

Kindergarten Quality and The Government's Role

Dr. Sarah Farquhar

The Hon Trevor Mallard recently explained the government's role in this way: "The Government owns the majority of kindergartens and there is certainly a public perception that we are a major partner in the kindergarten sector and therefore have a greater responsibility for encouraging quality" (Media Statement 14/3/00). This comment was made in the context of the return of kindergarten teachers to the State Sector Act. He said "by taking responsibility for the terms under which they (teachers) are employed, the Government is taking leadership for setting benchmarks for standards (for all early childhood services).

The Government is a major stakeholder in the quality of the kindergartens, and in the last decade has increasingly sought influence over the quality of other early childhood services. The Government's high level of financial investment in kindergartens places certain obligations on the service for accountability and for performance.

A second reason for why the Government is a major stakeholder is that one of its key functions are to be concerned about the current and future shape of our society. The present government for example, regards quality early childhood education as an answer for addressing what they see as the underachievement of Maori and Pacific Island children:

... if we can get these children access to quality early childhood education they are more likely to do well at school; they are more likely to do well in tertiary education; they are more likely to do well in the workforce and contribute to society as a whole (T. Mallard speech notes to NZEI Te Riu Roa, 11/7/00).

The questions I am asking in writing this article is: how do we know that what children receive is "quality"? And, "whose" quality is it anyway? For example, children differ in their backgrounds, in their perspectives, and in their interests. What might be quality for one child could seem like a prison for another. Often it may be something as simple, but very important for children, like the dynamics of their peer-group.

Here is an illustration of this point. Not long after starting my son at kindergarten I wondered about withdrawing him. The kindergarten itself was a quality one – it met Ministry requirements and had all the features of quality that the experts argue for. The problem was that my son disliked a couple of the other boys and apart from learning how to stand up for himself in fights with them (and fighting aggressively is not something I approve of) he seemed to be getting little out of kindergarten.

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Editorial

Karen Boyes, Board Member

Welcome to the second issue of Te Manu Hou, this issue leads off with a really interesting article from Sarah Farquhar that gives an interesting perspective on "quality" and how it is measured. Sarah is a well known early childhood education expert and the co-ordinator of the Early Childhood Research Network. She welcomes correspondence from readers on this issue if you would like to share your experiences and thoughts. Her email address is Sarah@childforum.com or write to PO Box 58-078, Wellington."

This is the first time we have sent our quarterly newsletter to all Kindergartens, we welcome your contributions to this newsletter. Publication deadlines are 1st November for articles and 15th November for letters.

EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT

The views expressed in this publication are those of its contributors. They do not necessarily represent the opinion of the Board of New Zealand Kindergartens Inc.

(...likewise the grammar)

IN THE DECEMBER ISSUE

- ♦ Marketing Play
- ♦ Closing the Gaps
- ♦ Life under Labour - One Year On

Letters to the Editor



Just a note to acknowledge receipt of the Quarterly Newsletter No 1 which came this week. I was happy to see such an interesting paper, and wish to congratulate all concerned on this first issue. I look forward to other issues as time goes by. Kind regards

Beverly Brayshaw, Honorary Life Member

WELLINGTON FREE KINDERGARTEN GRADUATES REUNION

The Wellington Free Kindergarten Graduates Assn. Reunion will be held in Wellington on 13th and 14th October 2000.

For information please contact either:
Barbara Gordon, 51 Tarawera Road,
Johnsonville, Wellington. Phone 04 477 3236
Jan Jones email: wqtnkindergads@hotmail.com

Please forward your Letters to the Editor in the following format:

- 300 words or less
- Typed
- Name, address, telephone numbers, and signature of author *must be included*
- Anonymous letters will not be published
- The Editor reserves the right to publish or withhold letter
- No correspondence will be entered into
- Late letters will not be published, unless issues raised remain relevant for a subsequent edition of the newsletter

Letter deadline December issue – 15 November

The Editor
Te Manu Hou ♦ Kindergarten Matters
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INSURANCE CORNER – An Update From Your Brokers

Olwyn Griffin

Wilkinson Insurance Brokers

Those Associations who currently use the insurance programme provided through Wilkinsons (previously BG Brokers), will have received your invoices following the renewal of all covers on the 1st July 2000.

