

Left Further Behind 2011

A Child Poverty Action Group Monograph
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PART FOUR

Chapter 15. Early childhood care and education

The logo for the Child Poverty Action Group is contained within a rectangular border. It consists of the words "CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP" stacked vertically in a serif font. The word "CHILD" is at the top, followed by "POVERTY", "ACTION", and "GROUP" at the bottom.

CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP

Jenny Ritchie¹ and Alan Johnson²

General introduction

The National Equal Opportunities Network (NEON), a partnership between the Human Rights Commission and the EEO Trust,³ argues that the provision of high-quality, affordable, accessible and available early childhood education benefits both young children and their parents, and ultimately the community. They give particular attention to the lack of provision of early childhood care and education places in rural and low-income areas, and the gender imbalance in carer roles that still operates as a cultural norm. There has been confusion in recent early childhood education policy as to the value to society of provision. This confusion has centred around the dual aims of meeting the needs of children and families for quality education and care; and providing support to families and the economy by providing adequate early childhood services for young children and thus freeing workers for the workforce. The focus in this chapter is on the causes and consequences of under-provision of early childhood education. The chapter first provides an overview of early childhood education in New Zealand. The second section, "To those that have, more shall be given", digs deeper into the data, and focuses particularly on under-provision in low-income and rural communities.

Overview of provision of early childhood education

The opportunities for learning, growth and development offered in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programmes have the potential to provide significant benefits for families and their young children in a range of ways. These include parenting skills and emotional support for families, and accessing foundational early learning experiences for young children.

High quality early childhood care and education services can be a powerful equaliser, reducing disadvantages in low-income families. (Fletcher & Dwyer, 2008, p. 66)

A range of New Zealand and international studies found that, in good quality ECE centres, cognitive gains in mathematics and literacy for children from low-income and disadvantaged homes could be greater than for most other children (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008, p. 3).

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³ www.neon.org.nz/nationalconversationaboutwork/onthejobissueswhatnext/parentinganddependentcare/.

The New Zealand government has historically positioned the ECE field outside of the compulsory sector of primary and secondary provision. This has allowed successive governments to display varying degrees of detachment from the responsibility for offering high quality and accessible early childhood education services for all children and their families. The three-term Labour-led government of Helen Clark made significant steps towards demonstrating a commitment to the provision of high-quality ECE services for all children of families who wanted to access these, with the development and implementation of *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki. A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2002). A key plank of this policy was raising the previous minimum requirement for staffing from one person per setting with a three-year level ECE qualification, to the goal of every staff member being a fully qualified teacher by 2012. In July 2007, the government's radically progressive innovation of the introduction of the "20 Hours Free" childcare policy for three- and four-year-old children was a promising step towards Labour's acceptance of its role in providing universal quality early childhood education. However, access for individual families was dependent on the willingness of particular early childhood services to take up the provision, many having expressed concern that the government's funding limit was inadequate. Further, the *20 Hours Free* was initially only available to 'teacher-led' services, thus excluding Playcentre and Kōhanga Reo.

The current National-led government extended availability of this subsidy to 'whānau-led' services from July 2010. At the same time, the policy was re-titled "20 Hours", semantically signalling a move away from the principle of universal free provision of quality early childhood care and education. Minister of Education Anne Tolley advised early childhood centres that are struggling financially to introduce fees to top up the '20 Hours' early childcare policy funding (Yahoo!Xtra News, 2010, Feb 1).

ECE Taskforce Overview Information

In October 2010, prompted by concerns about the huge increase in early childhood funding generated through the '20 Hours' policy, the Ministry of Education announced the establishment of a taskforce "to undertake a full review" of the early childhood care and education sector (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 1). The Ministry website on the ECE taskforce claims:

current spending is not reaching all the neediest children and families, but is benefiting many children who already have the opportunity for a strong start in their education. Costs to Government are continuing to rise, but with no guarantee of improved outcomes for learners in return.

Whilst there are no 'guarantees' in social arenas such as education, as shown throughout this chapter, the research evidence is emphatic that quality early childhood education is of benefit to all children and families who are lucky enough to access it. The chief difficulty in our current early childhood arena is that successive governments have relied on private provision to deliver what is actually a community benefit. The profit-orientation of many early childhood businesses means that these enterprises are viewed as being unlikely to deliver sufficient profit margins in low socio-economic areas. The briefing papers prepared by the Ministry of Education for the EC Taskforce offer some revealing statistics. These appear below in italics, with commentary following.

