

The quality imperative: Tracing the rise of 'quality' in Australian early childhood education and care policy

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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.

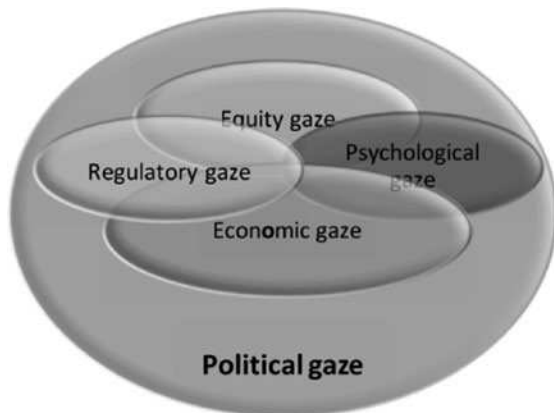
Discourses and gazes

Discourses and gazes provide tools for thinking about policy issues (Ball, 2008). As 'practices for producing

meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions at certain historical times' (MacLure, 2003, p. 175), discourses (e.g. maternalism, market discourses) promote certain ways of thinking about the world. Central to this view is an understanding of how discourses and power constitute truths and knowledge in certain ways at particular times. Within ECEC policy, certain discourses prevail to promote particular ways of thinking over others, as discourses are constructed in ways that fluctuate and change over time.

In a similar fashion, a gaze opens 'spaces to visibility' (Rose 1999b, p. 73); it frames, illuminates and normalises. In this article, a gaze is considered a way of loosely grouping multiple discourses in government policy to promote views based on particular philosophical beliefs for ECEC. Informed by Rose (1999a; 1999b), May (2007) identifies three gazes evident in New Zealand ECEC policy over a 60-year period (1940s–2000s): the psychological gaze, the equity gaze and the economic gaze. May (2007) refers to these gazes as collectively constituting a political gaze and she uses each to identify and categorise key policy shifts. We extend Rose (1999a; 1999b) and May's (2007) use of gazes by drawing on Osgood (2006) to add a fourth: a regulatory gaze. We see the political gaze encompassing and being informed by multiple discourses and gazes, including some not referred to here. Moreover, particular discourses can be evident within multiple gazes. After highlighting the use of metaphor to conceptualise different perspectives on quality in ECEC research literature, we go on to examine how streams of research, discourses and gazes make visible public and policy shifts concerning the rise of quality in the Australian policy context.

Figure 1. The four gazes constituting the political gaze



The ebb and flow of quality: The braided river as metaphor

Metaphor can create a bridge to new understandings and highlight the complexity of phenomena under investigation (Cameron & Low, 1999). As a means for thinking about studies of quality, we adopt the metaphor of a braided river (Somekh, 2010) to outline different streams of the research literature and debate and policy interest in quality concerned within ECEC. A braided river contains numerous streams separated at times by temporary islands (Tockner, Paetzold, Karaus, Claret & Zettel, 2009). Like a braided river, research literature, policy debates and attention to quality in ECEC separate into a number of related streams. Adopting an historical perspective provides a vantage point from which we can see the ebb, flow, depth and intensity of attention to quality in ECEC in research and in public and political debates.

Streams of research about quality in ECEC

Two dominant lines of contemporary scholarly debate frame international research around quality (Dalli et al., 2011). In broad terms, these can be identified as 'philosophical discussions about the meaning of quality and ... research interested in untangling the various daycare/childcare variables on child outcomes' (Dalli et al., 2011, p. 31). Within these two lines, Dalli et al. (2011) identify three phases of research on quality. In brief; the first phase (1960s and 1970s) examined whether or not child care was harmful for children; the second phase (1980s) examined the variables of childcare environments that could be controlled to produce high quality, and the third phase (late 1980s and 1990s) reflected an ecological perspective on quality. Drawing on Dalli et al. (2011) and flowing out of the previously identified lines of scholarly debates, we identify seven related streams of studies about quality, including Australian perspectives. While not necessarily chronological or exhaustive, these streams join at certain points, overlap at others and sometimes run parallel in their emphases on quality.

