

Connections between early childhood policy and research in Aotearoa New Zealand: 1970s-2010s

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Early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand has been shaped by strong partnerships between academic researchers, advocates for children and women, practitioners in the field and government agencies. The alliances are not always neatly aligned. Researchers have been proactive in shaping new policy directions for early childhood provision and pedagogy, interrogating its consequences and broadly defining uniquely New Zealand pedagogical directions. Themes of equity, social justice and the rights of children characterise the research agendas. The authors bring some shared and separate perspectives to this overview. Over several decades we have both been engaged in policy advocacy and participated in a variety of committees, working parties and a task force during periods of major policy change. Anne Smith began her involvement in ECE locally, working on setting up a community childcare scheme in Dunedin in the 1970s (Smith, 1980). Her observational research has focused on children's lived experiences in early childhood centres (Smith & Haggerty, 1979; Barraclough & Smith, 1996; Smith, 1988, 1996, 1999), as well as children's rights and agency (Smith, Duncan & Marshall, 2005; Smith, 2007; Smith, 2009). In the 1970s Helen May was working in childcare and began documenting the New Zealand policy story as a research task itself (May, 1985, 2001 & 2009, 2013, 2014), later collaborating on the development of a national early childhood curriculum (Carr & May, 1999).

This chapter summarises five eras of early childhood policy and research; from its fledgling beginnings in the 1970s when there were few doctoral scholars in ECE and no university early childhood programmes, to the current time when New Zealand researchers have become a presence and voice in various world forums. New Zealand is a small country with 4.4 million people. Consequently, there is only a small research community spread thinly across seven university sites but including too, a few other providers of teacher education and in earlier years, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Characteristic of this research community are its close personal relationships and collaborations and ongoing engagement in professional endeavours, policy development and advocacy. This overview chapter is also illustrative of expanding participation in ECE, from 1973 when 46% of 3 and 4 year olds

attended an early childhood service to 2012 when the comparable figure was 93% (Education Counts, 2013).¹ Each era has shaped and/or been a catalyst to new research agendas and is illustrative of a particular configuration of the interwoven partnerships cited above. Also shaping each era is the political philosophy of successive government, which in New Zealand swings between the left-leaning Labour Government and a right leaning National Government. In global terms the political parties would be characterised as centre-left and centre-right, in which broadly the significant advances for ECE are under Labour Governments whereas National governments tend to contain and sometimes curtail earlier development. The research cited for this chapter cannot be not comprehensive, but the examples are illustrative of the changing emphasis of the connections.

Early Policy and Research Beginnings: 1970s

In the 1970s there were ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, both in terms of types of ECE that received government support, and accessibility for families. Despite a groundswell of advocacy for change supported by rafts of conference remits and reports, there was, however, no inclination by government to rethink its policy agenda (May, 2001). Despite expanding coverage and funding support for part-day preschool programmes for 3 and 4 year olds, under the Department of Education, a growing number of children attending childcare services under the umbrella of the Department of Social Welfare were excluded from government funding. This divided administration across government departments meant that childcare was the poor relation of early childhood services, both in terms of reputation and funding. Childcare was seen as suitable only for single parents where mothers ‘had to’ work, or for other ‘disadvantaged’ families. The research cited in this section is indicative of the beginnings of changing understandings of the provision and role of ECE.

Early research questioned the dominant view that childcare centres offered primarily custodial care; and sessional preschool centres, kindergartens that were established in the late nineteenth century and staffed by teachers, and Playcentres, established in the 1940s and staffed by parents, provided educationally enriching experiences. Anne Smith and Heather Bain compared the type of interactions children from childcare centres and Playcentres had with each other and with staff (Smith & Bain, 1978). The study showed that there were similar interactions in both

¹ The 1973 figure can only be indicative based on a census at the time. The latter figure is broadly accurate based on enrolment data but does include some dual enrolments. The school entry census showed 95% of four year olds had attended ECE.

types of centre, but that childcare children were engaged in significantly more interactive play (talking about an activity, questioning, planning or co-operative play) than Playcentre children, perhaps because the longer hours allowed childcare children to get to know each other better. Another observational study evaluated a high quality early childhood centre (a Dunedin community childcare centre), and established that the centre incorporated high process quality in its programme – warm, sensitive and responsive interactions and joint involvement in meaningful activities – despite being under the auspices of Social Welfare and providing longer hours (Smith & Haggerty, 1979).

