

**INQUIRY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND
CARE SECTOR IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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I have worked in the EC sector now for over 10 years, and in that period I have advocated for greater accountability from the sector, and its various forms of advocacy. I wanted to give you my insights on sector advocacy, as I think they go a long way to explaining the sectors predicament.

The primary advocate is the union. The union is in bed with the Labor Party, and this has great influence on the union itself, in terms of its members who deal with government, what it desires and expects from its advocacy, how it communicates with its membership, and how it acts as a pipeline into the Labor Party. In a nutshell, because the union is joined at the hip to the Labor Party, senior union members are expected to tow the Labor line in terms of policy. This means those small gains, such as wage increases, are wiped out by cost of living increases by the time they take effect, and the breadth of other issues affecting the sector are largely ignored. Privatization being the perfect example. This towing the line when you factor in that the union is also a pipeline into the Labor Party becomes even more pronounced, as it doesn't allow for dissenting voices, let alone accountability of union activities. I want to highlight accountability. There is no analysis or discussion of union effectiveness, nor any advocacy for that matter. I came from a business background before entering EC, and am constantly astounded at the lack of any measuring of union advocacy. The union does a poor job of educating and galvanizing its base. Compared to any other professional sector with a union, such as Nurses for example, the level of awareness is poorly cultivated, as its power. Attempts to question the unions structure, affiliations, and the effectiveness of its advocacy will get you silenced. I, like a good number of others, have had this happen.

Personally, given the endemic problems we have, think this is a dereliction of duty. We should be accountable for privatization, and its flow on effects. We saw its effects with ABC, and we have seen the current predicament coming for over 10 years. We have known the accreditation and ratings systems do not engender a quality system, as the ratings are largely arbitrary, and the accreditation system completely flawed. We have known that training institutions have been failing to turn out quality educators for years. We have known the emphasis for many was the passing of students regardless of meeting standards.

This leads into the other major form of advocacy. That which largely comes from the professional development consultancy of EC. Like with the union, large contracts often come from towing the government or corporate line. There is also a noticeable and protected monopoly of such work, which mirrors the union and government relationship. There is no real analysis or accountability in this area either. Given educators are supposed to be lifelong learners, the quality of Pd's is often poor, and reflective of the lack of engendering greater competence in the work force at all stages of education. It should also be noted a number of these advocates are the prime voices within the sector. Again like the sector, we have the same gatekeeping of what can be said, and who gets a voice. After 10 + years I have come to the conclusion that as there aren't that many pathways from EC, there ends up being a prized bottleneck, and an innate conservatism that then pervades the sector.

This brings me to my last area. Regulation. Australia has long sought out what constitutes best practice in other countries, with a particular focus on the Nordic nations. Unlike Australia the Nordic countries regulatory body is not a government institution, but a professional independent body. We really need to be replicating this if we have any hope of reforming the sector.