Arguably, the most prominent and influential streams link high-quality ECEC to economic and social gains (Cleveland, Forer, Hyatt, Japel & Krashinsky, 2007; OECD, 2006). These include early longitudinal studies from the United States (US) such as the Abecedarian Project, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project and the Chicago Child-Parent centres that relate the quality of early childhood experiences to children's learning and development (Galinsky, 2006). Collectively, these studies highlight the long-term benefits of good quality services for children, families and society.

A second stream of studies, emanating predominantly from the US (for example, Cassidy et al., 2005; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney & Abbott-Shim,

2000; Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1989), identifies characteristics and measures of quality. In these studies, quality is identified according to structural (e.g. staff education and training, group sizes and child–adult ratios) and process (e.g. teacher–child interactions) elements (Melhuish & Petrogiannis, 2006) that can be defined and measured, generally using assessment tools such as the Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2003) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998).

A third stream of studies considers quality from different stakeholder perspectives, including parents (Da Silva & Wise, 2006), teachers (Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Singer & Miltenburg, 1994) and children (Einarsdottir, 2005; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), or a combination of these groups (Ceglowski, 2004; Katz, 1992). As Logan and Sumsion (2010) and others have pointed out, numerous assumptions and an eclectic mix of philosophical beliefs and perspectives contribute to different understandings of quality.

Another notable stream of studies includes Australian contemporary and historical examinations of ECEC (see for example Brennan, 1998; Kelly, 1989; Spearritt as cited in Langford & Sebastian, 1979; Mellor, 1990). These studies highlight political, economic and societal influences on the development of ECEC. Although these studies do not focus explicitly on constructions of quality, they establish a rich context in which to consider studies that have focused more specifically on policy developments in Australia concerning quality.

Yet another stream of Australian studies focuses on ECEC policy specifically related to quality. For example, Wangmann's (1995) foundational study identified a need for systemic reform to promote high quality in ECEC and was pivotal in placing the concept of quality on the policy agenda. More recently, such work has been supplemented by critiques of policy aimed at improving quality ECEC (Press, 1999, 2006; Press & Woodrow, 2005, 2009; Sumsion, 2005, 2006; Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2009) and studies highlighting inadvertent consequences of the Australian ECEC regulatory system (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007; Fenech, Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2006). An official history tracing the establishment of Australia's childcare accreditation from its early beginnings in the 1900s to the COAG reform agenda in 2009 (NCAC, 2009) could be considered a recent addition.

Critique of the use of quality as a policy and practice objective (see for example Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007), as also noted by Dalli et al. (2011), constitutes a sixth stream of studies. Some critics, for example, assert that quality is subjective. Its use is problematic because it positions practice in particular ways (Clark, Trine Kjørholt & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi,

2006) often aligned with technical procedures, leading to a narrowing of pedagogical approaches (Fenech, 2011). Related critique (see for example Fenech, 2011) points out that most research about quality ECEC focuses on an end point (findings) without questioning the conceptualisations of quality underpinning the research. Critiques such as these consider quality as multi-perspectival (Dalli et al., 2011) and challenge thinking about quality and how quality is determined.

A seventh stream of studies focuses on the contextual nature of quality. Questions about who determines quality, and how quality is understood and enacted in varying contexts, reflect an ecological perspective. Within the Australian context, Hutchins, Frances and Siggers (2009) highlight concerns about lack of attention to Indigenous perspectives on quality within the former Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). While not questioning the importance of a quality assurance approach, they highlight the need for a flexible system that is culturally and contextually relevant.

Identifying streams of literature within a large and growing corpus of research on quality helps map perspectives from recent history. As we have illustrated, a braided river metaphor illuminates how streams of research diverge, intertwine and overlap and can be aligned to dominant lines of scholarly debates about quality. Different metaphorical streams highlight different philosophical standpoints, while the points of convergence and divergence highlight pivotal debates. The streams can be useful in challenging perceived dichotomies, for example stances informed by modernist or post-modernist perspectives. To further highlight the value of an historical perspective, we turn from our examination of the research literature to map discursive shifts and tensions in Australian Government policy. Using discourses and gazes as analytical tools, we trace the emergence of quality between 1972 and 2009.

The Australian policy context: 1972–2009

This section uses five periods between 1972 and 2009 to identify events, policy shifts, discourses and gazes that have led to increased attention to quality in ECEC in the Australian context. Our starting point of 1972 was chosen because of the introduction of the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth) which acknowledged the Commonwealth Government's responsibility for childcare provision (Brennan, 2009). Our endpoint of 2009 was selected because quality became a centrepiece of significant unified national reform with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reaching a National Partnership Agreement on the National Quality Agenda for ECEC. Each period below is bounded by significant political and historical events within which we identify key contextual factors, challenges and tensions (see Appendix 1 for a summary of time periods).

