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Continuing professional development in early childhood education in New Zealand

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This article explores the influences on and nature of continuing professional development in the New Zealand early childhood education sector. In addition to discussing the nature of professional development and providing an explanation of the policy context that informs the delivery of professional development, the paper draws on evaluations of national programmes and research studies involving the authors that offer alternative approaches to professional learning. This discussion of literature, policy and research raises a number of implications for continuing professional development including: the need to balance individual reflection with collaborative learning and shared critical reflection; the possibilities for using technology to support professional learning; and the need for dissemination of research findings and debate to support teachers to choose effective approaches.

Keywords: continuing professional development; professional learning; early childhood education

Introduction

Engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) by practitioners within the early childhood education (ECE) context in New Zealand has been heavily influenced by central government policy initiatives, particularly over the past 20 years. Furthermore, the increasing professionalisation of the ECE sector (Dalli 2008) has seen greater emphasis on teachers engaging in CPD, and high levels of commitment to such engagement (Cherrington and Wansbrough 2007; Dalli 2008). Drawing on international literature and several New Zealand research and evaluation projects, this article examines how shifts in policy directions and the emergence of ECE as a profession have impacted on CPD practices, and considers alternative approaches to professional development in ECE. It concludes by discussing the resulting implications for practitioners.

Effective professional development in ECE

Whilst a wide variety of professional learning opportunities are available to practitioners working in the early childhood (EC) sector, internationally there is a lack of consensus on both the terminology and the approaches used (Buysse, Winton,

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and Rous 2009; Maxwell, Field, and Clifford 2006). Common understandings are necessary to ensure CPD that positively impacts on children's learning is organised and implemented and its effectiveness measured (Maxwell et al. 2006). CPD has been defined as 'all the further learning that contributes to how a qualified professional thinks and acts at work' (Eraut, Morley, and Cole 1998, 1). Recent literature (Edwards and Nuttall 2009; Howe et al. 2012) has emphasised the importance of CPD that aligns with a constructivist approach to teaching and learning and assumes that teachers as well as children are learners. Edwards and Nuttall (2009) recommend the use of the term *professional learning* rather than professional development as it fits better with constructivist notions of learning and teaching and acknowledges that teachers' learning will be ongoing. The importance of context is highlighted in an Australian study (Nuttall, Coxon, and Read 2009), which found professional learning to be 'a complex and highly context specific activity' (97). Nuttall and Edwards (2009) warn against transmission models of CPD, which they suggest are often driven by the desire to implement policy directions or new curricula rather than to promote learning and debate. These authors also advocate acknowledging the expertise and experience of EC practitioners suggesting that:

By attending to the 'lived experience' of teaching and learning, and to how meaning is constructed in particular places and times, researchers can position early childhood educators as the 'experts' in their fields, and capture something of this expertise to share with others. (Nuttall & Edwards, 2009, 132)

This focus on the experience of practitioners is also promoted by Fleet and Patterson (2009) whose research used narratives as a way of provoking adult learning in EC settings and emphasised the importance of collaboration between EC professionals.

So what constitutes quality professional learning that positively impacts on children's learning? Drawing on New Zealand and international empirical research, Mitchell and Cubey's (2003) best evidence synthesis (BES) identified eight characteristics of quality professional development:

- (1) It incorporates participants' own aspirations, skills, knowledge and understanding into the learning context;
- (2) It provides theoretical and content knowledge and information about alternative practices;
- (3) Participants are involved in investigating pedagogy within their own early childhood settings;
- (4) Participants analyse data from their own settings. Revelation of discrepant data is a mechanism to invoke revised understanding;
- (5) It provokes critical reflection; enabling participants to investigate and challenge assumptions and extend their thinking is a core aspect;
- (6) It supports educational practice that is inclusive of diverse children, families and whānau;
- (7) It helps participants to change educational practice, beliefs, understanding, and/or attitudes; and
- (8) It helps participants to gain awareness of their own thinking, actions, and influence. (Mitchell and Cubey 2003, 81, adapted)

