Diversity Amongst New Zealand Early Childhood Educators

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ABSTRACT

The diversity of service types and range of organisations involved in early childhood education (ECE) in New Zealand is a hallmark of the sector, recognised by both the sector and government as a strength in offering choice to families. However, little attention has been paid to issues of diversity within individual early childhood services. This article reports data from a national survey carried out as part of a larger project, The Diversity of Diversity in Early Childhood Education*, focusing specifically on educators involved in New Zealand ECE services. The article considers the implications of these results for practitioners, early childhood services, and providers of initial teacher education and professional development programmes for practitioners.*

INTRODUCTION

The breadth of early childhood education (ECE) services in New Zealand is widely recognised, with a diverse range of services available for children aged under-five years and their families. The New Zealand government licenses services as either teacher-led (including kindergartens, education and care services, home-based services, and the Correspondence School) or parent- or whānau-led (including playcentres, and te kōhanga reo). Meeting the needs of children and their families through access to a diverse range of services is a key principle underpinning the provision of New Zealand ECE.

Typically, discussions about diversity in New Zealand ECE focus on the diversity of service types outlined above. In undertaking this study we hoped to widen that discourse to include the diversity present *within* individual early childhood educational settings, and to explore how effectively

educators[1] worked with children and families from diverse backgrounds. We took a broad, inclusive stance when considering the aspects of diversity that practitioners, children and families bring with them to the ECE setting, collecting data on dimensions such as gender, culture and ethnicity, linguistic diversity, family background and make-up, socio-economic position, and the special educational, social or health needs of children together with data on educators' attitudes towards, and experiences of, diversity.

In this article we draw on data from the national survey in order to focus specifically on several dimensions of diversity that educators involved in New Zealand ECE services bring with them. Whilst the selected dimensions included familiar aspects such as practitioners' gender, age, and ethnicity, data were also collected on aspects such as length of service, the languages spoken with children, and educators' generational and citizenship status and experiences living overseas. The article concludes by considering implications for early childhood (EC) practitioners and services, and for providers of both initial teacher education and professional development (PD) programmes arising from our findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

New Zealand's EC curriculum draws on the metaphor of a woven mat, or whāriki, where curriculum is socially constructed and children learn through interaction with people, places and things within their environment (Ministry of Education, 1996). In addition, *Te Whāriki* consistently promotes strong partnerships between educators and families and whānau. Such an approach requires attention to, and inclusion of, the unique learning needs and interests of children within the context of their family and wider community.

Challenges for educators in weaving curriculum become evident when dimensions of diversity across children, families and practitioners are considered. For example, since 1986 the migrant population in New Zealand has become more culturally diverse, due to immigration policy reforms (Ministry of Social Development, 2008), resulting in increased ethnic and language diversity amongst children attending ECE services. It is perhaps not surprising that teaching in culturally diverse settings in both the EC and primary sector has become a recent research focus (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter & Clapham, 2012; Kaur, 2012; Schofield, 2007).

Other dimensions of diversity evident in EC settings include special learning needs, such as autism, physical disabilities, sensory impairments, and health challenges that require early intervention. Families themselves are also increasingly diverse, including immigrant and refugee families and those from distinct religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Different family structures are apparent, including single-parent, two-parent, gay-lesbian parent, and extended families (Rosewarne & Shuker, 2010).

Recognition of this diversity amongst children and families engaged in ECE has led to increased attention on how practitioners can work effectively with diverse learners and their families. Research evidence indicates that

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[1] As this study involved services from both teacher-led and parent/whānau-led services, the term 'educator' is used to include those working in both types of services. Similarly, when we refer to members of teams we have used the term 'staff', even though some members of teams may be undertaking their roles in a voluntary capacity.

