

# Diversity in New Zealand early childhood education: Challenges and opportunities

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# “Diversity of diversity in ECE” project

- Discourse about diversity in NZ ECE often focused on diverse service types
- This project aimed to expand this discourse by focusing on diversity within individual ECE services
  - National survey
  - Case studies of 8 ECE services

# Survey respondents:

| 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 Services | 1,932   | 879                        | 176                           | 52.5   |
| Home based service        | 227   | 116                        | 12                            | 3.6  |
| Casual Education & Care   | 36  | 13                         | 3                             | .9   |
| Playcentre                | 466   | 229                        | 33                            | 9.9  |
| Correspondence School     | 1   | 1                          | 1                             | .3   |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>3,280</b>  | <b>1,517</b>               | <b>335</b>                    | <b>100</b>   |

# In this workshop we will explore:

- What dimensions of diversity are evident within your ECE setting
- How you collect information about different dimensions of diversity within your ECE setting
- The challenges and opportunities you've experienced working with children and families from diverse backgrounds
- What factors influence how EC teachers/ educators view working with children and families from diverse backgrounds

## With the person next to you, discuss:

- What dimensions of diversity are evident in your ECE setting?
- How do you collect information from families about these different dimensions of diversity?
  - Formally?
  - Informally?

## Our data:

### How services collect information about diversity aspects from families

| Aspect of diversity  | Information collected by service: |      |                 |      |                            |      |               |      |
|--|-----------------------------------|------|-----------------|------|----------------------------|------|---------------|------|
|  | Only formally                     |      | Only informally |      | Both formally & informally |      | Not collected |      |
|  | No.                               | %    | No.             | %    | No.                        | %    | No.           | %    |
| <b>Children's gender</b>   | 282                               | 86.8 | 12              | 3.7  | 28                         | 8.4  | 3             | 0.9  |
| <b>Children's ethnicity</b>  | 279                               | 85.6 | 5               | 1.5  | 40                         | 12.3 | 2             | 0.6  |
| <b>Health issues affecting children</b>  | 219                               | 67.2 | 11              | 3.4  | 93                         | 28.5 | 3             | 0.9  |
| <b>Children's disabilities</b>   | 218                               | 66.9 | 25              | 7.7  | 74                         | 22.7 | 9             | 2.8  |
| <b>Children's special learning needs</b>   | 137                               | 42   | 84              | 25.8 | 103                        | 31.6 | 2             | 0.6  |
| <b>Children's linguistic diversity</b>   | 111                               | 34   | 121             | 37.1 | 74                         | 22.7 | 20            | 6.1  |
| <b>Multiple births (e.g., twins, triplets)</b>   | 96                                | 29.5 | 147             | 45.2 | 37                         | 11.4 | 45            | 13.8 |
| <b>Immigrant families</b>  | 65                                | 20   | 165             | 50.8 | 33                         | 10.2 | 62            | 19.1 |
| <b>Children's challenging behaviours</b>   | 55                                | 16.9 | 175             | 53.7 | 84                         | 25.8 | 12            | 3.7  |
| <b>Families' religious affiliations</b>  | 59                                | 18.2 | 162             | 49.8 | 24                         | 7.4  | 80            | 24.6 |
| <b>Family structures (including, for example, single parent families, foster families, blended families, grandparent-headed households, extended families, non-biological families, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer-headed families)</b> | 46                                | 14.1 | 173             | 53.1 | 68                         | 20.9 | 39            | 12   |
| <b>Refugee families</b>  | 40                                | 12.3 | 161             | 49.5 | 20                         | 6.2  | 104           | 32   |

# Your experiences:

- In your centre/service, which dimensions of diversity would you experience:
  - Always (i.e., with 5+ children each year)
  - Sometimes (i.e., with 3 – 4 children each year)
  - Rarely/never (i.e., with 0 – 1 child each year)

