

Influencing policy change through collective action ^[1]

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Source: International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Format: Book / booklet

Publication Date: 25 Oct 2018

AVAILABILITY

Access online via Springer Nature [limited access] ^[2]

Excerpt

Abstract

Aotearoa New Zealand academics, unionists and activists have a history of acting collectively to debate, formulate and progress their collectively desired early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy directions. Meade (1990) described the critical role played by the Campaign for Quality Education in giving women and children “a foot in the door” to increase funding for ECEC when a flank of new right politicians in 1988 were cutting back government expenditure. Advocates from the early childhood teachers’ union harnessing support from families and community, and working with national early childhood organisations and academics, have been highly influential in influencing policy change through collective action. Wells (1991) has described policy change as happening “against the odds”, during a period of harsh labour laws and punitive social and economic policies in the early 1990s. Three stories of collective action are told in this chapter. They occurred during the 1990s and early 2000s: a kindergarten story of collective strategising and action to achieve pay parity of kindergarten teachers’ salaries with primary and secondary teachers, a story that started to be told by Mitchell and Wells (1997); the campaign to achieve pay parity for teachers in education and care centres and the reasons for its limited success; and the story of a collective group formed by the union for policy development that resulted in the publication and widespread endorsement of the report *Future Directions: Early Childhood Education in New Zealand* (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996; Wells, 1999). This report pointed the processes of consultation and direction for the subsequent government initiated ECEC strategic plan, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002). A main argument is that participatory decision-making processes that draw on a diverse range of expertise from committed individuals and organisations can generate a sound platform for ECEC policy that upholds democratic values of equity and inclusion. These Aotearoa New Zealand stories show ways in which through acting collectively in a common cause, ordinary people can have influence.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

Tags: activism ^[4]

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