meaningful connections between the home and EC services is paramount for children's conceptual development as well as their ability to develop as human beings with a positive self-image (see, for example, Hedges & Lee, 2010; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006). For most children of new migrant families ECE services are the first context in which they come face to face with differences between the culture of their home and the culture of their new country (Pascal & Bertram, 2007; Rivalland & Nuttall, 2010). Robinson (2002) highlights the important role that EC educators can have on children's awareness of diversity and difference by means of the 'discourses that they make available to children and those that they silence, through their daily practices, pedagogies and curricula' (p. 416). She argues that for some EC educators, cultural diversity is often only 'perceived within the context of ethnic diversity and within the dominant discourse of 'multiculturalism'' (p. 416). De Lair and Erwin (2000, p. 154) agree, pointing out that educators need to address the 'constructs of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexual orientation openly and actively in the classroom', whether working with young children or as a university lecturer.

According to Vuckovic (2008, p. 12) teachers are 'cross-culturally perceived as role models' but their status and authority varies according to the cultural environment. A main challenge for teachers is to identify what is required of them by various cultural groups. Vuckovic (2008) suggests that self-reflection is one way to do this. To identify one's cultural roots, teachers might reflect on how they were socialised as a child, identifying what values and customs were internalised and those they continue to follow as a consequence of their personal and group affiliations. This includes one's own personal and interpersonal relationships as well as the social, cultural, historical and political circumstances that they grew up and live in (Gregory & Ruby, 2011). Vuckovic (2008) asserts that successful self-assessment assists teachers to acknowledge shared aims with and differences from the children and their families they work with, an essential requirement for developing trust and respect. When teachers accept and feel comfortable with their ethnicity they may be better placed to respond in a positive manner to those who belong to other ethnic groups.

One aim of multicultural education is to build on children's inter-cultural competence (Stonehouse & Gonzalez-Mena, 2004). According to Vuckovic (2008), teachers must also develop competence to assist children to do this. This requires teachers developing an understanding of their own ethnic and personal identity, together with an affirmative acceptance of their diverse group affiliations: 'Teachers should recognise their unique likes and dislikes (also in respect of culture and ethnicity). While such a degree of self-awareness is desirable for all teachers, it is indispensible if the learning environment is intended to be culturally sensitive' (Vuckovic, 2008, p. 12).

Along with knowing 'what' they are, EC teachers also need to be aware of 'how' they are. In other words, teachers' attitudes towards racial, ethnic and cultural issues and how their attitudes are revealed in programme content, particular theoretical approaches used, or experiences planned. Of particular importance here is that the 'how' is inherently linked to teachers' attitudes towards diversity (Vuckovic, 2008). Thus, teachers' self-awareness is critical to their identification and appreciation of diversity.

The above discussion highlights the increasing attention being paid to understanding diversity amongst children and families across many dimensions, and how pedagogical practices may be strengthened in order to enhance children and their families' engagement in and experiences of ECE. Whilst we know, too, that there is increasing diversity amongst early childhood teachers (Education Counts, 2011; DeJean, 2010), less is known about diversity *within* EC teaching teams across a number of dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

Whilst survey and case study methodologies were used in the wider project, this article draws solely on data from the national survey component. Using a random, stratified sample to ensure coverage of different service types, 1,517 ECE services, representing 46.25% of licensed ECE services on the New Zealand Ministry of Education's national database (MoE, 2007), were sent a postal survey in June 2008. Follow-up reminder letters and another copy of the survey were posted to non-responding services in August, 2008. There was a 22.09% (N = 335) response rate to the survey. The timing of the survey, distributed at a busy time of year for ECE services, together with the comprehensive nature of the questionnaire may have contributed to the fairly low response rate. Although sent to individual services, some returned questionnaires clearly represented several services operating under an umbrella organisation. Table 1 presents details of the sample and return rate by service type.

