

International perspectives on early childhood education education essay



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The aim of this essay is to compare an Early Childhood Education and Care provision in the UK with an international ECEC provision. This essay will focus on the ECEC provision in New Zealand. The essay will discuss the history of ECEC in the UK and the ECEC in New Zealand. The essay will reflect on the similarities and differences from each provision. There will be particular reference made to the role of children, parents and teachers, the environment in which children learn, the teaching methods, the role of play, furthermore it will discuss the curriculum guidelines and type of assessment. Education and Care are frequently split into two different aspects of a child's routine. However modern developmental theory recognises that learning begins at birth, therefore splitting education and care settings ignores the fundamental nature of development. New Zealand was the first country to integrate responsibility for all early childhood services under education, and the notion of 'educare' integrating childcare and education, and recognising their indivisibility, is wholeheartedly accepted within New Zealand" (Melhuish & Petrogiannis, 2006, p174).

In many countries early childhood provision, pre-primary and childcare has been a rising concern. The ECEC provisions have recognised the importance of education and services to the contribution of a range of goals, such as social, economic and educational goal. In some countries Early Childhood Education and Care is provided because of social reasons, for example so parents can go back to work. Early Childhood Education and Care settings around the world are diverse, they all reflect their own histories, beliefs, culture and values. " International evidence allows cross-national sharing of experience and practice in areas of common interest, while allowing account

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to be taken of national similarities and differences” (Melhuish & Petrogiannis, 2006, p167).

EYFS

History

The National Curriculum was introduced to primary and secondary schools in England in 1988, it was the first curriculum that was based on a subject model of learning. The National Curriculum impacted early childhood education; it resulted in professionals struggling to maintain the progressive ideals held by many early childhood educators and the governments aspirations to produce a cohesive, centralised system of early childhood education that is linked to the National Curriculum. The Early Years Curriculum Group (1989) believed that “ Early childhood is valid in itself not simply a preparation for work, or for the next stage of education” (The Early Years Curriculum Group 1989, cited in Soler and Miller, 2003, p60). Edwards and Knight (1994) state that early childhood settings in the past had been neither ‘ explicit, planned long term, or coherent.’ (Edwards & Knight, 1994 cited in Soler & Miller, 2003, p 60). Supporting these arguments was the belief that all children were entitled to a curriculum that would offer them a basis of becoming literate and numerate adults.

Early Years education in England has been neglected over the years. It has taken a long time to recognise the importance of early childhood education and care. Bertman and Pascal’s (2002) study found that “ early childhood education and care policies in England were dominated by short-term priorities of government and local authorities” (Bertman & Pascal, 2002, <https://assignbuster.com/international-perspectives-on-early-childhood-education-education-essay/>

cited in Palaiologou, 2010, p4). This shows that early education was not an important concern for the government and they did not feel the need to make any sudden changes or put any new policies in place.

Early year's education has not always received the same amount of attention as it does now. Researchers in the past have emphasised the importance of the early years of children's lives and their families' lives, however it was during the 1990's when policy developments and research findings were starting to link together. Researchers also began to look at European early years provisions and started to make comparisons between England's perspectives of early childhood education and care, to European perspectives of early childhood education and care and began to reflect on current practices in England. Research had been conducted on whether learning and development was impacted by early education and care. Palaiologou (2010) says Findings from research have suggested that it was important to improve the early year's sector and suggested the need for further policies and development within the early year's sector. There had been resurgence in instrumental belief, which caused the national early childhood curriculum to focus on ensuring that practitioners and teachers were given guidance to prepare children for schooling.

The Early Years Foundation stage (EYFS) was introduced in 2008. The aims of the EYFS are to provide children with a good start to life and provide a framework that delivers high quality environments for all children.

Principles and curriculum

The Early Year's Foundation Stage is based on four key principles that demonstrate the government's commitment on integrating services and parental involvement. The four principles are: a unique child, positive relationships, enabling environments and learning and development. The first principle 'a unique child' recognises that children are individuals and that all children are competent learners. Runco (2006) says it is the role of the practitioner to shape the child's confidence and to offer the child opportunities to face new challenges (Runco, 2006, cited in Palaiologou, 2010, p117). This principle is linked to the 'attitudes and values' and 'skills development', MLA generic learning outcomes. The second principle 'positive relationships' illustrates that children need positive and loving relationships with parents and a key person to become strong and independent individuals. The practitioner's role is to provide out-of-setting learning, which develops from a safe and reliable source. This principle focuses on the importance of supporting learners and partnerships with parents. The MLA learning outcomes that this principle links to are 'activity, behaviour and progression' and 'attitudes and values'. The third principle 'enabling environments' recognises that the environment in which a child is an active participant plays an important part in supporting their learning and development. Practitioners will observe, plan and assess children in order to support and further their learning and development. This principle links to the 'enjoyment, inspiration and creativity' and 'activity, behaviour and progression' MLA learning outcomes. The last principle 'learning and development' identifies that all children learn and develop at different stages "and that all areas of learning and development are equally important and are inter-connected" (Palaiologou, 2010, p117). It is the role of the