Both of these studies helped support the argument that all ECE can and should provide both education and care, which was reflected in the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s and is outlined in later sections of this chapter. The research took a sociocultural and ecological perspective on ECE in New Zealand, viewing children's engagement in social interaction with others in cultural contexts as crucial for their learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Vygotsky, 1978). Urie Bronfenbrenner's visit to New Zealand and keynote address at a large cross-sector gathering of the ECE sector in 1979 (the Second Early Childhood Convention) was influential, emphasising the importance of the ecological context, and the value of connections between children's worlds, and support for those who cared for them (May, 2009).

Equity of access to early childhood services by children and families across class and ethnic divides was another issue that arose in the 1970s. This concern was influenced by the War on Poverty in the US leading to research suggesting that participation in high quality early childhood programmes could break the cycle of poverty and underachievement for poor minority families (Lamb & Sternberg, 1992). The study *Who Gets to Preschool?* (Barney, 1975), provided evidence of the impact of geography, social class and ethnicity on the attendance of children across both childcare and preschool services in New Zealand. He showed that children from lower income and Māori families were less likely to participate in preschool programmes. During the 1960s and 1970s there were various government-led policies to encourage the attendance of Māori children at preschool, based on a deficit rationale of 'compensatory education' intended to redress the perceived poor home environment of Māori children (May, 2001). Two projects illustrate the landscape of early childhood research in the seventies, shaped around equity concerns for children missing out, but touching upon questions concerning the best kind of early childhood programme for so-called disadvantaged children.

Geraldine McDonald's book *Maori Mothers and Preschool Education* (1973) documented the outcome of Māori community initiatives to establish preschools for Māori children, with a particular focus on the role of mothers and the kind of infrastructure support needed to maintain their viability. She showed that Māori cultural patterns were easily lost when preschool programmes were dominated by Pakeha (European New Zealand people), and suggested that Māori leadership and self-determination would encourage more Māori families to participate. The sub text of McDonald's findings was that community enthusiasm had been undermined by government political rhetoric louder than political action, and by solutions that favoured the attendance of Māori children in mainstream preschool programmes.

In 1974 Jane Ritchie established *Te Kohanga*, a preschool for Māori children that operated as a research project until 1976; and in the same genre of compensation for 'cultural deprivation' as the US War on Poverty initiatives (Irwin, 1989). In *A Chance to be Equal* (1978), Ritchie challenged established notions of play-based ECE as the best preparation for school. These early research studies are significant in providing insights into the mix of culture, class and ECE of the era. Each study had longer-term policy implications. Anne Smith and David Swain (1988) later wrote: "There was little or no questioning of whether Pakeha (European NZ) institutions were appropriate or positive for Māori families" (pp. 117-18).

In 1983, with lessons learned from previous initiatives through both research and the experience of Māori participants, the first Kōhanga Reo, Māori language immersion ECE programmes were established by Māori themselves, outside of the Department of Education whose preschool institutions were deemed to have failed Māori children and overridden aspirations for tino rangatiratanga [self determination]. Similarly, government tardiness in addressing the issues of childcare funding and provision radicalised many women with childcare being a key plank of the 1970s women's movement (May, 1985). There emerged a raft of community and national organisations in support of childcare users, childcare workers and providers. This was the research and policy milieu in which the activism and research of the authors was seeded.

Before Five: 1980s-mid 1990s

Characteristic of this second era is the imprint of different government philosophies on ECE policy, and that the years of conservative cutback and cutrailment in effect sparked new research questions but also yielded an opportunity for a radical rethink of ECE curriculum. The