Type of Service	Number of Ministry of Education ECE licensed Services as at 1 July 2007	Number of surveys sent out	Number of responding services	Percentage of total number of returned surveys by service type
Kindergarten	618	279	110	32.8
Education & Care	1,932	879	176	52.5
Home based	227	116	12	3.6
Casual Education & Care	36	13	3	.9
Playcentre	466	229	33	9.9
Correspondence School	1	1	1	.3
Total	3,280	1,517	335	100

Table 1: Survey Sample

The questionnaire aimed to gather demographic data about the educators, children and families in the services, and to explore educators' attitudes towards dimensions of diversity and effectiveness of practice in working with children and families from diverse backgrounds. The survey contained 112 items, of which 100 were fixed-response. The remaining twelve items allowed open-ended responses. Four-point Likert scales were used to

garner respondents' attitudes about diversity whilst a three-point Likert scale was used to ascertain respondents' experiences in working with children and families from diverse backgrounds. Two questions were drawn from the International Citizenship and World-Mindedness Survey (Meyer et al., 2011). These items enabled the exploration of educators' experiences in some contexts beyond ECE (such as living and/or studying overseas).

Statistical analysis of quantitative data was undertaken using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Open-ended questions were coded and analysed using NVivo software.

PROJECT FINDINGS

We were interested in exploring dimensions of diversity across team members in New Zealand ECE services. Services were asked to respond to several dimensions including practitioners' gender, age, length of teaching experience, ethnicity and languages spoken. Some dimensions of diversity relating to practitioners, such as sexual orientation, were not explored in the survey as, based on the literature (e.g., DeJean, 2010; Duke & McCarthy, 2009) we felt that asking for this information may prove risky for some responding educators. Educators' experiences living overseas and their citizenship and generational status were also explored. Results for each dimension are presented across all educators within responding services and by teams.

Gender make-up of teams

Of 335 services responding to the questionnaire, 301 identified the number of male and female educators currently employed. All had at least two female educators, up to a maximum of 35, whilst 11% had one or two male educators. When compared to the overall number of educators identified as teaching within the responding services (using the total number of staff in each age range, N = 2144), just 1.8 % (N = 39) were male educators, slightly above the national early childhood workforce statistics (MoE, 2008) where 1.3% of staff were male.

Age range within teams

We asked respondents to indicate the number of people within their team who fitted into each of five age bands (see Table 2 over page). Almost three-quarters of services indicated they had at least one staff member within the 30 – 39 years age band or the 40 – 49 years age band. Slightly fewer services indicated they had staff aged 50 years or over. In contrast, just over half had educators within the 20 – 29 year age band. Not surprising, given the regulations governing who can be employed in ECE services and the length of required teaching qualifications in New Zealand, only 13.6% of responding services had staff aged less than 20 years.

Age Range	Services with at least one staff member in that age band		Staff in each age band	
	No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*
<20 years	44	13.6	53	2.5
20 – 29 years	186	57.2	492	22.9
30 – 39 years	233	71.7	668	31.2
40 – 49 years	231	71.3	502	23.4
>50 years	223	68.6	429	20
Total			2144	100

Table 2: Age range of educators

When individual educators within an age range are considered, the EC workforce is relatively evenly spread across four of the five age bands, from 20% aged 50 years and over through to 31.2% aged 30 – 39 years. The high number of services with educators in the top three age brackets compared with the relatively even spread of individual practitioners over the top four age brackets suggests that, although many teams are relatively diverse in terms of the ages of their educators, many services may be characterised by an older staffing demographic.

Length of service in ECE settings

Respondents were asked to indicate the length of ECE experience of team members, using five bands to cover service from less than two years through to more than 20 years.

Length of Service in ECE	Services with staff with that length of service		Educators' length of service	
	No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*
<2 years	161	52.4	408	21.9
2 – 5 years	192	62.5	529	28.4
6 – 10 years	188	61.2	405	21.7
11 – 19 years	162	52.8	292	15.6
>20 years	136	44.3	231	12.4
Total			1865	100

Table 3: Educators' length of service in ECE settings

Data presented in Table 3 reveals interesting patterns about team members' length of service. Just over half the services had one or more team members with less than two years ECE experience and at least one staff member with between 11 and 19 years' experience. Almost two-thirds of services had staff with between two and five years and six to ten years of

experience. A high proportion of services had staff with over twenty years' experience in ECE. These data indicate diversity within these ECE teams in terms of their length of experience. However, when the total number of educators across all services who responded to this question is considered, a relatively inexperienced sector is revealed: 72% of educators had ten years or less experience and 50.3% had five years or less ECE experience.