Economic disparities

- *In 2009, about 22% of all 0–6 year olds lived in a 'low-income household' (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a, p. 2).*

There are also compounding factors with regard to the rural/urban divide. The private sector does not view low population density areas as profitable. As stated earlier in this chapter, high quality early childhood education provision has been demonstrated to make measurable differences, which are more marked in children who arrive with the greatest initial disadvantage. Margaret Carr (a widely respected New Zealand early childhood education academic) and Linda Mitchell responded to last year's early childhood policy changes with a strongly worded opinion piece published in the *New Zealand Herald*, in which they stated:

Economic inequality will now be associated from the early years with educational inequity. The new education policy established by the May [2010] budget says that we cannot afford the financial cost of qualified teachers to provide care and education for all of New Zealand's youngest and most vulnerable of children. We say that as a nation we cannot afford not to– the long-term social, economic and educational cost is too high. (Carr & Mitchell, 2010, Wednesday March 9, p. 1)

Reliance on the private, for-profit sector

- *In 2009, about 40% of services were for-profit and about 60% non-profit, as compared to 2000 when the same split was 26%/74%.* (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a, p. 5)

It is clear that the neo-liberal policy agenda of relying on the private, profit-oriented sector for early childhood care and education provision, first promoted by the National-led governments of the decade of the 1990s, has resulted in the

private sector and corporate groups [being] best positioned to respond to the expanding provision and participation. (May & Mitchell, 2009, p. 9)

According to leading early childhood education researchers, May and Mitchell:

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. (May & Mitchell, 2009, p. 9)

This reliance meant that children, families, and early childhood education workers were increasingly vulnerable to market forces. This was clearly evident when, after the Australia-based corporate ABC Learning had expanded rapidly into New Zealand,

the financial collapse of its parent company left New Zealand ABC users and operators in limbo. (May & Mitchell, 2009, p. 9)

Service growth is lower in the poorest areas: 4.4% from 2006 to 2009 after taking account of the 0–4 year old population growth, compared with an average of 11.0% in not low SES areas (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a, p. 7).

Again, this inequity demonstrates the folly of leaving early childhood provision to the private sector. Market forces work in inversion to socio-economic need.

Cultural inequities

- *There is a persistent gap in take-up of ECE between children from European and higher socio-economic status backgrounds and others. While most children participate in at least some ECE prior to starting school (95.1% overall), participation rates of Māori (91.4%), Pasifika (85.4%) and children entering deciles 1–4 schools (and hence assumed to be from lower socio-economic groups, 89.2%) are much lower than this average, which is boosted by the 98.5% European rate. The reasons for this lower level of participation are complex and likely to relate to both the supply of, and demand for*

(including ability to access and afford), ECE services. (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a, p. 7)

- Post-2005 "participation"⁴ by Māori increased from 89.9% of four year olds to 91.4%, and for Pasifika, from 84.5% to 85.4%". (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010b, p. 11)
- Between 2006 and 2026, it is predicted that the European share of the under-five population will drop from 60% to 50%, with concurrent increases in the Māori, Pasifika and Asian populations. (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a, pp. 2 - 3)

Socio-economic and cultural factors regarding early childhood education (non)-participation are closely interwoven. There is copious research to indicate that Māori families value early childhood and other education experiences for their children, particularly those in which their children receive culturally relevant experiences, including the opportunity to learn te reo Māori (AGB/McNair, 1992; Dixon, Widdowson, Meagher-Lundberg, McMurchy-Pilkington, & McMurchy-Pilkington, 2007; Else, 1997; Te Puni Kōkiri/Ministry of Māori Development, 1998). The recent Ministry of Education-funded review of its Promoting Participation in Early Childhood Education project found that

For all Māori families, having access to ECE environments that supported Māori cultural practices and language was a key factor in participation. (Dixon, et al., 2007)

This places the onus on the Ministry to ensure that the kinds of provision that Māori and Pacific families value with regard to their particular cultural priorities is available, and accessible in terms of financial, logistic and cultural distance (Durie, 2003). It is erroneous for the Minister/Ministry to use the guise of trying to increase participation for these 'targeted' groups as the reason for across-the-board funding/quality cuts. These will affect all children, including those Māori, Pacific, and families from low socio-economic groups who are fortunate enough to attend early childhood centres. Reducing the quality of our teachers, and hence of the programmes they are able to offer, is seriously endangering the futures of not only all young learners, but also of our country's reputation for having a world-leading early childhood service (May & Mitchell, 2009).

Quality determinants

- *The proportion of registered teachers increased from 37% in 2004 to 52% in 2005, and to 64% in 2009. (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a, p. 9)*

Whilst a considerable increase is evident, 64% is still low compared to the primary and secondary education sectors, where all teachers must be registered (or in the two-year initial period of gaining registration). In order to be registered, a teacher must hold a qualification that is recognised by the New Zealand Teachers Council, and the current bench-mark is a minimum three-year teaching diploma or degree. The kindergarten sector, which is legally required to employ only qualified teachers, has been extremely disadvantaged by the recent 14% reduction in funding (Wells, 2010, p. 1) which means that services are funded only for 80% of their staffing to be qualified. The cut to funding is particularly ironic and frustrating given that this not-for-profit, community-based service has traditionally been a provider of free or very low-cost, high-quality early childhood education that has been widely accessed by families from low socio-economic areas (where state kindergartens have been established).

