ECE services to be staffed by a fully qualified and registered teaching workforce.
2. Fully implement the funding review to support quality in ECE services provided by whānau/parents.
3. Develop robust accounting systems for ECE linked to key indicators that determine quality outcomes in ECE, including, for example, pay parity for teachers and appropriate funding to support and recognise voluntary endeavours in whānau/parent-led services.
4. Build on the principles of quality, participation and collaboration to further improve quality outcomes for children and their families and whānau.

Issues and challenges

The visions, goals and strategies developed by the QPECE group point to distinctly new roles for Government and early childhood services, development of new early childhood policies, and full implementation of agreed policies based on quality, participation and collaboration.

These are where key challenges lie:

1. The QPECE group proposals require a move from a market approach, where services alone are responsible for the provision of early childhood education, to a partnership model where services work with the Government and community to build a coherent network of provision in every community. To find alternative ways of working together requires a willingness by each party to analyse their current contexts and processes and to be open to change. Nevertheless, the history of early childhood education shows that it is possible to reshape partnerships in order to work in the interests of a shared vision.
2. The proposals will require a Governmental commitment to fully implement the 2002-2012 strategic plan staffing policies, and with the sector to develop accountability systems and further strategies to improve quality. The consultative approach taken in the development of the strategic plan offers a model on how new policies may be developed.
3. An entitlement for every child to access free early childhood education is a further new development. This would necessitate an extension of free early childhood education to children of all ages in every type of early childhood education service, including whānau/parent-led services. Implementation issues, such as those that led to optional charging in New Zealand's free early childhood education policy, would need to be addressed. Nevertheless, many OECD countries are now offering free early childhood education as a legal entitlement and there could be value in exploring how their systems work.

The report of the QPECE group is a starting point for developing more concrete proposals on how to make high quality community-based provision freely accessible to all families in New Zealand. We hope it will act as a catalyst for other community groups to join with us in building a new system and lobbying for its implementation. For adoption of the vision and proposals will require a commitment by the Government and the early childhood sector to the ideas behind the vision and the goals and strategies for reaching it.

PART TWO: BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

Historical and policy overview

The first public provision of ECE in New Zealand from 1878 was in selected state-supported infant schools or classes that provided a kindergarten class to under five-year-olds and/or kindergarten activities for five to seven-year-olds (May, 2005). By the end of the nineteenth century kindergarten classes at school, although not necessarily kindergarten activities, had ceased as Education Boards enforced school entry at five years. ECE in the emerging free kindergartens was deemed to be outside the state's interests in education, although often applauded as a charitable and philanthropic endeavour appropriate for children of the poor. By the early twentieth century, four kindergarten associations had established the partnership model of Government support and community provision of services that still exists. The level and kind of this initial Government support, starting in 1904, was small and limited to a subsidy per child.

Over the next century the idea emerged, and was significantly realised, that a preschool experience was a good thing for all children prior to arrival at school. To accomplish this, the nature of the partnership changed and came to include more partners. Nevertheless, there have only been three significant reports and points in time where both the state and the early childhood sector have significantly reconsidered the partnership and the rationales for the kinds of provision and level of Government support:

- ▶ *Report of the consultative committee on pre-school educational services* (Department of Education, 1947)
- ▶ *Before Five: Early childhood care and education in New Zealand* (Lange, 1988)
- ▶ *Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi arataki 2002-2012* (Ministry of Education, 2002).

In 1947, the Government brought kindergartens within the free kindergarten associations under the umbrella of the state within the Department of Education, although their operations and ownership remained with their respective associations. The Government was poised to expand kindergarten provision out of the inner cities and into the suburbs and regions of New Zealand. Thenceforth funding for salaries, training, buildings and operations was provided to the associations, although fund-raising remained a feature of kindergarten life. The new playcentre movement that began as a self-help service for women during wartime was also recognised as a valid preschool option, although only with occasional and limited funding for many years. Remaining outside of Government interest were two other groups.

In 1903 Mother Aubert of the Sisters of Compassion established the first sustainable crèche in Wellington; other known ventures had faltered. The ethos was one of charity with a fee from the 'self respecting poor' if it could be afforded (May, 1997). Apart from the focus on the programme (one being primarily educational and the other primarily care) there was little difference between the early kindergartens and Mother Aubert's crèche: both were charitable services for children. The other difference was that the subsidy to kindergarten children, despite the efforts of Mother Aubert, was not extended to the children in the crèche.

In 1916 and 1932, in Wellington and Dunedin respectively, Citizens Day Nurseries were established with a mix of charity and fee-paying places. Likewise, in Wellington and Christchurch crèches were established, respectively at the Railway Station and in the Cathedral Square, primarily for shoppers but also used by mothers as a fee-paying childcare option. By the early 1940s four nurseries had also been established in connection with Christchurch secondary schools. During the Second World War years, several industries also established workplace childcare. *The Report of the consultative committee on pre-school educational services* (Department of Education 1947) recommended that Government should not support these nurseries.