PREMIUMS

As you will be aware, Fire Service Levies were increased 40% on the 1st February 2000. It is being widely rumoured that the Levy will be being increased again in the not too distant future.

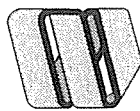
The Fire Service Levy is based on the Indemnity Value (IV) of your property. The Indemnity Value should represent the Current Market Value of the property (excluding land). You should give serious consideration to the figures shown, as if these are overestimated you will be paying more in Government levies than you need to.

A random sample of Associations' insurances show that currently Government levies, in the form of Fire Service and GST, make up between 25 - 30% of the total premium charged.

LIABILITY INSURANCE

We would like to reiterate the absolute necessity to advise ourselves or your Liability insurer immediately you become aware of a possibility of a claim. Liability claims are handled very differently from property damage claims, where a time delay in notifying will seldom have a detrimental effect on the final cost of the claim to the insurer.

Employment Grievance claims in particular seem to cause some problems. If you are planning any form of disciplinary action, or considering some form of restructuring which will involve staff, it is imperative that notification of such intention be given to the insurer before the action is taken. It is for this reason they have provided the Phillips Fox solicitors hot line number (0800 25 24 23) for your use. Having given notification, it is then important to follow the advice, which is given, as the insurers can decline a claim on the grounds that they have been prejudiced in the outcome of the situation, if correct steps are not taken. If you are a member of the EMA, then their advice is usually acceptable, but in every case the insurer must be notified. ☐



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Olwyn Griffin olwyn@wibco.co.nz Gary Brown gary@wilbo.co.nz

Children's Day – 29 October 2000

Imagine a day in New Zealand where thousands of people are focusing on the unique perspectives children bring to their lives. Putting time aside to have fun with children, sharing new activities and making a point of listening to what they have to say will be a great experience for yourself and the children.

New Zealand's first ever day for celebrating children will be on Sunday 29 October 2000. Celebrating Children's Day gives us a special opportunity to think about the ways that children's lives enrich our own and to enjoy activities with children.

EVERYBODY, all communities, and cultures, service and civic organisations in New Zealand are invited to organise activities on 29 October. We have a chance to shape that day and play a special role in ENRICHING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN in our families and our communities.

There has never been a nationally recognised day for children though there are many other festivals and commemorative days on the New Zealand calendar.

The three agencies mainly involved with Children's Day are Child, Youth and Family, Barnardos and the Office of the Commissioner for Children.

They invite you to promote Children's Day, celebrate children, whether they are young or grown up, and be a part of a day for all New Zealand to be proud of.

If you plan to organise a special community activity which is open to the public, please notify your local newspapers and send your information to a national register of Children's Day activities at:

The Children's Day web site: www.childrenday.org.nz
Or fax information to: 04 918 9298
Or call the Children's Day free ph. Line: 0508 222000

Quality and the Government's Role *Continued from page 1*

He was happier and able to follow his interests at home in ways that he was not able to do at kindergarten. This changed, thankfully for him and for me, when his peer group changed after being moved to the morning session and also because the programme held more challenges for him. The quality of experience for individual children tends to be overlooked due to quality concerns being focused more on structure and management.

Children are a major stakeholder in the quality of their early childhood education. Parents are another major stakeholder group. Both perspectives should not be considered any less important and could be argued to be more important than other stakeholder groups – because parents and children are the direct users of the service. When teachers' and management committee values are combined with parents' and children's values and needs for quality this creates a framework for quality for the individual kindergarten.

Unfortunately, the child and parent perspectives are rarely listened to. Their perspectives are overshadowed by the more powerful stakeholder groups of: (1) the government, (2) the "experts" who have developed a strong following over time from early childhood groups and tend to be listened to most during the formulation of new government policy initiatives and plans, and (3) the teacher

union who have bargaining power and finance to lobby on issues of quality from the teachers' perspective.