These characteristics align with the constructivist approach to professional learning discussed earlier. The importance of context is supported by characteristics 1, 3, 4 and 8 and fits with the belief that adult learning principles should inform CPD (Beavers 2009; Howe et al. 2012). Three indicators of professional development suggested by Buysse and Hollingsworth (2009), that it is content-specific and focused on clearly defined professional practices; aligned with curriculum or other standards or goals; and ongoing, intensive and supported by strategies such as coaching or group collaboration that offer feedback to participants are also reflected in the BES characteristics. Similarities include a focus on the provision of content knowledge and theory and the rejection of one-off professional development events. The BES further emphasises practitioners taking an active role in the CPD process together with the importance of expert facilitators or advisers who may challenge practice and provide alternative perspectives.

Continuing professional development within a New Zealand ECE policy context

The ECE sector in New Zealand is characterised by a diversity of provision at the service level within a coherent policy framework at national government level. ECE services are licensed as either ‘teacher-led’ (including kindergartens, education and care services, and home-based services) or ‘parent- or whānau¹-led’ services (including playcentre and Te Kōhanga Reo²) and must meet a range of recently updated criteria to access funding, including ensuring that ‘all reasonable steps are taken to provide staff employed or engaged in the service with adequate professional support, professional development opportunities, and resources’ (Ministry of Education 2011, 24).

The influence of policy initiatives on CPD in the EC sector can be traced back to 1986 when all ECE services were brought under the administrative responsibility of the then Department of Education (now Ministry of Education). This enabled an integrated approach to ECE policy development and implementation that did not separate out ‘preschool’ from ‘childcare’ or ‘daycare’ services (May 2009). Other key policy initiatives, including the introduction of the EC curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education 1996), and the development of the 10-year ECE strategic plan, *Pathways to the future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education 2002), have significantly influenced the focus and provision of CPD.

The ECE Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education 2002) outlined several key strategies for improving the quality of ECE services that linked directly or indirectly to CPD. These included: the staged implementation of a requirement for 100% registered teachers in teacher-led services by 2012³; reviewing and strengthening the provision of CPD to align with governmental strategic goals and to provide access for all ECE services; provision of leadership development programmes; establishment of Centres of Innovation to ‘showcase excellence and innovation in ECE’ (Ministry of Education 2002, 15); and development of self-review processes for ECE services to use to examine and reflect on their own practices alongside external reviews undertaken by the Education Review Office (ERO). Mixed progress was made in implementing these strategies between the introduction of the Strategic Plan in 2002 and its abandonment by a new government in 2009.

The increased number of registered teachers in ECE has resulted in higher expectations of involvement in CPD. Maintaining registration requires that teachers

demonstrate they meet the *Registered Teacher Criteria* (New Zealand Teachers Council 2010) including that they ‘demonstrate commitment to ongoing professional learning and development of personal professional practice’ (11) and ‘use critical inquiry and problem-solving effectively in their professional practice’ (14).

Access to continuing professional development

Following the education reforms of the late 1980s, the Ministry of Education adopted a contestable funding approach with external providers contracted to deliver ECE professional development programmes focused around the implementation of Ministry strategic goals for the sector and offered at no cost to the participating services (Cherrington and Wansbrough 2007). Such programmes have included, for example, CPD to support the implementation of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education 1996) and the introduction of new resources such as the *Kei Tua o te Pae* assessment for learning exemplars (Ministry of Education 2004, 2009), and the self-review guidelines, *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua* (Ministry of Education 2006). These programmes have drawn upon the characteristics of effective PD (Mitchell and Cubey 2003) identified above, utilising a broad range of approaches to CPD as outlined below. Table 1.