Even further from Government's gaze were the growing plethora of small privately owned kindergartens and childcare centres. Government interest was purely in the community-based sector but only of the part-day, preschool–educational kind. This view shifted with the 1960 regulation of childcare centres, both community and private and including the private kindergartens; indeed this regulation extended to everything that was not defined as a free kindergarten within an association or a playcentre also under the umbrella of its local association. There was no Government support intended for the collectively named childcare centres, only regulation. The consequential establishment of the New Zealand Association of Childcare Centres (later NZCA) in 1963 brought community and private, care and education interests together, sometimes uncomfortably, to advocate for Government financial support for childcare (May, 2003).

In 1973 the first Government funding for childcare was won, but only as a subsidy to parents who could not afford the fees or where it was deemed the child had 'special needs' and might benefit from attending childcare. The administration of the subsidy was given to the regional and national community childcare organisations which were emerging to meet the demand for childcare across the country. Access to the subsidy for children in privately-owned centres and across some whole regions was initially limited but gradually expanded. By this time the Barnardos organisation was establishing family day care services around the country, another model of community-based early childhood provision; while city councils, many more workplaces and tertiary institutions, and activist community groups were all active in establishing a network of not-for-profit community childcare in many towns and cities (Smith & Swain, 1988). Alongside this community-based endeavour there were individuals also opening centres to meet the obvious demand for childcare, and as a new business opportunity.

The first direct funding to childcare centres began in 1983 in the form of trained staff grants to centres that employed staff with qualifications. Community-based centres were well positioned to take financial advantage of these grants as they had traditionally invested in employing some staff with qualifications and/or supporting staff to get qualifications. By the early 1980s, in the lead up to the *Before Five* (Lange, 1988) reforms of 1989, a diverse range of organisations representing different interest groups and/or services had been established across the early childhood sector alongside the large kindergarten and playcentre organisations. For example, in 1982 Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust was set up initially under the auspices of the Department of Māori Affairs as a community-based umbrella organisation of kōhanga reo. From 1986 Island language 'nests' emerged although without an umbrella group but often in association with a Pasifika church.

In 1980 some private centres broke away from the New Zealand Childcare Association to form the Private Child Care Federation, later becoming the Licensed Childcare Federation, while another group of private childcare owners formed the Associated Childcare Council. These groups later amalgamated and in 1991 the Early Childhood Council was formed as an advocacy and service organisation for mainly private and increasingly corporate interests but also including some community centres. Other groups were established representing particular philosophical interests such as the Montessori Association and Family Day Care Association, both of which in time included both privately-owned and community-based members.

In 1987 the somewhat unwieldy plethora of childcare services was shifted to the Department of Education, which for the first time needed to consider policy inclusive of care and education and across community and privately-owned services. The eventual *Before Five* funding policies, implemented from 1989, did not intend to differentiate between these divisions, as this would discriminate against children across different services. The early childhood sector as a whole had much that it could agree on. However, the Government's *Before Five* funding position generated much debate, particularly amongst community-based providers who wanted measures of accountability for the private childcare sector to ensure that the financial gains of *Before Five* were genuinely passed on to children and staff. These measures did not eventuate. In the event, the halting of the staged funding plan in 1990 by the incoming National Government meant that kindergartens retained a much higher level of funding than the other services.

Post-‘Before Five’, during the 1990s, a significant shift in the early childhood landscape began. The earlier planned provision of Government support for new kindergartens, as well as community initiatives that had characterised post-war provision was halted. Playcentres began to decline in numbers, although this was related to shifting priorities for women with young children who now often wanted to be in the workplace. A Capital Grants Scheme to support community-based services establish or extend buildings was - and still is, as the Discretionary Grants Scheme - grossly under-funded and over-subscribed and has become a hugely complex endeavour often extending over several years.

Filling the gap and able to meet the demand, particularly for the re-named education and care centres, was the private sector, attracted also by the high levels of Government subsidy into the business of childcare. By 1999, half of all education and care centres were privately owned as well as a quarter of home-based networks. Forty-two per cent of all preschool enrolments were in childcare services. This was a significant shift in the landscape of demand and provision. During the 1990s kindergarten enrolments increased by only 1 per cent per annum, while playcentre decreased around 4 per cent annually.

By the mid-1990s, broad concerns across a range of policy issues from organisations and groups providing or supporting community-based early childhood services led to the formation of the Early Childhood Education Project, whose report *Future Directions* (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996) received attention and acknowledgement from the National-led Government. The report’s proposal for a strategic plan for the sector was adopted by the 1999 Labour-led Government. *Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi arataki 2002 - 2012* (Ministry of Education, 2002) detailed a ten-year strategic plan intended to articulate a renewed partnership between the state and the early childhood sector, with a more hands-on role for Government and to wrap a range of funding and qualifications policies around ‘quality participation’ in both ‘teacher-led’ and ‘whānau/parent-led’ services. There was a particular concern with redressing the barriers to provision and participation that still existed for Māori and Pasifika children, with the solutions seen to lie significantly within the community-based sector. The Equity Funding scheme was an early initiative. This provided extra funding for community-based services that either provided for children in isolated or low socio-economic indexed localities, or had a proportion of children with special needs or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