1984-1990 Labour Government initiated reforms across the education sector. Prior to the 1989 reforms, detailed for early childhood in the *Before Five* report (Lange, 1988), the government shifted childcare from the Department of Social Welfare to unify all early childhood services under the Department of Education in 1986, and introduced an integrated early childhood teacher education qualification (combining the previously separate childcare and kindergarten training) in 1988. On the industrial front the older Kindergarten Teachers' Association and the Early Childhood Workers Union for childcare formed the Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa. Cumulatively, these changes were significant as a blueprint to remove entrenched divides between care and education. *Before Five* was premised on ideals of equity, addressing the interests of children, of women and of cultural survival: the latter being of particular importance to Nga Kohanga Reo² and the emerging centres for migrating Pacific Islands people. Overall, the reforms were intended to: acknowledge the diversity of services in terms of philosophy, culture, structure and ownership; improve participation; address affordability; integrate care and education; support quality for children; improve the status of teachers, and enable women to work in paid employment with improved childcare support. Despite resistance from the Treasury, ECE won additional funding to implement the new policies. Anne Meade, a significant architect of the reforms and a leading researcher, celebrated that the reforms enabled "Women and young children [to] gain a foot in the door" (1990, p. 96). Disappointment followed as the 'door' did not open fully (Dalli, 1993). A National Government elected in 1990 curtailed the funding package. A shift towards deregulation and right-wing market ideals undermined some of the tenets of *Before Five*. Research projects of this second era reflected political concerns in a shifting policy landscape, with researchers seeking to provide hard data to convince policy makers about the best policy for quality ECE. The New Zealand research was influenced by US longitudinal intervention studies showing the lasting effects of participation in high quality ECE (e.g., Schweinhart, Barnes & Weikart, 1993), and studies on the aspects of quality ECE that had an impact on children's development such as ratio, group size and training (Lamb & Sternberg, 1990; Lamb & Sternberg, 1992).

The Competent Children study, initiated by Anne Meade helped persuade government that it was worthwhile investing in ECE. The study followed 307 children from four years of age, and looked at the contribution that quality ECE and other variables (such as family and school) made to children's competence (Wylie, Thompson & Hendricks 1996). Participation in quality

² Nga Kohanga Reo are language immersion early childhood centres for under five-year-olds, designed to strengthen cultural and Māori language knowledge.

ECE influenced children's later competency in literacy and mathematics achievement at school as well as perseverance, communication, and logical problem-solving (Wylie & Thompson, 1998). Better literacy and numeracy scores were associated with teachers asking open-ended questions, providing a print-saturated environment, engaging in children's play, and providing age-appropriate resources and opportunities for co-operative activities (Wylie & Thompson, 2003).

The visit of American researcher, Bettye Caldwell (1967) in the late 1970s, and her research on infant childcare had suggested that rich childcare settings for infants could be a particularly powerful positive influence on their development, but that infants were very vulnerable to poor quality. Anne Smith's research in the early nineties was influenced by Caldwell's work. Smith wanted to know what sort of quality was offered for infants in New Zealand early childhood centres, and what its influence was. Her observational study of 200 under-two-year olds in 100 childcare centres throughout New Zealand examined the influence of staff training qualifications, and other aspects of structural quality (staff child ratios, staff turnover, working conditions, salaries) on process quality, as measured by the nature of the interactions between staff and children (Smith, 1996; Smith, Ford, Hubbard & White, 1995). The study showed an association between three year staff training and measures of quality (Smith, 1996, 1999). Highly trained staff were more likely to be engaged in joint attention episodes with infants, suggesting that a more advanced level of training directly influenced quality processes (Smith, 1999). The study also showed that the strongest predictor of high quality within centres was the wages of the staff, and working conditions were also important. The findings of this research fed directly into later debates and forums, fuelling calls for improved funding for early childhood (particularly childcare) centres, for better regulations to maintain quality, and for widespread reforms towards a qualified early childhood workforce, a career structure and appropriate salaries for staff.

The first half of the nineties was a time of extended debate and discussion about an appropriate philosophical and curriculum approach for ECE in New Zealand. This debate was particularly pertinent to the development of New Zealand's early childhood curriculum guidelines, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), which began with Helen May and Margaret Carr from the University of Waikato winning a Ministry of Education contract, and their partnership with Māori leaders, Tilly Reedy and Tamati Reedy, in developing a bicultural, holistic curriculum (Smith, 2010a). Sociocultural theory (Rogoff, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, del Rio &

Alvarez, 1995) was becoming increasingly influential internationally because of the quiet revolution that had been taking place in developmental psychology. The re-discovery of Vygotsky put much more focus on the importance of responsive social contexts as the crucible of thinking, in contrast to the traditional Piagetian approach of a free play curriculum with the teacher standing back and allowing children to explore.