The perspectives of government, of experts, and of the teacher union have increasingly become intertwined. This is especially so with the current government who has shown that their concerns for quality mirror those of the teacher union and also the experts. The expert's view of quality most in favour with the government reflects that of the traditional psychological research approach which focuses on measurable indicators related to child development outcomes (a conclusion drawn from an analysis of recent speeches and press-releases surrounding new policy announcements for early childhood education). Our perception of what quality means has largely been influenced by these three stakeholder groups who hold and assume the most power.

Quality is a current buzz-word in early childhood education. Much public money has been spent to promote quality, and the early childhood sector has devoted considerable time, energy and resources to meeting increasing government expectations for quality. The paper-work and time spent working towards compliance has often been to the expense of such very important things as planning for children, meetings with parents and home-visiting, and addressing other issues of quality of relevance within the kindergarten.

The result has been what can be described as the growth of a “quality” industry supported by the relevant government agencies, and in-turn unwittingly supported by us. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p. 92) have pointed to the dangers of this trend:

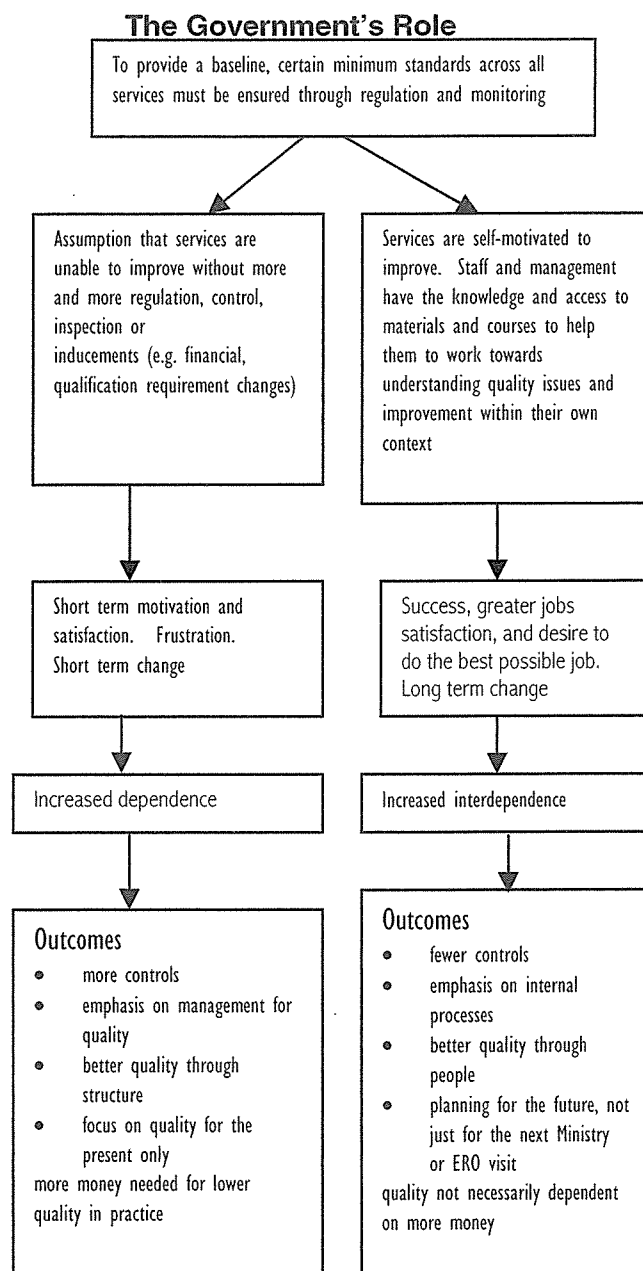
... we can see a growing body of experts – researchers, consultants, inspectors, evaluators and so on – whose job it is to define and measure quality. Increasingly, we rely on this expert system to make judgements for us about the services we want or need for ourselves and our children. We look to these experts to tell us that what we are getting is good “quality”. Increasingly overloaded, we seek reassurance rather than understanding, we want the guarantee of expert assessment

It is timely to think about the government’s role in the quality of kindergartens, because:

1. we have recently had a major change of government,
2. the national quality assurance system developed during the period of last government (“The Quality Journey”, 1999) may well become mandatory for all services given the amount of investment in developing, field testing, and professional development for this, and
3. a government appointed working group has been formed to develop a strategic plan for the sector, following on from the last strategic plan “The Meade report” which led to some dramatic changes in conceptions of quality within the sector and the relationship between the early childhood sector and government.