A flagship policy for the Government, although not directly in the strategic plan itself, was the 20-hours-free policy announced in 2004 to be implemented in 2007. This was intended initially for children in community-based services, but an outcry from parents whose children would miss out caused the Government to extend the policy to children attending private centres where the centre opted into the scheme. Despite a fraught implementation process around the level of costs that the Government would actually fund, and issues such as ‘optional fees’, the policy soon proved highly popular with parents. After a cautious response by private centres and corporate groups, as well as some kindergarten associations, the uptake on all fronts has been high and is still increasing (May, 2009; Education Counts, 2009).

New Zealand has much to be proud of in its early childhood education policies. The country is well recognised internationally as a leader. Peter Moss, an international commentator on early childhood education policy, told a New Zealand audience of policy-makers and providers that New Zealand was ‘leading the wave’ of early childhood innovation. More particularly, New Zealand had ‘confronted the wicked issues’ with the development of an integrated and coherent national approach to funding, regulation, curriculum and qualifications (Moss 2007, p.33). In 2008 Moss told an international audience of policy-makers in Dublin that New Zealand was an ‘interesting and surprising exception to the general picture’ of ‘market standardisation’ in early childhood policy and its ‘split systems’ of childcare, early education and targeted services for the poor (Moss, 2008a, p.7). Moss’s outsider view of New Zealand provides a useful perspective:

...having developed a reform of ECEC services that confronts the split system and the dominance of technical practice. While there are many elements of the market apparent, including a large private sector, New Zealand has also opened up to diversity, most obviously in its innovative early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*.

New Zealand has developed a national framework, which brings some coherence to the system around issues of equity and access. One Ministry (education) is responsible for all ECEC services; there is a single funding system for services (based on direct funding of services rather than parents); a single curriculum; and a single workforce, which by 2012 will consist of early childhood teachers, educated to graduate level. Underpinning these structures, and perhaps the most radical change of all, New Zealand has an integrative concept that encompasses all services - 'early childhood education', a broad and holistic concept that covers children, families and communities, a concept of 'education-in-its-broadest-sense' in which learning and care really are inseparable and connected to many other purposes besides. *New Zealand has, in short, understood the need to rethink as well as restructure, early childhood education and care* [our emphasis] (Moss, 2008a, pp.7-8).

From an insider perspective it was also apparent, as Carmen Dalli suggested, that some 'unintended consequences of well-intentioned policies' were beginning to emerge (Dalli, 2008, p.1). It was the private sector and corporate groups that were best positioned to respond to the expanding provision and participation. Increasing levels of Government funding were, again, making early childhood education service provision a business opportunity, to the extent that some private childcare businesses were listed on the stock exchange with the intention of delivering a financial return to stockholders. Multi-national companies such as Macquarie Bank were able to move in and out of the market, rapidly buying and then selling centres for a large profit. ABC Learning expanded rapidly throughout the country, but the financial collapse of its parent company left New Zealand ABC users and operators in limbo (May, 2009). By 2008, 36 per cent of all enrolments in early childhood education were in privately owned services. In the growing number of education and care centres, more than 60 per cent of enrolments were in private services.

The overall enrolment rates of children attending early childhood education services increased by 58 per cent between 1990 and 2008, which included a 10.8 per cent growth from 2000 levelling to a 4.2 per cent growth from 2006, mainly for under three year olds (Education Counts, 2009). Overall participation rates in early childhood education for children upon starting school increased from 92.3 per cent in 2002 to 94.5 per cent in 2006. For Pakeha children participation increased from 96.6 per cent in 2002 to 98 per cent in 2006; for Māori children it increased from 86.5 per cent to 89.9 per cent, and for Pasifika children from 79.4 per cent to 84.2 per cent. For Māori and Pasifika children, participation rates were lower but there were still increases between 2004 and 2008 of 5.7 per cent and 16.5 per cent respectively.

Despite this increased participation, a Salvation Army *State of the Nation* (Salvation Army, 2008) report described 'a large and lingering inequity of access for poor and generally brown children' (p.6). Citing 2005-2006 figures, the report pointed to overall enrolment rates for preschoolers of 64.9 per cent, up from 59.7 per cent in 2001. However, there were variations around this national average, with an enrolment rate of only 44 per cent in Manukau City compared to 86 per cent in Tauranga. Similarly, in Otara, Auckland, just 33 per cent of preschoolers had early childhood places compared to 80 per cent in Wellington City.

Despite the huge gains over the past two decades, some hard-to-solve issues remain. A more planned approach to provision regionally and nationally is required in addition to the current market forces of private provision and the handicapped situation of community providers. This is the backdrop to the establishment of the QPECE project,

with its intent to strengthen community-based early childhood education and to better position services to meet community needs and serve the interests of children, their families and their diverse communities.