A sociocultural approach linked with the ongoing debate in New Zealand about whether it was possible to separate care and education in environments for young children. Sociocultural theory suggested that a key element to promote learning was a shared frame of reference between adults and children (or between children), and that this was facilitated by caring and warm relationships. It reinforced Anne Smith's (1993) critique that there was a false dichotomy between education and care institutionalized in New Zealand's separate types of early childhood services (childcare centres, kindergartens and playcentres). She challenged the separation of education and care, and the laissez-faire free play approach, and suggested that instead teachers should jointly participate in activities and share meanings with children.

A sociocultural framework was also sensitive to the foregrounding of Māori world views, cultural practices and perspectives in ECE, which was a key issue. These issues and many others were discussed and debated up and down the country during many consultations, meetings and amongst a diverse group of practitioners over an extended period between 1991 (at the beginning of the Ministry contract) and the introduction of the final curriculum into all early childhood centres in 1996 (Carr & May, 1996). This was an era shaped by sharp political differences, considerable advocacy, turmoil and change in the ECE sector, alongside new theoretical paradigms which began a transformation of ECE policy and practice.

Te Whāriki: Mid 1990s to 2000s

A significant wave of mainly qualitative research arose in the aftermath of *Te Whāriki* and the development of an associated narrative assessment approach called Learning Stories (Carr, 2001; Carr, Lee & Jones, 2004-2009). This body of research was initiated by professional and researcher interests. Government agencies provided funding support, with the Ministry of Education managing the development of resources to support teachers in the implementation of *Te Whāriki*. This has been a long term and ongoing process and a fruitful engagement across political and policy interests, research expertise and professional concern. The story of *Te Whāriki*'s development as a bicultural partnership with Te Kohanga Reo Trust and the project

co-ordinators, Margaret Carr and Helen May, has been well documented (Carr & May, 1994, 1996, 1999; Smith, 2010a; Nuttall, 2013). This following section summarises the impetus *Te Whāriki*, as a curriculum document, has had on subsequent research agendas.

The theme of empowerment was important for Māori, and ‘empowering children to learn and grow’ became a foundation principle. *Te Whāriki* was about self-determination. A set of parallel Aims for Children in Māori and English were developed, as equivalent aspirations of empowerment in both cultures. *Te Whāriki* made a political statement about children: their uniqueness, ethnicity, and rights in New Zealand. For people from the Pacific Island Nations (and other cultures), *Te Whāriki* provided a curriculum space where language and cultures could be in the foreground and not an add-on. The curriculum was envisaged as a whāriki, translated as a woven mat for all to stand on, and provided the framework which allowed for different programme perspectives to be woven with many possible ‘patterns’. It provided signposts for individuals and centres to develop their own local curriculum through a process of talk, reflection, planning, evaluation and assessment. The aspirational principles of *Te Whāriki* construct children of New Zealand as both powerful and participating, and are premised on principles of the rights of the child and child agency. *Te Whāriki’s* research journey became a tool to challenge older beliefs and reshape practice according to its ideals.

The curriculum emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships with people, places, and things. Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 6)

Learning is conceptualised in *Te Whāriki* as arising out of the context of meaningful joint activity in cultural contexts using the tools of culture (language, stories, songs, rituals, family connections). Rather than assuming that there is one developmental pathway, development emerges from cultural goals with the guidance of community practice and expertise. *Te Whāriki* assumes that children will learn according to the opportunities they are given to participate, and the guidance and stimulation provided by adults. The concept of learning dispositions, defined as “habits of mind that dispose the learner to interpret, edit and respond to experiences in characteristic ways” (Carr, 1997, p. 2), underlies *Te Whāriki*. Examples of learning dispositions are persevering with difficulties rather than giving up and avoiding failure, communicating with others, and being imaginative. This approach suggests that

teachers should avoid teaching fragmented skills, but encourage and provide opportunities to exercise ongoing learning strategies and strengthen children's identities as competent learners in a range of different situations (Cowie & Carr, 2009).