Ethnicity of educators

Respondents were asked to describe the ethnic backgrounds of their team members, using categories of ethnicity from the Ministry of Education's annual returns for ECE services (see Table 4), selected because they were familiar to respondents. Services were able to indicate more than one category where individual educators identified with more than one ethnic background.

Almost all services reported having one or more staff identifying as New Zealand European. More than one-third of services had staff identifying as New Zealand Māori or as Caucasian/European. Around 15% of responding services had staff members identifying as Pasifika or Asian whilst very few services had staff identifying as African, Hispanic or Arab/Middle Eastern.

Ethnicity	Services with one or more staff of this ethnicity		Educators from each ethnic group	
	No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*
NZ European	300	92.3	1640	71.1
NZ Maori	116	35.6	210	9.1
Caucasian/European	113	34.7	203	8.8
Pasifika	51	15.7	92	4
Asian	58	17.8	88	3.8
African	18	5.5	22	1
Arab/ Middle Eastern	3	0.9	6	0.3
Hispanic	4	1.2	4	0.2
Other	31	9.5	40	1.7
Total			2304	100

Table 4: Ethnicity of educators

Quite different patterns emerged in the data concerning ethnicities that individual staff identified with. Whilst educators identifying as NZ European were the largest group overall, far fewer educators identified with a different ethnic group. Less than ten percent of educators identified themselves as NZ Māori or Caucasian/European, about four percent of staff identified as Pasifika or Asian, and one percent or less identified as African, Hispanic or Arab/ Middle Eastern. Thus, although many ECE teams are ethnically diverse, educators from minority ethnic backgrounds are often the only person of that ethnicity within the team.

Languages spoken by ECE educators in their services

Responding services were asked to identify languages spoken by educators with children. English was listed as the first option with respondents able to identify up to seven further languages. In total, ten languages were spoken by educators although Chinese, Mandarin and Cantonese are listed separately to reflect respondents' identification of these languages (see Table 5). Almost all services identified that staff used English with the children. Just over half had educators who used te reo Māori whilst ten percent had staff who spoke Samoan. Whilst individually Chinese, Mandarin and Cantonese were spoken by teachers in relatively few services, when combined they were spoken in 38 services. Other languages were spoken by staff in small numbers of services.

Languages Spoken	Services with staff speaking these languages	
	No.	*%*
English	325	97
Te reo Māori	188	56.1
Samoan	34	10.1
French	22	6.6
Chinese	18	5.4
Mandarin	12	3.6
Sign	10	2.9
Cantonese	8	2.4
Thai	1	0.3
Kiribati	1	0.3

Table 5: Languages spoken by staff in ECE services

Educators' international experiences

Services were asked about the number of educators who had lived overseas for a period of time, to gain an indication of their experiences in living within different cultural settings. Table 6 indicates that 89 services had at least one staff member who had lived in another country for up to one year, 128 services had at least one staff member who had lived overseas for between one and three years, and 168 had at least one staff member who had lived overseas for more than three years.

Educators' Experiences Living Overseas	Services with one or more staff with experience living overseas		Staff with experience living overseas	
	No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*
Educator has lived in another country for less than one year	89	33.1	175	8.2
Educator has lived in another country for between 1 and 3 years	128	47.4	241	11.2
Educator has lived in another country for more than 3 years	168	62.5	446	20.8
Total			862	40.2

Table 6: Educators' experiences living overseas

When results are considered by individual educators, 862 educators (40.2%) had lived overseas. When these data are broken down into the length of time spent living overseas, they reflect the results at the service level with greater numbers of educators having lived overseas for three years or more in comparison to the other two categories.

