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Rhetoric to Reality: Early Childhood Education Funding Policy

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Abstract

In the 1997 budget the Government increased bulk funding to early childhood education centres by 5%.

Since 1990 the amount of State spending on early childhood education has increased annually, more early childhood centres have opened and more children are attending. There has been a trend to a “New Right” approach, allowing market forces to regulate quality and supply. The current Government does not wish to foster welfare dependence and wishes to clarify that parents are responsible for the care and education of children under five. Given this political context the 1997 increase was a surprise to some stakeholders.

This research examines the goals behind the 1997 funding increase. It focuses on a particular, discrete injection of public money and analyses the rationale behind it.

The questions for this research are:

- What does the government intend to achieve by increased State investment in early childhood education and care?
- How is the success of this investment to be judged?
- Who makes the decisions on spending of government funding in centres?
- Does the decision maker’s understanding about the use of this money coincide with that of the policy makers?

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Table of Tables	iv
Table of Figures	v
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Aims of This Study	1
What is the Problem?	2
Templates for Policy Analysis Design	5
Outline of This Study	6
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature	7
Education Policy Directions	16
Chapter 3 Theory and Background	23
Theoretical Stance	23
A Critical Approach	25
Why Involve the State in Early Childhood Education?	27
Is Quality Improved When More Money is Provided by the State?	27
History of Public Funding in Early Childhood Education	29
Current Situation	34
Other Issues	36
This Study	39
Chapter 4 Research Methods	41
Policy Analysis Methodology	42
Methods of Data Collection	44
Quantitative Data	49
Restrictions	51
Strengths and Limitations of the Study	52
Chapter 5 Results: Context of Construction	55
State Agents	55
Political/Economic Conditions	55
The Context of Construction	59
Chapter 6 Results: Policy Text	64
Conclusion	69
Chapter 7 Results: Context of Interpretation	71
Section A: Quantitative Results	71
Section B: Qualitative Results	83
Question 1: Was an increase in bulk funding expected? If yes - how much?	83
Question 2: What did you think was the purpose of the increase in bulk funding?	89
Question 3: What do you think early childhood education centres were expected to do with this increase in bulk funding?	94
Question 4: Who makes decisions in Associations and centres?	99
Question 5: What areas appear to have priority for spending?	108
Question 6: In your opinion or experience has this money brought about the re- quired improvements?	119
Question 7: In what way could increased funding be introduced which did improve quality, affordability and access?	128
Chapter 8 Conclusions	135

Chapter 9 Implications for Public Funding Expenditure on ECE and Further Research	141
Appendices	145
Appendix 1 Government Funding Per Hour Since 1990	146
Appendix 2 The Policy Making Process	147
Appendix 3 Comparison of Salaries Across Teaching Sectors in New Zealand	149
Appendix 4 Early Childhood Education Statistics	151
Appendix 5 Information to Participants, Consent form, Interview Schedule ..	153
Appendix 6 Glossary of Terms	158
Appendix 7 Auckland Kindergarten Association Accounts Analysis	161
Appendix 8 Independent Centre Accounts Analysis	162
Appendix 9 Annual Salaries Across the Education Sector	163
Appendix 10 Auckland Kindergarten Association Council Minutes	164
Appendix 11 Changes in Childcare Centre Fees 1997/8	165
Appendix 12 Interviewee Code Numbers	166
Appendix 13 Media Releases	167
Appendix 14 Policy Advice Documents	169
Appendix 15 Bibliography	172

Table of Tables

1: Some of the components of early childhood education contests.	38
2: Criteria for selecting interviewees.	46
3: Numbers of teachers and parents interviewed at Kindergarten.	48
4: Education sector experience of Members of the Select Committee for Education and Science.	63
5: Childcare Centre fees	77
6: Average weekly household spending on health and education.	78
7: Did you expect any increase in bulk funding in 1997? If yes, how much?	83
8: Possible reasons seen for bulk funding increase.	90
9: Who do you think makes the decisions on spending of government funding in Centres?	103
10: Which areas do you think appear to have priority for spending?	109
11: Donation rates (\$) at two Auckland kindergartens over the last five years (Auckland Kindergarten Association Annual Reports).	116
12: Opinions on changes resulting from increased bulk funding.	120
13: Funding rates for early childhood education in 1997.	146
14: Children on the rolls at early childhood services at 1 July 1997.	151
15: Change in early childhood enrolment (1990-1997).	151
16: Change in the number of early childhood services 1990 – 1997.	152
17: Number of enrolments by type of centre.	152
18: Glossary of terms.	158
19: Annual salaries across the education sector.	163
20: Childcare centre fees.	165
21: Interviewee code numbers	166

Table of Figures

1: Research Process used for this research.	41
2: A materialistic conception of the policy text.	42
3: Progress of policy text.	64
4: Change in centre roll size in Kindergarten, Playcentre and Childcare centres.	73
5: Auckland and Wellington teacher vacancies, actual numbers.	74
6: Teacher vacancies in Auckland and Wellington Associations with Auckland vacancies divided by two for comparison.	75
7: Changes in rates of pay, 1997 to 1998 (Gross annual salary in dollars).	75
8: Increases in Kindergarten, Playcentre and Childcare Centre enrolments.	79
9: Total number of Kindergartens, Playcentres and Childcare Centres.	79
10: Changes in enrolments by type of service.	80
11: Employment status of mothers of children under five.	81
12: Employment status of Pacific Island mothers of children under five.	82
13: The policy making process.	147
14: Income of childcare workers, 1996	149
15: Income of Early Childhood Teachers and Te Kohanga Reo Teachers, 1996	149
16: Income of Primary school teachers, 1996	150
17: Income of Secondary school teachers, 1996	150