How learning dispositions are shaped by learning contexts over time (between the ages of four and five years) was investigated by researchers from Waikato and Otago universities (Carr, Smith, Duncan, Jones, Lee & Marshall, 2010). They focused on three dispositions - reciprocity, resilience and imagination – in fourteen case studies, looking at the affordances offered by educational settings for children to develop learning identities and transfer learning strategies to new situations. The book presents a theoretical analysis of dispositions and the environmental characteristics that support them, illustrated by many learning episodes. For example, David, previously a reluctant writer, engaged in a story-writing session at school and his teacher responded to his attempts by telling him that he is “a clever writer” (Carr et al., 2010, p. 94). The teacher reflected that something ‘clicked’ for him on that day, and he became much more eager to participate in writing.

A challenge in the implementation of *Te Whāriki* was to find a way of assessing its impact on learning, and this resulted in the development of a narrative, holistic bicultural approach to assessment, Learning Stories, which documented significant learning moments in children's everyday experiences (Carr, 1997, 1998, 2001). Learning stories allow teachers to gain windows onto children's world views and assumptions, as well as allowing children to retain significant ownership of their stories and to share meaning and power with adults. Teachers documenting a child's learning story focus on five areas related to dispositions – finding something of interest, being involved, engaging with challenge, persisting when there are difficulties, expressing a point of view and taking responsibility – all of which align with the strands of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education contracted a team led by Margaret Carr from the University of Waikato to capture exemplars in early childhood centres and to produce illustrated books documenting a variety of learning stories. These exemplars, known as *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004-2009) are not prescriptive, but illustrate a variety of ways to implement the curriculum and possible future learning pathways. The stories have been a powerful way of encouraging teachers to have positive constructions of children's competence, share stories with children and families, and support teachers' confidence in trying out new ideas. Children also gain a strong sense of ownership and pride in their own learning, and enjoy sharing the stories with family, friends and teachers (Carr et al., 2005).

More recent research has focused on developing a Māori approach to assessment, *Te Whatu Pōkeka*, to enable the assessment of children’s learning journeys in their unique cultural contexts (Ministry of Education, 2009; Rameka, 2012). *Te Whatu Pōkeka* is a resource for teachers in Māori early childhood centres, produced by Māori researchers Lesley Rameka and Rita Walker, which gives exemplars of assessment that draw on children’s history, cultural heritage and Te Ao Māori (Māori world views). *Te Whatu Pōkeka* is designed to help “Māori children develop a strong and secure sense of identity that emphasises their connectedness to their ancestors, the universe and everything in it, and the spirit world” (Rameka, 2011, p. 254). For example, whakapapa (genealogy and history) is incorporated into early childhood programmes through genealogical narratives layering generations of ancestors into the lifeline of those living today. The importance of whakapapa is the connection to land and other forms of life over time and space, establishing personal and collective identity (Rameka, 2011). This section has provided some glimpses into a research agenda shaped by *Te Whāriki* although the era of ‘*Te Whāriki*’, its implementation and research story, is ongoing.

Early Childhood Strategic Plan: 2000s

In 1999, a Labour Government returned to power with an election platform agenda to recapture the impetus of the *Before Five* (Lange, 1988) policies that had languished. In this era ongoing curriculum research initiatives (cited above) were entwined with policy focussed research. The small research community was hard at work, but supported too by a growing number of new doctoral students and graduates.

Between 1999 and 2008 the government introduced Equity Funding to support participation in ‘high need’ centres and services, delivered 20 Hours Free ECE per week for three and four-year olds across all early childhood teacher led services; and was on target to have teacher-led ECE centres 100% staffed by qualified teachers by 2012. These policies were embedded in the Labour Government’s Strategic Plan, *Pathways to the Future - Ngā Huarahi Arataki 2002-2012*, intended to provide a robust infrastructure for delivering high quality, affordable, ECE participation by all children (Ministry of Education, 2002).

The Strategic Plan for Early Childhood (Ministry of Education, 2002) was well founded in research and informed by the cumulative experience and dialogue of the previous 20 years within the early childhood sector. Immediately after the election in 1999, the Ministry of Education contracted a Children’s Issues Centre team at the University of Otago to produce a

literature review on ECE (Smith, Grima, Gaffney, & Powell, 2000). The review showed that there were high participation rates in ECE (but lower for Māori or Pasifika children), that participation in EC was associated with cognitive gains and improved school performance, but that in order to achieve positive outcomes it was essential that children participated in quality programmes. Quality involves subjective components of what is valued in a society, but also objective components linked to positive outcomes, like staff training, staff-child ratios and group size, as well as sensitive and responsive adult-child interactions, and joint engagement in meaningful activities. This research was used by the Ministry of Education and the Strategic Plan Working Group to develop strategic directions, which included increasing participation, improving quality and increasing collaboration between services.