Funding issues

- *Vote Education ECE spending increased from \$300 million in 2000/01 to \$1,100 million in 2009/10. The number and costs of teachers have increased, driven by the teacher-registration targets and increases in teacher collective agreements, and by services*

⁴ Meaning at least 1 hour per week.

moving quickly to the higher teacher funding bands.

- *There have also been significant volume changes with more children enrolling (an increase of almost 70%, 2001–2009), and for longer hours (from an average of 16.6 hours in 2005 to 19.5 hours in 2009). (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a, p. 11)*

The previous Labour-led Government had been strongly committed to increasing both the quality of, and participation in, early childhood care and education, for both economic and educational reasons, and had put these expectations into highly regarded policies such as *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki. A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education*, and 20 Hours Free ECE. Given that commitment, it is hardly surprising that funding has needed to be increased substantially. At times of high employment, availability of early childhood provision is highly desirable for the economy. Now that we are in an economic downturn, the needs and rights of children and families to the well-established educational, social and economic benefits of early childhood services are being viewed by the current National-led Government as less of a priority.

Recent changes to early childhood policy and regulations

Recent changes to early childhood policy are eroding the positive steps that had been achieved to date through *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* with regard to the expectation of having fully qualified early childhood educators, as well as the maximum group sizes for early childhood centres. Both of these factors are highly significant with regard to the provision of quality early childhood education. In its Budget 2010, the Government reduced the goal of 100% qualified teachers to a funding ceiling of 80%. Then on March 3, 2011, the Ministry of Education announced:

From July 1 2011 this year, the maximum centre size that ECE services or hospital-based education and care services can be licensed for will change from 50 to 150 licensed child places.... The amended regulations will require one person responsible for every 50 children in a service. This will maintain the quality of supervision, continue to protect children, and will not add additional compliance costs to existing services. (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 1)

It is incomprehensible that the Ministry has promulgated such a potentially damaging regulation without waiting for the April 2011 report of the ECE taskforce it set up in October 2010.⁵ The research is unequivocal regarding the value of quality ECE provision:

A number of rigorous, evaluative, controlled longitudinal studies have demonstrated that high quality ECE and parenting programmes can contribute substantially to school-readiness, improved educational performance and increased economic success in adulthood. (Heckman, 2006; Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; Schulman & Barnett, 2006; cited in Waldegrave & Waldegrave, 2009, p. 7)

The gains are especially clear for children and families who are struggling: “Good quality ECE has greater benefits for children from low socioeconomic families, but children from middle and high socioeconomic families also gain.” (Mitchell, et al., 2008, p. 7) However, it is important to note that: “the especially negative effects of poor quality early childhood education for children, who come from families at risk, is another clear finding” (Smith et al., 2000, p. 121).

Key components of high quality early childhood education which are especially important are: “qualified staff, low child: adult ratios, small group size, and staff professional development opportunities” (Mitchell, et al., 2008, p. 8). These components enhance the possibilities for the quality of staff–child interaction; the learning resources available; the

⁵ Surprisingly, there was no consultation with the sector prior to establishment of this taskforce.

engagement of children and their families in the programme; and a supportive environment for children to work together (Mitchell, et al., 2008, p. 5). Furthermore, early childhood services “that contribute to positive child and family outcomes” are characterised by: intentional teaching; family engagement with ECE teachers and programmes; inclusion of social/cultural capital and interests from home; and cooperation between family and teachers to support the child’s learning; as well as the complexity of the curriculum provided (Mitchell, et al., 2008, pp. 7 - 8).

Clearly, the Government has decided that the early childhood sector has been costing too much money. Its response is to enable more places in lower quality early childhood education settings, without consideration for the research, or for the potential for long-term ill-effects. Ironically, the decision-making flies in the face of the economics:

Economists, using conservative estimates of benefits based on recent relevant research evidence of ECE effects for children from across the socio-economic spectrum, projected cost benefits of offering universal high-quality ECE for 2-, 3- and/ or 4-year-olds. Most economic evaluations of ECE programmes have shown that benefits of public spending exceed the costs. Gains are not realised, or are not as great, if the ECE is of poor quality. Without considering the opportunity costs of that spending, comparing the investment to other types of early years intervention or alternative policy options, these findings tend to suggest that public spending for ECE programmes will result in good returns in terms of maternal employment, higher levels of the participant’s lifetime earnings, reductions in usage of special education services, lesser criminal activity, and reduced use of social services that are expected to have a flow-on effect to the economy. (Mitchell, et al., 2008, p. 7)