In addition, we were interested in the numbers of staff who had undertaken community service whilst living overseas or who had studied overseas (see Table 7). Very few ECE services had staff who had undertaken overseas community service: 21 services had staff with less than one year, 13 services had staff with between one and three years and 13 services had staff with more than three years overseas community service. Slightly higher numbers of services had educators who had studied overseas, either in a country with a culture like their own or in a country with a culture unlike their own.

Similarly, very few individual educators had undertaken community service or studied overseas, with only 80 educators with overseas community service of any length, and 148 educators who had studied overseas, whether in a country with a culture like their own or in a country with a culture unlike their own.

Educators' International Experiences	Services with one or more staff with these experiences		Staff with international experience	
	No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*
Educator undertook community service in another country for less than one year	21	7.8	37	1.7
Educator undertook community service in another country for between 1 and 3 years	13	4.8	19	0.9
Educator undertook community service in another country for more than one year	13	4.8	24	1.1
Educator studied overseas in a country with a culture like their own	62	23	93	4.3
Educator studied overseas in a country with a culture unlike their own	31	11.5	55	2.6

Table 7: Educators' international community service and education

Citizenship and generational status

The final dimension of diversity related to teaching staff reported here is that of educators' citizenship and generational status. Responding services were asked to identify how many of their staff were first, second or third generation New Zealanders, or were born overseas and what their citizenship status was (see Table 8 over page). A specific category was included for people born overseas who were also citizens of New Zealand by birth (for example, people who were born in New Zealand protectorates but whose parents were New Zealand citizens).

Citizenship/ Generational Status	Services with one or more staff in each category		Educators identifying with each category	
	No.	*%*	*No.*	*%*
Grandparent, both parents & educator born in NZ	283	89	1211	59.1
Educator & at least one parent born in NZ	97	30.6	321	15.7
Educator but not parents born in NZ	71	22.4	105	5.1
Educator a citizen of NZ at birth but born overseas	75	23.7	122	6.0
Educator born overseas & now a citizen of NZ	94	29.7	172	8.4
Educator born overseas and not yet a citizen of NZ	75	23.7	106	5.2
Educator on student or visitor visa	7	2.2	10	0.5
Total number of educators			2047	100

Table 8: Educators' citizenship and generational status

Results indicate that 89% of responding services had at least one third-generational New Zealander within their teaching team. This was in sharp contrast to those services with staff members from other generational and citizenship categories with percentages ranging from 22.4 – 30.6% of services with staff from each other category, bar staff on student or visitor visas. When the data are analysed by individual educators, 59.1% are third- and 15.7% are second-generational New Zealanders. Between 5.1% and 8.4% of staff are first generation New Zealanders, or born overseas and now citizens, or born overseas and not yet citizens. Given the numbers of immigrants into New Zealand in recent decades, these data suggest that the generational and citizenship status of New Zealand EC teachers in this study may be quite different from that of the general population.

DISCUSSION

Consideration of diversity within ECE settings typically focuses on how diversity is reflected within the children and families attending the service and what this may mean for teachers' pedagogical practices (e.g., Gonzalez-Menz, 2008; Hedges & Lee, 2010; Vuckovic, 2008). Shifting focus to consider even limited dimensions of diversity amongst educators themselves highlights a different set of issues that have implications for educators and management within ECE services, and for policy makers and providers of initial teacher education and PD programmes.

Age range and length of experience

Our results revealed that, despite a reasonably even spread of individual educators across each band from age 20 years through to over 50 years, teams were more likely to have at least one staff member in the three older bands than in the band, 20 – 29 years. This suggests that, whilst practitioners in ECE are relatively evenly balanced across the different age ranges, individual teams are more likely to be characterised by an older demographic amongst their educators.