Funding for these programmes was predicated on each early childhood service accessing in-depth (either whole-service or cluster) professional development once every three years. A change in government in 2009 led to a reduction in overall funding levels and the introduction of a targeted approach to the delivery of programmes. Current Ministry of Education-funded programmes target services operating in low socio-economic communities and in communities with high Māori and Pacific populations, with the intention of increasing teacher and service responsiveness to children from these communities to improve participation rates. These programmes have an underlying focus on valuing children’s identity, language and culture together with targeted content, including literacy, numeracy, social competence, transitions (into services and from ECE to school), education and care for children aged under two, and leadership. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the current round of programmes in improving teacher practices and outcomes for children and of the targeted approach to professional development is being undertaken by a team including the authors of this article, with results due in early 2013.

Engagement in Ministry of Education-funded CPD

Ministry of Education-funded CPD programmes have played a major role in the sector’s participation in CPD, although considerable variations in access to and engagement in these programmes are evident. Barriers to engagement in CPD identified in evaluations of ECE professional development (e.g. Cherrington and Wansbrough 2007) include cost, staff workloads, the unavailability of qualified relievers to release qualified teachers, inability to include the entire teaching team, and CPD opportunities being scheduled at unsuitable times. Cherrington and Wansbrough’s (2007) evaluation also found that access to CPD was influenced by the degree to which the service (or its umbrella organisation) actively sought CPD tailored to its needs or responded to offers by providers. Adopting the latter approach had potential for services to have minimal or no engagement in CPD or access to CPD that was not matched to the specific needs of their teachers.

Table 1. Approaches to CPD utilised in MOE-funded professional development programmes.

Model	Delivery	Location	Length & hours	Facilitator role
Whole-service	Involves full teaching team addressing an area of practice, often using action research (AR) methodology	On-site	From 3 – 24 months; from 15 – 30 h per annum	Assists team to undertake needs analysis to identify PD goal(s); facilitates team discussions; supports team to gather, analyse and critique evidence
Clusters	Involves 2 – 3 lead teachers from several services meeting regularly to address aspects of practice, with follow-up visits and support to each service, often using AR methodology	Off-site and on-site	Usually 12 months; involves 2 – 5 workshops plus facilitator visits to services	Facilitates cluster meetings on agreed PD focus; supports lead teachers to take learning from cluster meetings back to services; supports teachers to gather, analyse and critique evidence
Short courses, seminars, workshops	Focus on individual practitioners rather than teams	Off-site	Range from ½ to 2 days. May involve follow-up visit to individual services	Plans and facilitates sessions. May undertake follow-up with participants in their service
Networks	Focused on specific topic areas (e.g. leadership) or groups of teachers (e.g. beginning teachers)	Off-site	Minimum one year; many networks continue over several years; 4 – 6 meetings per annum	Facilitates meetings; supports network members to address areas of interest through provision of resources (such as research literature) and speakers
General advice and support	Focused on individual service	On-site	Variable, depending on need but usually short-term	Responds to requests for advice and support – may involve visits to the service, provision of resources or information, facilitating workshops for service personnel (including management)
Individual	Focused on individual staff member	On-site	Variable, depending on need but usually short-term	Responds to requests for advice and support – may involve mentoring, provision of resources or information, phone support

Teachers' engagement in CPD activities ranged along a continuum from individuals or groups of staff participating in one-off events through to cluster or whole-service CPD. Paralleling this continuum, delivery moved from a transmission mode approach (short courses) through to increased ownership and a socio-cultural approach within whole-service and cluster programmes (Cherrington and Wansborough 2007). An evaluation of a pilot ECE ICT professional learning programme (Cherrington et al. 2009) found that whilst the in-depth programme was highly successful for ECE services with strong internal features (such as a positive team culture; supportive management; strong internal team motivation; commitment and passion from the Lead Teacher; and ownership of their action research project), the complexity and demands of the programme were too high for less robust services. Collectively, such findings suggest that a range of delivery modes and styles are necessary for CPD programmes to meet the needs of a diverse workforce.

