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The Role of the State in Early Childhood Care and Education: Kindergartens as a Case Study of Changing Relationships

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Abstract:

Much of the public discussion of early childhood education policies has focused on particular policy initiatives, rather than considering more broadly what should be the role of the state in relation to young children's education and upbringing. The roles that the state chooses to play are political decisions that are influenced by constructions of childhood and preferred policy approaches. In turn, these policy approaches help shape the nature of early childhood education. This article analyses changing models of state responsibility for New Zealand kindergartens to highlight their repercussions on kindergartens and the wider early childhood education sector. It argues that the state needs to take a supportive and responsible role in provision of early childhood care and education, to support a move away from a market model, and to resolve inequities in children's access and teacher employment conditions that continue to beset the sector. The article ends by setting the discussion within an international context and suggesting policy challenges for early childhood education in New Zealand.

In recent years, a new construction of childhood is emerging from the sociology of childhood that recognises that children are active participating citizens, members of a social community, with rights and responsibilities. Children have agency: they are shaped by society and also shape it through their own experiences and interactions with others. Childhood is an important time in its own right, and not simply in relation to adulthood (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 101). Such a

construction is encapsulated within New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, as a founding aspiration for children.

A second approach from the sociology of childhood emphasises childhood as a feature of social structure separate from other social structures such as the family, and examines the position of children as a group within a society (Qvortrup, 1997). Studies of childhood as a social structure aim to provide children and childhood with "conceptual autonomy" (Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, & Wintersberger, 1994, p. xi) by making children the unit of observation rather than others on whom they are dependent.

Prout (2003) has argued that in order to represent children's interests and needs, it is increasingly necessary to give visibility to children as separate identities. Moss and Petrie (1997, 2002) have applied similar thinking to their analysis of children's services in the UK. They have highlighted problems of fragmented, compartmentalised services, wasted resources, undervaluing of staff, inadequate training levels, and poor pay and conditions of staff within these children's services. They argue (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 5) that the ideas underlying these problems are:

> that children are a *private* responsibility of parents; that children are passive dependants; and parents are *consumers* of marketised services for children. [Original emphases]

By contrast, the new ideas of children as citizens and the importance of childhood in its own right, suggest the value of viewing the education and upbringing of young children as a co-operative effort between families and the state (a supportive state) rather than a largely family and private responsibility (minimal state). These categorisations were first used in New Zealand by the Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988). In a situation of "minimal state involvement" the state's role is to substitute where the family cannot perform its function.

We will use kindergartens as a case study to illuminate the contested nature of early childhood education provision. The case study reveals the swings in state support received by kindergartens, and how these reflect differing views of children; the positioning of kindergartens as a "flagship" of government support during the 1950s to 1980s; the political manipulations and manoeuvres used to reduce state support for kindergartens by a government wedded to a neo-liberal approach in the 1990s; and the shift again under a Labour-led government to a revised vision of enhanced state responsibility in the 21st century, extending to

some degree beyond kindergartens to the wider early childhood education sector. In 2009, the future directions are somewhat uncertain.

The case study highlights the consequences of differing models of state involvement for teacher pay and employment conditions, and funding. We argue that views of childhood underpin these different models. Setting our analysis within an international context, we highlight the repercussions occurring when the state takes a minimal or supportive role, and discuss challenges and issues for New Zealand's early childhood education policy developments.

Some Historical Background

During the 1990s, New Zealand's kindergarten movement came to be referred to as the "flagship" of government support for the early childhood sector (Davison, 1998; Wylie, 1992). Originally established as a private, philanthropic service catering for "needy" and disadvantaged children, kindergartens lobbied successfully over the years for increased state funding and responsibility. Successive government reports recommended the development of a national pre-school education system available for all children, controlled and supported by the state (Bailey Report, 1947; Hill Report, 1971). Kindergartens, as a nationwide, homogeneous service already had established administration structures at both the regional and national levels and were clearly positioned as the ideal service to meet this goal. An enduring aim of the kindergarten movement was to be regarded and treated as part of the state school system.

