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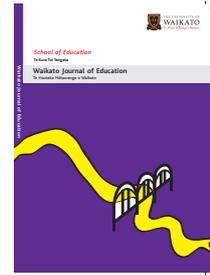
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Discourses of economic investment and child vulnerability in early childhood education

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Abstract

This article explores discourses of economic investment and child vulnerability that have become dominant under New Zealand's National-led Government as a rationale for policy directions in early childhood education. It highlights the need for explicit values about children and childhood to be a basis for early childhood policy development, with a commitment to equity and democratic citizenship being a good place to start. The article draws on policy document analysis, policy evaluations and research to argue that current policies have run counter to a democratic view of citizenship, and led to a swing away from universal approaches to education for all towards targeted interventions for priority children. At the same time, a drive for measurable outcomes is in danger of funnelling early childhood education into narrow goals that bypass a broad view of what education might possibly be. Ideas for future policy directions are discussed.

Keywords

Early Childhood Education; education policy; New Zealand; National-led Government; privatisation; democracy

Introduction

On taking office in 2008, the National-led Government immediately made a clear demarcation between its policies in early childhood education and the policies of the previous government led by Labour. Within weeks of being elected, the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education (ECE) developed under Labour was removed from the Ministry of Education website, a sign that this was a new political regime. The strategic plan had been a somewhat visionary plan developed through a highly consultative process and generally acclaimed by those working at grassroots. It had been accompanied by incentives and resources to improve the quality of early childhood education, increase participation in quality services, and enhance collaborative relationships between early childhood settings and families, schools, communities, iwiⁱ and government agencies. The collaborative

ⁱ Māori (Indigenous New Zealander) word for tribe



relationships goal was a marker in conveying an understanding of the importance of connections between the major settings that impact on family lives—a breakthrough in policy thinking about a holistic understanding of childhood.

Opportunities made possible under the strategic plan had resulted in almost doubling of employment of qualified and registered early childhood teachers in teacher-led settings over five years. Nationally, 64 percent of teachers held teacher registration in 2009, compared with 37 percent in 2004 (Ministry of Education Web Page). A culture of critical inquiry emerged through opportunities for teachers to be professionally supported and to work with research associates to explore and disseminate their innovative practice through becoming Centres of Innovation. Pay parity between school teachers and kindergarten teachers was won in a flagship settlement in 2002 that put an end to pay rates being based on the age of the child—the New Zealand Educational Institute union slogan “Shoe size shouldn’t shape salaries” resonated with the public. A further pay parity settlement for teachers in education and care centres followed 18 months later (May, 2005, 2009)—but only for employers who agreed to this, leaving many teachers in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings outside the settlement.

One of the boldest policy initiatives under Labour was the provision of 20 hours free early childhood education for 3- and 4-year-olds—this aimed to make early childhood education affordable for families, and was the first time in New Zealand’s history that free early childhood education was a policy for all early childhood services (kindergartens had in earlier times been prohibited from charging fees). Elsewhere I have argued that in combination, these policies encouraged more accessible provision and democratic practice, made possible through reduction in cost barriers for low income families, a more permeable curriculum and a professionally supported and inquiring teacher workforce (Mitchell, 2012; Mitchell, Meagher Lundberg, Mara, Cubey, & Whitford, 2011). In 2007, Moss, speaking at a seminar half way through the implementation of the strategic plan, stated that New Zealand was leading the “second wave” of countries that have integrated early childhood services within education, taking integration further than any other second wave country and in doing so is “dealing with the wicked issues” of curriculum and regulation, funding and workforce (Moss, 2007, 2-3 May, p. 33).

Unfortunately, New Zealand’s strategic plan did not deal with the ‘wicked issue’ of early childhood provision. Children do not have right of access to early childhood education because there is no entitlement to a place. Labour’s reliance on the market approach to provision without necessity for planning, continued the inequitable distribution of services throughout New Zealand. Despite progress in regard to affordability, children from low income communities were still at that time more likely to miss out on attending early childhood education (Mitchell & Davison, 2010). New Zealand’s for-profit sector is a thorn in the side, an Achilles heel, in policy that on the one hand asserts principles of the benefits and rights for children and families to access quality early childhood services, but then largely allows the market to determine where and how early childhood is provided and at what cost to parents.

