

Leading early childhood researchers concerned about threats to quality early education

Recent changes to education policy threaten the provisions for children set out in UNCRC, say early childhood researchers who gathered together this week at an inaugural early childhood Special Interest Group (SIG) of the New Zealand Association of Research in Education in Rotorua. The meeting of 94 participants marked the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Presenters Anne Smith (University of Otago) and Sarah Te One (Victoria University of Wellington) noted New Zealand had achieved a great deal for its children in the last two decades and international measures of quality early childhood education set us amongst the top providers. Significantly, New Zealand has one of the highest rates of participation in early childhood education in the developed world and international measures set us amongst the top providers.

But despite the overwhelming evidence that teacher qualifications directly influence the quality of the experiences for the children “this government has cut the requirement for 100% of staff to be qualified by 2012 to 80% for over twos and to 50% for under two and a half year old children” said Emeritus Professor Anne Smith.

This change was made without consultation with the wider early childhood sector. Cut-backs to professional development for teachers, and cessation of the Centres of Innovation research programme announced in this year’s budget, all signal a government shift from supporting children and families’ rights for quality early childhood education.

“We are in danger of threatening New Zealand’s status as a world leader in the field of ECE, and becoming a first world country with a third world early childhood system” Dr Te One said.

The participants in the day called for the aspirations of earlier policies promoting quality early childhood education to be reinstated. More opportunities for teachers, researchers and academics to work together to support children and families to promote UNCRC are also planned.

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