In 1948, following the Bailey Report (1947), the state took on the responsibility of paying kindergarten teacher salaries and setting their conditions of service. Kindergarten teachers were recognised as state servants and required to hold a kindergarten teaching qualification. Kindergartens were part of the state sector from this time onwards. This was a significant move to a supportive state that now believed it had on-going responsibility for provision in the kindergarten sector. Conceptually children started to be viewed as a distinct group. "There was a validation of the value of preschool education with the view that families were no longer able to provide all the experiences and companionship a child needs, and that a mother's time was inadequate to carry out this task" (May, 1997, p. 211).

Kindergartens enjoyed halcyon days during the 1950s, '60s, '70s and early 1980s. They expanded throughout the country and received

considerable state support. This state support included the provision of ongoing funding – an operating grant per session, funding to cover teacher salaries, funding to provide professional support, and a special group grant; administration grants per kindergarten; an administration grant and special needs funding for the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union (their national body); as well as some building sites and capital grants, and money to pay for building maintenance and equipment. In addition, the government paid for kindergarten teacher training (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988).

Kindergartens were prohibited through regulation from charging fees. Although nominally free, most kindergartens asked for voluntary donations and had to undertake fundraising. In addition, kindergarten teachers effectively subsidised the service through accepting low rates of pay that were incommensurate with their qualifications and responsibilities, and families put in hours of unpaid voluntary work.

Whilst kindergartens never achieved the full state funding and support needed to address these issues, significant progress was made towards the goal up until the late 1980s. However by this time, changes in New Zealand society were impacting on families and the early childhood sector. Women were increasingly seeking paid employment and demanding access to high quality, early childhood care and education to enable them to work outside the home. Kindergarten-style, sessional provision did not meet this requirement. All-day services, catering for children of a range of ages, operated by community and private interests, developed to meet this need. Women's desire to participate in the workforce coincided with a prospering labour market and their work and skills were welcomed.

During the mid to late 1980s a relatively new ideology based on neo-liberal or "New right" ideas was becoming influential internationally. The key beliefs of this ideology are that private providers are more efficient than the state. Therefore state services should be reduced and private provision encouraged. Individuals should make choices based on personal interest and this would create competition amongst services. Efficient, responsive services will thrive and inefficient or non-responsive services would (and indeed should) be allowed to fail. Basically the "market" should determine and be responsible for provision, not the state (Lauder, 1990; Kelsey, 1993).

When applied to the early childhood sector these views heralded a new vision of devolved state responsibility. No longer should the state be responsible for early childhood provision; the provision of services

would be the responsibility of private and community providers who would respond via competition to the demands of their clients, the parents. Children did not feature at all in this thinking, other than as the property of their parents. Parents were identified as consumers and would choose whichever service best suited their needs and competition would force services to be flexible and responsive. This was indeed the viewpoint espoused by the New Zealand Treasury in the briefings they provided for incoming governments (Treasury, 1984, 1987). If this thinking was to be applied to kindergartens, there would no longer be any need for the state to regulate and fund kindergartens to the extent that it did. Indeed kindergartens would, under this model, operate more efficiently and responsively if they were independently run and not a state-supported service. Previously viewed as a free service, parents would, according to this model, be required to pay fees, and kindergartens would compete on an equal footing with all other early childhood services. Kindergartens, according to the neo-liberal rhetoric, were an ideological anomaly.

The Labour Government elected in 1984 pursued this ideological direction for the provision of early childhood education through private and community ownership throughout its two terms in office. Policy initiatives with regard to the early childhood sector were tempered by strong considerations of equity amongst services and for all participants in early childhood education (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988). Kindergartens managed to survive this period relatively unscathed.