Summary

While the financial pressure on Government caused by national and global crises is undeniably severe, the commitment to ensuring equitable access to quality early childhood provision is too important to be side-lined. The recent Ministry changes, which cut funding for centres which retain qualified staff, and enable centres to increase unit sizes so that children may be cared for in centres catering to 150 children, and with one person responsible for 50 children are a crude and potentially devastating blow to a sector which has advocated for many years for the quality commitments that were finally articulated in *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki. A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2002). As a recent report stated:

It is very important to continue to create access and participation in high-quality ECE for as much of the population as is possible. The high quality of this sector in New Zealand is ideally placed to be a buffer against the negative effects of stress on children at risk and create authentic and natural connections between their parents and extended families, and informed people who can provide support and information. The ongoing quality of ECE in New Zealand will require continuing investment and monitoring. (Waldegrave & Waldegrave, 2009, p. 53)

To those that have, more shall be given

Middle-class capture is a reality of the provision of early childhood care and education programmes in New Zealand. This is of concern because of ‘cumulative advantage’:

This idea ... has been applied to literacy acquisition in primary school where a child entering school with literacy knowledge continues to achieve literacy advantage while those who enter without acquisitions tend to lag behind. It is a case of the literacy-rich getting richer and the literacy-poor getting poorer. (Walden, 2011, p. 7)

Despite political and professional rhetoric on the value of early childhood education for reducing childhood inequality, there is scant evidence to suggest such a reduction has been prioritised by those who have designed early childhood education policy in the past decade. There is certainly little evidence to suggest children from poorer communities have benefited to the same degree as middle-class children from the rapid growth in government spending on ECE since 2006. While this inequity is not the result of indifference or malice on the part of those who have designed and approved funding for early childhood policy, the disappointing outcomes point to a poor understanding by politicians and their policy advisors of the limits of a paradigm which relies on demand subsidies and private sector investment decisions.

This part of the chapter considers the inequalities which have resulted from a market-driven and increasingly privatised ECE sector. Recent changes in the levels of ECE participation and funding are followed by analysis of levels of participation in ECE across ethnicities and household incomes. Finally, differences in the local availability of ECE services across a number of communities in New Zealand are reported and discussed.

Recent changes in ECE participation and funding

The past five years have seen a huge expansion in public spending on ECE from \$522 million in 2006/07 to \$1.157 billion in 2010/11, disproportionate to the far more modest increases in the numbers of children participating in ECE services. The result has been a near doubling of the per-enrolment subsidy for a child attending an ECE centre. Over this period, 2006/07 to 2010/11, the average hours which children attended an ECE centre increased from 16.9 hours to 19.0 hours so some of this subsidy increase can be explained by this increase in extent of use. These trends are shown in Table 15.1 below:

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Enrolments*	165,254	171,138	176,993	180,910	188,924
Budget \$millions nominal	522	586	807	1,029	1,157
Budget** \$millions Jun10	574	632	837	1047	1,157
Subsidy*** per enrolment \$s Jun10	2,885	3,357	3,571	4,626	5,543

Notes: * Data from Education Counts website and are at July of the respective year.

** Data from NZ Government Budget Appropriations which have been indexed against the CPI.

*** This per-enrolment subsidy is based on the budget for the previous year ie. the subsidy for 2010 is the budget for 2009/10 divided by the enrolments in July 2010.

ECE participation by ethnicity

Two sources of official data provide a picture of recent changes in ECE participation by different ethnic groups. One source is data published by the Ministry of Education and is based on parent interviews of new entrants at the time they start school. This data, summarised in Table 15.2 below for Māori, Pasifika and European/Pakeha children, shows that the rate of participation of European/Pakeha children is about 10% higher than that for Māori children and 15% higher than that of Pasifika children.

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Māori	90%	91%	90%	91%
Pasifika	84%	84%	85%	85%
European/Pakeha	98%	98%	98%	99%

While these reported rates of ECE attendance indicate fairly high levels of participation across the board these data say nothing of the extent or quality of the participation being reported. For example, was the reported prior participation for two months or for two

years? The data discussed below suggests a far less equitable pattern of ECE participation than that presented in Table 15.2. The second source of data is taken directly from Ministry enrolment data, summarised below in Table 15.3.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Change 2006-10
Māori	33,019	33,366	34,748	36,118	38,580	17%
Pasifika	9,697	9,993	10,678	11,060	12,111	25%
Asian	9,481	10,230	11,530	12,357	13,181	39%
European/Pakeha	110,366	111,982	113,401	112,618	119,170	8%
Total all ethnicities	165,254	171,138	176,993	180,910	188,924	14%

In isolation, the data in Table 15.3 reveals little about the equity of the current pattern of ECE enrolments except perhaps that minority ethnic groups, and specifically Pasifika and Asian children, have benefited relatively more from the increase in enrolment numbers between 2005 and 2010.