The scope of New Zealand's early childhood policy directions received international attention. Peter Moss (2007) described New Zealand as "leading the wave" of early childhood innovation, having "confronted the wicked issues" (p. 33). Moss (2008) explained:

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

The Strategic Plan years created a fertile research environment, including evaluative studies addressing the new policy directions. The Ministry of Education contracted an evaluation of the implementation of the Strategic Plan between 2004 and 2009 (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Mara, Cubey & Whitford, 2011). The study involved collecting data from 32 services in eight localities varying in geography and ethnic composition. Participation had increased markedly by 2009 (by 19%), children were participating for longer hours, affordability for parents had increased, and services were more viable. Quality was found to

be good or very good in two thirds of centres but only fair or poor in about a third. Factors associated with high quality were teachers being involved in professional development, higher proportions of registered teachers being employed, and use of *Te Whāriki* and associated resources. Linda Mitchell (Mitchell et al., 2011) from the University of Waikato commented on the positive shifts on every indicator of teaching and learning associated with a high usage of the Ministry of Education resources, such as *Kei Tua o Te Pae* (the exemplars) (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007, 2009), the Self Review Guidelines and the Centres of Innovation reports (see later discussion).

In 2003 the government funded two new research initiatives, the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) and Centres of Innovation programme (COI), which have supported a range of early childhood projects around teaching, learning and curriculum (Meade, 2010a, Meade 2010b; Nuttall, 2010). Both initiatives were premised on the idea of partnerships between researchers and education professionals, and encouraged the interrogation of practice toward richer weavings and understandings of *Te Whāriki*. The TLRI was a cross education sector-wide initiative intended to enhance the links between education research and teaching practices to improve outcomes for learners. A recommendation from the Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, 2002) was to establish early childhood centres that showcased innovation (COIs) that, on a three-year cycle, would embark on an action research journey in partnership with experienced researchers to enable deeper exploration and documentation of innovative teaching and learning processes. The strategy was aimed at disseminating and showcasing quality practice across the sector. Anne Meade led the COI projects. Her task was to co-ordinate, support and build research capacity within the various COIs. From 2005, the various research journeys were documented and disseminated in a series of publications (Meade, 2005, 2007, 2010a&b).

The COIs involved partnerships and collaboration between early childhood teachers and researchers. Meade (2007) points out that traditionally teachers have been placed in a passive role in relation to research, but the COI projects gave teachers leadership experience and helped them to theorise, reflect and discuss their practice, as well as to disseminate their findings to networks of colleagues. The impact of these projects exceeded all expectations and played a critical role in enabling centres to flourish, improve their practice, and engage in critical thinking (Ramsey, Lee & Carr, 2013). The funding for COI projects was terminated in 2008.

One of the earliest COI projects was to strengthen children's agency and increase their competence and confidence using ICT (computers, cameras, photocopier, laminator etc.) in order to deepen learning and broaden assessment (Ramsey, Breen Sturm, Lee & Carr, 2005; Ramsey, et al., 2013). It was undertaken at Roskill South kindergarten and attended by mainly 3 and 4-year old children prior to school entry. The project helped to develop a culture in the kindergarten where the children became competent with digital technology and could produce videos and narratives to incorporate into their Learning Stories. Teachers saw the technology as just another tool that helped them to notice, recognise and respond to children's learning. Teachers ran workshops, held visitor days and developed professional resources to disseminate the findings of the project.

Another project was carried out in a Samoan language immersion centre in Auckland (Podmore, Samu, Taouma & Tapusoa, 2007). This innovation placed small groups of children together with their teacher (and primary caregiver) from the point of entry through to school with a strong focus on supporting language immersion and bilingualism. Children in the centre became capable, confident and competent in Samoan, and engaged in meaningful conversations with peers and teachers. Children's sense of belonging was also enhanced by their participation in stable groups.