Tenuous Links with the State Sector

In 1990 a National Government came to power. It adopted a more hard-line neo-liberal approach, severely curtailing support for all early childhood services. Its actions in relation to kindergartens were particularly harsh. Throughout the 1990s it applied pressure to kindergartens, and implemented a programme of policy initiatives that endeavoured to make kindergartens operate in the same manner and at the same level of funding as all other early childhood services. The National Government aggressively targeted reduced state responsibility for the provision of kindergarten services. In December 1990, the government revoked the regulation prohibiting kindergartens from charging fees, and thus left open the door to fee-charging. The 1991 Budget introduced kindergarten bulk funding, virtually froze kindergarten funding at 1991 levels, and announced the removal of the

requirement for compulsory kindergarten teacher registration. One of the most obvious moves to reduce state responsibility, however, was the removal of kindergartens from the State Sector Act in April 1997. These measures had the effect of removing a direct role for the state, and passing that role on to families and kindergartens.

The Associate Minister of Education responsible for early childhood education in the early 1990s, John Luxton, repeatedly exhorted kindergarten associations to change their mode of operation and fall in line with other early childhood services. He told the 1994 New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations Conference that they could "no longer hold onto the sacred cows of the past" (sessional provision, qualified teachers and free access for families). He told them that they must "face the realities of New Zealand's social and economic structure" and "adopt a more business-like approach" (Luxton, 1994). Kindergartens resisted this pressure to change their operation or charge fees. Instead, they made ends meet by deferring maintenance and taking more children (each child attracted funding) (Mitchell, 1996). In this way, children were treated as units, and issues of what was best for them in terms of quality were barely deemed relevant. Kindergartens struggled to increase staffing to meet new staffing requirements for licensing. Teacher morale sank, workloads increased and pay remained static. It was apparent that a funding increase was the only way to resolve kindergarten woes. NZEI Te Riu Roa, the kindergarten teachers' union, recognised this and began a nationwide campaign to resist privatisation, secure increased funding and a fair settlement of the teachers' collective employment contract. Kindergarten associations joined with the union and this united campaign resulted in 263 petitions with more than 16,000 signatures asking for an increase in kindergarten funding. This was sufficient to prompt the Education and Science Select Committee to invite submissions on the issue.

John Luxton responded to the campaign vowing that "he would not marginalise other sector providers" and accused kindergarten associations of "burying their heads in the sand" (Luxton, 1995). The Ministry of Education advised that changes within the sector had brought kindergartens into line with other providers in the sector and had put an end to the "preferential treatment" that kindergartens had received (Ministry of Education, 1996). It recommended that kindergartens charge fees and access the Department of Social Welfare childcare subsidy to increase their funding. Ongoing state responsibility for kindergartens was uncertain.

The Select Committee met during October and November 1995 and requested that the Minister and Ministry of Education officials attend the committee hearing in Wellington. The Minister and officials recommended no increase in funding. Associations asked for an increase in funding to compensate for teacher pay increases negotiated on their behalf. The Minister replied that the state had no responsibility to fund such an increase as kindergartens were not part of the state sector. This point was hotly disputed and officials were directed to provide clarification. This clarification confirmed that under the terms of the State Sector Act 1988, kindergarten teachers were indeed state servants and therefore the state had responsibility to meet the good employer provisions of the Act and fund any negotiated increase. The link with the state proved to be a powerful mechanism for ensuring the government upheld a responsibility for funding teacher pay increases.

Associations appreciated that this provided them with certain protections, particularly as the teachers' employment contract was under negotiation with a significant increase being sought. Teachers' pay had not increased since 1991 and NZEI Te Riu Roa was also seeking progress towards pay parity and a unified teaching scale. It was likely to be an expensive negotiation with on-going expenditure committed. The Select Committee recommended that favourable consideration be given to an increase in kindergarten funding. The Government responded that kindergartens had the ability to increase their funding by extending their hours, reiterated that a neutral funding system was the aim for the sector, but said an announcement would be made in the upcoming budget (New Zealand Government, 1996).

