Political advocacy by early childhood educators conference

University of Newcastle, ECA Hunter, SJiEC

Systems advocacy in the professional practice of early childhood teachers:
How do we get there?

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May 5, 2014

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Have times changed since the *1972 Child Care Act?*

- Increased understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of the early years and the lifelong difference quality early childhood education can make (Council of Australian Governments, 2009; OECD, 2006)

- Shift from operational to parent subsidies (confusing; doesn't achieve equitable outcomes or value for money) (Brennan & Adamson, 2014)

- Increased regulation and accountability for quality (ACECQA, 2011; National Childcare Accreditation Council, 2005)

- Marketisation of ECEC:

    - market limits how high quality bar can be set (Penn, 2011; Fenech, Giugni & Bown, 2012)

    - internationally, not-for-profit centres generally higher quality centres (Penn, 2011; Cleveland et al., 2007)

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What about Australia?

ACECQA ratings of NSW ECEC services as at 30/9/2013	CCCC analysis of ACECQA ratings of NSW ECEC services as at 14/11/2013	Ratings of KU services to date (KU Children's Services, 2014).
14% of services were rated as Exceeding the NQS	84% of services rated as Exceeding were not-for-profit community based services	63% of rated services
29% of services were rated as Meeting the NQS		31% of rated services
56% of services were rated as Working Towards the NQS	80% of services rated as Working Towards the NQS were for-profit services	7% of rated services

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Community Child Care Co-operative, 2014)

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Some things haven't changed …

- Children still not at the centre of ECEC policy (Brennan, 2004)

- Education / care divide e.g., Australian Government, 2013; Productivity Commission, 2013)

- Low professional status and lack of pay parity (Productivity Commission, 2011)

- Inequitable access to preschool education (Brennan, 2012)

- Quality at the mercy of affordability and accessibility e.g., Productivity Commission Inquiry into Childcare and Early Childhood Learning (Productivity Commission, 2013)

Productivity Commission Inquiry

"The Australian Government is committed to establishing a sustainable future for a more flexible, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood learning market that helps underpin the national economy and supports the community, especially parents' choices to participate in work and learning and children's growth, welfare, learning and development" (p. iii).

"There are also inherent tradeoffs between different aspects of ECEC systems. For example, measures to improve the quality of childcare and the standard of learning and development outcomes could often be expected to put additional cost pressures on ECEC providers, therefore working against the achievement of the objective of improving affordability" (3)
(Productivity Commission, 2013)

Systems advocacy is critical

Systems

Community

You and your centre

Personal (child & family)

Waniganayake et al., 2012

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Systems advocacy is challenging

- lack of time
- lack of confidence and perceived needed experience
- sector fragmentation
- feelings of powerlessness and marginalisation
- lack of attention to advocacy in pre-service teacher education programs
- limited or no affinity with advocacy role

Grieshaber, 2001; Kagan, 1989; Lombardi, 1986; Macfarlane & Lewis, 2012; Mevawalla, 2009; Mevawalla & Hadley, 2012; Sumsion, 2006

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Marianne Fenech, Macquarie University, 5 May 2014

Advocacy in the professional practice of early childhood teachers: A case study exploration

- What factors enable participants to undertake systems advocacy?

- Purposive sampling strategy

- Semi-structured interviews (views about advocacy; examples of systems advocacy; motivators (eg., values, significant others, why advocacy is important); facilitators

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	Liam	Brigitte	Vanessa	Gabe
Age	28	34	35	57
Experience in ECE	10	15	15	30
Experience as director	2	0	4.5	17
Quals	BTeach (Birth - 5)	BEd (0-8)	BEd	BEd + Grad Dip Special Education
Current position	Area manager (ACT)	ECT team leader (Sydney)	Centre director (Sydney)	Centre director (Albury)
Memberships	ECA, CCCC, United Voice	ECA, CCCC, IEU, United Voice	ECA, CCCC, IEU	ECA, CCCC, IEU

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What does 'advocacy' mean to you?