1972–1983: The reluctant acknowledgement of women's workforce participation: Quality subsumed

The introduction of the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth) marked the commencement of significant Commonwealth Government involvement in the provision of child care. The 1983 agreement between the Commonwealth Government and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), known as the Accord, triggered a major expansion of childcare places throughout Australia (Brennan, 1998).

Prior to 1972, few childcare centres existed (Brennan, 1998). By the start of this decade three forces had converged to place child care on the policy agenda: social welfare concerns about the children of working mothers being left at home unsupervised; the demands of the women's liberation movement for women's right to paid employment; and demand for women's labour, particularly from the manufacturing industry (Press & Hayes, 2000). The *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth) enabled the Commonwealth Government to fund child care, making capital and recurrent grants available to non-profit childcare centres. While not explicitly referring to the term 'quality', the Act implicitly promoted quality by tying funding to the employment of qualified staff.

Nevertheless, funding levels for child care fluctuated under both the Whitlam Labor Government (1972–1975) and the Fraser Liberal Coalition (Conservative) Government (1975–1983) reflecting, in part, ongoing debates about the place of child care in government policy. By and large, the Labor Government (1972–1975) considered child care a public responsibility, whereas the Coalition Government emphasised individual responsibility for choices about child care, which, in turn, led to a reduction in government expenditure on such care (Brennan, 1998).

This period was marked by discursive tensions concerning the role of women and the role of child care, particularly for working mothers (Brennan, 1998). Discourses of maternalism sustained notions that mothers should care for their children at home in unpaid employment (Ailwood, 2008) while child care as a right for women's workforce participation was defended through feminist discourses (Brennan, 1998). The question of whether child care was harmful for children was the subject of an emerging stream of US research (Phillips, 1987) and passionate public and political debate (Wangmann, 1995). Throughout this period, demand for childcare places outstripped supply and was an ongoing concern for many families. The election of the Hawke Labor Government in 1983 led to the negotiation of the Accord, a landmark agreement in which government-provided benefits and services (known as the social wage) were increased in exchange for wage restraint. The Accord (1983) was instrumental

in positioning child care as part of the social wage and an economic policy necessity (Brennan, 1998).

During this period dominant discourses positioned child care as an adjunct to mothers' rights to paid employment, and the framing gaze was that of equity for women. However, as women's workforce participation became entrenched and regarded as necessary for Australia's economic prosperity, child care became increasingly captured by an economic gaze. These discourses and gazes overshadowed questions concerning the quality of children's experiences in child care.

1984–1993: Women's workforce participation entrenched, social wage, demand outstrips supply: Quality emerges

This period commenced with the systematic expansion of Commonwealth childcare places initiated by increased funding by the newly elected Hawke Labor Government (1983) (Brennan & O'Donnell, 1986). Concluding with the establishment of the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) in 1993, this period was marked by key policy changes related to childcare funding and standards. The establishment of the NCAC, with its mandate to oversee a system of quality assurance for Australian long day care, firmly placed quality on the policy agenda.

As women's workforce participation became entrenched, child care became a right for families in Labor policy (Brennan & O'Donnell, 1986); however, the escalating demand for child care meant continuing shortages of places. In 1985, Commonwealth funding for child care changed, removing the link between subsidies and the employment of qualified staff (Wangmann, 1995), reversing a previously 'enshrined' principle of the *Child Care Act 1972* (Brennan, 1998). Concerns about quality surfaced as the nexus between qualifications and funding was broken (Wangmann, 1995) and Commonwealth-funded centres became less able to afford the employment of qualified staff (Brennan, 1998).

In the research literature, the question of whether or not child care was harmful for children was replaced by the question of what constituted the best type of child care. US research focused on structural and process elements that contributed to the quality of child care (Phillips, 1987), reflecting a psychological gaze. In contrast, the expansion and affordability of childcare places remained a focus of Australian public and policy debates, with high numbers of young, inexperienced and untrained staff reported in the private sector (ABS, 1988).