Targeting priority families for ECE participation

The Treasury’s briefing to the Incoming Minister of Finance (The Treasury, 2008) foreshadowed some of the policy directions that were to come. In a section entitled “Improving educational standards and improving the performance of the benefit system”, it argued that in terms of “value for money gains” there was no need to improve levels of ECEC funding, but instead the focus should be on improving “how funding is linked to performance through improved targeting, stronger accountability for outcomes and incentives for responsiveness in the early childhood, schooling and the tertiary sectors”. In the same section, The Treasury highlighted the welfare benefit system, and its view that “expectations/sanctions are critical to reducing beneficiary numbers and making long term gains” in reducing beneficiary numbers. In these ways, The Treasury made a link between benefits and early childhood education that would be played out later.

Funding principles were quickly altered by the new National-led Government. At the end of January 2009, the new Education Minister, Anne Tolley, removed the word “free” from the “20 hours free ECE” policy, on the grounds that this was “... a more honest expression of the programme’s intent” (Tolley, 31 January 2009). The removal of “free” made it clear that free education as an entitlement for children was not to be a policy priority and signalled a philosophical shift away from government having responsibility for early childhood education for all children.

In its May 2009 budget, the government pared back the policy initiatives that in combination were doing well in improving and sustaining quality of ECEC provision (Dalli, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2011). It abruptly stopped funding for professional development resources and Centres of Innovation (Meade, 2007; Mitchell, 2011); it also removed higher funding bands for services which were employing more than 80 percent qualified teachers. Later, Ministry of Education data analysis shows the financial impact on services of the cut to the funding bands as “an average funding per hour drop of 8% for those services impacted, and an estimated 5% decline in affordability for parents” (Ministry of Education, 2014).

A further change announced in 2011 was to allow ECEC centres to operate with 150 children over two years of age and 75 children under one year old, replacing maximum centre sizes of 50 and 25 children respectively. Many countries regulate for small group size, since small groups in early childhood are considered to be a structural feature of quality, offering facilitating conditions for children to make close and reciprocal relationships with adults and children. In New Zealand the maximum centre size has been the only regulated way in which numbers of children in a group have been constrained (Dalli & Pairman, 2013).

New Zealand has a relatively high rate of early childhood participation, but lower levels of participation are associated with ethnicity and income levels. While cuts were being made to policies intended to support quality, targeted policies were developed to support participation of children deemed to be “priority” (Māori, Pasifika and children from low socio-economic homes, and who are not yet attending ECE). The main government initiative was the ECE Participation Programme, introduced in 2010, targeting local areas where there are high numbers of children who have not attended early childhood education before starting school. Supported Playgroups, Targeted Assistance for Participation (TAP) grants, a coordinator working with priority families (Engaging Priority Families)—were three main initiatives. Findings from the Ministry of Education contracted evaluation showed more priority children taking part in early childhood education and some very positive benefits from families’ viewpoints of access to networks of family support and friendship and educational opportunities for their children (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Arndt, & Kara, 2016; Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Davison, Kara, & Kalavite, 2016).

The main focus of this evaluation was on participation in ECE, and whether children developed stronger learning foundations. The researchers had proposed to rate quality, using a rating scale validated in New Zealand settings, but the Ministry of Education determined that this aspect was out of scope for the evaluation. Quality is a crucial issue because of the considerable body of research evidence that quality makes a difference to positive child and family outcomes. In a literature review on outcomes of early childhood education, Mitchell, Wylie and Carr (2008, p. 7) found that quality settings were characterised by

- intentional teaching, i.e., settings that provide opportunities for ‘sustained shared thinking’, rich teacher-child interactions, engaging programmes, peers learning together, and assessments with valued outcomes in mind;
- family engagement with ECE teachers and programmes, where social/cultural capital and interests from home are included and both family and teachers can best support the child’s learning; and
- a complex curriculum involving both cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions.