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practitioner to provide stimulating opportunities and experiences for all children to enhance their overall development. It is important that practitioners track each child's progress to enable the child to reach their full potential. The MLA generic learning outcomes that this principle relates to is ' knowledge and understanding of the world' and ' skills development'

These principles acknowledge that government value the importance of the early years of children's lives and understands that every child is unique and have diverse needs and they learn at different stages. The four principles also show that the government acknowledges the importance of parental involvement.

The EYFS includes seven learning and development areas. The first three are known as the prime areas of learning and development and the last four are known as specific areas of learning and development. It is the practitioner's role to plan enriching activities and opportunities that cover all areas of learning and development. Children are expected to work towards their early learning goals for each of these areas.

' Personal, social and emotional development' is the first prime area of development. This main focus of this is the child's confidence, independence and behaviour. The Second prime area is ' communication and language'. This looks at the child's speaking and listening skills and begins to introduce basic reading and writing skills. The third prime area is ' physical development'. This looks at children's physical skills for example learning to eat, children will also learn about keeping fit and healthy lifestyles in this area. ' Literary' is a specific area of learning and development. This area

introduces the child to reading and writing, older children will learn to link sounds and letters together. ' Mathematics' is the second specific area of learning and development. Children will learn maths skills, it focus's on numbers and shapes. The next specific area is ' understanding the world', children will learn about a variety of things such as the world, communities and people, technology and past and present. The Last specific area is ' expressive arts and design'. The main focus of this is self-expression, children will engage in a variety of different activities using media and materials, such as dance, painting and imaginative play. (Early Education, 2012).

Each area of development and learning has individual learning goals that children are expected to have attained by the end of the EYFS. The learning goals for personal, social and emotional development are; self confidence and self awareness, managing feelings and behaviour, and making relationships. The learning goals for communication and language are; listening and attention, and understanding. The learning goals for physical development are; moving and handling, and health and self-care. Children are expected to learn reading and writing skills for the literacy area of learning and development. The learning goals for mathematics are; numbers, and shape, space and measures. The learning goals for understanding the world are; people and the communities, the world and technology. The learning goals for expressive arts and design are; exploring using media and materials and being imaginative. Each learning goal has a range of things that children are expected to learn. (DFE, 2012)

Assessment

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Assessment is vital part of the Early Years Foundation Stage; it is an on-going process and is viewed as an important part of child's learning and development process. Practitioners carry out observations on children to ensure that they are meeting their early learning goals. It is important that parents and practitioners communicate to ensure that the child's development is the main focus, by having positive parent-teacher relationships ensures the child is receiving the best support they need to thrive. Parental involvement is an important aspect of the EYFS; it is based on an on-going dialogue based on observations and assessment of children. " The on-going dialogue takes place in the form of a formal, formative assessment that is used as evidence to identify learning priorities for children, and to relevant and motivating learning experiences for each child" (Palaiologou, 2010, p13).

Children also have their own individual EYFS profile. These profiles are used to keep a record of the child's development. The profile is a way for practitioners and teachers to keep track of children's development and learning achievements. This is important so that when the child goes onto primary school, it allows the teacher to gain an understanding of the child's progress and what they have achieved during the EYFS. There are 13 assessment scales that are made up from the EYFS learning outcomes. The benefits of assessing and collecting EYFS are; parents are able to see how their child is progressing, it allows year 1 teachers to plan effectively for children during the transition from EYFS to KS1.

Observation and assessment is an essential part of the EYFS, it allows improvements to be made to practice and children's progress is monitored
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throughout the EYFS, which is extremely important in order for children to thrive and achieve goals.

As well as children being assessed, the EYFS is also assessed by Ofsted to ensure that practitioners are meeting the EYFS requirements and ensuring that settings are safe and have the relevant policies and procedures in place. Ofsted produce inspection reports of each early childhood setting. Parents often use the Ofsted reports as a way of determining which setting offers the best quality of childcare and education for their child. “ 32% of parents and carers said they would look at Ofsted reports. Workshop discussions with parents confirmed that they relied on Ofsted reports to provide information on the quality of early years provision” (DFE, 2011)

Teachers

All staff in early years settings should have the appropriate qualifications, training and knowledge. It is important that the providers ensure that all staff receives induction training. Induction training should include child protection, health and safety issues, emergency procedures and the settings policies. In group settings, the manager must have a full or relevant level three qualification and have at least two years experience of working in an early years setting, and at least half of the staff must have a full or relevant level two qualification. Early Years Providers must make sure that the regular training is completed by staff, and that they are providing staff with opportunities to improve their qualifications wherever possible.