A major policy shift occurred with then prime minister Hawke's (1990) announcement of fee relief to the for-profit sector and a 'system of accreditation' to ensure children would receive quality ECEC regardless of whether they attended a non-profit or

for-profit childcare centre. Tensions about the design and introduction of an accreditation system ensued between the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), lobby groups representing the non-profit and for-profit sectors, and peak early childhood bodies, with most opposition coming from the private sector (Wangmann, 1995). An Interim National Accreditation Council (INAC) was established later that year and the NCAC was subsequently established in July 1993.

Concerns about quality in ECEC provision, chronic shortages of childcare places, and recognition that licensing standards alone did not ensure quality prevailed in this period (Wangmann, 1995). Childcare accreditation emerged as a potential guarantee for children's learning and development; parents' workforce participation; the effective distribution of Commonwealth funds; and 'assurance' of quality in long day care centres in a privatised sector. Although second to a focus on the expansion of childcare places, quality was finally on the policy agenda. An economic gaze continued to permeate government policy, with the provision of childcare places linked to Australia's economic prosperity.

1994–2000: Privatisation of the sector: Quality legitimised but threatened

This period began with the introduction of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) and concluded with the Australian Background Report for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Thematic Review of ECEC (Press & Hayes, 2000). QIAS linked government funding to a national system aimed at guaranteeing good-quality long day care (Wangmann, 1994). At the end of this period, the OECD Australian Background Report noted Australia's ECEC policy was 'at the crossroads' and recommended systemic national reform (Press & Hayes, 2000, p. 6).

By 1994, the concept of quality was emerging in several key government reports. The Australian Law Reform Commission, *Child care for kids*, Report No. 70 Interim (ALRC, 1994) and subsequently the Economic Planning and Advisory Commission (EPAC), *Future child care provision in Australia, Task force interim and final reports*, focused on the availability, affordability and quality of childcare places. The ALRC report had a clear focus on equity, the needs of children and children's rights, whereas the EPAC report highlighted the importance of childcare arrangements for the Australian economy (EPAC, 1996a, 1996b). While a concern for quality was evident in these reports, it remained secondary to discourses focused on the availability and affordability of childcare places.

In 1997, the Howard Coalition Government removed operational subsidies from non-profit long day care

centres, arguing that this policy shift created a level playing field with the private sector. Thus fee subsidies became the predominant form of government funding for both non-profit and for-profit child care centres (OECD, 2006, p. 273). The promulgation of privatisation saw the provision of child care in Australia move from reliance on the non-profit sector prior to the 1990s to reliance on the private sector. The number of for-profit childcare places more than quadrupled between 1991 and 2003, whereas the growth of community-based places increased by little over half for the same period (Rush, 2006). Critiques of policy aimed at improving quality in ECEC, and questions about the compatibility of quality and the profit motive emerged (Press, 1999) as a growing stream of research towards the end of this period.

Shifts in government policy to stimulate private investment were underpinned by an assumption that market forces would respond to parent demands, demands that EPAC (1996b, p. xi) describes as 'clear enough: they want quality, affordability and flexibility'. Concern that QIAS was underpinned by different regulatory regimes in each state and territory, with less than optimal requirements for child–adult ratios, staff qualifications and physical environments (Loane, 1997). While quality was desirable, it was also expensive (Press, 1999). In the face of such concerns, QIAS became increasingly used as a reassurance of quality by both government and providers.

In 2000, Australia participated in the OECD Thematic Review of ECEC Policy, the first national overview of all ECEC provision in Australia. This stream of research echoed calls for national policy reform identified previously by Wangmann (1995) and highlighted obstacles to the provision of quality such as shortages of qualified early childhood staff. The report emphasised the importance of early childhood teaching qualifications in facilitating professional practice, and recommended the development of a systemic and unified national framework for ECEC policy development in the years prior to school (Press & Hayes, 2000).

As the for-profit model became the dominant form of childcare provision, business discourses became more influential across the sector. Within these discourses, discussions about quality and how it could be enacted were framed in terms of systems of accountability and performance measures (Ishimine, Tayler & Thorpe, 2009). Thus a regulatory gaze described by Osgood as suggesting disempowerment of early years practitioners 'in the name of higher standards' (2006, p. 5) became more prominent. Tensions remained as a stream of research questioned assumptions about the meaning of quality when positioned within regulatory discourses (Fenech et al., 2006).