The Centres of Innovation programme

A unique form of CPD in New Zealand has been the Centre of Innovation (COI) programme, established in 2003 by the Ministry of Education, which enabled a number of ECE services to engage in an action research project, supported by a research associate, to show how innovative approaches were enhancing teaching and learning. Prior to its cessation in 2009, the COI programme provided professional learning opportunities for the COI services and for those in the wider ECE community, as a key feature of the programme was the dissemination of their work to the sector (Meade 2005) through seminars, conference presentations and publications. Meade suggests that this dissemination was particularly successful because it was led by practitioners: 'Teachers have an authentic voice; they embellish their presentations with examples about real children and with stories about their own struggles in facing challenges' (2005, 3).

For those in the COI centres, the professional learning opportunities were numerous. Teachers built capacity as teacher-researchers through their interactions with their research associate and their engagement with the research and dissemination processes, with shifts in thinking and practice on both pedagogic and research planes that evolved as they prepared the initial proposal and undertook their action research project. Several factors were important in this transformative process: the collaborative nature of projects involving teachers/educators, children, parents and whānau, and the research associate; leadership (both positional and distributed); engagement in ongoing and deep reflection on practice; advice and support from outside (such as professional development facilitators or umbrella organisations); supportive workplace conditions; and 'an uncertainty orientation' (Meade, 2005, 65) towards their work (Gibbs and Poskitt 2009; Meade 2005, 2009).

Broadening approaches to continuing professional development

This article now focuses on research undertaken by the authors which has involved innovative approaches to professional learning that have been shown to be both effective and supportive. Thornton's doctoral study (2009) involved the use of blended action learning to support leadership learning in the New Zealand ECE sector. Cherrington's doctoral study (2011) identified that teaching teams working as communities of practice influenced individual teachers' thinking about and

reflection on their interactions with children and noted the value of using video-recorded episodes of teaching as a professional learning activity. These studies will be explained and the implications for ongoing professional learning identified.

Blended action learning to support leadership development

Blended action learning is a process that involves small groups of learners working on issues or problems with the support of a facilitator and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The 12 participants in Thornton's interpretive case study research were head teachers in ECE services. The units of analysis in this study were two blended action learning groups, the members of which met face to face in facilitated workshops and interacted online. The online interactions involved the use of email, online reflective journals, forum discussions, and chat sessions for ongoing reflection, discussion and the sharing of knowledge and resources related to leadership within their respective workplaces. The groups used an action learning process to learn about themselves as leaders and to work collaboratively on issues and challenges related to their leadership roles.

Data from this study suggest that such groups are a very effective model for use in leadership development. Benefits of this model include: allowing for an intensive and continuing professional learning experience while not requiring a large amount of scheduled meeting time; increasing participation of people who are located in isolated situations; encouraging both individual and shared reflection; supporting participants to identify and take action on issues that they face in their everyday work; and building communities of practice through the sharing of knowledge. These benefits fit with the shift to a more constructivist approach to professional learning as proposed by Edwards and Nuttall (2009). Three aspects of this research in particular have wider applicability for use in other professional learning contexts: first, the use of action learning; second, the combination of face-to-face and online interactions; and third, the mix of technologies used. Action learning has been described as 'a continuous process of learning and reflecting that happens with the support of a group of colleagues, working on real issues, with the intention of getting things done' (McGill and Brockbank 2004, 11). Action learning groups meet regularly and participants take turns to discuss the issue or problem they are working on. Group members ask questions aimed at clarifying the nature of the problem and also practice reflective listening. This process has been described as 'shared reflection on individual perceptions of problems' (Bird 2006, 3) and the group deliberations are seen to lead to the social construction of knowledge. An action learning approach fits with the recognised benefits of problematising practice and of group collaboration leading to sustainable inquiry (Fleet and Patterson 2009).