Each child will have a Key person in the early years setting. The role of the key person is to ensure that the child's care is being adapted to meet their

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individual needs. Other roles of the key person include building relationships with parents, ensuring that the child becomes familiar with the setting and to build a positive relationship with the child.

The adult to child ratio in early years settings for children under two years old is at least one member of staff for every three children, they must hold the relevant level 3 qualification. For children aged two, there must be one member of staff who holds a relevant level 3 qualification to every four children. For children aged three and over in an early years setting during or outside the hours of 8am and 4pm when there is not a qualified teacher working with the children, there must be one member of staff with the relevant level 3 qualification to every eight children. (DFE, 2012).

The practitioners' role in the EYFS is to provide a safe, stimulating and loving environment for children. It is important that children and practitioners form positive relationships and practitioners offer support to children at all times. The practitioner in the early years setting should provide adult-led activities; and child initiated activities, so that children can explore new things.

Role of play

The EYFS is a play-based approach; all areas of learning and development are required to be delivered through structured, meaningful play, with a balance of planned activities from teachers and child-initiated activities. It is the practitioner's role to adopt a flexible approach to teaching. Research shows " practitioner groups welcome the play-based and child-initiated nature of the EYFS, and view it as a validation of established early years principles" (Brooker et al, 2010).

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Play is a valued aspect of the EYFS, as it stimulates children's development. All practitioners understand the impact play has on children's learning and development. Through play children develop language and social skills, creativity and intellectual skills. Langston & Abbott (2007) state Children can practice new skills, challenge themselves, and use their imagination during play. It is the adult's role to provide time and space and resources to allow children to explore through play.

Role of the environment

The environment in which children learn plays a very important role in the EYFS framework. Enabling environments is one of the principles of the EYFS; therefore it is important that practitioners provide a stimulating environment for children. Settings should offer a variety of toys and play materials and space for the children. It is important that the learning environment is attractive and stimulating to both children and adults. Practitioners should set up areas such as sand play, role-play, book corners and painting stations. Children can explore and develop skills in their learning environment; there should be a variety of enriching experiences available for children to engage in around the classroom.

Role of parents

The EYFS practice guidance (2008) suggests that practitioners should work in partnership with parents to support children. "The 'parents as partners' guidance acknowledges that parents are children's first and most enduring educators and that 'parents and practitioners' have a lot to learn from each other" (DCSF, 2008: Card 2. 2, cited in Palaiologou, 2010, p116).
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It is important that practitioners inform parents of relevant information or changes that are occurring, and provide up-to-date reports on the child's progress. Parents are a valued part of the EYFS, practitioners acknowledge that they need to communicate with parents to ensure the best quality care and education of children.

It is important that parents understand that they play an important part in the child's learning and development. Parents should work with practitioners and share information about their child, to ensure that the best care can be provided. The benefits of parents working with practitioners are; parents will feel valued and practitioners can plan effectively, children will see the benefits of the partnership and will feel more secure. (ANON, N. D)

Special Educational Needs

' Providing an inclusive setting that promotes equality of opportunity does not mean that all children should be treated the same, but that the unique skills and abilities of each child should be recognised and developed, and that inclusion is not optional: children have defined entitlements in this area and settings have legal responsibilities.' (EYFS, 2007 cited in Everett, N. D, p19)

The Early Years Foundation Stage acknowledges the importance of inclusion and meeting the diverse needs of all children in all early childhood settings. There are four principles of the EYFS and each principle had four commitments, inclusive practice underpins the unique child principle. " The EYFS ensures that all providers understand their responsibility to ensure that

diversity of individuals and communities is valued and respected and that no child or family is discriminated against” (Kids, N. D).

All early years provider must have and implement policies that are effective and ensuring that children with learning difficulties and disabilities are given the support and guidance that they need. Individual Learning Plans (IEP’s) may be used in order for practitioners and parents to keep a track of the children’s progress. An IEP is used to record targets, interventions and evidence. (Everett, N. D p 21).

The EYFS profile has been developed to be inclusive. Parents and professionals must communicate with each other to gain a clear picture of the child’s achievements. When practitioners are carrying out observations on children with special educational needs there are some differences in the assessment criteria for example, “ when the EYFS profile scales contains the word ‘ talk’, children can use their established or preferred mode of communication”(Anon, 2008).