Nothing in Table 15.3 suggests anything about the ethnicity of children being born so that we might be able to assess if ECE participation is relatively equal. The ethnic breakdown of live births is provided below in Table 15.4 to provide a basis for assessing the fairness of current ECE enrolment patterns.

The significant difference between the number of live births and the number of reported ethnicities of babies in the bottom two rows of Table 15.4 points both to the extent of multiple ethnicity mixing within New Zealand's population⁶ and to the problems we may have in accurately comparing ethnic identification from one data source to another.⁷

	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total 06-09	Share of Total (identified ethnicities)
Māori	17,342	18,717	18,844	18,027	72,930	22.7%
Pasifika	8,926	9,788	10,122	10,068	38,904	12.1%
Asian	6,028	7,076	7,263	7,492	27,859	8.7%
European/Pakeha	41,575	44,680	44,534	43,292	174,081	54.3%
Total all ethnicities	75,760	81,995	82,491	80,549	320,795	
Total live births	59,193	64,044	64,343	62,543	250,123	

The extent of these problems of definition has not been considered as part of this paper although it seems unlikely that such a problem can explain away the differences between enrolment rates and the ethnic breakdown of births which are summarised below.

Table 15.5 illustrates the extent to which European/Pakeha pre-school children are likely to gain above average access to ECE opportunities while Pasifika and Asian children are less likely to attend an ECE centre.

	Age 1	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	All enrolments	Share of births 2006-09

⁶ Between 2006 and 2009, 14% of all new-born babies were identified as having more than one ethnicity: around 18% of European/Pakeha babies, 25% of Pasifika babies, and nearly 50% of Māori babies.

⁷ Ethnicity is a characteristic which is self-identified by the respondent. Statistics New Zealand allows for the identification of multiple ethnicities by respondents. This is the basis of data collected by Statistics New Zealand on births. The Ministry of Education reports on singular ethnicities which presumably requires the respondent (who would normally be the parent enrolling a child) to identify a preferred ethnicity. There is no way of knowing if the ethnicity/ethnicities (as identified by its mother) of a new born child is the same as at their enrolment in an early childhood education centre or at school. This paper assumes that there is not a significant or systematic change in reporting of ethnicities by parents between birth and such enrolments.

Māori	21.7%	20.8%	19.7%	20.2%	20.4%	22.7%
Pasifika	5.4%	5.2%	6.6%	7.7%	6.4%	12.1%
Asian	4.6%	5.9%	7.7%	8.4%	7.0%	8.7%
European/ Pakeha	64.3%	64.8%	63.4%	60.9%	63.1%	54.3%
Total all ethnicities	24,771	36,873	57,729	59,141	188,924	

The lower rate of attendance for Asian children may be a result of parents being less willing to send very young children to an ECE centre as levels of enrolment of Asian children rises as children reach four years old. The participation by Māori children appears to be just below the Māori share of births.

It is difficult to estimate rates of enrolment in ECE by ethnicity from birth data because of the complications around ethnic identification and the allocation of multi-ethnicities from this data into the categories used by Ministry of Education for reporting of enrolments. This difficulty centres on the lack of an estimate of a base population against which to calculate enrolment rates. Statistics New Zealand does, however, provide population estimates by age for both the total population and for the Māori population which of course allows us to make Māori/non-Māori comparisons of ECE enrolments rates. This comparison is provided in Table 15.6 below.

Table 15.6. A comparison of Māori & non-Māori ECE enrolment rates 2010 (Source: Statistics New Zealand and Education Counts) ⁸			
	Under 3	3 & 4 year olds	Under 5's
MĀORI			
ECE enrolment (July 2010)	14,997	23,291	38,288
Estimated population (at 30th June 2010)	55,850	33,310	89,160
Enrolment rate	26.9%	69.9%	42.9%
NON-MĀORI			
ECE enrolment (July 2010)	55,351	93,579	148,930
Estimated population (at 30th June 2010)	134,990	87,700	222,690
Enrolment rate	41.0%	106.7% ⁹	86.9%

Table 15.6 indicates that the ECE enrolment rate for Māori children is likely to be half of that for non-Māori children. Even in the targeted three- and four-year-old age cohort, the rate of enrolment is around two thirds of that of non-Māori. The main reason for the apparent discrepancy between the reported relative position of Māori children is that Table 15.5 uses the larger estimate of all reported ethnicities in birth data as the basis for estimating the share of Māori children in the total population. By comparison, Table 15.6 and Statistics New Zealand estimates count a Māori child as someone with some Māori descent whose parents do not choose to define their child principally as non-Māori.