## Our data: Frequency of challenges and opportunities faced over the past 5 years (part 1)

| Challenges and opportunities                          | Always (5+ children per year) |      | Sometimes (3-4 children per year) |      | Never/Rarely (0 – 1 child per year) |      | Total responding services |      |
|---|-------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|
|   | No                            | %    | No                                | %    | No                                  | %    | No                        | %    |
| <b>Sole parent families</b>                           | 163                           | 48.7 | 121                               | 36.1 | 45                                  | 13.4 | 329                       | 98.2 |
| <b>Families from diverse cultures</b>                 | 126                           | 37.6 | 147                               | 43.9 | 57                                  | 17   | 330                       | 98.5 |
| <b>Families facing financial hardship</b>             | 117                           | 34.9 | 161                               | 48.1 | 51                                  | 15.2 | 329                       | 98.2 |
| <b>Blended families</b>                               | 101                           | 30.1 | 160                               | 47.8 | 65                                  | 19.4 | 326                       | 97.3 |
| <b>Children from non-English speaking backgrounds</b> | 95                            | 28.4 | 125                               | 37.3 | 108                                 | 32.2 | 328                       | 97.9 |
| <b>Children with behavioural needs</b>                | 90                            | 26.9 | 196                               | 58.5 | 45                                  | 13.4 | 331                       | 98.8 |
| <b>Extended families</b>                              | 88                            | 26.3 | 152                               | 45.4 | 84                                  | 25.1 | 324                       | 96.7 |
| <b>Families experiencing poverty</b>                  | 75                            | 22.4 | 126                               | 37.6 | 125                                 | 37.3 | 326                       | 97.3 |

## Our data: Frequency of challenges and opportunities faced over the past 5 years (part 2)

| Challenges and opportunities                  | Always (5+ children per year) |      | Sometimes (3-4 children per year) |      | Never/Rarely (0 – 1 child per year) |      | Total services responding |      |
|---|-------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|
|   | No                            | %    | No                                | %    | No                                  | %    | No                        | %    |
| Children accessing learning support           | 66                            | 19.7 | 165                               | 49.3 | 96                                  | 28.7 | 327                       | 97.6 |
| Multiple births (e.g., twins, triplets)       | 51                            | 15.2 | 189                               | 56.4 | 89                                  | 26.6 | 329                       | 98.2 |
| Children with multiple special learning needs | 48                            | 14.3 | 139                               | 41.5 | 141                                 | 42.1 | 328                       | 97.9 |
| Grandparents raising children                 | 48                            | 14.3 | 135                               | 40.3 | 142                                 | 42.7 | 325                       | 97.0 |
| Foster families                               | 41                            | 12.2 | 109                               | 32.5 | 175                                 | 52.2 | 325                       | 97.0 |
| Families with alcohol and drug dependency     | 37                            | 11   | 102                               | 30.4 | 186                                 | 55.5 | 325                       | 97.0 |
| Refugee families                              | 31                            | 9.3  | 46                                | 13.7 | 247                                 | 73.7 | 324                       | 96.7 |
| Families with a parent in prison              | 27                            | 8.1  | 72                                | 21.5 | 229                                 | 68.4 | 328                       | 97.9 |
| Gay and lesbian-headed families               | 25                            | 7.5  | 44                                | 13.1 | 254                                 | 75.8 | 323                       | 96.4 |

# Your experiences:

- What successes have you had when working with children and families from diverse backgrounds?
- What challenges have you faced when working with children and families from diverse backgrounds?

# Our data:

- Factors influencing how EC teachers/educators view working with children and families from diverse backgrounds:
  - Attitudinal aspects – “diversity as normal” or “feeling inadequate and unsupported”
  - Availability of appropriate support
  - Professional knowledge and skills
  - Quality of relationships with parents and families

# Implications for practice:

- Complex nature of educators' work with diverse children and families
- Requires the possession of dispositions and attitudes that enable educators to truly welcome, acknowledge and embrace diversity
- Need access to PD that supports practitioners to develop effective inclusionary practices

- Breath of diversity apparent within New Zealand ECE services raises implications for the preparation and on-going professional development of educators
- Potential for a practitioner to be the only male, or recent immigrant, or a 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