Arguments for Quality Public Early Childhood Education

Public education for school-aged children was enshrined in the 1877 Education Act which established a national education system that would be compulsory, free and secular for the primary school-aged child. There were schools outside of this public system in the so-called private domain, but these were mainly charitable or church schools and rarely commercial, unlike the private providers which operate in the ECE sector today. The much-quoted statement on education in 1939 from the first Labour Government Minister of Education, Peter Fraser, penned by the future Director of Education C. E. Beeby, might have outdated language but remains a measure of commitment to the idea of a public education and the rights of the citizen child:

The government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every child, whatever his level of ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers (Fraser, 1939, p.2).

The statement did not consider preschool-aged children, whose interests were subsumed within the Government's welfare state policies to provide safety nets for families. Over the past 70 years the Government has shifted its interests in education to include the preschool-aged child but this does not embrace the level or extent of the Fraser-Beeby promises to the school-aged child, significantly realised. In recent years the Quality Public Education Coalition (QPEC) has campaigned to keep successive governments focussing on public education. At the 2003 QPEC conference the famous Fraser-Beeby quote was revisited and current education audited against its vision. Helen May considered the issues for the ECE sector and re-penned the quotation, firstly in the light of current Government ECE policy:

The Government's objective, broadly speaking, is that every child, whatever their family circumstances, whether their parents are solo, separated, married or defacto, at work or at home, whether they be rich or poor, whether they live in town or country, are Māori or Pakeha, should participate in quality early childhood education that meets their family needs, recognizes their cultural heritage, and provides a rich learning environment so that each preschool child is empowered to learn and grow to their fullest potential prior to arrival at school.

Secondly, the statement was penned inclusive of advocacy and debate of the time concerning the role of ECE for young children.

The Government's objective, should broadly speaking be, that every child: whatever their family circumstances, whether their parents are solo, separated, married or defacto, at work or at home, whether they be rich or poor, whether they live in town or country, are Māori or Pakeha, should have a right as a citizen to a free early childhood education that meets their family needs, recognizes their cultural heritage and provides a rich learning environment in a community of learning that empowers both adults and children to learn and grow as equal participants in a democratic society.

This was, and still is, an unrealised vision.

NZEI Te Riu Roa (NZEI) also has political interests in advocating for public education. A position paper *QPE 4 21C Quality Public Education for the 21st Century* (NZEI, 2006) was submitted to the 2006 annual general meeting. The QPE 4 21C position paper identified four principles:

- ▶ Education is a human right and a public good.
- ▶ Every child or student is entitled to a good local school or early childhood education centre.
- ▶ Every student is entitled to quality learning.
- ▶ Active teacher professionalism is the marker for a desirable future.

The vision above, penned by May, was included as part of Principle One. The paper used a 'right to education' framework adopted by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission from the United Nations Economic and Social Council (1999) to assess the realisation of the right to education:

- ▶ **Availability** – free education for all children and respect for parental choice
- ▶ **Accessibility** – eliminating discrimination of access
- ▶ **Acceptability** – quality education and a safe and nurturing environment for all children in accordance with their human rights
- ▶ **Adaptability** – education that responds and adapts to the child's best interests.

At the 2006 annual general meeting, NZEI resolved to build communities of interest to develop a vision of public early childhood education and returned to the 2007 meeting with the report *Quality Public ECE: a vision for 2020* (NZEI, 2007).

This report summarised the situation, acknowledging that New Zealand's proud record in ECE included increasing professionalisation, a national bicultural curriculum, the Ministry of Education assuming responsibility for the sector and the introduction of pay parity for teachers with their primary and secondary colleagues. The 20-hours-free policy for three and four-year-olds was hailed as a further significant milestone.

However the report cited the benchmark survey by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (Mitchell & Brooking 2007) that highlighted the problems associated with the growing domination of private services. These include poorer working conditions for teachers, a higher incidence of excessive workloads and less time for professional development, and consequent higher turnover. These services are also more likely to be located in areas already well serviced. Also cited was recent research from Canada using four datasets which confirmed the superiority of public provision, showing a quality advantage of between 7.5 and 15 per cent (Cleveland, Forer, Hyatt, Japel, & Krashinsky, 2007). This research confirmed earlier findings in New Zealand and elsewhere (Mitchell, 2002).

The report also identified some issues for ECE provision in Aotearoa New Zealand around the themes of the rights outlined above and summarised below:

Availability

While the sector is characterised by diversity, the NZCER (2007) survey shows there are many barriers to availability, including waiting lists, hours of operation, location and affordability. Any new private service is automatically entitled to public subsidies on the basis of the number, age and hours of the children enrolled, and the qualifications of staff. The private sector tends to provide full-day services suited to the needs of middle and higher income families where the parents are in full-time work. There is no mechanism to ensure that community services are established in areas of need which may not be attractive to private operators.