One option is for kindergartens to accept being “increasingly overloaded” and to become even more reliant on the “experts” and the government for defining and determining quality. This option goes down a path towards self-exhaustion and minimal change in actual quality for participants within kindergarten settings.

An alternative is for kindergartens to affirm their values about quality and to take ownership of and to lead change. This path to quality leads to self-renewal rather than to exhaustion. It leads to an on-going growth in quality, concern about quality in the eyes of participants rather than how those outside of the setting judge it, and internal responsibility for change. Here is a diagram to illustrate the two paths.



To conclude when looking at the government's role in quality we need to ask why the government is interested in doing more than ensuring baseline standards, and what values underpin any documents, activities, policies and initiatives to improve kindergarten quality. When talking about quality we need to be aware of "whose" quality we are talking about and understand that there are many different stakeholder groups and thus also perspectives on quality. Change in quality is more likely to be long-lasting and lead to yet further improvement when participants have ownership of that change.

Fleer and Kennedy (2000) have recently argued in their reflections on the Australian experience of quality assurance that for external quality systems to be successful it is essential that the values behind these are made clear. In other words, participants in early childhood settings should be told what values are behind different standards and quality requirements and know whose quality is the focus. In this way quality improvement moves from quality assurance to total quality – that is, to a concern for informed decision-making, internal motivation, and ownership of change.

Useful sources and references for further material

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.

Farquhar, S-E. (1999). The trouble with quality. *The First Years*, 1(1), 10-14

Fleer, M. & Kennedy, A. (2000). Quality assurance: whose quality and whose assurance? Invited Paper. *New Zealand Research in Early Childhood Education*, 3, 13 – 30.

The web site: <http://www.childforum.com>

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www.nzkindergarten.org.nz**

Dyspraxia Planning to Learn and Learning to Plan

Dyspraxia is a disorder of planning and sequencing. It is very complicated and can be displayed in a hundred different ways by hundreds of different children. A child with difficulties in learning skills such as eating with a spoon, riding a bike, holding a pencil may be affected by Dyspraxia. Developmental Dyspraxia is found in children with no clear neurological condition.

New Zealand is highly regarded on the international scene as being well ahead of the rest of the world with diagnosis and treatment of Dyspraxia.

In 1997 the highly regarded inaugural conference, 'Getting it Together', (a conference promoting the multi-disciplinary care and treatment of children with Developmental Dyspraxia) was held in Christchurch, and attracted 250 delegates representing parents and professionals from many different disciplines. The keynote speakers included Professor Sasson Gubbay, Professor of Clinical Neurology from Perth. Professor Helene Polatajko, Professor and Chair of Occupational Therapy from Ontario.

The second conference called 'Planning to Learn and Learning to Plan' will be held in September 2001. The aim will be to help the educators of children with Dyspraxia; parents, teachers, therapists and professionals, by looking into how the whole child learns and by providing people with the tools and techniques with which to educate the child.

Over the three days information will be presented on helping the child to learn and to be able to recall the learning as needed. Comprehensive theory will be provided, if we are to find out how to effectively teach the child, we must find out how the child learns and how the disorder affects him/her. Then we can learn the 'tools', and indeed with good theory we can develop our own tools, tailored to the individual child.

We look forward to your attendance and would be happy to provide further information. To register your interest in the 2001 conference or for further information please contact:

Judy Davies Q.S.M., 03 355 7844

Email: praxisnz@xtra.co.nz



Board Talk

News - views from national Board Members

Kindergarten Issues My Professional Perspective

By Val McCullum
Early Childhood Representative

You will be aware that the Board recently worked with Stephen Frawley of EMA to assist us with the recent review. As we looked at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to New Zealand Kindergartens Inc., I couldn't help but raise some of the issues as I see them from my own professional perspective.