The increase announced in the budget was minimal. Accordingly, Associations and NZEI Te Riu Roa lobbied strenuously for a significant improvement. Three funding packages were announced, then revised. The general election loomed and kindergarten teachers planned a strike to coincide with it. This pressure, at a critical time, resulted in the Government offering a one-off bonus, a five percent pay increase and agreement to support a job evaluation to compare the skills, experience and qualifications of kindergarten teachers relative to those of primary teachers – a critical first commitment towards pay parity.

State responsibility for funding kindergarten teachers' pay settlements had now been proved under the State Sector Act. Associations and the union had used this as a lever to extract additional funding to settle the kindergarten teachers' employment contract. The agreed progress towards pay parity indicated an on-going and

increasing responsibility for the state. This was in contradiction of the ideological belief in reduced state involvement and a level playing field for competition within the sector. Continued inclusion within the State Sector Act emphasised state responsibility, at a time when reduced state responsibility was the goal. Kindergarten inclusion in the state sector also represented a liability for the state with regard to future negotiations and imminent progress towards pay parity.

Devolved State Responsibility

On April 29, 1997, the Minister of State Services invited representatives from kindergarten associations to meet with her to discuss "bargaining arrangements for the forthcoming round" of negotiations (personal correspondence from Hon. Jenny Shipley to kindergarten associations, April 24, 1997). Associations expected to discuss how the State Services Commission would approach the negotiations on their behalf. However, totally unexpectedly, the Minister informed the group that "Government will today introduce legislation into Parliament to remove kindergartens from the coverage of the State Sector Act," and that it was "seeking Parliamentary agreement to using urgency provisions of standing orders so as to give effect to the change immediately" (personal correspondence from Hon Jenny Shipley to kindergarten association representatives and NZEI Te Riu Roa, April 29, 1997).

The key argument for removal from the State Sector Act was to break the government's obligation to fund kindergarten teachers' pay increases. It was articulated by Hon. Jenny Shipley (April 29, 1997):

> It is true that kindergarten teachers and, in particular, the New Zealand Educational Institute, have been able to use their industrial muscle. The time has come for that to stop.
>
> In the past because of the State Services Commission involvement, the negotiations have been used by the New Zealand Educational Institute to secure additional funding for kindergarten associations over and above that allocated to the early childhood sector through the budget process. This is an avenue to secure extra funding for wage increases that is simply not available to other early childhood providers. The government is not prepared to allow this inequity to continue in the forthcoming contract negotiation.

Despite the outrage of associations and NZEI Te Riu Roa, the legislation was introduced under urgency that day and became law the following day. The reason given for invoking urgency procedures was to give associations as much time as possible to prepare for the negotiations.

Urgency procedures circumvented the need for scrutiny, submissions and the select committee process – provisions utilised successfully by Associations and NZEI Te Riu Roa previously. In fact the Cabinet Committee on Education and Employment Policy had been examining removal of kindergartens from the state sector as early as January 26, 1997 (Cabinet Committee on Education and Employment, 1997). If giving associations plenty of preparation time was the main reason for urgency, then why not simply inform them of the possibility earlier? The fact that this did not happen suggests that the reason was to maintain secrecy, avoid confrontation and minimise public input to what was a contentious move.

Removal of kindergartens and kindergarten teachers from the State Sector Act absolved the state from responsibility to fund or provide for kindergartens any differently from other early childhood services. It removed the state from any responsibility to pay, determine conditions of work, or employ kindergarten teachers. The state was no longer tied to kindergartens by the provisions of the State Sector Act requiring them to be a good employer. The state had effectively removed itself from responsibility for kindergarten provision and left regional kindergarten associations to shoulder the responsibility.

The Aftermath of Devolved State Responsibility

Long, protracted and difficult employment contract negotiations followed. Associations were unable to agree on bargaining agents and fragmentation resulted in up to 18 separate contracts in negotiation at one time (Mitchell, 1999). According to NZEI Te Riu Roa contract newsletters, negotiations started for the Federation contract in June 1997 and a settlement was ratified in November 1998 (17 months later). The New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations began negotiations in August 1997, and the first settlements were reached in March 1999 (19 months later). By December 1999, three kindergarten associations had still to settle contracts (NZEI Te Riu Roa newsletters, 1997-1999). Teacher morale dropped, relationships between teachers and associations were fractured, negotiations resulted in significant expense and, combined with widening employment opportunities in the early childhood sector, issues of recruitment and retention escalated. The removal of state responsibility had impacted negatively on the kindergarten service.

