New Zealand’s bold strategy for professionalising early education and care

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Background

• In NZ, ECEC ownership is community-based or private (growing corporate)
• Government develops and administers policy, gives grants in aid, regulates, reviews (inspects), provides information and support, and approves and helps fund teacher education providers
• Until the late 1980s, three departments administered ECEC services
Integrating childcare in education

• Integration took time
• It involved a wide constituency and several working groups
• It was evidence-based vis-a-vis children
• There were agreed principles:
  – Care and education cannot be separated
  – All young children have a right to care that is educational and by qualified staff regardless of parental income and/or choice of type of service
• The transfer of administration happened in 1985. Integrating activities continue.
1989 education reforms

• The transfer into Education in 1985 was followed in 1987 by the integration of training for all ECEC teachers

• Major education reforms in 1989 (*Tomorrows Schools, and Before Five*)

• The *Before Five* reforms were based on principles:
  – Child rights;
  – Equity; and
  – ECEC being in the interests of children, parents and NZ society, with no one of these parties being championed ahead of the others.
Education reforms 1989

- Establishment of:
  - Ministry of Education, and
  - Education Review Office
  - Early Childhood Development Unit – to focus on capacity building
  - NZ Teachers’ Council

It determined that ‘a teacher is a teacher’ (regardless of the sector s/he teaches in).
1990: big changes in grants and structures for childcare services

- *Before Five* policies meant childcare became more like kindergarten:
  - More equitable funding
  - More equitable access for families
  - Funding became more like schools’
  - Common support and ERO review systems
  - A common core of training to raise standards.

- Childcare became integral to everyday life as more mothers took paid jobs
Key dates after integration

1990 – government announced a staged-plan for a majority of childcare workers in each setting to become qualified EC teachers

1991 – new government did a U-turn re qualifications requirements

1996 – early childhood curriculum finalised

1996 – incentive grants offered to increase qualified EC teachers

2000 – work on a 10-year plan for ECE began
Professionalising the workforce

• 2002 – *Pathways to the Future*, 10 year plan for ECE

  – Shift in the role of government
  – Completion of the integration of childcare by setting a bold strategic goal to have all education and care settings staffed 100% by qualified teachers by 2012
  – To achieve this goal, the mechanisms were:
    • Regulations re % of qualifications changing 2007, 2010, and 2012;
    • Increased capacity in teacher education;
    • Scholarships;
    • Pay parity; and
    • A cost-driver funding model.
What has happened?

- Education and care centres met the 50% qualified-teacher target by 2005
- The 80% target date has been delayed to 12/2012
- The new government dropped the 100% target (and cost-driver funding for them)
- Many centres with 100% qualified teachers endeavour to maintain this profile on lower grants
- After funding was reduced, feasibility of 100% qualified teachers more dependent on high-income families. Diminished equity?
The vision and key policies have survived

- Why is NZ a leader in childcare policy?
  - Long-term vision and goals
  - Strategic planning by government/s
  - A broad, supportive constituency
  - An innovative curriculum for 0 to 5 year olds
  - A group of academics that have maintained the vision & articulated key principles for decades
  - Staunch Ministers arguing for adequate funding (albeit just under the OECD GDP benchmark)