EYFS (2012) REVIEW

In 2010 the Early Years Foundation stage was reviewed. The revised EYFS framework was implemented in early years in September 2012. Dame Clare Tickell carried out the review, she said the Early Years Foundation Stage should stay mandatory for all early years settings. From the review Tickell found that the EYFS is successful and it has driven standards up for children. There are numerous improvements of the review; one of them is to reduce the amount of paperwork for practitioners and simplify the assessment of children’s development at age five. Dame Clare Tickell also said that the 69 <https://assignbuster.com/international-perspectives-on-early-childhood-education-education-essay/>

early learning goals were repetitive and has narrowed them down to 17 early learning goals. There is now a small check for children between ages two. The EYFS requires that practitioners provide parents with a written summary of their child's development in the three prime areas; personal, social and emotional development, physical development and communication and language development. The review also recommends that the EYFS profile be slimmed down, to help with the transition process for children going into key stage one. Teachers will make judgements against 17 goals instead on the 117 scale points in the EYFS 2008, this is to ease the process of transition from EYFS to KS1. There have also been changes to the welfare requirements in the new EYFS. The revised EYFS provides examples of child protection issues, such as signs of abuse and neglect, which might occur in adult's behaviours. There should be policies and procedures in place for the use of mobile phones and cameras in settings. Criminal record checks for managers will now be obtained by the providers instead of Ofsted. The revised framework ensures the use of clear language, in order to strengthen partnerships with parents and professionals. (DFE, 2012b).

New Zealand

History

Education for children from birth to school age is not compulsory for children in New Zealand, however there are a number of services for children in the early years; because there is a range of diverse services for children, they are allowed to attend more than one early childhood provision. Soler and Miller (2003) believe that the Te Whariki curriculum framework has been

inspired by sociocultural and progressive theories and beliefs. The Te Whariki curriculum is similar to the early childhood curriculum in England in that the curriculum was linked to the National Curriculum in primary schools. Despite being restricted into what could be implemented into the early childhood curriculum, the developers of Te Whariki developed a framework that has implemented a “ bicultural perspective, an anti racist approach and reciprocal relationships with the Maori community in New Zealand” (Smith, 1999 cited in Soler and Miller, 2003, p62). Practitioners and early childhood services were involved in the development of the Te Whariki framework. The Te Whariki document is written in both English and Maori, despite the Maori perspectives being a separate framework. Carr (2001) states, “ from the beginning Te Whariki took into consideration the foundational principles assessed from Maori epistemology, via Tilly Reedy, to create a bicultural document” (Soler and Miller, 2003, p60).

The title Te Whariki draws upon weaving real life experiences into learning within traditional Maori culture. The literal meaning of Whariki is ‘ the woven mat’, on which everyone can stand on; “ it interweaves principles and goals into different ways which each setting can develop their own particular learning methods” (Carr & May, 2000, cited in Soler & Miller, 2003, p63). Another meaning conveyed in the title is the idea of a ‘ spider web’ model of curriculum rather than a ‘ step’ model of curriculum. The Te Whariki curriculum moves away from the idea of a step model where there are measured outcomes that are assessed, moreover Te Whariki is believed to have lots of different strands thus the comparison to a ‘ spider web’

“ Te Whariki emphasises a model of knowledge and understanding for young children as a tapestry of increasing complexity and richness. The weaving model of learning conceptualises the child’s development as a series of increasingly intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning, centred on cultural and individual purpose” (Carr & May, 1996, cited in Soler & Miller, 2003, p63).

Curriculum

The curriculum in New Zealand is flexible; the early childhood sector is diverse. Te Whariki is the ministry of education’s early childhood curriculum policy statement. Te Whariki views children as active agents and rights holders. Childhood in New Zealand is viewed as a social construct understood differently at different times in different situations. Te Whariki is a curriculum based on sociocultural aspects, theories from Rogoff 1995; Vygotsky, 1978 and Wertsch; 1995 have massively influenced the Te Whariki curriculum. The curriculum recognises that children learn things that are valued and helpful within their community through shared relationships and activities with others. Te Whariki is “ a cultural site whose social reality is constructed by, and in turn constructs, the communicative interactions amongst teachers and students” (Carr, 1996; cited in Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006, p105).

The curriculum is based on strands, values and principles. The Te Whariki curriculum is different to other international curriculums as it does not setting guidelines for content or methods; it allows the teachers to weave their own Whariki (mat). This allows each setting to maintain its own

methods of teaching children and provide enabling environments for them to learn and develop. “ Te Whāriki has enabled the diverse early childhood provisions to be maintained within one national curriculum” (Alvestad et al, 2009).