ECE participation across communities

Opportunities for pre-school children to attend a local ECE centre are not evenly distributed throughout New Zealand. As a general pattern, wealthier communities have higher rates of access to ECE places, although not all poorer communities have relatively poor provision of ECE services.

Table 15.7 sets out the national pattern of distribution of ECE enrolments based on local government regions and on local districts where there are localised problems of poor ECE provision. In mid-2010, ECE enrolments represented 60% of the country's under-5

⁸ Data from Statistics New Zealand population estimates and ECE enrolment data, Education Counts website.

⁹ Because some children are enrolled in two or more centres at the same time, this rate exceeds 100%.

population. Of all regions, only Auckland had a level of local provision significantly below this national average, while the Bay of Plenty, Canterbury and Otago regions had rates of provision significantly above average. Carterton District had the unenviable position of the lowest level of provision of ECE for any local council area with 34% enrolment of the local children, however, parts of South Auckland have lower levels of provision.

	Under 5's population (June 2010)	ECE enrolments (July 2010)	Enrolment as % of under 5's
NORTHLAND REGION	11,480	6,494	57%
AUCKLAND REGION	108,980	56,225	52%
South Auckland	29,975	11,890	40%
WAIKATO REGION	30,920	18,120	59%
Hauraki District	1,230	603	49%
Waikato District	5,200	2,193	42%
Waitomo District	810	384	47%
BAY OF PLENTY REGION	19,960	14,736	74%
Western Bay of Plenty District	2,810	1,327	47%
GISBORNE DISTRICT	3,940	2,295	58%
HAWKES BAY REGION	11,550	8,266	72%
TARANAKI REGION	7,880	4,722	60%
MANAWATU-WANGANUI REGION	16,290	10,365	64%
Manawatu District	2,110	943	45%
Tararua District	1,380	599	43%
WELLINGTON REGION	33,930	21,145	62%
Carterton District	540	181	34%
TASMAN-NELSON DISTRICTS	5,890	4,011	68%
MALBOROUGH DISTRICT	2,830	1,696	60%
WEST COAST REGION	2,200	1,279	58%
Buller District	660	286	44%
CANTERBURY REGION	37,300	25,203	68%
OTAGO REGION	11,870	8,186	69%
SOUTHLAND REGION	6,780	3,884	57%
Southland District	2,250	924	41%
NEW ZEALAND	311,850	187,218	60%

South Auckland is not an officially defined area and despite having a local population of nearly 300,000 people it is usually included in an administrative area known as Counties-Manukau. The aggregation of South Auckland into Counties-Manukau hides the relative disadvantage of some communities through the averaging of social outcomes such as ECCE enrolments across middle-income and low-income neighbourhoods. South Auckland can now be quite easily defined by the Auckland Council wards of Manukau and Manurewa-Papakura and by the local board areas which are known as Mangere-Otahuhu, Otara-Papatoetoe, Manurewa and Papakura. Tamaki, another urban community to the north and east of Otahuhu, has similar socio-economic characteristics to South Auckland although historically this community is seen as part of the Auckland isthmus and makes up a distinct part of the Maungakiekie-Tamaki ward of the Auckland Council.

Table 15.8 below shows the inadequate distribution of ECE centres, and therefore places, across the Tamaki and South Auckland communities, a large urban area where a single urban community can span six to eight kilometres across. The size and scale of such communities means that the local availability¹⁰ of ECE centres is an important determinant of the feasible access families have to ECE services and opportunities.

¹⁰ In these contexts, 'local' is defined by walking distance.

	Under 5's population (June 2010)	ECE enrolments (July 2010)	Enrolment as % of under 5's
Tamaki subdivision of Maungakiekie-Tamaki Ward	4,210	1,358	32%
- Panmure/Glen Innes/Point England	1,710	726	42%
Mangere-Otahuhu Local Board Area	9,234	3,144	34%
- Otahuhu	1,580	473	30%
- Mangere	7,654	2,671	35%
- Mangere – excluding Auckland Airport precinct	7,654	2,356	31%
Otara-Papatoetoe Local Board Area	7,140	3,276	46%
- Otara	4,095	1,395	34%
- Papatoetoe	3,046	1,881	64%
Manurewa Local Board Area	9,115	3,151	35%
- Manurewa west (west of railway line)	5,630	1,240	22%
- Manurewa east (east of railway line)	3,485	1,911	55%
Papakura Local Board Area	4,485	2,046	46%
- Papakura – core urban area	3,005	966	32%
South Auckland (excluding Tamaki)	29,974	11,890	40%
AUCKLAND REGION	108,980	56,225	52%
NEW ZEALAND	311,850	187,218	60%

While the whole of the area covered by the data in Table 15.8 is poorly served with ECE places, there is a story within the story. Some areas such as Papatoetoe and the Auckland Airport precinct, where there are high levels of employment, are relatively well served. Others such as Otahuhu and Manurewa West are virtual ECE deserts with local provision of ECE at half the national average.