Swift Change and A Return to State Responsibility

Another election loomed and voters registered their dissatisfaction, electing a Labour/Alliance Government in late 1999. Trevor Mallard was appointed Minister of Education and he voiced his commitment to early childhood education. In February, 2000, he announced at the Ministry of Education Advisory Committee that he intended to return kindergartens to the state sector and that there would again be one national employment agreement for kindergarten teachers. A revised vision for state responsibility was evident.

The proposed changes were encapsulated in a legislative change that would replace the Employment Contracts Act with a new Employment Relations Act.

In a media release on March 13, 2000, the Hon. Mallard noted that kindergartens provided a benchmark for early childhood funding and quality and accepted that government should take responsibility for setting these standards – a strong acknowledgement of the state's role and responsibility in the sector. Return to the State Sector Act was followed by the swift settlement of a nationwide collective employment agreement for all teachers (achieved in less than two months) and approval to fund staged increases leading to pay parity and a unified teaching pay scale.

Pay parity has since been negotiated by the union and the New Zealand Childcare Association for early childhood teachers covered by the Consenting Parties Collective Employment Agreement. However, this was without the benefit of direct government intervention, as occurred for kindergartens, and covers only those employers who are a party to the agreement. May (2005) has given an account of the history of the Consenting Parties Collective Employment Agreement and notes: "The full realisation of the pay parity dream still appears elusive and is now in the hands of market forces" (May, 2005, p. 17).

A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002) set the policy directions for early childhood education from 2002. It was based on proposals developed by a sector working group and subsequent technical group, and wide consultation. Its policies transformed the role of the state away from minimal state involvement towards a supportive role, whereby the government became more "hands-on" in relation to ensuring quality, participation and collaborative relationships between early childhood education and parents, schools, and health, parent support and social services. Policy measures to improve quality included

a requirement that by 2012, 70 percent of regulated staff in teacher-led services would be registered teachers and the rest in training for a registerable qualification; publication of professional resources and provision of professional development to support assessment, self review and use of ICT; and funding and research support for designated Centres of Innovation to undertake action research over three years, so they could extend and demonstrate an area of their innovative practice. By 2006, some improvements in teaching and learning practices that had been the target for strategic plan actions had occurred (Mitchell & Hodgen, 2008). These initiatives to raise the quality of early childhood education were based on an understanding that "Children only benefit from participating in high quality services" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 6). They were accompanied by supporting strategies, a review of the regulations and rules, a review of the funding system, conducting of research and ongoing involvement of the sector in policy development and implementation. By 2007, a new funding formula and levels of funding had delivered double the funding budget of 1999 when the Labour-led government was elected (May, 2009, p. 263). These and other initiatives are indicative of a substantive shift in government responsibility and support, not only for kindergartens, but for all early childhood education services.

Perhaps the most marked shift in political focus in terms of children's visibility and rights was a landmark political decision, announced in the Budget of May 27, 2004, for the government to fund up to 20 hours free early childhood education for three- and four-year-olds in teacher-led services. Initially, the "20 hours free ECE" was for children attending community-based services only, but in 2005, following pressure from the private sector, the policy was extended to teacher-led private early childhood education services. The policy was not expressed as an entitlement. To access the free hours, children had to attend an early childhood education service that "opted in" to the scheme. Playcentres and kōhanga reo were excluded. Nevertheless, the policy moved the political thinking away from discourses of children as needy and disadvantaged and children as the responsibility of their families, towards "realising the possibilities of the rights of the pre-school aged child" (May, 2009, p. 288). May has argued that the policy is the result of collective and concerted advocacy, and of

> political, professional and scholarly consensus that participation in quality early childhood education is a significant benefit for children and their families both "here and now" in their daily life and also in the future at school and beyond. While there is still no right or entitlement to free early childhood education, New Zealand is inching towards this in both policy and rhetoric. (May, 2009, p. 295)

2009: Where to Next?

