

A Brief Response to the Child Care and Early Childhood Learning Public Inquiry

3rd February 2014

As my time is limited, I have selected a few areas that stood out for me in a rather quick scan of the issues document:

What outcomes from ECEC are desirable and should be made achievable over the next decade:

Most importantly, children need the opportunity to BE children, to explore natural environments, to get their hands dirty, to develop as naturally as possible, nurtured by loving, caring adults who understand children, have empathy for them and put the children's best interests ahead of all else.

Well qualified educators – preferably with university degrees in early childhood (or an alternative means whereby aspiring educators undertake rigorous theoretical and practical training in children's growth and development from conception to 5-8 years of age – guide and facilitate children's early education and care experiences.

We need to take good note of the factors that impact children, their well-being across all domains, their education, commitment to life-long learning, being and becoming good citizens who contribute to their communities and the society in general.

Although it is now rather 'aged', the Perry Preschool Project provides sound underpinnings for decisions regarding children's education and care.

Most important of all: children's holistic and positive growth, development, expanding horizons and ever-increasing of their world and how it works, including a sense of wonder and awe at the amazing universe which we call home.

The Commission is seeking evidence on the effect of the different types of ECEC, including separate preschool programs, on children's learning and development and preparedness for school.

It's much more about the social, physical and temporal environments available to children and the expertise and empathy of the educator-carers than it is about the 'type' (preschool, long day care, etc) of service.

How does the amount of time spent in ECEC and the age at which a child first enters childcare impact on learning and development outcomes?

Again, it is more about the overall environment and the passion, maturity, expertise and environment than it is about time. However, children need time to 'be', time to connect, to bond with the most significant people in their lives, namely their families. Children are born into families, not into early childhood services, no matter how good.

Would extending the length of the school day have a significant impact on children's learning and development outcomes or parents' workforce participation decisions? What other impacts would such changes have?

Significantly negative! So many children are already rushed and stressed at young ages because of long days plus extra-curricular activities. Schoolwork to be undertaken as homework exacerbates this issue.

There is much evidence – that I unfortunately don't have at my fingertips right here and now – that points to the importance of rest, of opportunities for the memory to 'deal with' new learnings and the like; evidence of the negative impact on health and well-being of elevated stress hormones in children whose environments and experiences are less than optimum.

Please, children MUST be first and central in this whole debate. We who are adults have had our opportunity to be children and it now our turn to be the parents, the carers and educators, the 'mature' and responsible influences in children's lives. Truly, it's NOT all about us, not all about ME!

The Commission is seeking information and where possible quantitative evidence on: financial difficulties arising from paying childcare fees, including the types or location of families experiencing the greatest difficulties in meeting childcare costs

The Commission is seeking views and evidence on:

- the effect of increased staff ratios and qualification requirements on outcomes for children
- how ECEC providers are handling the pace of implementation of new staffing ratios under the NQF
- the case for greater recognition and assessment of competencies as an alternative in some cases to additional formal training and qualifications
- the impact of changes to staff ratios and qualification requirements on the cost of employing ECEC workers
- whether any increased staffing costs have been, or will be, passed on in higher fees charged to families

This is such a significant area for the future of our nation. 'Productivity' and 'contribution' are so much more than financial figures in a 'bottom line'! I refer back to the Perry Preschool Project for evidence of cost-benefit analysis of excellent quality early childhood programs – increased participation in the workforce, contributing to another generation of productive contribution to the nation; less incarcerations and reduced substance abuse.

Operators, Approved Providers, need to bite the bullet and commit to employing well-qualified educators, with a balance of mature and experienced educators acting as mentors to younger, less experienced and less-qualified 'next generation' lead educators.

This is SO important and so overlooked and denied by some 'for profit' providers of early childhood education and care. Other who know the benefits have centres with huge waiting lists and wonderful reputations.

Respectfully submitted,

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