



Ngā tikanga a ngā mokopuna

Crises in early childhood education policy in Aotearoa

Jenny Ritchie

**Presentation to Children in Crisis Conference
Hamilton, Oct 7-9, 2013**

Multi-faceted Crisis in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy

- Privatisation of the sector (in 2009 40% were privately owned, as opposed to 26% in the year 2000) (ECE Taskforce Secretariat, 2010) (
- Low requirements for qualifications of staff (only 50% minimum)
- Concerns regarding capacity of ECCE staff to demonstrate engagement with and responsiveness to whānau Māori (only 23% of services in a recent ERO review valued the language, culture and identity of Māori children) (ERO, 2012) and only 9.3% of ECCE staff are Māori (Ministry of Education, 2013b)
- Ongoing in-service professional learning for ECCE staff is not available to all services but to a select few 'targeted' by the Ministry (Ministry of Education, 2013f)

Neo-liberal Agenda

The Ministry of Education's 'Amazing Children' Taskforce report (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2011) has been critiqued for its capture by neoliberal discourses of mistrust of educators and their pedagogies (Nuttall, 2013):

- Silent on children's human rights
- Instead we see increasingly language of 'vulnerability' of 'children at risk'
- Children as human capital, ECCE as economic benefit
- Ideological shift away from common good, social well-being to individualising/corporatising profit-orientation

ECCE as economic good

The view of early childhood education as an economic good is seen in the languaging of the research summary which underpinned the Taskforce's work:

“Most of the 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” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 13)

Teacher Qualifications

- The Taskforce recognised that teacher qualifications are a strong indication of quality provision, recommending a minimum of 80% of staff in should be registered teachers (Ministry of Education, 2011)
- The previous Labour-led government had set the target of 100% by 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2002)
- Current government policy requires a minimum of 50% qualified teachers
- Teacher registration ensures monitoring of poor practice. Complaints about unregistered teachers are not dealt with or recorded by the New Zealand Teachers council

“‘Better’ Public Services”

- Current government policy has set targets for increasing participation in early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b)
- Meanwhile, respondents to a Ministry survey on their Māori education strategy stipulated that early childhood education centres need to be “more culturally responsive and meaningfully engage whānau” (Ministry of Education, 2013d, p. 6) – this would be a better ‘target’

Penalties for Non-participation

- Recently implemented welfare reforms require all beneficiary parents to ensure that their children attend an early childhood service from ages 3-5, and face the penalty of their benefit payment being halved if they don't comply with this 'social obligation' policy (Ministry of Education, 2013)
- Previous research has pointed out the inequitable access to early childhood services for those living in low socio-economic areas (Ritchie & Johnson, 2011)

Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success *2013-2017*

Ka Hikitia, the Ministry of Education's Māori education strategy affirms the value of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*:

Te Whāriki, the early childhood education curriculum, is an expression of biculturalism and provides a strong basis for teachers and leaders to promote aspects of Māori language and culture in early learning environments. *Te Whāriki* must be embedded within all services (Ministry of education, 2013c, p. 33)

Crisis of Compulsion in a Context of Poor Quality Services

- There is, therefore, a serious question as to whether under current government 'Better Public Services' targets for ECE participation families will be able to access the "culturally responsive high quality" (Ministry of Education, 2012) support that is more likely to be provided by qualified, registered teachers
- Teachers will be placed in the uncomfortable position of monitoring beneficiaries re their child's non-attendance leading to their benefit being cut, undermining trust and reciprocity as per *Te Whāriki* (ECCE curriculum) principles

Better Public Policies?

This presentation has proposed that instead of focussing on the child as the locus of crisis, we might better turn our attentions to scrutinising our public policies, in order to ascertain the extent to which they are placing the wellbeing of the child at the heart of the matter.

I suggest that there is a crisis, one which is located in the callous and contradictory policies affecting children within the early childhood care and education sector.

References

- Children's Commissioner. (2013). Parents', families' and whānau contributions to educational success. Wellington: Office of the Children's Commissioner. Retrieved from http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports_documents.
- ECE Taskforce Secretariat. (2010). Overview of the New Zealand Early Childhood Education (ECE) System. Introductory Briefing. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/1-Overview-of-the-NZ-Early-Childhood-Education-System.pdf>.
- Education Review Office. (2012). Partnership with whānau Māori in early childhood services. Wellington: Education Review Office.
- Ministry of Education. (2013). New Zealand Early Childhood Education (ECE) Social Obligations. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ManagementInformation/RecentAnnouncements/ECESocialObligation.aspx>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2002). Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki. A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2010). Research Summary. Background paper prepared for the ECE Taskforce. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/essential-reading/>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2011). An agenda for amazing children. Final report of the ECE taskforce. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from http://www.taskforce.ece.govt.nz/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Final_Report_ECE_Taskforce.pdf.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2012). Me Kōrero. Let's Talk. Ka hikitia. Accelerating success 2103-2107. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/~media/MinEdu/Files/TheMinistry/KaHikitia/English/MeKoreroLetsTalk.pdf>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2013a). Better public services. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices.aspx>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2013b). Education Counts. Maori in ECE. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/ece2/mori-in-ece>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2013c). Ka hikitia. Accelerating success. 2013-2017. The Māori education strategy. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia.aspx>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2013d). Me Kōrero. Let's talk. Summary of online feedback. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/PolicyAndStrategy/KaHikitia/MeKoreroLetsTalk.aspx?moe-tile>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2013e). More children in early childhood education - one year on. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/BetterPublicServices/MoreChildrenInECE.aspx>.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education. (2013f). Tender for Strengthening Early Learning Opportunities 2013-2015. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ManagementInformation/RecentAnnouncements/StrengthEarlyLearningOpportunities.aspx>.
- Nuttall, Joce. (2013). Introduction. In J. Nuttall (Ed.), Weaving Te Whāriki. Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice (pp. 1-5). Wellington: NZCER Press.
- Ritchie, Jenny, & Johnson, Alan. (2011). Early childhood care and education. In M. C. Dale, M. O'Brien & S. St John (Eds.), Left further behind: how policies fail the poorest children in New Zealand (pp. 159-174). Auckland: Child Poverty Action Group, Inc.