The combination of face-to-face and online learning was seen to be a useful combination by all participants in the study, particularly as it reduced the time away from their workplace. Ongoing face-to-face meetings were also valued by participants; several participants commented that these interactions were more focused, probably because they were synchronous, and felt that it was worth making the effort to travel to occasional face-to-face meetings.

The use of technology to support learning was seen as particularly beneficial. Each of the technologies used on the online site was valued for different purposes. The online journal provided an opportunity for deep reflection on a personal basis and the responses made by the facilitator assisted in this process. The forum

discussions provided an opportunity for participants to share the goals they were working on and to discuss issues related to their work contexts. Chat sessions also allowed participants to discuss issues and keep in personal contact between face-to-face meetings. The combination of asynchronous and synchronous tools provided for the different communication styles of individual learners and minimised communication barriers (So and Brush 2008).

A model of leadership learning was developed as a result of this study. The development of self-awareness, awareness of context and awareness of broader approaches to leadership resulted in greater confidence and the distribution of leadership. This occurred through a process of recognising, reflecting, realising and responding, influenced by four key elements: the role taken by the facilitator, which involved enabling learning and acting as a trusted inquisitor; the blended action learning process of questioning and reflection; the ICT tools used; and participation in the blended action learning group, which involved both sharing and support (Thornton 2009). While this research study focused on the use of ICT to support leadership development in the New Zealand ECE sector, study participants commented that the blended action learning approach to leadership development could have implications for other professional learning situations. They suggested that the progression from awareness to confidence was a feature of other learning situations, and that the stages of recognising, reflecting, realising and responding formed a useful framework for encouraging reflective practice.

Professional learning within communities of practice

The influence of teaching teams, as a *community of practice* (Lave and Wenger 1991), on individual teachers' thinking about and reflection on their interactions with children was a key aspect emerging from Cherrington's (2011) doctoral research. Situated within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm, case studies of three ECE services were undertaken where teachers participated in group stimulated-recall interviews about their reflection and thinking drawing on video-recorded episodes of their interactions with children.

Wenger (1998) suggests that learning is a characteristic of practice and that communities can be a site both for the *acquisition* of knowledge and for the *creation* of knowledge as a result of constant fine-tuning between participants' experiences and their competence. Although the study did not explicitly set out to investigate teachers' engagement in CPD, there was evidence that viewing and discussing the episodes together enabled teachers to negotiate meaning regarding their practices, the programme, and their understandings of children. Three factors supported their learning: first, the visual record of the episode enabled participation, whether teachers had participated in the episode or not; second, the opportunity to hear others' perspectives on the situation, both from the stance of those who had been involved in the episode and from an 'outside' stance; and third, being able to collaboratively reflect-on-action (Schön 1983) without having to respond to children in the moment of the interaction. For example, teachers in Moana Early Learning Centre (ELC) (pseudonym) were keenly interested in understanding what was happening in each episode, frequently asking questions to clarify their understanding and sharing their ideas, opinions and prior knowledge about children involved in the situations. Understanding the episodes was facilitated by teachers involved in the episodes whose rich descriptions of what was going on provided detailed

contextual information. Teachers' negotiation of meaning focused intensely on the children involved, although particularly during periods of collective reflection teachers turned attention to their own practices and broader issues such as the learning environment and their relationships with parents. Instrumental in this team's negotiation of meaning about their work was the leadership role played by Rachel (pseudonym) who contributed more extensively to the discussions, engaged more in self-critique and exerted her authority on occasion.