- standing up for children and other educators (Brigitte)

- advocating for those who are not as privileged as ourselves (Liam)

- supporting ideas, causes, others who are unable to advocate for themselves (Gabe)

Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Gibbs, 2003; Kieff, 2009

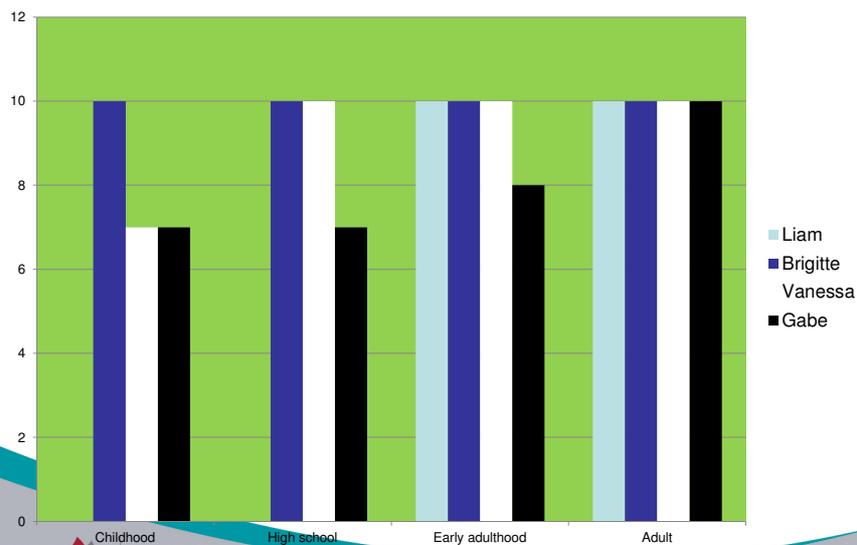MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY | FACULTY OF HUMAN SCIENCES

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Some new perspectives:

- being prepared to be the voice of the cause, idea or individual, as either part of a group or individually (Gabe)
- engaging in discussions or actions that raise greater awareness about … 'secret teachers' business' (Vanessa)
- Advocacy is about preserving things that are good and beneficial to all (Gabe)
- giving a part of yourself for a cause which may not benefit you at all but will lead to better outcomes for others (Gabe)
- … a responsibility that comes from privilege (Liam)

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Systems advocacy campaigns and strategies

Public

Community

Centre staff, families and employer

Personal (Participant)

Paths to systems advocacy: No one yellow brick road

	Liam
	Brigitte
	Vanessa
	Gabe

Childhood   High school   Early adulthood   Adult

Marianne Fenech, Macquarie University, 5 May 2014

Advocacy as duty, advocacy as for the greater good, or advocacy as virtue

- *Deontology* (Kant): RULE based where focus is on the act e.g., Code of Ethics

- *Utilitarianism* (Bentham, Mill): CONSEQUENCE based where the focus is on outcomes e.g., equitable access to quality ECE

- *Virtue ethics* (Aristotle): CHARACTER based where the focus is on the person e.g., justice, courage, charity, honesty

(Hursthouse, 1999)

Rule/duty motivators

- *From pre-service education:* "When we study early childhood we're told to be an advocate for children and an advocate for your colleagues, so your fellow educators, and so you're already told **you're supposed to** do this" (Brigitte).

