



Discussion Paper 2

The 2:8 Model for Home-based Care and Education

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Discussion paper version 3.0, 27th October 2022

Note: An earlier version of this discussion paper was originally provided as a submission for the Ministry of Education's home-based care review (2018). Unfortunately, the submission was removed from the process by the Ministry of Education before it could be considered by the Minister of Education and Cabinet.

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- *ECE and care in a private home with a maximum of eight children (age-based limits within this to be discussed).*
 - *A least two teachers (1:4 ratio), at least one qualified, and the other commencing training if not qualified.*
 - *Indoor and outdoor space requirements for a high quality of living and learning experience, in excess of current minima.*
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- 1 This proposal is for a new model for home-based care and education, the '2:8 model'. The core of the concept is to have two adults and up to eight children, in a private home setting, with at least one of the adults being a qualified teacher, and the other at least commencing training. The 2:8 model is not intended as a replacement for the 1:4 model, but rather as an additional option, filling the gap between current home-based care and centre-based care. It has a number of advantages over both the 1:4 model and over centre-based care.
- 2 The 2:8 model builds on the advantages of home-based care:
 - A domestic environment rather than an institutional or school-like environment
 - Small group size – maximum 8 children, maximum 1:9 relationships
 - Location in a residential zone, as part of a local community, with access to community facilities
 - Ease of facilitation of excursions, for example to local parks
 - Flexibility of activities – less time- or programme-bound
- 3 It has the advantages of two adults on site for safety, facilitation of breaks and support, and the ability to involve people in home-based ECE who are not the home owners.
- 4 The proposal at this stage is for a working group to consider the concept and engage in dialogue with the home-based care and education sector. This dialogue has been begun on an informal basis, but with very little resource, and it needs more work to consider practicalities and frameworks for employment.

Home-based care and education advantages

Home-based ECE and care has many good things going for it, including a home environment, small group size, usually more space per child indoors and outdoors than centre-based care (although not by virtue of legislation) and better ratios. Home-based ECE has the ability to provide a mixed age, family-like setting, in which children are not siloed into age-groups, but are able to experience tuakana-teina relationships more akin to family and whanau. International research has shown that the infection rates in home-based care are either similar to the rates for children not in care, or at least lower than for centre-based care [1-3]. This presents substantial savings for the health sector and for working parents and/or their employers. Noise tends to be lower due to fewer children, and ergonomics are much better for the teachers. Home-based ECE allows much easier excursions, connecting children with parks and other public spaces. Home-based ECE also provides greater activity flexibility due to smaller numbers.

2:8 model advantages

The 1:4 model has the disadvantage of only one adult on site, presenting difficulties if one child needs extra attention, and providing no breaks for the teacher. The 1:4 model also has the financial constraint of having resources funded by subsidies and fees for only four children at most, which limits expenditure on equipment.

The 2:8 model has all the good features of home-based care, but with the major advantage of a two-adult team and at least one ECE qualified teacher. The two-adult team has obvious advantages in terms of breaks and flexibility of child teaching and management, with greater safety and parent confidence. Not requiring both adults to be ECE qualified provides for the employment of someone with other skills and qualifications, whether it is years of experience and rapport with children, child special-needs knowledge and skills, or language and cultural knowledge and relationships. A 2:8 home could work well with a Pasifika or Chinese community, or provide an environment for a child with autism or mobility challenges.

New Zealand has many homes that could comfortably accommodate a 2:8 ratio, with 4m² per child requiring 32m² (e.g. two connected 4m x 4m rooms) plus a sleep room. This compares with only 2.5m² per child plus 10% for fittings (2.75m² per child total) in centre-based care. At present half of a traditional quarter-acre section (500m²) could be licensed for 100 children in centre-based care, while in a home-based 2:8 model it would be for only eight children – with the ability to have real grass and room to run on it. Many homes don't have this much outdoor space, but even a quarter of this (125m²) is more than three times better than the current regulation minimum if used for a 2:8 model home.

Suggested maximum numbers for very young children in a house are:

- up to three children under two years
- up to five children under three years.