Contrasting with these results, however, are our findings that these educators were relatively inexperienced, with half having five years or less experience and almost three-quarters with ten years or less experience. Whilst we did not explore educators' experiences outside of ECE (other than their experiences living and studying overseas), it is possible that many practitioners come to EC later in life or that, having trained at an earlier age, they have breaks in their careers. A recent Ministry of Education study into the employment outcomes for ECE graduates supports these explanations (Tupou & Scott, 2012). That study found a wide age spread amongst EC teachers who graduated from their initial teacher education programme in 2003, and noted the cohort was older when compared with other tertiary graduates. Our explanation that educators' length of service is influenced by breaks in their careers is also supported by Tupou and Scott's (2012) study which found that only 47% of 2003 graduates worked continuously in EC teaching positions for the five years immediately post-graduation.

Dimensions of diversity amongst practitioners

The gender imbalance amongst EC practitioners in New Zealand is well recognised (e.g., Farquhar, 2008; Gibbons, 2009), and is reflected within our responding services. Most male educators in this study were the sole man in their teaching team, with only four services with two male teachers. Imbalances across practitioners' ethnicity, although not as extreme as for gender, were also apparent. Compared with New Zealand population statistics (Statistics New Zealand, 2008), Māori, Pasifika and Asian ethnicities were all under-represented in the educators within our study. Educators from non-Pakeha/European ethnicities were twice as likely to be the only practitioner of that ethnicity represented within their team than to be working alongside a colleague identified as from the same ethnic category.[2]

Whilst not assuming that educators from particular ethnic groups would also speak languages other than English, it is interesting to consider practitioners' ethnicity and languages spoken with children. Although both English and te reo Māori were used in more services than there were Pakeha/European or Māori educators, other identified languages were used in fewer services than there were educators from related ethnicities. Services using either Pasifika or Asian languages numbered two-thirds of those with Pasifika or Asian staff. No services reported using African, Middle Eastern or Hispanic languages despite 25 services having educators who identified as belonging to one of these ethnic groups. Whilst these results suggest a positive

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[2] We note, of course, that being members of the same broad ethnic categories used in this study does not equate to sharing the same cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

bicultural emphasis, little attention appears to be paid to the use of languages that might reflect multicultural communities.

Our data concerning generational and citizenship status, together with educators' experiences abroad, paint an interesting picture of ECE practitioners in this country. As a cohort, these practitioners represent solid New Zealand backgrounds with limited international experiences. Overwhelmingly they were second- or third-generation New Zealanders and only 40% had experienced living overseas. It is possible that many educators who reported living overseas for more than three years were also those who were born overseas. A similar pattern to other aspects of diversity is apparent when educators with different generational and citizenship status or international experiences are considered by membership within service teams. Here, again, there are larger proportions of services with one or more educators who are children of migrants or migrants themselves, or who have experienced living overseas than when all educators are considered as a group. Again, too, educators with these backgrounds and experiences are more likely to be the sole member of their team with the exception of educators who had lived overseas for more than three years, where slightly more services reported having two or more staff than did services that only had one staff with this experience.

IMPLICATIONS

Several implications arise from our findings. ECE teams vary considerably in terms of diversity, across teams and across the limited dimensions of diversity that we surveyed. Further research into dimensions of diversity amongst practitioners not addressed in this study, such as sexual orientation, disability, religious affiliations and family structure, is likely to reveal even greater complexity in terms of individuals and teams. Dimensions such as generational and citizenship status revealed a workforce more reflective of traditional New Zealand demographics than of recent migration patterns.

The relative maturity of the EC workforce reported here suggests many practitioners have extensive life experiences outside of ECE to draw upon when working with children and families from diverse backgrounds. However, such life experiences, on their own, cannot guarantee effective practices for working with diversity, particularly when these results are considered alongside our findings that almost three-quarters (74.8%) of practitioners were second or third generation New Zealanders. Educators may struggle with De Lair and Erwin's (2000) call to engage with multiple constructs within the classroom and, instead, contribute to the on-going silencing of discourses of difference and diversity (Robinson, 2002). These factors suggest that access to ongoing PD focused on effective pedagogical practices for working with diverse children and families is important in order to build effective, inclusive relationships with children and their families.