- *As a woman:* "I suppose, being a woman in early childhood **you feel like you must** always fight for your rights" (Brigitte)

- *From one's leadership position:* "So it confers me really clearly when we're working in a sector where, where the system isn't that great and people aren't being paid that much to do it and the professional identity maybe isn't strong, then if I have a position where I've got these benefits then **I need to** also be focusing on the other stuff as well" (Liam)

- *Code of Ethics* (Early Childhood Australia, 2006) not an influence

Outcomes motivators

- *Equity of access:* "It just makes me angry about what's happening and why it's happening and something that could make such a difference, that's been proven to make such a difference, is not being funded because they know, as well as we do, that if we fund now, you're going to save a lot of money later on. So those sorts of things, I think and also there's so many children who are missing out on it" (Gabe)

- *ECE as a public good:* "I just think at the crux of it all I would like to see change in the future so that everybody is treated in an equal way and has an equal opportunity. So at the moment there's a separate state government and a separate federal government funded thing depending on long day care or preschool. But really, the way I see things is that it should be a public responsibility for everybody" (Vanessa)

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- *Improved professional status:* "We need to value that role as vital for children's development and just society in general" (Liam)

- *Improved outcomes for children and educators:* "I did choose to do early childhood so I obviously felt strongly about improving outcomes for children and educators. So that was one start of it and just the frustration that things were improving but things were not improving at the same time. Especially the more research and knowledge we have, the more frustration that we're staying stagnant, I suppose. Just trying to maybe have some kind of power to effect change" (Brigitte)

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Character motivators

- "I think it's (COE) there and it just sits well with everything that … it's sort of those values are probably something that are dear to my heart or are in my moral makeup anyway and the way I conduct myself "(Vanessa)

- "I suppose it's (COE) very prescriptive, that you must do this, but I suppose my values … that's the driver" (Brigitte)

- Values that served as motivators?

Justice

- "Childcare at the time was set up to support workforce participation for women but to do it, we have created this huge workforce underclass of women who are paid next to nothing to do it and have no professional recognition. So the dichotomy of that is just crazy to me, that we'll support workforce participation but we'll do that by having these really underpaid and really hideous roles for women to do, primarily that's a huge social justice issue for me" (Liam)

- (Vanessa referring to commonly held attitudes) "'Why should I pay?" or 'parents should pay. If they want the best for their children they will pay'. What if they can't pay? What does that mean? Does that mean that little Johnny who's from a family of generational unemployment, does it mean that he can't go and get access to a good early childhood experience? If we're going to take that attitude with our children, we're just entrenching a class system. We're moving more and more towards having the haves and the have nots and the gaps being bigger and bigger all of the time. I don't want to live in that type of society" (Vanessa)

- "I could also see the shift in the clientele – it was so expensive that less and less children from low socio-economic backgrounds or ATSI and CALD backgrounds were able to access preschool and the children from the higher socio-economic backgrounds were accessing more and more and filling the vacancies by taking 3,4, and 5 days and so the educational chasm was widening. I feel injustice and oppression very deeply". (Gabe)

- "Early childhood being a feminised education sector - or education area - means that we may still have a way to go because many of us are women working in the sector. That meaning that our pay - for what we do - is not comparable to some occupations that have more males" (Brigitte)

Courage

- I do try and be brave" (Brigitte)

- V: The advocacy stuff and talking about early childhood is just you and it is you talking about what you believe in ... I suppose I feel more vulnerable in that situation or I'm shy or I'm worried about how I come across …

  M: what you've said to me is that …you don't shy away, even though you find things like the media stuff - it sounds like you found it quite intimidating to do, quite threatening, but you still did it.

  V: Yeah, and I'd do it again, and I'd like the opportunity to do it. Because I think it's important and it's the core of why I do what I do.

- "I have ideas and courage, but you have to have a group of like minded people who are prepared to be persistent and realise that it may take years to effect change". (Gabe)

- CONTRAST LIAM: "I'm not scared to talk to a large group of people. I'm not scared to get up and confidently argue for what I believe in, I think that's really important. I think maybe the issue we're facing is that a lot of people don't have that confidence, whether it's the roles people have been in or because it just feels that it's a huge daunting thing".