The TLRI recognises the value of involving practitioners in collaborative research with researchers. The programme is designed to strengthen the links between educational research and teaching practice, to improve learning outcomes, and to build research capacity and leadership in the early childhood sector. Examples of these projects include a study of the role of visiting teachers in improving the quality of educators' practice in home-based care (Duncan, Irvine, Cross, Fagan, Seiuli, Sutton & Weir, 2009); an investigation of teachers' understanding and recognition of infant learning and an articulation of the specialised nature of infant pedagogy (Dalli, Rockel, Duhn & Craw, 2011); and a project designed to strengthen bicultural strategies in ECE and increase the confidence and competence of teachers in Māori tikanga (cultural practice) in order to support the participation of Māori tamariki and whānau (Ritchie & Rau, 2008).

Linda Mitchell and her colleagues were contracted by the Ministry to provide policy makers with a synthesis of research on the impact of ECE on children and their families (Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008). Like the earlier review (Smith, et al., 2000), it showed consistent evidence of the influence of participation in ECE on short and long-term cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes for children (especially those from low income families), that the key to achieving positive outcomes was quality ECE, and that investing in good quality ECE brought about cost savings and benefits for societies and economies.

This era is illustrative of a particularly close synergy across professional, research and political domains. Research evidence supported policies that drove up the costs of ECE but political opinion determined that these costs be carried by a supportive state, making quality ECE more affordable to parents. However, an incoming government was soon poised to redraft the policy and research landscape.

Early Childhood Taskforce: 2010s

The final era sketched for this chapter is illustrative of the division in New Zealand political opinion and policy. The election of a government led by the National Party in November 2008 caused a shift in ECE policy directions (Smith, 2013; May 2014). Researchers are still midstream in adjusting to the new ethos. A worldwide economic downturn was used to justify a funding retrenchment. Cutbacks were made to funding for research, training and professional development programmes, and the COI programmes. Labour's target of 100% of staffing by fully qualified teachers in early childhood centres was cut to 80%. Instead, the government's specific focus was to achieve 98% participation in ECE. There were new initiatives to improve early childhood participation in 'high need' locations with mainly indigenous Māori children or Pasifika children. The cutbacks around quality were called "a brutal blow" (Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa -New Zealand Childcare Association, 2010) The largest daily newspaper, *The New Zealand Herald* (24 May, 2010) summed up more conservative opinion with the 'Editorial: Preschool Budget cuts right move':

Plainly National does not regard specialist teaching of pre-school children to be quite as important as Labour did. It is probably right. ... Did childcare centres ever need to be fully staffed by trained teachers? Or is this a classic case of 'qualification inflation'. ... It is easy to insist little children deserve nothing but the best. ... but 'the best' at that level might not require professional training. The

Government is right to direct more of its early education support to areas where children are missing out. ... Contentious the decision may be but it seems educationally harmless, socially equitable and financially necessary.

The issue remains contentious, reflecting political divides over state interest in the universal funding of quality ECE for all children versus targeting funding towards those children and families deemed to pose risks to the economic and social infrastructure of the country. The focus on targeting disadvantaged children and families was also reflected in the government's welfare policies, and especially their Green Paper on Vulnerable Children (Ministry of Social Development, 2011) that viewed children in terms of their vulnerabilities and deficits.

Anne Tolley (4 April 2011), Minister of Education between 2008-2011, justified the government's position:

Taxpayer investment in early childhood services has trebled over the last five years...Despite this growth in funding, too many children that the evidence tells us would benefit most from ECE are still missing out. They are at a disadvantage before they even start school. The economic reality is that money will be tight for the foreseeable future, so more than ever we must invest in the areas that will make the biggest difference to children and their families.

This shifting narrative became a catalyst for research investigating the links between qualifications, quality and outcomes for children, and addressing political questions around the effectiveness of early childhood. The policy backdrop to these concerns was the establishment of an ECE Taskforce in 2010 (ECE Taskforce, 2011). The terms of reference addressed Government concern over the rising expenditure on ECEC. The phraseology included "effectiveness and efficiency of the Government's current early childhood expenditure", "the value gained from the different types of investment" and determining "cost effective and evidence-based ways to support children's learning in early childhood" (p.13). The report reiterated the evidence that there was a strong case for investment in high-quality ECE especially for low income children, drawing heavily on economic analyses of benefit/cost ratios (p. 22). The Government asked the Taskforce to propose a new funding model "without increasing current government expenditure" (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p. 176). The funding recommendations were

controversial, proposing a shift in emphasis from universal funding mechanisms towards targeting ‘priority children’. Taskforce member Anne Smith, released a minority report (Smith, 2011):