Strengths

- ♦ purposefully designed buildings that are well resourced to enhance learning opportunities for children
- ♦ well designed playgrounds that are regularly maintained and improved
- ♦ relationships with families
- ♦ trained registered teachers, who continue to update their skills and knowledge
- ♦ delivery of an ever widening, purposeful, balanced curriculum to all children
- ♦ ensuring the learning outcomes for individuals and large groups of children
- ♦ senior teachers or equivalent
- ♦ dedicated personnel both paid and unpaid who work for NZK Inc

We know our strengths but tend not to promote them as much as possible. I do believe this is partly out of concern that we do not want to be seen as thinking we are the 'elite'. Clearly we are not, however we do provide an excellent service and meet the needs of a large number of children and



their families.

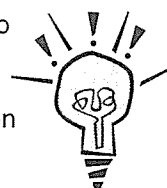
Weaknesses

- ♦ group sizes and ratios are really poor. Research shows that high quality interactions with children are not guaranteed by high teacher / child ratios but that the probability and opportunity for this to occur is much greater.
- ♦ retention of teachers. Loss of staff to other education sectors e.g. childcares, primary teaching. (In Northland 7 teachers in the past year have chosen to return to college to complete their teaching degree and obtain their Primary Teaching Diploma. They all cite pay, roll numbers, attendance regulations and the problem of coercing parents to be on committees etc.
- ♦ attracting applicants to train in our profession, is in some parts of the country a huge problem.
- ♦ lack of qualified, skilled teachers applying for positions in kindergarten. Some Associations are having to accept that 'untrained' staff will be employed daily on short term contracts (that are rolled over term after term). Day to day relieving is a reality in some areas
- ♦ having volunteers as employers, without them first being trained to fulfil their role
- ♦ lack of skilled available people for committees and boards
- ♦ fragmentation of the kindergarten service



Opportunities

- ♦ publicise our service, to promote what we provide for children and why
- ♦ close the gaps between kindergarten and school
- ♦ flexible funding arrangements e.g. 4-hour sessions
- ♦ to have the name 'kindergarten' as a high profile in the community
- ♦ to lobby at local and national level for our service
- ♦ for NZ Kindergartens Inc and Federations to work together on common issues



- ♦ to obtain sponsorship that will put kindergarten out in the public eye
- ♦ deliver an exciting curriculum to children
- ♦ gains a higher status in the community, perhaps the challenge of finding the volunteers will be turned around to having elections for Boards and committees!
- ♦ the ability to access funding either discretionary or grants
- ♦ equal pay for qualifications, skills, experience and responsibility with the primary sector

Threats

- ♦ falling rolls – and accessibility in some regions
- ♦ shortage of teachers
- ♦ childcares :- are growing fast, steadily employing more trained staff
 - often have smaller group size.
 - have the ability to pay higher salaries to staff
- ♦ have 1 :10 ratios is attractive despite the long hours.
- ♦ rarely work with volunteer employers.
- ♦ are able to meet the needs of the families in full time employment



This is not meant to be a rhetorical account about what is wrong with our organisation. So much is just excellent. I can categorically state that the longer I have been in Kindergarten teaching, the greater my commitment.

We do need to capitalise on our strengths, face up to the weaknesses, access the opportunities and minimise the threats.

I believe every individual involved in kindergarten should take responsibility for making the most of every opportunity to ensure that our service really does offer quality, is accessible and affordable to all families for another 100 years ☐

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

PRESIDENTS AND MANAGERS MEETING

VENUE: NOVOTEL HOTEL
345 THE TERRACE,
WELLINGTON

DATE: Friday 13th October to
Saturday 14th October

TEACHERS RETURN TO THE STATE SECTOR

We welcome our teaching staff back into the State Sector from the 1st of October

KINDERGARTEN AWARENESS WEEK

BUILDING BRIDGES

9TH – 15 OCTOBER 2000

The focus for Kindergarten Awareness Week is Building Bridges through:

- ♦ Professional Teachers
- ♦ Transition to School
- ♦ Education for Four-Year-Olds

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