

Response to the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Draft Report

I have been reflecting on the introduction of the NQF and the impact of some of the changes to my work practices and how these have impacted the quality of the educational experience for children.

I have four comments to contribute in relation to the release of the Draft Childcare and Early Childhood Learning, Productivity Commission Report, released on July 22, 2014.

1. Firstly, it is very heartening to know the care and education of our most precious resource, our children, has been the focus of such an important investigation for the past year. I would like to highlight that education begins at birth. From their first primal reflexes and sensory interactions children's brain cells are multiplying continuously and rapidly for the first five years. Each age from one to five is equally important, not just the year before school. The best possible environment should be provided for every child, to maximise their potential.
2. Currently fifty local families use our parent-managed, community based and not-for-profit child care and kindergarten centre in inner city Melbourne. Most parents meet the Commonwealth work or study requirements for child care. A small percentage of parents meet Exceptional Circumstances each quarter. Assisting all families with dealing with the complexity of meeting Centrelink requirements and trying to explain to them the very complex way the different levels of funding and child care assistance are accessed is an ongoing challenge. A simpler system would be very welcome for service providers and users alike. For vulnerable families the current system is a nightmare. They either cannot access services without some type of centre or community support network, or the children just miss out on any service because the parents cannot navigate the complex systems required to gain access, such as waiting lists, meeting Centrelink and other government eligibility requirements. There appears to be no understanding of vulnerable family dynamics.
3. For educators, the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Frameworks in the past two years has been very beneficial to our collective professional practices. The higher quality National Standards, government regulated requirement for continuous Quality Improvement Plans and the improved qualification requirements and better ratios have combined to ensure excellent outcomes for children and also their educators. One example I can provide as a manager is that of a mature worker who was marking time until retirement. This educator decided to commence Diploma level qualifications and with a combination of Recognition of Prior Learning and formal Saturday classes at a TAFE, has completed the Diploma and now contributes to the developmental observations of the children and contributes to the children's planned program. She has gained personal confidence, has improved her earning capacity, continues to build her Superannuation savings toward her retirement and contributes positively to the whole centre environment. This is just one example; across Australia the benefits have been multiplied to have a huge positive impact. We do not ever want to go back to the old ways.

Respectfully I urge the Commission recommends to the government

- To continue to highly value children in our society

- Recognise that care and education is important for all children
- Maintain and increase child care funding
- Maintain 15 hours of kindergarten funding
- Provide vulnerable families and children with access to high quality ECE programs
- Continue to support the highest qualifications for educators
- Maintain or improve the current ratio requirements – Global research was used to put these in place nationally in 2011
- Ensure the access to adequate funding is equitable
- Combine the child care and kindergarten funding systems to make them simpler
- Ensure professional wages are assured for this important work of early childhood education

With gratitude for your continued efforts for improvements for the lives and future of our children.

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