Although formal quality ratings were not made, poor quality practices were evident in some of the settings in the evaluation. Some ECE centres provided only very limited assessment documentation

about each child across all the strands of Te Whāriki, the New Zealand early childhood curriculum. Most centres organised health checks, but in different settings, three of the children had undiagnosed issues that were not detected by teachers or coordinators—including speech and language, hearing and vision. These were immediately identified when the children went on to school and required remedial action. In a quality early childhood setting, these health issues would have been detected. There were variable connections between the early childhood setting and the home (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Arndt, et al., 2016). Many children were brought by van to the early childhood centre thereby making it more difficult for teachers and families to have a direct relationship. Some providers went to lengths to still connect with families, but others had no connection and the family had never been to the centre their child attended. As our literature review (Mitchell et al., 2008) showed, family engagement with ECE teachers and programmes is a characteristic of quality in New Zealand ECE settings. Additionally, in their encounters with ECE centres before they took part in the Participation Programme, many priority families spoke of encountering attitudes and practices in centres they had visited that were demeaning and had put them off enrolling their child in ECE. A stark conclusion is the need to prioritise quality as a policy aim: participation and quality need to go hand in hand. This had happened in the previous Labour-led Government's strategic ECE plan. It has not been a focus for the National-led government. Instead, supports for quality (professional development and resources, incentives and requirements for teacher qualifications and centres of Innovation) have been removed.

Targeting beneficiaries and punishment for non-compliance

In parallel to the implementation of the Participation Programme administered by the Ministry of Education, early childhood education became a social obligation for beneficiaries with preschool children under the Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Act, passed in April 2013. Specifically, beneficiaries with a child age three years or four years are required to “take all reasonable steps” to enrol their child in a recognised early childhood education programme and ensure attendance. If the beneficiary does not comply, their benefit could be reduced by 50 percent. If a beneficiary has another child while on the benefit, he/she is required to be “work ready” when that second child turns one year old.

The Act was contentious and subject to widespread criticism by early childhood organisations who argued amongst other matters that making early childhood education compulsory would undermine trusting and respectful relationships between beneficiaries and early childhood education services (Wells, 2012). The interrelated reasons why families do not participate in early childhood education suggest barriers to participation need to be addressed in a range of ways. Randall (2015) undertook a study of the views and experiences of the beneficiaries who were affected by the policy and of early childhood education service managers working with beneficiaries. Her study found that Work and Income New Zealand staff members, who administer the policy, were not trained or equipped to provide sound information to parents about early childhood education. Staff members did not know what early childhood education programmes were available, nor did they have details about the different types of early childhood education services. Additionally, some beneficiary participants recounted administration errors, staff disregarding individual needs and circumstances and treating beneficiaries with a lack of respect. Randall argued that matters concerning early childhood education should remain under the administration of the Ministry of Education, and that the principle of integration has been undermined through this policy on beneficiaries. The beneficiary participants and early childhood education service managers were critical of the labelling of children as vulnerable and the lack of autonomy afforded families to make their own decisions about early childhood education as does every other family in New Zealand.

Continued growth of market-led provision

Following a rigid adherence to free market principles, all recent New Zealand governments have been unwilling to make comprehensive plans for ECE provision or provide ECE directly. Rather, they have

relied on the private or community-based sector to provide ECE services. The underlying thinking is that a competitive market will stimulate businesses and communities to establish ECE services that meet community needs, and that parents will “vote with their feet” if services are low quality or not meeting needs. This has not happened and many ECE sector groups have complained that a competitive market has led to duplication of services in some areas, with consequent oversupply in some areas and services becoming unsustainable so that some have to close, and undersupply in others (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996; May & Mitchell, 2009).

The National-led Government removed the only funding differentials between community-based and privately owned ECE services in 2010. Equity Funding became available to the private sector. Discretionary grants which offered capital works funding were abolished and replaced by Targeted Assistance for Participation (TAP) grants. TAP grants were made available to for-profit corporate owners as well as community-based services, making New Zealand infamous for providing tax-payer funding for privately owned capital assets. Private services in New Zealand include sole-traders, companies, partnerships, private trusts and state-owned enterprises. Community-based services include incorporated societies, charitable trusts, statutory trusts, community trusts, government departments, health boards, city councils and public education institutions. While both private and community-based services may charge fees, a crucial difference is that private services are able to make financial gains and distribute these to their members. Profits and assets for private services can go into the pockets of individual owners or groups of owners if the service stops operating or changes ownership; community assets remain with the community. Financial reporting to the Ministry of Education is different for each type of service. Community-based services are required to provide a full general purpose financial report, including a statement of financial performance (profit and loss account) and balance sheet, while private centres are required to provide only a special purpose financial report detailing accounting policies, amounts received from the Ministry of Education and how these are spent. The profits made by private owners through, for example, fee charging and rentals for privately owned buildings escape consideration.