Home-based care hubs, excursions, and community networking

There are already home-based care organisations providing linked hubs of homes, e.g. three to six homes providing collegial support and resource sharing, as well as community networking. The hub member homes can combine for group activities, for example rented use of a community facility, extra programmes, or group activities in a park. Hub activities can provide the opportunities for children to mix with more children of their own age, and make new friends in their local community. The 2:8 model also means that an 11 or 12 seat van can be used to provide excursions with at least one extra helper adult, giving a 3:8 or 4:8 ratio. Hubs provide the ability for an organisation to share a leased vehicle between three or four homes. Getting children out and about is a great advantage for learning, and re-establishes connection between children and their communities.

Teacher training and skill flexibility

The 2:8 model provides an excellent opportunity for teacher training and mentoring in a home-based context – an option currently unavailable in teacher training. It is an excellent environment for observation and engagement with individual children. The ability to employ and train someone with extra skills, such as another language or special needs skills, brings a more diverse group of people into the ECE workforce.

Cost-effectiveness and funding

Home-based care has the tremendous financial advantage of utilising existing infrastructure. Rather than spending money on resource consents and construction of new childcare centres in what are frequently industrial and commercial locations, home-based care normally requires only minor modification to homes in residential settings. In addition to house and garden spaces, children get the advantage of easy access to the parks and other green spaces often lacking in commercial areas. They stay in, and learn about, their own local community, with the option of volunteer or paid community input. Home-based care with two teachers can provide high quality ECE without the illness costs associated with centre-based care, the damage to child and teacher health from excessive noise and associated stress, or the lack of adult furniture common in centre-based buildings. Home-based care also solves the vexed question of group size, and reduces risk of emotional development problems such as attachment disorder, caused by lack of personal attention from adults that may occur in busy large-group care.

At present home-based care is poorly funded, making it very difficult for carers to earn a living wage, let alone a professional income. The 2:8 model of home-based care can provide high quality care and ECE, and should be funded as such. The extra cost to a home of higher per-child ratios and overheads is offset by having funds go primarily to children and teachers, rather than new infrastructure. The relatively small immediate cost of increased funding to the home-based sector can be offset by long term benefits in learning and in physical and emotional health, as well as community-building societal benefits. Dollar for dollar, the 2:8 model has the potential to provide a better return for both quality of care and education, than the 1:4 model or centre-based care.

Possible franchise model for administration

At present home-based ECE and care normally operates as self-employment under an umbrella organisation that holds the licence. There are economies of scale in this arrangement, but it has also allowed for unqualified carers to operate under the supervision of visiting teachers.

The 2:8 model does not absolutely require supervision in the same way, as at least one teacher would be qualified, but there remain the economies of scale and licencing considerations. This means that there are two practical scenarios that we could consider:

1. Teachers as employees of an organisation
2. Teachers as self-employed operating under a franchise.

While being employees reduces the business aspect of home-based care for individual homes, the complexities of variable hours and variable attendance make centralised management of pay and leave rather difficult. Self-employment however can generate problems when it comes to a two-teacher arrangement, especially when one of the two is the homeowner, and that person may not be a qualified teacher. How do you decide on the distribution of the shared income?

It is likely that the better model is to use a franchise. A franchise arrangement retains self-employment, but can include the following:

- Standardised systems for calculating remuneration taking into account home ownership, qualifications, and experience
- Standardised provision for holiday and sick leave arrangements
- Agreed standards of conduct and quality
- A reliever pool attached to the organisation
- Senior teacher roles similar to those used in kindergarten associations
- A dispute resolution process.

Pilot programme and legislation

The 2:8 model cannot be operated under the current very restrictive legislation, and it is envisaged as part of a more comprehensive legislative change to the ECE sector including quality-based contract (see ECE Reform Discussion Paper 1 on The ECE reform Facebook page). There is work currently being done towards a pilot program, which would need special permission beyond the current regulatory framework.

FAQs

1 *Is this creating 'mini child care centres'?*

To answer this, we need to consider the question “What is the difference between a ‘child care centre’, and ‘home-based care?’”, in this context referring to their characteristics rather than their regulatory definitions. Internationally there is a considerable range of limits for numbers in ‘home-based care’ or ‘family day care’. In the United States maxima range from 4 to 12 children of pre-school age [4]. In Helsinki there are three different models for ‘family day care’ with allowance for up to three teachers [5].