Accessibility

Despite the rapid growth of the sector, there is evidence that some children are missing out on ECE because suitable services are not available. In rural and low income areas, this is more likely. The community sector is also more likely to prioritise culturally appropriate services for Māori and Pasifika families, and migrant families. Children who attend low decile schools are 10 times more likely to have missed out on ECE (Maharey, 2006). As the Mitchell & Brooking (2007, p.137) report says:

As long as provision is left to the market and relies heavily on the private sector for education and child care services, which... cater[s] for higher proportions of high-income families, there will be no guarantee of having suitable ECE provision available for all children whose families want them to attend.

Acceptability

Acceptability to families is closely tied to accessibility – families will only find services acceptable if they feel their family and culture is supported by the service. *Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi arataki*: (Ministry of Education, 2002) states:

Children's interests and developments are fostered if well-being of their family is supported, if their family, culture, knowledge and community are respected, and if there is a strong connection and consistency among all aspects of a child's world.

The structure of community services ensures that they are accountable to families, reinforcing the idea that education is a partnership. Children learn best in a setting that respects their culture and background, and for this reason, the quality of relationships with families and whānau is crucial. Community services are legally obliged to account to families for how their money – from fees and taxes – is spent. Community centres are well placed to foster the community connections that create some of the knowledge and confidence, relationships and sense of connectedness that families need for effective child-rearing. Community well-being is outside the mandate of commercial operations, which cannot afford to invest in non-core activities with no financial return.

Adaptability

Communities are able to get limited assistance to establish new centres, but the process often relies on considerable ongoing time and effort from a small group of volunteers. For Māori and Pasifika communities this can put considerable strain on limited resources.

NZEI has continued its advocacy for quality public education across the sectors. One of its initiatives was to invite ECE national organisations with significant interests in community-based ECE to meet to discuss the issues. The organisation representatives formed their own project group to work towards strengthening the community-based sector. The vision and goals outlined earlier in this report are the shared views of the QPECE project group, not NZEI's. There were some shared and also different interests to the NZEI's position on public education.

International contexts

Within international contexts, ECE is receiving new policy attention from the world's richer governments. In recent years, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which works with 30 member countries to compare policy experiences and advance policy solutions, has entered into this policy debate, publishing a series of reports reviewing ECE. *Starting Strong* (OECD, 2001) reviewed provision in 12 OECD countries. A further

eight countries participated in the *Starting Strong II* review (OECD, 2006). New Zealand was not a participant. The reviews took a broad and holistic view of the roles of ECE, and were concerned with how policies, services, families and communities can support children's learning and wellbeing. A holistic overview has also been taken by the QPECE group in respect to community-based provision.

The comparative reviews identified elements of successful ECE policy and offer valuable examples of policy initiatives. Much of the research and thinking within these reviews and other international literature is relevant to the focus of the QPECE group on the provision and nature of ECE and children's citizenry rights to participate in free ECE.

Provision and nature of ECE

Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, United States and the Netherlands are countries that, like New Zealand, share a mixed market economy and involve private groups in the provision of ECE services alongside community or state providers. In common, these countries are different from their European counterparts in terms of the emphasis placed on the marketplace for provision of childcare services, and the limited role played by the state in such provision. A market approach assumes that the community or business sector will respond to community need and ensure appropriate ECE provision.

The market approach to provision has been widely critiqued internationally, with evidence offered from different countries about its negative effects. The main conclusions from international literature are that a market approach augments inequities of access and quality associated with socio-economic status; that private provision offers more variable standards than community-based or state provided ECE, and that markets in ECE have led to the corporatisation of childcare services with attendant problems, and rather than generating new forms of provision that meet community aspirations, may limit the nature of what ECE might be. The OECD reviews, and several researchers and advocacy groups, have argued like the QPECE group that a market approach needs to be replaced by planned provision involving the Government and community.

The Starting Strong II review (OECD, 2006) argued that a reliance on parental choice and privatised provision of early childhood education will almost certainly lead to inequities in provision of services in poor communities, because commercial providers are reluctant to invest in these communities. Other studies have linked a market approach with inequities in access and also quality, favouring higher income communities. Noailly, Visser and Grout (2007) "suggest that the introduction of a free market in childcare in the Netherlands has led to a shift away from non-profit provision in poorer areas to for-profit provision in high income areas". Penn (2009) has described her own work in South Africa, where almost all provision is private. Preliminary results suggest that "the market amplifies social stratification". She also cited a UK Ofsted survey of 90,000 inspection visits to 84,00 providers over three years, which found that only half the providers in deprived areas were good quality compared with two thirds overall (Ofsted, 2008). In Canada, private provision has been found to service smaller proportions of children from low-income families and with special educational needs (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2004). In New Zealand, NZCER's 2003 national survey (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007) found that the private education and care sector catered for higher proportions of high-income families than the community-based education and care sector.

Funding mechanisms favouring low-income families do not seem to be able to address inequities in access. The OECD (2006) concluded that targeting subsidies to low-income families is inherently problematic, missing families that are over the border for subsidy assistance, and families who move in and out of risk. Likewise, Penn (2009) stated that while South Africa had moved to "supply-side funding" (grants given to providers on condition that they admitted poor children), it was very difficult to decide under a targeted system who was eligible for a place and who was not. In addition, subsidies would only be helpful in resolving access issues if appropriate services were available in every community.