This saga of the role of the state within the kindergarten sector has highlighted an up-and-down history linked to various ideological frames of government thinking. The roles that the state chooses to play are political decisions that are influenced by constructions of childhood and preferred policy approaches. The unfolding story exemplifies that:

- Kindergartens were part of the state sector from the 1950s to the 1980s. Children were perceived to be the responsibility of the state as well as parents. The State safeguarded certain principles: the employment of qualified and registered teachers, a common pay scale that was determined by the government, and free kindergarten education. Nevertheless, inequities between kindergartens and schools in funding and teacher pay rates, and high levels of unpaid volunteer work were a feature.
- Devolution of state responsibility for kindergartens in the 1990s led to fragmented bargaining arrangements, differential teacher pay rates and employment conditions, and fee charging by some kindergarten associations. Arguably these trends also had repercussions for children, exposing them to the inequalities and uncertainties of market forces.
- These issues did not start to be addressed until kindergartens were returned to the state sector, and the Labour-led government from 1999 to 2008 reinstated compulsory kindergarten teacher registration, negotiated and funded a unified pay scale for kindergarten teachers with pay parity with primary school teachers, and announced free early childhood education for three- and four-year-olds in teacher-led services. These policies represented a shift in thinking towards realising the rights of the child to participate in high quality early childhood education.

In 2009, there are some signs that a return to stronger neo-liberal thinking may be on the horizon. In wider government policy areas, reductions in the scope of Accident Compensation and privatisation of prisons are foreshadowed.

In early childhood education, the word "free" has been removed from the "20 hours free ECE" policy. Minister of Education, Anne Tolley, said that renaming the policy "20 hours ECE" would be "a more honest expression of the programme's intent" (Tolley, 2009). She argued that early childhood education was not free because some services were making optional charges for extras. The national survey undertaken by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) in October 2007, three months after the free policy was implemented, indicated that only 34 percent of services were asking parents to pay regular optional charges. This is similar to the 30 percent in the Statistics New Zealand price survey in that quarter. Rather than removing the word "free" from the policy, we would argue that the issues around the implementation of free early childhood education that led to the optional charging policy could have been explored. Internationally, there is a trend for OECD countries to provide at least two years free provision before children start school, and most of these offer free provision as a legal entitlement (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006). 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.

Planned increases to the employment of qualified teachers for children under two years have been halted. The planned improvements to staff:child ratios were stalled pending further review of regulations aimed at ensuring "any unnecessary compliance burdens on services could be removed" (Tolley, 2009). Many research studies have shown that qualified teaching staff and high staff:child ratios (more adults to children) are "structural" aspects that provide conditions for the kinds of teaching and learning that lead to quality outcomes for children (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008).

In the broader education policy context there are also signs of stronger neo-liberal influence. The New Zealand Treasury has consistently provided advice based on neo-liberal interpretations, and its 2008 *Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Finance* continues this policy direction (Treasury, 2008). It advocates reduced public expenditure, and with regard to the early childhood sector, recommends prioritising access over quality improvements, and advocates targeting disadvantaged children for participation. These features emphasise a reduced or minimal state role rather than a supportive role, with the state "picking up the pieces" when parents cannot provide.

The Ministry of Education had provided a briefing for a change of Minister in 2007 that advised prioritising improved participation and improved quality (Ministry of Education, 2007). The next year the Ministry's *Briefing to the Incoming Minister*, following the election and a change of government, showed some distinct differences. The 2008 briefing is focused on improvements in participation for children in "disadvantaged" communities, and suggests shifting from universal funding to a more targeted approach:

> There is a strong case for further targeted assistance for low-income families. The extent and nature of any further assistance should be decided by the government in the context of overall early childhood education policy settings. The key point is that increased assistance to the children that could benefit most from high-quality early childhood education services will need to be at the expense of more general assistance for all families. The alternative is further growth in the overall fiscal cost of ECE services. (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 16)

The current focus of policy advice to the government is not advocating state responsibility for universal provision of free early childhood care and education. The Minister's recent decisions suggest acceptance of this policy advice.