Empowerment as systems advocacy strategy

"Early childhood advocacy is not a passive activity in which the educator (or peak body) takes action on behalf of parents (educators). Empowerment occurs when parents and educators confront and overcome the issues or barriers preventing them from achieving what they want for themselves. This value is based on the belief that individuals have strengths to acquire knowledge, become assertive, and develop skills, and that these strengths **can be set in motion** (my emphasis)" (Schneider & Lester, 2001, p. 78)

Empowering self

- Pre-service teacher education

- Working for an organisation that is committed to advocating for children, families and educators

- Joining peak organisations

- Finding like minded colleagues

- Finding a mentor who is an EC advocate

- Participating in advocacy campaigns and be open to being challenged

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Empowering others

- Discuss with staff why being "*politically aware and politically active*" (Liam) is important

- Disseminate campaign resources to staff and families (and governing body?)

- Participate in campaigns together

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Systems advocacy: Educators or leaders?

A professional responsibility of leaders

M: So you also feel that directors almost have an obligation to advocate?

L: Definitely. I use that word a lot. I always apply it to myself. Even with my centre directors – oh they're not mine – but you know, the ones in my team, you know, it's a leadership role and that does come with a lot of responsibilities to the wider sector.(Liam)

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Systems advocacy: Educators or leaders?

A professional responsibility of all educators

M: Some people, for example, would see advocacy as the domain of only leaders in early childhood, so like directors, because directors have more time and more power to effect change.

V: Oh, definitely not. I think things like when the election was going on, definitely mail out to my staff and talk in meetings with the hope that, I might not like getting on Facebook and doing things like that but they might, because they're younger, some of my team are much younger and that's very much more a norm for them in their worlds to communicate in that way, so I was kind of hoping that that might work… (Vanessa) …

M: So does that mean you see systems advocacy as part of everyone's professional practice?

V: I think so, yeah, and I'm really glad that this team has started to get a bit of a drive around that

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"Road blocks" (Liam, Brigitte)

(i) Limited resources

-> Lack of time, confidence, energy

(ii) Systems advocacy not a priority

"*We are our own worst enemies. We see ourselves a second class because we have been led to believe so by others' attitudes, poor pay, poor funding and the lack of recognition for the importance of EC education. This is slowly changing but we need teachers to see EC as a profession and behave accordingly by educating families and the wider community, rather than seeing it as a job that fits their lifestyle*". (Gabe)

"*But advocacy, I wasn't particularly interested in. I wasn't particularly worried about the wages and the professional identity stuff. I look back on it now and I can't see how it didn't bug me but it just didn't. I really enjoyed my job. .. The need to be, the drive to be politically active wasn't there. And the organisations that I was working for at the time I thought were really great but they weren't politically active themselves" (Liam)*

Systems advocacy: Educators or leaders?

"Road blocks" (cont.):