2001–2007: Corporatisation

Beginning with the floating of the first publicly listed childcare corporation, ABC Learning, on the stock exchange in 2001 and concluding in 2007 with ABC Learning dominating the childcare sector, the corporatisation of childcare provision had a distinct policy impact. This period was characterised by unparalleled growth of corporate long day care (Brennan, 2009), a type of ownership which ‘complicated and exacerbated the privatization trend’ (Sumsion, 2006, p. 101). A stream of research warning of the dangers of relying primarily on market models to ensure quality (Press & Woodrow, 2009; Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2009) highlighted a divergence from policy decisions that promoted a reliance on market models. By 2007, ABC Learning was responsible for 1084 childcare centres and about 20 per cent of long day care provision in Australia (DEEWR, 2010).

The Howard Coalition Government introduced tax rebates for out-of-pocket childcare costs through the Child Care Tax Rebate to parents, which particularly benefited those with the highest costs (Brennan, 2007). Such increased levels of government financial support enabled the corporate sector to flourish, leading to market domination by a single company. Less able to access economies of scale, the non-profit sector increased only marginally in this period.

Corporate domination was, in part, responsible for changing the shape of Australian child care (Press, 2010). In competitive childcare markets, branding as associated with (although not exclusively) large childcare corporations led to the positioning of quality ECEC in particular ways through the use of images and slogans. Concerns about quality associated with the corporatisation of child care intensified throughout this period as economic and regulatory gazes continued to suffuse government policy. Press and Woodrow (2009, p. 232) argue that corporatisation has ‘far-reaching implications’ for changing the shape of children’s services and the professional identities of early childhood staff, and diminishing the ‘space’ for broader societal conversations about ECEC. A deep underlying unease about quality prevailed, where the changing shape of children’s services potentially repositioned ways quality was understood and enacted.

2008–2009: Quality front and centre

This period opened in 2008 with the financial collapse of ABC Learning and concluded in 2009 with the introduction of a National Quality Reform Agenda for ECEC (COAG, 2009b). In November 2008, ABC Learning went into receivership. A realisation of the far-reaching effects of market failure and recognition of the importance of nationally consistent standards saw COAG endorse the National Quality Reform Agenda for

early childhood development (COAG, 2009a, p. 4).

Concerns about the viability of ABC Learning were prominent in debates about the provision of child care throughout 2008. The Rudd Labor Government, in an unprecedented move, spent \$22 million to ‘bail out’ the company until the end of December, 2008 (Dunkerley & Draper, 2008). Subsequently, a not-for-profit consortium, GoodStart Ltd., purchased the 678 economically viable ABC Learning centres with a \$15 million loan from the Commonwealth Government, a \$120 million loan from the National Australia Bank, and other loans from private investors, signalling a new type of childcare service and management structure (Horin, 2010). In January 2009, a report from an expert advisory panel (EAP) about quality ECEC was commissioned by the Rudd Labor Government to ‘inform the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) reform agenda’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 1).

Echoing recommendations from the OECD Australian Background Report (2000), written nine years earlier, a system of unified national reform recommended by the EAP was adopted as part of ECEC policy agenda. Quality featured as a centrepiece of the reform. The national quality framework addressed three key aspects: ‘an integrated system of licensing, regulation and accreditation; strong national quality standards, and a quality rating system’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 1) to support universal provision of high-quality early childhood programs. With an emphasis on public investment for the benefit of children, the economy and alleviating disadvantage and poverty, the EAP report was reminiscent of an earlier government report on work-related child care (Anstie, Gregory, Dowrick & Pincus, 1988) and larger streams of research linking high-quality ECEC to economic and social gains. Of notable difference, however, was the emphasis on reform through productivity and investment in a national quality framework. Furthermore, the EAP report highlighted the complexity of quality as a multi-dimensional construct.

This period signalled a time of significant unified national reform, highlighting quality as a critical component of the Commonwealth Government’s National Quality Reform Agenda. The failure of ABC Learning gave rise to the emergence of GoodStart Childcare Limited, overseen by large not-for-profit organisations which claim to combine corporate governance efficiencies with principles of strong social conscience. Ball and Exley (2010) note the proliferation of organisations and institutions represented broadly by public, private and voluntary sectors in the United Kingdom that combine to create a complex web of networks influencing government policy. Changes in the UK have been described as ‘a shift away from government towards forms of polycentric governance’ where the lines

between public and private are increasingly blurred (Ball & Exley, 2010, p. 151). In Australia, questions arise as to whether the blurring of lines evident in the emergence of GoodStart represents the framing of ECEC by a new gaze.