A consistent finding from international research is that while good quality care and education enhances social, dispositional and cognitive outcomes for children, poor quality care and education may be detrimental (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008). Recent studies carried out in Canada (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2005; Cleveland, Forer, Hyatt, Japel, & Krashinsky, 2007; Cleveland, 2008; Doherty, et al., 2000), the United States (Sosinsky, Lord, & Zigler, 2007), the Netherlands (Noailly et al., 2007), New Zealand (Mitchell, 2002; Mitchell & Brooking, 2007; Mitchell & Hodgen, 2008), and the United Kingdom (Mathers, Sylva & Joshi, 2007; Mathers & Sylva, 2007) lead to a reasonable conclusion that while levels of quality of private provision vary, on average, not-for-profit services offer higher quality services than private services. These differences have been found in relation to measures of “process quality” (observational measures of the quality of interactions, equipment and environment) and “inputs” to quality, including teacher qualifications, employment conditions, staff:child ratios and staff turnover. Findings are reasonably consistent across countries. Cleveland et al. (2007) found the differences on quality measures between not-for-profit and private services were particularly evident in “thick” markets, where there is high demand for places.

Cleveland (2008) has identified two important reasons why early childhood education markets do not perform in the way competitive markets perform when they are working well (i.e., the market compels goods and services to be competitively produced, efficiently produced, of reasonable quality and at a price that is close to costs). One is the public interest in good quality provision, since it is from good quality early childhood education that positive outcomes for children are gained. There is also public interest in childcare as a means to support mothers’ paid employment. The second reason is that parents do not have the ability to make perfect choices. Parents are constrained by their access to information on quality and the services that are available to them, either cost-wise or in terms of their location. Cleveland cites the *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study*, where parents substantially overestimated the actual quality level of the services their children used.

Expansion of private provision can have the effect of squeezing out community-based provision. We have commented on the growth of the private education and care sector in New Zealand and the relatively handicapped position of the community-based sector. According to Lloyd (2008) in the UK, “market conditions have favoured the corporate childcare sector, which has grown sevenfold since 1997, after a good deal of consolidation” (Penn, 2007: 202).

Cleveland (2008, p. 11) identified two main barriers to the expansion of non-profit programmes in Canada:

- ▶ initial and ongoing access to capital. The private sector can negotiate loans and mortgages from banks. The same terms are hard for non-profit groups to obtain. It is difficult for non-profit groups to establish services in new communities
- ▶ insufficient management and operations support.

These highlight issues that were of concern to the QPECE group, which has recommended strategies to ensure planning for the establishment of community-based ECE services and for administrative and management support. The OECD (2006, p. 115) notes that the “rapidity of the small private provider in starting up a service is a considerable advantage, as public systems can take a number of years to plan and build each new early childhood centre”, but it cautions that a long term view needs to be taken, one which addresses the importance of providing equal opportunity for all children. A market system shifts away from this principle.

Recently in countries that share a mixed market economy, concern has grown at the spread of corporate chains of childcare services, owned by public companies and publicly listed on the stock exchange. The first duty of publicly listed companies is to shareholders who expect a financial return from their investment. Penn (2009) points out that the business expertise expected of corporate providers requires financial and managerial expertise but no prior knowledge of professional issues of childcare.

The story of ABC Learning's growth and eventual collapse highlights what can happen when generous government subsidies are available to private corporate providers operating in an unplanned childcare market. ABC expanded from one centre in Brisbane in 1988, to 2300 centres in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Canada, the US and the Far East by 2007 (Press & Woodrow, 2009; Scherer, 2009). In Australia, ABC Learning owned around 30 per cent of all childcare services overall, and over 50 per cent in some communities. This large market share of childcare provision had the effect of limiting parental choice of service, and putting non-ABC childcare centres at financial risk because of ABC Learning's competitive edge (Press & Woodrow, 2009). In November 2008, ABC was placed in receivership owing nearly \$2 billion (Scherer, 2009). The Australian government announced a \$22 million package to keep the centres open until December 2008. As the New Zealand Herald's Karyn Scherer noted, "ABC shareholders have also lost tens of millions of dollars and the banks that owned the parent company money have already written off hundreds of millions" (Scherer, 2009). ABC's New Zealand services are currently up for sale. The story of the ABC collapse exemplifies "the widespread, disruptive and unpalatable consequences" that may occur from "overly ambitious, high risk expansion" (Sumsion, 2006, p. 108).

In response to the trend towards the corporatisation of childcare, and the concerns that market approaches have raised, some community early childhood education organisations and university academics have set up advocacy and/or research networks to undertake further research and advocate for a different approach to providing ECE services.

United Kingdom

Helen Penn and Eva Lloyd have established a research centre at the School of Education, University of East London: The *International Centre for the Study of the Mixed Economy of Childcare* (ICMEC). The ICMEC is launching a programme of work to try to address some issues. Penn (2007) has suggested more detailed research is needed on the operation and economic impact of the corporate and single trader private sector.