Such PD may be difficult to find, given the results of an evaluation of Ministry of Education-provided PD programmes (Cherrington & Wansbrough, 2007) which found little explicit attention given to teaching and learning practices that were inclusive of diverse children and families. Inadequate access to language resources for use with children and adults identified by

practitioners in that evaluation suggests that the relatively low use of languages other than English and Māori found in this study are unlikely to change. Changes to government-funded ECE PD priorities in the 2010 and 2013 contract periods have limited any focus on diversity to ethnicity, most specifically children and families from Māori and Pasifika backgrounds (MoE, 2010, 2013).

The potential for a practitioner to be the only male, or recent immigrant, or person from a minority ethnicity within a team raises the issue of how their perspectives and voices are heard within female, Pakeha/European dominated teams. Whilst feelings of isolation felt by male educators (e.g., Buckingham, 2006) have been noted in literature little attention has been given to the experiences of inclusion or exclusion of colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Ryder's (2007) study, although not focused on diversity, highlighted how group processes initially silenced minority voices within a group of EC teachers undertaking their teacher registration programme and noted the efforts required to build acceptance of diversity of views amongst group members. Further research is required to investigate how EC services appreciate and include the views and voices of all team members in order to improve teaching and learning, particularly for diverse learners.

Similarly, the demographic profile revealed here has implications for ECE management practices. Explicit attention to practices that address diversity amongst employees are no longer required for licensing (MoE, 2009) although previously the *Desirable Objectives and Practices* (MoE, 1998) required an equal employment opportunity policy. Previous research indicates that ECE services vary in how inclusive their administrative documentation and policies are of gay and lesbian-headed families (Gunn, 2002) and of families with children with disabilities (Purdue, 2006). The extent to which management practices are inclusive of diverse educators and how practitioners from diverse backgrounds experience their services' policies and documentation are worthy of further research.

Our findings that the early childhood workforce does not reflect wider New Zealand demographic patterns also poses challenges for the Ministry of Education in terms of workforce planning, and for providers of initial teacher education. Addressing factors that contribute to the difficulties in attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers – low social status, low pay, the perception that teaching is 'women's work', the potential for false accusations of child abuse, and few male peers within the teaching profession (Rice & Goessling, 2005) – requires a 'comprehensive policy approach' (Fenech, Waniganayake & Fleet, 2009, p. 209) from government agencies, professional organisations and teacher education providers. Ensuring that teacher education programmes are culturally responsive to diverse student teachers is important in enabling culturally diverse student teachers to enter and successfully complete their initial teacher education programmes. Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) highlight incongruities between teacher education expectations that student teachers will learn to teach children from diverse backgrounds whilst, in contrast, teacher education programmes themselves may be silent about diversity amongst their pre-service teachers, suggesting that teacher educators need to ask how they can 'embrace the diversity and complexity of today's teacher education workforce' (p. 58).

Furthermore, Nuttall and Ortlipp (2012) argue that 'the education of *all* teachers about diversity and difference' (p. 59, italics in original) would be beneficial for teachers, as well as children and families from diverse backgrounds. Brereton (2008) argues that viewing differences as valuable is an effective approach to take, both when teaching diverse children and when encouraging appreciation of diversity amongst children. Initial teacher education and PD programmes might usefully adopt such an approach to develop practitioners' dispositions and skills for working effectively with colleagues who may come from very different backgrounds, in order that the advantages of diversity within a team may be recognised and maximised.

Our focus on diversity amongst practitioners and within teams has revealed new insights about the EC workforce, and suggests fruitful possibilities for further research. Investigating how government policies, initial teacher education, and professional development programmes can build a more diverse workforce and enhance educators' attitudes and knowledge about diversity are key priority areas if we are to better understand how practitioners can work effectively with children, families, and colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

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