Collectively de-privatising (McLaughlin and Talbert 2006) and examining their own professional practice created opportunities for professional learning that met many of Mitchell and Cubey's (2003) characteristics of effective professional development, including investigating pedagogy, engaging in critical reflection, and gaining awareness of their own thinking and actions. Part of the value of the stimulated recall process for the teachers was the emphasis on their own thinking about their practices:

And it's good 'cos ... usually when I used to watch videos I would be quite scared to say, 'This is what I was doing', and these [interviews] have been good 'cos I've ... voiced what I was doing. 'Cos some other person will say, 'Well, how come you didn't do that?' Rather than hearing me out and go, 'Oh that's what I would have done', 'You could have done this'. (Anastasia, Ngā Rangatahi ELC) (pseudonyms)

One benefit of watching the video-recorded episodes together was that teachers were able to identify aspects unseen or unrecognised during the actual episode. For example, whilst watching an episode of a group of toddlers at lunch at Ngā Rangatahi Tamariki (pseudonym) ELC one teacher commented on the hectic nature of the routine, stating that children sitting at the table had stood up constantly and that there were lots of children in highchairs to feed. However as the episode proceeded, another teacher noted 'it's interesting that the kids actually sit quite nicely at the table. Whereas looking at it now ... I think, because we're so busy all we see is them getting off the chair'. Later in their discussion they noted that two of the children sitting at the table, rather than in highchairs, had only been doing so for about a week, revising their perceptions of these children to see them as capable rather than as challenging.

Teachers found discussing and reflecting on the video-recorded episodes to be a powerful form of professional learning as it created opportunities for shared dialogue, gave them a broader view of what was happening in the centre, and allowed teachers to gain new insights into children's actions, particularly when teachers were employed part-time or had not been part of the episode. Several teachers identified ongoing shifts in their thinking and their practices as a result of their engagement in the project; one teacher at Summer Kindergarten (pseudonym) described how the opportunity to watch herself and think about her practices had been a catalyst to re-examine her teaching. She subsequently went on to undertake a range of CPD opportunities, including upgrading her teaching qualification.

The combination of using video-recorded episodes to examine teaching practices alongside the collective approach afforded by working within their communities of practice offers a strategy for engaging teachers in effective CPD. Such CPD enables teachers to maintain ownership of their learning whilst the increased de-privatisation of their practice has potential to support greater articulation about pedagogy and learning, and create more openness to critique from others. To be effective,

however, such an approach demands that teacher communities of practice have the necessary structural support (e.g. time and spaces for regular, ongoing meetings) and internal processes that build trust (Stoll et al. 2006) and encourage critique of practice (Timperley and Earl 2008). Many New Zealand ECE services struggle to find sufficient time for teachers to meet regularly to discuss issues of teaching and learning (Aitken 2005; Hedges 2007; Nuttall 2004). If teachers are to engage in such collaborative dialogue, reflection and critique it is important that they are resourced to do so regularly. Furthermore, whilst many EC services have the requisite internal features to be strong communities of practice, a recent New Zealand ERO report suggests others lack the leadership and culture of reflective practice and professional learning (ERO 2009) needed to develop an effective community of practice. Such services are likely to require significant support such as that provided by a skilled external facilitator if they are to be able to engage in the depth of reflective dialogues with colleagues required to support children's learning or be open to feedback and critique from others in the wider centre community.

Implications

This discussion of literature, policy and research raises a number of implications for CPD. These include: the need to balance individual reflection and learning with collaboration and shared critical reflection; the role of outside facilitators; the possibilities for using technology to support professional learning; and the need for dissemination of research findings and debate to support teachers to choose effective approaches to CPD.

Individual learning versus collaborative learning

Collaborative learning, where teachers work alongside other professionals within and across organisations, is strongly promoted in a recent OECD report (Schleicher 2012) and supported in much of the research literature. Collaboration is a highly valued feature of the CPD initiatives such as blended action learning and communities of practice described above; however, it should be balanced with the need for individuals to have access to personalised professional learning opportunities (Clement and Vandenberghe 2000). Examples of these may be engagement in postgraduate study, the results of which should impact on teaching practice and be shared with colleagues, and attendance at professional learning opportunities focusing on specific areas of practice such as leadership or infants and toddlers. This personal learning can result in leadership opportunities for teachers not in formal leadership roles, as they provide opportunities to lead professional learning discussions that draw on evidence and question assumptions (Thornton 2010). Individual reflective practice is also seen as important (ERO 2012), and opportunities for documenting personal reflections such as reflective journaling can support the development of personal critical awareness and lead to improved learning outcomes for children.