These developments are highly problematic. Earlier research has shown quality differentials between privately owned and community-based ECE services favouring the community sector (Mitchell, 2002; Mitchell & Brooking, 2007) and that private centres are more likely to be in high-income areas where fees could be charged. The 2006 OECD study of 20 countries (OECD, 2006) suggested that a reliance on privatised provision of early childhood education will almost certainly lead to inequities in provision in poorer communities because commercial providers are reluctant to invest in such communities.

Perhaps the most spectacular example of the failure of a market approach was the rise and fall of the “giant in the playground” as Australian academics Fran Press and Christine Woodrow (2009) termed ABC Learning. ABC Learning was a large Australian corporate company, listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. It rapidly expanded its ownership of childcare centres not only within Australia but to New Zealand, United Kingdom, China, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Indonesia to become the largest corporate childcare provider in the world (Sumsion, 2012). In February 2008, following a financial crisis and massive drop in its share prices (shares in ABC Learning listed on the Australian Stock Exchange fell 70 percent over two days), ABC Learning was suspended from trading. It went into voluntary receivership in November 2008, forcing the Australian government to spend AUD56m to keep centres open while a new buyer was found. ABC Learning shareholders and the banks that owned the parent company lost millions of dollars (Scherer, 2009). Another consequence of a reliance on market and for-profit provision is its capacity to squeeze out the community-based sector (Sumsion, 2012). This happened in Australia where ABC Learning swamped provision in some local communities.

In late 2014 in New Zealand, a publicly listed company, Evolve Education Group, bought two large ECE companies: Lollipops Educare with 30 education and care centres and Porse, an accredited homebased provider and trainer. It also bought an additional 55 education and care centres and an ECE management organisation and has stated its intention to expand. In a comment to a national newspaper (Mitchell, 2014), I argued that government ECE funding and parent fees intended for

children's education will pay for the dividend yields of shareholders. The Evolve Education Group Prospectus foregrounded the money-making potentials of ECE, and in so doing conceptualised ECE as a business opportunity, selling a commodity to parent consumers as they participate in the workforce. The first duty of Evolve as a listed company is to shareholders, and this main interest from a commercial view in making profits for owners or shareholders, positions Evolve Education Group at odds with community-spirited aims to invest fully in the service itself. Profitability is a key selection and acquisition criteria, distilled in chairwoman Norah Barlow's media interview reported in the *Business Herald* that she "reckons early childhood education has the potential to become just as big a share market success as the aged-care sector she's more commonly associated with" (Adams, 27 November, 2014).

According to Gordon Cleveland, an economist who, with others, constructed a childcare demand and affordability model for the City of Toronto (Cleveland, Krashinsky, Colley, & Avery-Nunez, 2016), the main policy lever to encourage participation is affordability. This is consistent with findings from the New Zealand participation programme evaluation that cost is the greatest barrier preventing families from enrolling their child in ECE. Yet New Zealand does nothing to cap fees or curtail business profits. This is out of kilter with what most other countries do in respect to children over three years, where early childhood education is an entitlement, free and often provided by the government. Penn (2013) writes,

For most countries early education is a universal, free, state funded and state provided service, although the educational offer varies from 12–15 hours per week (England, Ireland) to 28 hours per week (France). In some countries (England, Ireland) education may also be offered in private provision, either in voluntary provision or in for-profit provision. (pp. 438–439)

Some provincial and state governments take seriously their role in providing public early childhood services that are also experimental: the municipality of Reggio Emilia is a well-known example.

Nevertheless, the National-led Government has taken some small steps in supporting planned ECE services through allocation of TAP grants for increasing child places and funding for Supported Playgroups in communities where there is low ECE participation and where a community need had been established. The Ministry of Education contracted evaluation of the Participation Programme (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Davison, et al., 2016) found that the selection of providers who were knowledgeable and connected with the community and who had the capacity to deliver the service required was a factor in contributing to success. This planning approach could be applied much more widely.