Conclusion

In the recent past (between 1972 and 2009), quality has moved from a marginal feature of Australian childcare policy, subsumed by questions of cost and availability in the 1970s, to centre stage for ECEC policy in 2009. Our initial sense is that quality emerged in relation to three trends: initially, rapidly increasing numbers of children in child care; second, questions concerning the compatibility of quality and for-profit child care in a sector increasingly dependent on a for-profit model; third, and running parallel to the political context, a burgeoning base of research about quality in ECEC. Quality remains a highly complex concept. As Wangmann (1995, p. 65) emphasised almost two decades ago, quality is not just a 'single issue' but a result of 'the various elements of the system'; while more recently Fenech (2011, p.102) argues that conceptualisations of quality in the research literature constitute multiple 'inter-connected truths'.

Quality in ECEC is multi-dimensional and an integral concept for ECEC policy; child care; and broader social, economic and policy issues. Particular streams of research about the importance of quality and broader societal and policy debates about the value of ECEC have shaped the rise of the concept of quality. At a time of policy focus on systemic national reform of ECEC, it is vital to reflect on how and why quality in ECEC has been constructed by dominant discourses and influenced by multiple streams of research. Moreover, many might argue that this need is particularly pressing as the lines between public and private ECEC provision become increasingly blurred. In looking to the future, a key challenge for early childhood practitioners, advocates and policy-makers is to consider the multi-dimensional nature of quality and how quality in ECEC can be enacted in culturally and contextually relevant ways that are locally constructed. In imagining new possibilities that might arise from practice, research and policy trajectories concerning quality, it seems particularly timely to challenge the dominance of current discourses of investment and productivity within economic and regulatory gazes and to consider how quality could be positioned more strongly within other gazes, particularly an equity gaze.

To assist in imagining new possibilities for the future, we propose to undertake further in-depth genealogical analyses of quality in ECEC policy. Genealogies 'search for accidents, contingencies, overlapping discourses, threads of power and importantly, conditions of possibility for the production of commonsense, taken

for granted truths' (Ailwood, 2004, p. 21). Such detailed analyses are necessary to extend understandings of the complexities of quality, its place in ECEC policy and the processes and impact of policy itself.

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Appendix 1. The periods described in the Australian political context section are detailed in summary below.

Time period	Key events	Relationship to quality
1972–1983	The <i>Child Care Act (1972)</i>	Quality is linked to funding the establishment of non-profit long day care centres and the employment of qualified staff in these centres.
	The Accord (1983)	Child care considered part of the social wage.
1984–1993	Section 11 of <i>Child Care Act</i> – repealed (1985)	Link between subsidies and qualified staff is removed leading to fears of an erosion of quality. Government policy emphasises the provision of childcare places through the privatisation of the child care sector.
	Commonwealth Government calls for a system of accreditation (1990). Government funding available to private sector (January, 1991). Establishment of INAC (end of 1991) and subsequently NCAC (July, 1993).	Attention shifts toward concerns about quality.
1994–2000	Introduction of QIAS (1994)	A level of quality is guaranteed through QIAS.
	Operational subsidies removed from non-profit long day care centres (1997)	Removal of operational subsidies from non-profit long day care centres renders these centres less able to afford qualified staff.
	OECD Background report for Australia (2000)	Calls for a national focus to address the provision of good quality child care.
2001–2007	OECD Country note for Australia (2000)	Unprecedented expansion of the corporate sector and concerns of low quality linked to corporate childcare chains.
	Rapid expansion of corporate long day care	Calls for increased numbers of qualified staff and ways to ensure and improve quality regardless of service auspice.
2008–2009	Government spends \$22 million to 'bail out' ABC Learning	Financial collapse of Australia's largest corporate child care chain (ABC Learning).
	Towards a national framework for early childhood education and care (2009)	A period of significant unified national reform for early childhood sector with an emphasis on quality.

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Addendum

Early Childhood Australia would like to apologise for the misprint in AJEC 1202 with the corrected list of author details below.

Page 34 The role of community-based playgroups in building relationships between pre-service teachers, families and the community

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