Both home-based and centre-based environments provide care and education, and a well-designed centre or kindergarten can have a warm and even home-like physical environment. In New Zealand many centres are converted houses. The essential difference lies in an environment with no more children than one might find in a family. Admittedly, eight children is a large family these days, but it is not the same as 20, 30 or 50 children, and it is still not outside the family range of some cultures in New Zealand. For each child and teacher, the total number of relationships is nine, and it is this limiting of relationship numbers that is a key characteristic of family or home-based ECE. The 2:8 model adds the element of adult-to-adult conversation, which introduces new vocabulary to children, and is an element missing from the 1:4 model.

The 2:8 model holds to the 1:4 ratio of current home-based ECE with a maximum eight children, and it is this ratio and group size combination, combined with a genuine home environment, that retains the key home-based characteristics.

2 *Will there be homes with enough space? Where will the teachers come from?*

The first thing to mention is that this proposal is enabling, so it provides for the use of homes large enough for a 2:8 model, rather than requiring anyone to use that model. It doesn't take away from existing 1:4 provision in smaller homes.

It may be that the current demographic of home-based educators is skewed towards first homes or rental accommodation. Home-based care can be seen as a mechanism for extra income for a new family. Discussions to date suggest that there are teachers who have left the ECE sector because of the stress of centre-based environments, who would like to return to ECE under a different model with better ratios and better management. This demographic is more likely to include older teachers with homes that have the 30m² or more activity space that is reasonable for this model. One of the teachers supporting this submission said, “As an older teacher with a larger home I can see the benefits for the children and myself”.

3 *What about teacher registration?*

The inability for teachers to maintain registration in home-based ECE is an obvious fault in the current model. It needs to be corrected with or without the 2:8 model in place.

These are comments from teachers supporting this submission:

"It is time I believe that the training as a teacher is recognised and maintained in home-based settings. I am appalled that I can't maintain my registration when my daughter (who left home-based because of this clause) gets to keep hers. Both of us provide quality care for the children in our care."

"In order to achieve certification, I had to leave my home based setting (meaning all the families I worked with had to find alternative arrangements) and go to a centre - where I performed the same job but with other people... I do the same job, I do the same documentation, I can get my certification. A home based teacher does do planning (possibly more, perhaps not always documented but the children are in your home, planning becomes much more individualised and in-depth), does the same paperwork and is under the regular supervision of a visiting teacher."

4 *Will teachers be employees or contractors? What about funding rates?*

The choice of employment or contracting are an operational decision for the home-based organisations, but either way teachers need to be fairly paid according to the work they do. Funding models need to be cognisant of this, and per child funding needs to be the same as for centre-based or kindergarten (which should be equivalent to each other). Fair and reasonable employment conditions for ECE teachers in any environment needs to be a condition of licence (or in another proposed legislative model, a contract to provide an ECE service). Teacher wellbeing and retention need to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, not simply left to a 'market'.

5 *What happens if a teacher is sick?*

This is a limitation for current home-based ECE, and it would be a limitation for the 2:8 model as well. In the 2:8 model a home would only need to close if the home owner or a member of their household was sick with an infection that is a risk to others. For other scenarios, relievers could be used. The 2:8 model means that a reliever would always be working with one or other of the normal two-teacher team. There is evidence (mentioned on page 2) that infection rates, and consequently parental lost work hours, are lower with home-based ECE than with centre-based. The risk of home closure may be offset by the benefit of reduced risk of infection spread from a large group of children, especially for children under 2 ½ years old. If a number of homes operate as a hub or local cooperative, there is also the option of temporary placement in other another home, perhaps prioritised by age. If the children and teachers from homes in the group meet each other fairly often, then the temporary move to another home will be with teachers and children the child already knows.

Summary

The home-based model for ECE and care needs to be much better supported, as it can provide excellent quality and is more suited to the needs of some children than a large group environment. It needs to be on the same financial footing as centre-based, and it needs to be a fair and viable option for a full-time income for a qualified teacher. The home-based environment provides an immediate (albeit partial) solution to problems of ratios, group size, noise stress and infection spread, and if managed well, can be the best quality ECE model.

The 2:8 model provides a mechanism to greatly increase home-based capacity, with more children getting the benefit of a home environment with better ratios and group size. It also provides a mechanism to bring experienced teachers back into the workforce, as they will not necessarily need to provide a house to do so.

The 2:8 model provides an excellent opportunity for teacher training in a high quality environment.

The financial practicalities for an organisation running this system have been modelled, and appear to be viable if the funding is on the same basis as centre-based ECE. The higher ratios are balanced by the reduced capital outlay associated with use of existing house and community infrastructure.

References

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