Measurable outcomes in pedagogy

At the same time as applying free market principles to provision and cost, an international drive for measureable outcomes is in danger of funnelling early childhood education into narrow goals that bypass a broad view of what education might possibly be. This is exemplified in the highly problematic development by the OECD and its member state governments of an International Early Learning Study (OECD, 2017), which will use common tools to assess approximately 5-year-old children in four domains: emerging literacy/language skills, emerging numeracy/mathematics, self-regulation, and social and emotional skills. The work, initiated in 2012, will be implemented in three to six countries in late 2018 and early 2019. New Zealand was one of the 16 countries that participated in the scoping work. The rationale for the study is argued to be improving children's learning and the performance of education systems. We know that testing does not in itself improve early learning (Stobart, 2008). Young children have very different rates of development and learning across different domains. New Zealand has recently conveyed to the Ministry of Education Early Childhood Advisory Group (Wells, 2017) that it will not participate in the study.

Nevertheless, similar thinking about narrowly based outcomes runs through as a stream in the current funding review proposals for schools and early childhood services. The review (Parata, 2017) aims “to develop a new funding system in which children are adequately supported to make at least a year’s worth of progress against the curricula every year” (Para 2., p. 1). It proposes “a curriculum-based per child funding amount” and “additional funding for individual challenges” (para 26). The rationale is “to ensure that the expected curriculum progress will be made, and to lift the learning potential of all children and young people” (Para 27). Gordon Cleveland asked, “How will the new funding model achieve its objectives of linking spending with outcomes unless it develops standardized testing of preschool children? Is this a sensible curriculum for early childhood?” (Cleveland, 21 February, 2017). Both the OECD survey and the review have a basic premise that standardised measurement will raise achievement.

The OECD study and New Zealand’s review pose many dangers that are increasingly being canvassed in academic and practitioner forums and with government officials and politicians. In a united collaboration, early childhood professors from nine countries—United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, Italy, New Zealand, Canada, France, United States of America and Belgium opened a colloquium in the *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Journal* (Moss et al., 2016) to highlight concerns about the study and its possible effects. They point out that the OECD treats early childhood education and the proposed study as “purely technical practices” (p. 346) without arguing for the political choices it has made, or asking questions about the underpinning construction of the child, or the purposes and values of early childhood education. The focus on universal and measurable outcomes derived from child development and human capital theories is highly selective and narrows an idea of possible worlds to a single world that is “more of the same” (p. 346). Furthermore, and most critically, it fails to accommodate differences in context and culture.

Carr, Mitchell and Rameka (2016), in relation to Te Whāriki, New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum, pointed to its sociocultural approach to learning which rejects a “one world view” and the idea of standardised and artificial contexts. The universal outcomes of the proposed study do not relate to the outcomes within the Te Whāriki strands of wellbeing, belonging, contribution, exploration and communication, or to the sociocultural understanding that learning outcomes “are situated in—placed within—the lived social and cultural practices of the children as well as their interpretations of those practices. To lose them as the front frame for teaching and learning would be disastrous” (Carr et al., 2016, p. 2). Te Whāriki warns against generalising from a single piece of information, a snapshot in time, and warns that children’s responses and behaviour will vary according to contextual factors. In a unanimous resolution passed at the 2016 NZARE Annual Conference, members of the NZARE called on the New Zealand Government to not participate in the OECD International Early Learning and Wellbeing Study (IELS):

Aotearoa New Zealand’s ECE curriculum takes a sociocultural perspective acknowledging multiple possibilities and opportunities for children’s wellbeing and learning; the OECD measures promote a ‘one-world’ view with a focus on standardised outcomes.

Aotearoa New Zealand’s well-established international reputation for the quality of its early childhood curriculum, will be severely damaged with the imposition of global and culturally homogenous measures of child outcomes. We risk a narrowing of the curriculum, loss of culturally valued outcomes, and the emergence of a pedagogy of compliance.

Aotearoa New Zealand’s children will become subject to testing regimes that will further marginalise the marginalised. Overseas experience indicates that in countries with such testing regimes the children from families with high social and cultural capital are advantaged. Aotearoa New Zealand’s so-called ‘priority learners’ will be especially disadvantaged.