Canada

Several advocacy groups exist in Canada, and aim to strengthen community-based provision and resist corporatisation.

The *Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada* was set up in 2005 in response to concerns about the international trend towards the corporatisation of childcare and a determination not to let multinational corporate childcare enter Canada. Its key message is that increased public funding needs to be used to expand public or not-for-profit childcare programmes. In an open letter to the leaders of Canada's political parties at the end of 2008, the association asked that the 2009 Federal budget "include a \$2.2 billion investment in child care services, along with a commitment to work with provinces and territories to build community-owned, quality, affordable child care" (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, 2008).

The *Coalition of Child Care Advocates* of BC has been seeking ways to strengthen community-based provision. Working in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Policy, the Coalition developed proposals to move away from patchwork provision to a system of accountable, community-based childcare services (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, 2007). There are some commonalities between its proposals and those of the QPECE group. Like the QPECE group, the Coalition argued that all children should have equitable access to non-profit or publicly owned early childhood services across regions and diverse groups. Other key principles included inclusiveness and responsiveness to diversity, coordination and integration of services, and accountability to the community. Its proposals are more specific than those of the QPECE group. It recommended the actual form of a community governance model in British Columbia: the establishment of Community Child Care Boards that would evolve into governing bodies with a mandate to plan, develop and deliver child care services that meet the needs of their

community. The boards would have capital and operating budgets and would be accountable to their communities through their decision-making processes. The Coalition also recommended “a government ministry to champion child care”. (Unlike New Zealand, childcare services in BC were not integrated with education services under one departmental administration). The Coalition also costed its model.

The Child Care Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto, has proposed that as a long term goal, Canadian childcare should be delivered through non-profit services, and has suggested a range of ways in which this could be done.

Australia

In Australia, several researchers have been highly critical of the rise of corporate childcare, in particular of ABC. One of these researchers, Deborah Brennan, hosted a symposium at the University of New South Wales in 2008 to analyse the issues and concerns of corporate childcare.

Alternative models of responsibility

The goals that the QPECE group has formulated for the development of a national plan of all ECE provision and collaborative relationships in planning at local and regional levels are not new internationally. Another model for childcare provision, one that is not premised on the idea that the operation of the market will provide suitable services, exists in many European continental countries. Here, it is commonplace for local or central government to play a strong role in planning provision, and even in providing directly themselves.

In Scandinavian countries, ECE services are planned and supported by local bodies (municipalities). For example:

- ▶ In Finland, every child under the compulsory school starting age has a right to a “day care” service provided by the municipality once paid parental leave comes to an end. The responsibility rests with local authorities to organise services for parents who wish their child to attend. Most services are provided by the municipality (day care, family day care and preschool class). A small percentage of services are provided by selected private providers, outsourced by the municipality and part of the municipal network. Fully private services may be open to parents who choose, but these are outside the municipal network and do not attract the same funding and support. In addition, municipalities and voluntary organisations organise sessional ECE services.
- ▶ Since 2003, in Norway, the provision of ECE services has been a legal duty of municipalities, similar to provision of health and social services. All parents who want their child to attend an ECE service must be offered a place.
- ▶ In Sweden, all children aged from one year have a right to preschool education. Most provision is provided directly by municipalities in “day care” centres; private provision is through co-operatives, churches, corporations (for example universities, government organisations) and other providers. According to a national evaluation of preschools (Skolverket. Swedish Agency for Education, 2004), one disadvantage of devolving planning totally to the municipal level is the variations that may be generated between municipalities in access and quality. This evaluation found lack of support in terms of resources and management was particularly evident in low-income communities. Since the evaluation and the OECD review in 2006, some of these issues have been countered through state grants to improve staffing, and a new teacher education programme (not yet evaluated). These experiences lend weight to the emphasis of the QPECE group on both national and local planning, and on the full implementation of strategic plan staffing initiatives.

A strong community or state sector is upheld in France. Here, private provision is not permitted and the state provides and fully funds services through the free école maternelle system, has been held up as an exemplar of support for quality ECE (OECD, 2006; Penn, 2009). The école maternelles are part of the education system. Children have a legal right to a place in a neighbourhood école maternelle from the age of three years, but can enrol from two years. About 99 percent of three, four and five-year-olds, and a third of two-year-olds attend (Penn, 2009). École maternelles open from 8.30am to 3.30pm and often include out-of-school care on school premises. The central government determines the national curriculum and recruits, trains, and pays teachers and the inspectorate. Teachers are public employees, paid on a national pay scale, and covered by the same union as primary school teachers. Local governments have responsibility for facilities (buildings, equipment and curriculum materials) and support for staff (OECD, 2006). Rigby, Tarrant and Neuman (2007) have argued that direct government provision through the école maternelle system “reinforces an active role for government in childcare policy and decreases the legitimacy (and strength) of arguments against government interventions in children’s lives” (p. 101).

