

Parents as consumers of early childhood education and care: The feasibility of demand-led improvements to quality ^[1]

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Abstract:

The quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is important for children, their parents and society more broadly. Positive outcomes for children in centre-based ECEC, particularly those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are largely dependent on centre quality (NICHD Early Child Care Re-search Network 2002; Sylva et al. 2003). Parents' decisions about labour force participation are influenced by the quality of available care, and this is especially the case for mothers (Duncan et al. 2004; Hand 2005). Moreover, high quality ECEC contributes to the de-velopment of social capital by enhancing family and community networks (Press 2006). Yet, in Australia, over the last decade and a half, the policy emphasis on ECEC, particularly long day care, as a competitive service best provided by the market (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006), has led to a greater focus on availability rather than sustained attention to quality. With the notable exception of the introduction of a national accreditation system for long day care centres in 1994, quality, for the most part, has been framed as a natural outcome of the efficient operation of market forces. Faith in market rationality as a basis for quality ECEC provision is, at best, naïve given well-rehearsed arguments concerning the market's limitations in providing universally high quality ECEC (see, for example, Cleveland & Krashinsky 2002; Folbre 2006; Helburn & Howes 1996).

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[4]

Tags: child care market ^[5]

for-profit child care ^[6]

high quality childcare ^[7]

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