Somewhat ironically, these communities are the ones with high concentrations of pre-schoolers with 8.5% of Otahuhu's population and 11% of Manurewa West's population being under five years old, compared to the national average of 7%. Urban Papakura, Mangere and Otara have rates of ECE provision which are scarcely better than those of Manurewa West and Otahuhu.

	Under 5's population (June 2010)	ECE enrolments (July 2010)	Enrolment as % of under 5's
Flaxmere	1,205	475	40%
Hastings urban area	2,530	1,654	65%
Havelock North	700	757	108%
HASTINGS DISTRICT (includes homebased services)	5,760	4,338	74%

The pattern of distribution across all three areas covered by the Tables 15.8, 15.9 and 15.10 is similar in that levels of ECE provision are much higher in middle-class suburbs and neighbourhoods than they are in poorer communities.

	Under 5's population (June 2010)	ECE enrolments (July 2010)	Enrolment as % of under 5's
Porirua East	2,170	924	43%

¹¹ Numbers of children attending Kohanga Reo have been estimated based on average attendances in the local authority area. Home-based services have been omitted from local totals because the business address may not relate to where services are offered, but home-based services are included in the totals on this table.

¹² See footnote 6 for details of data source and limitations.

¹³ See footnote 6 for details of data source and limitations.

Rest of Porirua	2,665	1,508	57%
Porirua City (ECE centres only) Havelock North	4,820	2,432	50%
PORIRUA CITY (includes homebased services)	4,820	3,028	63%

To provide a comparison with Auckland, and to illustrate the extent of the inequitable distribution of ECE opportunities within these communities, Tables 15.9 and 15.10 report the distribution of ECE places in Hastings District and Porirua City respectively.

The comparison is most marked in the case of Hastings District where Havelock North has more than two-and-a-half times the level of provision of Flaxmere. A similar pattern of distribution can be seen between Porirua East and the western and northern suburbs of Porirua City, between urban Papakura and the surrounding rural residential suburbs and between Papatoetoe and Otara. Bucking this pattern is the case of Tamaki where there is a higher level of ECE provision in Glen Innes, Point England and Panmure than in the wealthier nearby suburbs of Mt Wellington, Panmure Basin and Ellerslie South.

If Aucklanders were to have the same level of provision of ECE services and opportunities as other New Zealanders, an additional 12,000 places would need to be provided in that city, with over 6,000 of these places in South Auckland and a further 1,000 in Tamaki. The Government's commitment to provide capital funding for community-based ECE centres in South Auckland is welcomed although the rate at which these are being built is unlikely to keep pace with population growth let alone make up for this deficit.

The failure to plan

There is evidence that poorer communities and/or communities with high concentrations of Māori and Pasifika people have lower levels of provision of ECE services and centres. There is also some evidence (see Table 15.3) that, although Asian and Pasifika children have benefited most in proportional terms from the recent increase in ECE enrolments and participation, it is European/Pakeha families and their pre-school children who have benefited most in numerical terms. While such an outcome might be expected given the sheer numerical dominance of European/Pakeha people within the population, especially outside of Auckland, European/Pakeha already had the highest rate of participation before the rapid increase in ECE funding from 2006.

Rates of ECE participation by Māori have actually declined over the past five years despite the increase in the numbers of Māori children actually enrolled in a licensed ECE centre or service.¹⁴ This paradox is due to the recent baby boom of which almost one third are Māori children. This has meant that the population of Māori pre-schoolers has grown at a faster rate than their enrolment in ECE. Based on the enrolment rates reported in Table 15.6 for Māori and non-Māori children, if Māori enrolment rates are to be lifted to those of non-Māori then an additional 17,000 to 18,000 places are needed.¹⁵

This decline in enrolment rates may also be a feature of Pasifika families' ECE experience given their share of recent births compared with their share of ECE enrolments (see Table 15.5), although there are no reliable estimates of the Pasifika population on which to confidently base this claim. However, estimates of the shortfall in Pasifika enrolments

¹⁴ In 2006, 32,351 Māori children aged under five were enrolled in a licensed ECE service out of a total estimated population of 73,040, providing an enrolment rate of 44.3%. By 2010, 38,288 Māori children under five were enrolled in ECE from a total population of 89,160 meaning an enrolment rate 42.9%. In 2006 72.7% of three- and four-year-old Māori children were enrolled but by 2010 this rate had fallen to 69.9%.