Peter Moss, in a discussion paper for the Bertelsmann Stiftung (Moss, 2008b), defines and compares the market model for the provision of early childhood education and care services with a model of “democratic experimentalism”. He argues that each model is based on different values, understandings, concepts and goals. Under the market model, services “are managed by their owners, who respond to consumer need and to the need to make a return on capital” (Moss, 2008b p. 37).

Most commonly, this is childcare for working families. The model of “democratic experimentalism” values early childhood education as a public good and public responsibility, and regards democracy and experimentalism as basic values. Moss argues that the types of service created under this model will be multipurpose, offering a range of functions for children and families in the community. Parents and staff would be systematically engaged in their management. In this model, unlike the “hands off” role played under a market model, the local authority:

. . . actively promotes collaboration between [ECE institutions], fostering networks and shared projects; democratic practices within them; and experimentation, individually and collectively. But it also acts as a provider itself, not of all services, but of some, both to ensure it has direct experience of what it means to create democratic experimental services and (as Unger suggests) to serve as a pace setter for experimentalism (Moss, 2008b, p. 30).

Bennett (2006), in discussing the OECD reviews, has concluded that the principle of democratic participation can work at service level and at management level through decentralisation to local authorities. At the same time, the central Government has a strong role in creating strong and equitable systems, and ensuring standards.

The international literature has offered examples from countries that, like Aotearoa New Zealand, are dealing with the difficult issues around providing access for all children to responsive and appropriate ECE services. The pathways that the QPECE group have put forward would seem to offer a way forward that is consistent with approaches found to be useful in some other countries.

Ensure every child can participate in free, high quality ECE

Internationally, free early childhood education is regarded as affirming the value of good quality early childhood education, and of rethinking the role of the state in its responsibilities for young children. Like the QPECE group proposal, a recent Children in Europe Policy Paper (Children in Europe, 2008) argued that access to ECE is a right of all children, an entitlement and a public responsibility that should be offered free of charge. There is a trend for the OECD countries participating in the OECD review of 20 countries (OECD, 2006) to provide at least two years' free provision before children start school, and most of these offer free provision as a legal entitlement. The United Kingdom, the United States and Denmark are currently expanding access to free ECE. Denmark, Finland and Norway cap the fees outside the free provision to keep fees to parents low. The goal of free ECE held by the QPECE group is in keeping with these international trends.

Free provision of ECE by country, nature and age of access	
Country	Nature and age of access
Hungary	Free entitlement from 6 months, but not all children are able to access
Belgium (Flemish community)	Free entitlement from 2.5 years, full-time
Belgium (French community)	Free entitlement from 2.5 years, half day
France	Free entitlement from 3 years and some communes offer free from 2 years, school day
Italy	Free entitlement from 3 years, full day
Portugal	Free from 3 years, 5 to 6 hours per day. Places not always available but situation improving
Mexico	Free from 3 years, 3 or 4 hours per week. Preschool education is compulsory
Austria	Free for 5 year-olds, and free kindergarten places for 3 and 4 year-olds, morning session
United Kingdom	Free from 3 years, 15 hours per week. To be extended to 20 hours by 2010. Some pilots of free ECE for disadvantaged 2 year-olds
New Zealand	From July 2007, up to 20 hours free for 3 and 4 year-olds in teacher-led services, but not all children are able to access and optional charges able to be made. From January 2009, word "free" removed from policy
Sweden	Free from 4 years, and from 3 years for children with additional needs, 3 hours per day
Ireland	Free from 4 years, school day
Netherlands	Free from 4 years, 4 to 6 hours per day
United States	Free from 5 years, but increasingly children have access to free programmes from 4 years
Denmark	Free for 6-year-olds, but could be from 4 years and 10 months
Australia	Free for 5 and 6-year-olds
Canada	Free for 5 to 6-year-olds depending on province
Korea	Free in principle from 5 years, but demand far outstrips supply
Finland	Free for 6-year-olds
Norway	Free for 6-year-olds
Germany	Children entitled to kindergarten place from 3 years, but not free
Czech Republic	None

Information sourced from: OECD (2006). *Starting Strong II. Early childhood education and care*. OECD: Paris.

Summary

The QPECE group brought together national organisations with an interest in strengthening community-based early childhood education provision. The group developed a strategic report defining goals and strategies to reach a shared vision that:

- ▶ every child has a right as a citizen to participate in free early childhood education
- ▶ every family that wishes to can access high quality, community-based early childhood education.

The goals and strategies will require new partnerships among ECE services, local communities and the Government. Collaboration at national and local levels to develop coherent patterns of ECE provision could invoke a sense of commitment to the quality of ECE in every community, as well as to provision that meets national and community aspirations. Collaboration offers the potential to stimulate new ideas of the roles that early childhood education might play, not only in strengthening children's learning and wellbeing, but also in supporting adults and building community cohesion. The project group's report and the background discussion by the authors is intended as a foundation document for building a wider coalition of support to move the early childhood sector forward towards the year 2020.

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