Role of the outside facilitator

The importance of the role of an outside facilitator in providing support and feedback, and challenging practice was stressed in the ECE professional development BES (Mitchell and Cubey 2003). This role was taken by the research associates in

the COI programme and in government-funded programmes by the professional development facilitators. The blended action learning facilitator's dual roles as enabler of learning and trusted inquisitor were essential and complementary aspects that both supported and challenged the leadership learning of participants. Suggested roles for outside facilitators include: building trust with and between participants; encouraging reflection through questioning; providing possible pathways for future growth; and providing resources (Thornton 2009).

Use of technology to support CPD

The use of technology to support CPD appears to be a relatively new area of research and practice in the ECE sector. Two main advantages of using ICT in CPD include, first, supporting the ongoing implementation of skills and knowledge learned in face-to-face professional development and, second, deepening professional learning through the use of online tools that support both reflection and ongoing collaboration. A report prepared for UNESCO promotes the use of technology in CPD suggesting that online and blended communities of practice can support professional growth and impact positively on teacher practice (Albion, Knezek, and Adubra 2011). There is a lack of agreement over whether ICT should be used to support existing communities as recommended by authors such as Schlager and Fusco (2003) or be specifically designed and built for an online environment (Locke 2006). Whatever form they take, online communities of practice are recommended by the New Zealand Ministry of Education as they are seen to 'strengthen collegial support, professional dialogue, and reflective practice' (Ministry of Education 2006, 11). The blended action learning discussed above relied on technology to support and enhance professional learning.

Determining CPD priorities and forms

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the influence of CPD programmes and opportunities funded by the Ministry of Education within the New Zealand ECE context. Whilst the significant levels of government funding for CPD activities are to be applauded, and have clearly contributed to improving early childhood teacher practices across the sector, issues for the profession arise from government dominance in the ECE CPD field. Most obviously, the Ministry of Education determines the key focus areas for CPD that it funds, aligned to the policy imperatives of the day. Such CPD may use a transmission approach and has the potential to position teachers as functionaries rather than as professionals (Blackman 1989; Nuttall and Edwards 2009). In addition, recent high levels of government funding for ECE CPD has led to an expectation amongst many New Zealand teachers and service management that their CPD will be provided at no or little cost to themselves and, for some, an unwillingness to contribute towards the costs.

The current government targeted approach has altered the CPD landscape for many ECE teachers and services. Those services outside the targeted communities must now make their own arrangements for CPD, drawing predominantly from short-course offerings or from CPD provided by their umbrella organisations. There is evidence that spontaneous decisions about selecting CPD activities are often made in response to advertised opportunities for traditional short-course-style CPD rather than for in-depth CPD (Cherrington and Wansbrough 2007), and this pattern

is likely to continue given the shifts in government policy outlined earlier. CPD that draws on the evidence of effective professional learning, including that emerging from the research projects described in this article, is likely to make more of an impact on teaching and learning than short-term offerings. These approaches allow for greater teacher innovation and autonomy but do require higher levels of skills (critical reflection, interactive skills, coping with conflict) and knowledge (pedagogic content knowledge, theory), and a willingness to engage in critical reflection on practice.

It is our view that debate is required regarding the nature and purpose of CPD in the New Zealand ECE sector. Teachers and services need access to research evidence on effective CPD when making decisions about the nature and focus of their professional learning programmes, otherwise we run the risk that teachers do not engage in worthwhile professional learning activities, and that the quality of teaching that supports children's learning does not improve over time.

Notes

1. Whānau is the Māori word for family, including extended family
2. Te Kōhanga Reo are Māori language nests, originally established in the early 1980s to preserve Māori culture and language.
3. This target was later reduced by the current National-led government in 2010 to a target of 80% registered teachers.

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