(iii) 'Nice ladies' hangover

"*By and large we are nice ladies, we do not like to offend, we like to please people. Whether because of our gender, our personality, or our training, we are mostly caring, considerate, warm people. It is hard to imagine people choosing to work with children who do not possess those characteristics, but perhaps that is one of the reasons we are not so good at fighting for our profession, at saying no, at asserting ourselves, at dealing with conflict*" (Stonehouse, 1989, pp. 66-67).
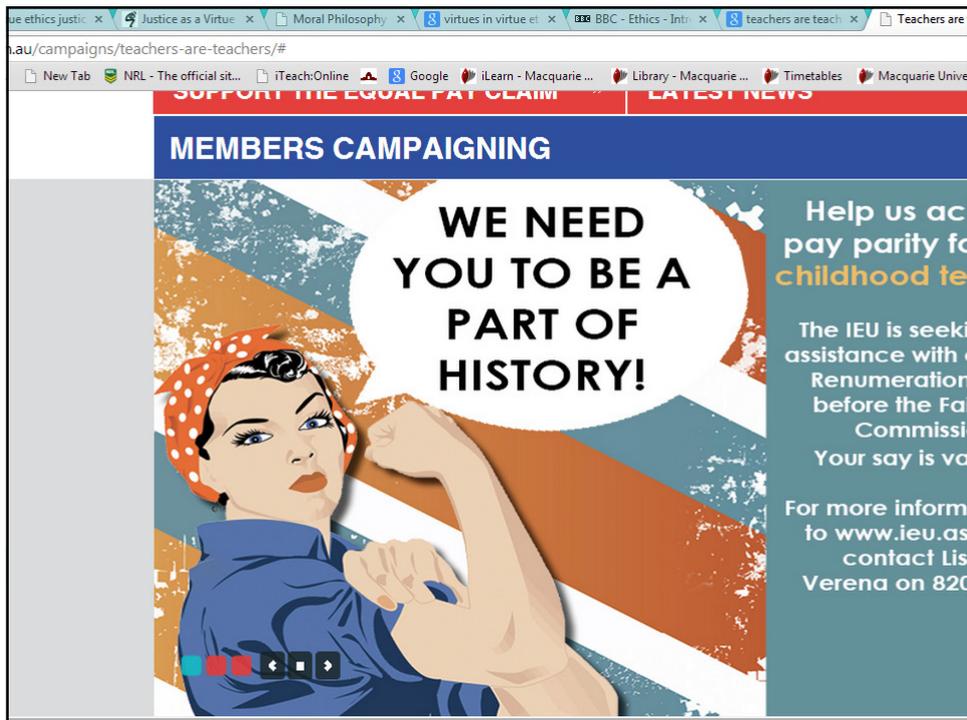
Systems advocacy: Educators or leaders?

(iii) 'Nice ladies' hangover

"*It was really hard to get preschools involved and it was still that, 'oh we're nice ladies' sort of attitude and 'we don't do that sort of thing' … We are also mainly female and I think many females think they should not be 'strong', particularly the older ones.* (Gabe)

I do remember a community child care representative coming to speak at a class and of course saying, quoting Anne Stonehouse, you know, you are not just nice ladies, you need to be loud and be a bit unladylike. It's easier, much easier, just to sit there and do your job. (Brigitte)

"*I go into professional development stuff, and people I've only met once, they remember me, and it's because I'm the only guy there [laughs]. I think some of these also to just - with the dynamics of the sector … a lot of it is still at a basic level, trying to combat the nice old lady image*" (Liam)

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(iii) 'Nice ladies' hangover cont.

*I lay awake all night after doing it. 'I should have said this, I didn't say this, I didn't say that' … we're finally getting our space in the sunshine and **we don't want to put the media off-side by being aggressive**, so … I sort of - **I watered it down a little bit**. ... During the interview I'm getting asked questions on that program about funded babysitting and funded nannying and **I didn't want to offend people** that work in that profession … **I didn't want to appear aggressive or make judgements** on people's choices as parents about how they're caring for their children … **I didn't want to appear as though I was passing judgement** on people that have made that decision for their families, so I feel like I missed this advocacy opportunity … we still have this underlying attitude as a society about the importance of "women's work". So it seems as though it's the same sort of situation that would have happened with nurses back in the day. Nice ladies doing a nice job and not making enough hoo-hah and stink. **You kick a stink and you're going to look like bitches that are being noisy and cantankerous** … 'all the shrews in early childhood making a noise', and that's not it at all. It's just we've been so polite for so long. ... I mean, **I don't want to offend early childhood either**, because we've always been a noisy bunch, but I don't think it's spread out to a greater audience. We're really good at talking to each other about the important issues, but we don't get many opportunities for those conversations to be with a wider audience (Vanessa) (my emphases)*

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Key points

- A stronger advocacy base is needed to drive ECE policy that has children at the centre and which raises educators' professional status

- Undertaking systems advocacy work does not have to start in the public domain. Personal, centre and community strategise can be utilised

- Advocacy is an ethical practice, driven by moral character, desired outcomes, and rules or a sense of duty

- Advocacy is the professional responsibility of all educators, not just those in leadership positions

- Educators can be advocates, but they can also lead and empower others to advocate

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