

# The quality imperative: Tracing the rise of 'quality' in Australian early childhood education and care policy <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Logan, H., Press, F., & Sumsion, J.


**Source:** Australasian Journal of Early Childhood

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 1 Sep 2012

## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

| Attachment   | Size      |
|--|-----------|
|  <a href="#">The quality imperative - Tracing the rise of 'quality' in Australian early childhood education and care policy.pdf</a> <sup>[3]</sup> | 106.16 KB |

## Abstract

Quality in early childhood development was barely mentioned in government policy four decades ago. But this has changed. Using discourses and gazes as analytical tools, and by examining the recent past (1972–2009), this article traces how and why 'quality' has become a key component of the current Council of Australian Governments' agenda. We conclude that the elevated status of quality arises from shifts in policy understandings of the social and economic potential of early childhood education and care. These changing understandings highlight the need for in-depth genealogical analyses.

Our perspective on the past alters. Looking back, immediately in front of us is dead ground. We don't see it and because we don't see it this means that there is no period so remote as the recent past (Bennett, 2004, p. 74)

## Introduction

Similarly to Bennett, Lagemann (2005) notes the importance of reflecting on history in addressing present-day concerns. History, Lagemann argues, 'connects with enduring dilemmas or current puzzles and, in so doing, helps one see the present in more depth' (p. 17). Given that quality is a key concern of the recent Commonwealth Government policy agenda for early childhood (COAG, 2009a), it is timely to examine how and why it has become so prominent in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy. Tracing the trajectory of quality within the recent past presents opportunities for imagining new possibilities for ECEC policy in the future.

Australian ECEC had its inception in the introduction of the Kindergarten movement in the late 1890s and early 1900s (Brennan, 1998; Wong, 2006). Within this historical context we construe the period between 1972 and 2009 as the recent past. This period has seen such rapid expansion in ECEC provision that there has been little opportunity to reflect on the rise of quality as a key concept in public and policy debates about ECEC. Indeed, as Rush (2006) contends, public debate about Australian child care has focused more on its affordability and availability than on quality.

In this article, we begin by outlining our theoretical approach to mapping the recent past, using discourses and gazes as analytical tools (MacLure, 2003; Rose, 1999a, 1999b) and subsequently metaphor as a conceptual tool (Cameron & Low, 1999) to highlight different perspectives on quality in ECEC research literature. Discourses and gazes, although not exclusively, are associated with discursive meaning making practices over time in ECEC policy, while a braided river metaphor is used to identify streams of loosely complementary perspectives on research about quality. We then propose five broad periods as a framework for exploring increased attention to quality between 1972 and 2009. Each period identifies and examines the context, tensions, policy shifts, discourses and competing ideologies contributing to constructions of quality with reference to pervasive gazes. We conclude with a discussion of implications and highlight a need for future in-depth genealogical studies of quality in Australian ECEC.

**Region:** Australia and New Zealand <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** quality <sup>[5]</sup>

child care policy <sup>[6]</sup>

## Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/23/08/quality-imperative-tracing-rise-quality-australian-early> [2]  
[https://www.academia.edu/2419802/The\\_quality\\_imperative\\_Tracing\\_the\\_rise\\_of\\_quality\\_in\\_Australian\\_early\\_childhood\\_education\\_and\\_care\\_policy](https://www.academia.edu/2419802/The_quality_imperative_Tracing_the_rise_of_quality_in_Australian_early_childhood_education_and_care_policy) [3]  
<https://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/The%20quality%20imperative%20-%20Tracing%20the%20rise%20of%20%27quality%27%20in%20Australian%20early%20childhood%20education%20and%20care%20policy.pdf> [4]  
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [6]  
<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-policy>