The argument is that the new funding system will be better for low SES and Māori and Pasifika, but there is little information about how the new scheme will be able to accurately seek out and identify targeted groups. (pp. 2-3)

There were other worrying things in the Early Childhood Taskforce Report including the focus on economic development as opposed to child wellbeing or the rights of children, on getting parents into the paid workforce without acknowledgement of the value of unpaid parenting work, and the support for the unfettered market (Smith, 2013). The current government has a strong drive towards coercing beneficiaries back to work, culminating in the introduction in 2013 of a policy to make it compulsory for beneficiaries to enrol their children in ECE for at least 15 hours per week, with benefits cut as a sanction for non-compliance. This initiative was also connected to the government’s goal of increasing the participation of vulnerable children in ECE.

The Taskforce had noted that “one of the most important indicators of structural quality of an ECE service is the availability of appropriately qualified staff” (ECE Taskforce, 2011, p. 45). The Taskforce, however, did not comment on whether it supported the government’s policy of cutting funding for centres with 100% qualified staff, though it recommended increasing the regulated minimum from 50% to 80%. Minister Tolley claimed there was no research evidence to show centres staffed 100% by qualified teachers were better than 80% of staff being fully qualified teachers. Conversely, Anne Smith, claimed that:

Such research would be hard to do. (There are few countries that employ 100% qualified teachers in ECE). There isn’t any research either which shows that 100% qualified staff isn’t better than 80%. (Smith, November, 2010b, p. 2, emphasis in original)

Smith said that there was plenty of research demonstrating that “Qualified teachers provide more sensitive and responsive learning opportunities for children. ... Logically the more qualified teachers.... the better outcomes there will be for children’s well-being and learning” (Smith, 2010b, p. 2).

Minister Tolley's challenge about the value of all early childhood teachers being fully qualified teachers stimulated the Early Childhood Teachers' Work Study (Meade, Robinson, Smorti et al., 2012). This research compared staff-child interactions in five centres with 100% staffed by fully qualified teachers and five centres with 50 to 79% qualified staff. In the centres with 100% qualified staff, teachers interacted more and were more responsive to children, were more likely to model and encourage children, participate in children's play and activities, ask open-ended questions, foster language development, and provide complexity and challenge for children. Children in the fully qualified centres were more likely to be involved in an education programme, work with symbols systems, and to have access to more resources. One key indicator of quality processes is the amount of sustained shared thinking between adults and children, and this was higher in the centres where all staff were qualified teachers. Teachers also had greater pedagogical expertise and were better able to link theory to practice. Children in the fully qualified centres had higher scores on indicators to do with independence and concentration (known to be associated with self-control, one of the strongest predictors of later success in life). The study added to a considerable volume of other research showing that teacher qualifications were a significant component of quality ECE. This final era outlined in this chapter is paused midstream at the time of writing because 2014 is an election year. It unclear whether the National Government's redirection of ECE policy will become more entrenched or whether, if elected, a Labour Government will as promised will roll back the clock to emphasise again the supportive state nudging towards universal provision funded by the state.

Summary and Conclusion

In almost half a century radical changes have taken place in our ECE system in Aotearoa, from a divided unevenly funded system towards a system with a coherent national policy framework, an integrated funding system, widespread improvements in quality, almost universal participation, and the implementation of an innovative bicultural holistic curriculum. All of these policy changes have been connected to research agendas and programmes driven by a coalition of researchers, child advocates, parents and staff, concerned with the rights of children and their families to high quality, accessible and affordable ECE. Initial research was sporadic and initiated by individual academics, but since the 1980s research funding from government has provided

significant support for important policy questions to be addressed by teams of researchers, including collaborative partnerships between practitioners and researchers. There is now a solid body of research evidence supporting the value of investment in high quality ECE, although debates about the nature of quality continue, and the political will to implement accessible and high quality care has waxed and waned. The 2014 election will determine whether New Zealand's world-class ECE system will remain intact, or whether it will be further eroded and move towards targeted funding approaches.

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