Likewise, writing in an open letter and statement to Germany's Federal Minister of Family Affairs about Germany's potential participation in the study, representatives of five education organisations argued that measuring and standardising ECEC will decontextualise the processes of early childhood education, marginalise children and neglect diversity and difference (Wagner, Heise, Goller, Hocke, & Bender, 2016). Germany has withdrawn from the process.

The Ministry of Education Early Childhood Research Policy Forum had begun to develop locally situated indicators of outcomes that include implications for facilitating environments. The outcomes framework developed by this group and presented in 2012, focused on *mana*, being strong, as an all-encompassing aim, and 'growing potential' as a theme for the outcomes. This framework has not been progressed; it offers a way forward to New Zealand in advancing understanding of outcomes that do not include a 'national standards' type framework or a 'ready for school' checklist (Ministry of Education, 2012).

An alternative model

The current approach could be characterised as social interventionist (May, 2014; Mitchell, 2015; Penn, 2011) where ECE is viewed as most beneficial for vulnerable children from priority families and the role of the state is to support where it perceives that families cannot provide adequately. At its extreme, the state makes punitive demands through the social obligations of beneficiaries with preschool children to enrol their child in ECE or risk having their benefit halved. Associated with this social interventionist approach has been a predominant focus on participation by priority families, and a neglect of policy measures to support good quality. The market approach to provision and burgeoning dominance of corporate private education and care and homebased services has been actively encouraged through funding policies. The result is a radically unequal patchwork of provision and cost structures that largely favour those with the social and cultural capital of the dominant class. At its extreme, the corporate world constructs early childhood services as places of commercial exchange, where the first duty of directors is to shareholders, who expect a financial return on their investment, and where parents are positioned as consumers purchasing a product. With a focus on business and profit, corporate childcare will limit the potential for "what an early childhood service might be". For-profit services "are situated in the economic sphere; they cannot also be forums within civil society" (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, pp. 74-75). Alongside has been a governmental focus on measurable child outcomes as a form of accountability. The policies of the National-led Government have consequences for ECE, shrinking possibilities for an education for lifelong learning.

Fielding and Moss (2012, p. 56) portray the distinction between a marketised system of education where schools are conceptualised as businesses and parents as consumers making individual choices, and "a democratic system of education that treats schools as public institutions and parents and children as citizens, capable of engaging in a democratic way of life and democratic forms of relationship, including participation in the making of collective choices" (p. 56). The case for democracy in education and a new form of public ECE is an ethical response to the expansion of ECE that is occurring, the increasing institutionalisation of childhood as more children spend long hours in ECE settings, and the emphasis on standardised outcomes. Core ideas from Dewey (1915, p. 1) that democracy is something that has to be made and remade by each generation and of the capacity of education to build democratic society rather than reproduce society are still highly relevant. Democracy in education raises possibilities for debating and generating new thinking and understandings about the purpose of education, children and childhood, and the roles and responsibilities of the state, community and participants in early childhood services.

Affirming a democratic system of ECE will require a radical shift in policy thinking. As in many of the advances made in early childhood policy in New Zealand (May, 2009), early childhood activists have united to start to chart possible ways forward. The Quality Public Early Childhood Education project (May & Mitchell, 2009), undertaken by a coalition of community based services, met to

develop a vision and proposals to counterbalance the market approach and strengthen community-based provision in New Zealand. Its vision is that

1. Every child has a right as a citizen to participate in free early childhood education.
2. Every child that wishes to can access high quality, community-based early childhood education.

The following tenets of community-based provision align with principles of democracy—emphasis placed on collectivity, partnership and participation in decision-making, and the idea of educational institutions as a community asset:

1. The service is seen as a community asset and the children, parents, families and community benefit from it.
2. Collectivity, partnership and participation are hallmarks of decision-making.
3. The full funding from government resources goes into educating the child and supporting their family (Mitchell & May, 2009, p. 4).

The report proposed shifting from a market approach to what it termed “a partnership model” where ECE services work with the Government and community to build a coherent network of provision in every community. The project group’s report and the background discussion is intended as a foundation document for building a wider coalition of support to move the early childhood sector forward towards the year 2020. Reclaiming a rights-based approach and asserting democratic values is a way towards radical alternatives away from existing educational policies and practices.

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