¹⁵ For under 3s this is 41%–27% = difference in enrolment rate of 14% x 55,850 in the under-3 population = 7,819 + for 3- and 4-year-olds to lift enrolment rate from 70% to 100% = 30% difference x 33,310 = 9,993.

suggests that an additional 10,000 to 12,000 places would be required to bring them up to national average enrolment rates.¹⁶

Importantly, there is no evidence that the relative disadvantage in the ECE stakes of Māori and Pasifika families and of poor communities has been addressed by the huge increase in ECE funding between 2006 and 2011 (see Table 15.1). There is no evidence that this neglect was intentional, it has been a consequence of the ECE policy settings.

Unlike the compulsory and tertiary education sectors, the early childhood sector has no public agency responsible for planning the supply of educational services. Since its inception, the early childhood education sector's growth has been driven by local initiative rather than need: kindergartens, Playcentres, and more recently Kohanga Reo were all initiated by local community efforts. This meant that if a community had high levels of transience or lacked leadership or discretionary income, pre-school educational opportunities were patchy or non-existent.

Table 15.11. Changes in ECE provision 2001-10 (total enrolments) (Source: Education Counts, 2011)

Institution type	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Kindergarten	45,439	45,169	45,109	45,287	44,920	44,435	43,695	41,487	39,346	37,600
Playcentre	14,786	14,879	15,200	15,440	15,059	14,888	14,664	14,929	15,171	15,049
Education & Care Centre	73,192	76,246	78,967	81,096	83,889	86,059	91,733	97,756	101,424	109,204
Homebased	8,546	8,591	9,591	9,922	9,770	9,802	11,073	13,065	15,054	17,084
Te Kohanga Reo	9,546	10,389	10,319	10,418	10,070	9,493	9,236	9,165	9,288	9,370
Correspondence School	947	913	991	922	813	577	737	591	627	617
Total	152,504	156,187	160,173	163,085	164,521	165,254	171,138	176,993	180,910	188,924
Community based*	69,819	70,437	70,628	71,145	70,049	68,816	67,595	65,581	63,805	62,019
Share community based	45.8%	45.1%	44.1%	43.6%	42.6%	41.6%	39.5%	37.1%	35.3%	32.8%

*Note: Kindergarten, Playcentres and Kohanga Reo

More recently the extension of funding to private sector operators and to social service agencies has seen an expansion of ECE centres and services into communities where some level of co-payment from parents was feasible. The needs of families unable to afford such co-payments have been overlooked or left to community-based ECE providers with long waiting lists to look after. These community providers have not fared well in this new environment as indicated in Table 15.11 above which shows both a relative and absolute decline in community-based ECE providers especially since 2006.

Conclusion

It is a great pity that the Labour Government did not address the inequity of access to ECE as part of its expansion of ECE budgets. The system we have now remains inequitable but is twice as expensive, and there appear to be no easy answers for addressing the identified two-fold and overlapping deficits. There is the deficit created by the children not enrolled in ECE, principally Māori and Pasifika children. The second deficit is where ECE

¹⁶ Birth statistics report that up to 10,000 children with Pasifika descent are born in New Zealand each year. As 75% of these children have two parents who identify as Pasifika it is likely that between 7,500 and 8,500 children will be identified as Pasifika on their enrolment in school each year. At a national average ECE enrolment rate of 60% this would mean that between 22,000 and 24,000 Pasifika children would be enrolled in ECE. In 2010 there were 12,111 children enrolled (see Table 15.3).

centres are missing from in a spatial sense. Most likely these missing ECE centres would otherwise be found in suburbs populated by Māori and Pasifika families and in small and medium-sized towns populated by Māori communities. However, the highest deficit is in Auckland.

There is firm evidence of the benefits of good quality early childhood education for later educational success; and that those who miss out on meaningful access to ECE share a sequence of misfortunes and missed opportunities throughout their lives. This is not to say that more equitable access to ECE centres and services is the silver bullet to reducing inequality and rates of welfare dependency, but it is an important cornerstone of any credible attempts to do so. The ideal response to these deficits in ECE availability should not be more of the same. The model of market-based provision and demand subsidies has clearly not worked for New Zealand's poorest and most vulnerable children.

Recommendations

- Government commits to reducing reliance on private sector provision of early childhood education and care as a long-term objective, aligning the early childhood sector with primary education in terms of accepting government responsibility for both quality and access expectations in order to ensure equitable provision;
- Government enables adequate funding provision to ensure that all early childhood education centres are fully staffed by qualified teachers, and further require ratios of teachers to children and unit sizes to be maintained in accord with quality guidelines;
- Establish a model of ECE provision that is more intentional in terms of who it serves, where it is located and what else it provides to support parents and families;
- Base the new model of ECE provision on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood and a town-by-town assessment of future early childhood education needs;
- Start thinking about travel distances in terms of pushing strollers rather than in terms of driving SUVs.

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