Within an international context, the OECD reviews of early childhood education and care in 12 and 20 countries respectively (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001, 2006) have argued that a reliance on parental choice and privatised provision will almost certainly lead to inequities in access and variable quality. They note that subsidies for low income families may help address issues of unequal access, but targeting is inherently problematic, missing families that are just over the border for subsidy assistance, and families who move in and out of risk.

The OECD reviews emphasise the importance of qualified teaching staff, good staff working conditions and professional education as key to quality early childhood education. They have reported greater variation in remuneration and conditions of employment in free market systems. In New Zealand, a recent NZCER national survey of early childhood education provision found that kindergarten teachers are better paid than other early childhood teachers (Mitchell, 2008). The pay differential favouring kindergarten teachers was found for each specific teaching position. Kindergarten teachers also had better annual leave and non-contact time provisions. Assessment, planning and evaluation were most commonly carried out during non-contact time – pedagogical

activities that contribute to enhanced teaching and learning. In addition, there was greater variability of pay and employment conditions for teachers in services other than kindergarten. The likely reason for these differences is that only kindergarten teachers are part of the state sector and have the advantage of a national collective employment agreement, linking their salaries to primary and secondary teachers' salaries.

The NZCER survey also found that high levels of teacher turnover are occurring, and a predominant reason given by teachers is competition over pay and employment conditions. High teacher turnover is linked to poorer quality of education and care (Whitebrook & Sakai, 2003), and can erode the pedagogical culture of services and capacity of staff to build on professional development.

Conclusion

We have argued that a new construction of the "child as citizen" gives credit to children's agency and the contemporary conditions of childhood in New Zealand society today. This new construction requires the state to take a responsible and active role in the education and upbringing of children alongside families and communities.

The main specific challenges for services and policy makers emerging from the analysis can be found in:

- Supporting a qualified, well-remunerated and professionally supported early childhood teaching workforce. Our discussion of the ups and downs of kindergarten teachers' pay and employment conditions within and outside the state sector, and the comparisons with the pay and employment conditions of teachers who have always been outside the state sector, suggests that state responsibility for negotiations and funding of employment costs is a highly positive influence. The competitive model that exists in New Zealand for all but kindergarten teachers generates highly variable pay and employment conditions and is associated with teacher turnover levels that are problematic for service quality.
- Advancing a policy vision for free early childhood education for all children whose family wishes their child to benefit from the opportunity. Our discussion of funding mechanisms and international research has suggested that targeted funding is unable to provide such opportunities. We have put forward an argument that policy needs to be based on the participatory rights of children. Free early childhood education is consistent with such rights.

A minimal state model does not give credit to children as people distinct from their parents, with rights to attend good quality early childhood education. The experiences within New Zealand's kindergarten sector to date suggest that state responsibility and funding for teachers' pay and employment conditions, establishment of rigorous teacher qualification requirements, and universal access to free early childhood education can assist a shift away from a market model that is flawed.

Peter Moss, speaking at the Early Childhood Education Symposium at the mid-point of implementing the 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* said that New Zealand's early childhood education provision is held in very high regard internationally. It is "leading the second wave" in early childhood education amongst richer nations and is "one of the most important global experiences" (Moss, 2007, p. 33). Moss argued that New Zealand is starting to confront the "wicked" issues by creating a "coherent national framework" of curriculum and regulation, funding and workforce. He recommended further coherence is needed with respect to workforce and pay parity. New Zealand's curriculum, innovative practice, and respect for diversity are held in high esteem. We do not want this reputation and quality to be diminished.

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