Carr & May 1997 found that it is important that all teachers involved with the Te Whāriki curriculum have adequate knowledge and skills on how children learn and develop. However Cullen, 2003 found that because teachers maintain their own methods under one curriculum, it could lead to teachers ignoring challenges that would be found in a traditional curriculum (Cullen, 2003, cited in Carr & May, 1997).

Teachers in early childhood settings have introduced a holistic curriculum in response to the children’s learning and development. The curriculum highlights the importance of the learning partnership between teachers, parents and families.

In 1996 numerous forms of early childhood care and education provisions were introduced such as; school, play centres, kindergarten, childcare centres, home-based schools, community based play groups, To Kohanga Reo, Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres (PIECCs) and Pacific Island Language Groups.

The curriculum is based on the following aspirations of children “ to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009,

p26)

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The curriculum highlights the importance of socially and culturally facilitated learning and mutual and responsive relationships with people, places and things. The child learns through shared experiences with others, and guidance from others and by individual experiences and reflection. The curriculum focuses on the individual child; the main focus is how the learner brings knowledge, skills and attitudes to their experience. The curriculum acknowledges that the learning begins at home as well as in early childhood settings.

“ There are four principles of the curriculum, empowerment; the curriculum empowers children to learn and grow, holistic development; the curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow, family and community; the wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum, and relationships; children learn from mutual relationships with people, places and things. ” (Perris, N. D).

There are five strands that arise from the principles; each strand has various goals. Strand one is Well-being; this ensures that each child's health and wellbeing is protected and supported. The goals from strand one are to provide an environment where; children are kept from harm, health is promoted and children's emotional welfare is nurtured. Strand two is Belonging; this emphasises that all children and families are entitled to feel a sense of love and belonging. The goals from strand two are to provide an environment where; children understand limits and boundaries of suitable behaviour, understand that they belong and that there are opportunities for links to be made with family and the wider world and there are routines and values to ensure the individual is comfortable. Strand three is Contribution;

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this strand is about providing opportunities for learning and acknowledging a child's contribution. The goals of this strand are to provide an environment where; children can make a positive contribution; children are acknowledged as individuals and are encouraged to engage in learning experiences with others. Strand four is Communication; this strand encourages and protects language and symbols of their own culture and other cultures. The goals of this strand are to provide an environment where; children can experience ways of developing non-verbal and verbal communication skills for different purposes, there are opportunities for developing and discovering ways to be creative. Strand five is Exploration; the child actively explores the environment. The goals of this strand are to provide experiences for children to, explore and gain confidence, play is valued as purposeful for learning and spontaneous play is recognised as an important aspect in a child's learning experiences, the child will learn skills such as reasoning and thinking and children will develop working theories for making sense of the environment. (Ministry of Education, 2009).

These principles, strands and goals form the framework of the curriculum. Learning outcomes have been made for each goal in each of the strands, this is so Whariki becomes an integrated basis for each child's development.

The New Zealand curriculum has values that are to be encouraged, modelled and explored. Values are believed to be expressed through how individuals think and act. The decision making process that is related to the curriculum or that take place at the school reflects the values of everyone involved and the values within the setting. Students will be encouraged to value “

“ Excellence, by aiming high and by persevering in the face of difficulties,

Innovation, inquiry, and curiosity, by thinking critically, creatively, and reflectively,

Diversity, as found in our different cultures, languages, and heritages;

Equity, through fairness and social justice;

Community and participation for the common good;

Ecological sustainability, which includes care for the environment;

Integrity, which involves being honest, responsible, and accountable and acting ethically

Respect themselves, others, and human rights”

(Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI), 2007).

Assessment

The Te Whariki curriculum does not assess children’s learning and development against milestones. Te Whariki believes that in order to assess children’s development we need to understand what children are trying to achieve and what is possible. Assessment is about supporting children and motivating them to reach their potential.

Margaret Carr came up with the idea of ‘ learning stories’ as a way of assessing a children’s progress. Te Whariki has very holistic goals therefore it is hard to assess a child’s development. The idea of ‘ learning stories’ is to

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avoid assessing specific skills and the use of checklists. Learning stories are about capturing children's learning through stories. Practitioners will document and photograph children's learning experiences. The stories are shared with children and families. Learning stories set up a picture of the child's overall development and the activities and relationships they have engaged in.

“ This assessment approach orient children and teachers to learning goals involving mastery, persistence and striving towards increased competence, rather than perf